

PRESS RELEASE

Date for Release – Day Date January 2004

Today's date – Day Date January 2004

Ref - AB – 0XX

Co-op helps bring Broadband technology to rural communities

Oxford, Swindon & Gloucester Co-operative Society (OS&G Co-op) is helping rural communities in Oxfordshire get access to Broadband Internet services.

Broadband technology gives users access to the internet at high speed and is always on. This enables (for example) access to real-time video footage, video conferencing and instant email. It is a key piece of technology to re-build the economies of rural communities and ensure that residents of villages and hamlets are part of the Internet revolution.

OS&G Co-op is supporting the development of community broadband technology in two key ways -

OS&G Co-op is sponsoring a business dinner as part of a conference, which will promote Broadband nationally. The conference is called – *‘Revolution at the Edge: Broadband Networks and Innovation’*. It takes place on Tuesday 27th January and Wednesday 28th January near Heathrow.

Revolution at the Edge enables private sector and public sector business people to meet community broadband experts. The event's overall aim is to enable more communities in the UK to benefit from Broadband. It is part of a wider initiative called The Access to Broadband Campaign. Speakers include Alun Michael, Minister for Rural Affairs and Nigel Heriz-Smith, head of the Rural Broadband Unit at the DTI.

OS&G Co-op's head of corporate development, Neil Homer said, "At this conference, the Community Broadband Network will be launched. This new network aims to ensure that rural communities and rural businesses are not left out with regard to broadband access. As a co-operative Society that is owned and run by its local members, and also one which predominantly trades in village and market town locations, our support for this event shows that we are committed to supporting rural businesses and communities".

In addition, in a unique move for a co-operative society, OS&G Co-op is also a key supporter of Oxfordshire Rural Broadband Ltd (ORB).

In areas where ADSL (BT's broadband service) is not available, ORB is working with local groups of people roll out broadband networks in their area. This is already happening in the Wychwoods and Kingham near Chipping Norton.

contd...

2.

ORB will encourage local residents and businesses to join as members and then they will benefit from affordable fast access to the Internet. With this core technology in place, the community can then run their own online TV and radio stations, CCTV security systems, inter-community on-line gaming (for those young at heart) and possibly provide remote monitoring and health care for the elderly and in-firm

These new community businesses, including ORB, are set up using rules drawn up by Co-operatives UK. The rules and guidelines cover the registration of a 'community broadband enterprise'. To do this there is a fee of £350. In each case where a community business of this type is set up, OS&G Co-op has agreed to pay this fee.

Neil Homer explains, "We now have our very first community Broadband business set up and running in the Wychwoods and Kingham. We hope they will be the first of many locally owned and run organisations, which will bring this new and essential technology to rural communities in our trade area. In communities where we have food stores we are also offering new enterprises small, start-up loans and the use of our stores to market their services to the community".

"The benefit to us is that this supports co-op development and builds more co-operative businesses. It supports rural communities and rural businesses and also gives our small, rural Co-op stores cutting edge technology".

ORB's Commercial Director, Jeremy Renwick, said "We are very grateful for the support of the OS&G Co-op and look forward to working with them in Milton and other villages."

-ends-

For more details contact Adrian Barradell, public relations manager for Oxford, Swindon & Gloucester Co-op on 01865 256280 or mobile 07976 055376.

OSG Websites

www.osg.coop

www.osgmakeitfair.coop

Oxfordshire Rural Broadband

www.oxonrb.net