

2 November 2011

## **VODAFONE UK TO GIVE RURAL COMMUNITIES A BOOST WITH GROUND-BREAKING MOBILE COVERAGE TECHNOLOGY**

- Vodafone looking for 12 communities across the UK to take part in rural mobile coverage trials
- Innovative 'open femto' technology will provide vital connectivity, including mobile internet, to help rural economies
- Builds on the successful Vodafone pilot carried out this year in the West Berkshire village of East Garston

Vodafone UK is calling for local communities to get involved in public trials of innovative technology that has the potential to provide rural areas with an affordable way of getting 3G mobile internet coverage. The 12 new trials, which will start early in 2012, build on the experience already gained by Vodafone in a continuing pilot programme in the West Berkshire village of East Garston.

Mobile connectivity plays a vital role in keeping communities in touch and helping to support rural economies. The economics of getting mobile coverage into rural areas by traditional methods, however, can mean that some communities have less opportunity than others to take part in the growing smartphone revolution. To bring connectivity to rural areas involves a partnership between the local community, central and local Government, politicians and other infrastructure providers.

These trials present a very real opportunity for rural communities to play a positive role in extending mobile coverage locally. Vodafone is looking for local politicians, communities and the Government to work with the company to improve access to the mobile internet.

**Communications Minister Ed Vaizey** comments: *"Bringing mobile coverage to communities can make a huge difference to people's lives. That is why the Government has pledged £150m to extending mobile coverage. It is good to see Vodafone looking for innovative ways to bring mobile coverage to rural areas. Anything that increases mobile coverage is to be welcomed. I urge areas without mobile coverage to get involved and see if this trial is suitable for them."*

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# news release



News of the extended trials comes after Ofcom yesterday (November 1) published its 'State of the Communications Nation' report which shows that the geographic coverage of 3G services is "concentrated in urban areas". The report (available at [www.ofcom.org.uk](http://www.ofcom.org.uk)) highlights the issue of local 'not spots' adding "these local 'not-spots' will typically result from very specific circumstances and may be technically and commercially challenging to resolve".

The extended trials will enable Vodafone to explore ways to fill these 'not-spots'. The trials will allow Vodafone to test the latest version of 'femtocell' technology that can provide 3G signals in local areas and see whether the co-operation that has worked so successfully in East Garston can be replicated elsewhere. They will also enable Vodafone and its technology partner Alcatel-Lucent to experiment with the use of other forms of infrastructure and local residential broadband projects, to support rural mobile phone coverage.

Vodafone has been working closely with BT on innovative ways to boost mobile coverage in East Garston. This has included ensuring the right network connectivity is in place to support femtocells, as well as siting some in payphones. This will shortly be extended to trialling the mounting of femtocells on Openreach's telephone poles. Both parties are exploring options to extend the learning from East Garston to the additional 12 communities and potentially help bring improved mobile coverage to more rural areas

**Richard Benyon MP for Newbury and Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Natural Environment and Fisheries** comments: *"I welcome the news that Vodafone is extending the 'open femto' scheme that I helped start in the East Garston part of my constituency. It means that other rural communities will be able to benefit from improved mobile coverage and gain access to the mobile internet. As a Minister with responsibility for rural broadband and an MP with a rural constituency, I know that there is as much eagerness in rural Britain for the latest smartphones or tablet computers, as there is in towns and cities. There is also just as much need for connectivity and schemes such as this one can help make this a reality, bringing mobile coverage to areas that are hard to reach by traditional means."*

**Damian Collins MP for Folkestone and Hythe, and member of House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport select committee**, comments: *"I look forward to talking to Vodafone to explore how this scheme can help bring mobile coverage to rural communities that increasingly need it. I believe MPs have a pivotal role in bringing together companies like Vodafone with local communities in order that there is a positive, collaborative approach to investing in vital infrastructure such as mobile telephone and internet coverage."*

# news release



**Nick Carter, Chief Executive, West Berkshire Council** comments: *"It is great news to see that more rural communities across the country will be able to benefit from increased coverage as a result of the trial that I helped set up here in West Berkshire. This will not only help people to stay connected but bring the benefits of the mobile internet to more areas, helping to boost local economies."*

**Guy Laurence, Chief Executive, Vodafone UK** comments: *"Hundreds of thousands of people across the country use Vodafone Sure Signal every day to boost their 3G signal at home. Now we are extending this groundbreaking femtocell technology to make a real difference to rural communities. Bringing mobile coverage and the benefits of the mobile internet to rural areas involves not just us, but local people, politicians and other infrastructure players all working together. We are confident that everyone will step up and help give rural communities a real boost and look forward to extending our trial."*

## **For more information please contact**

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## **Notes to editors:**

### **Building on the success of Vodafone Sure Signal**

The trials involve the use of innovative 'femtocell' technology. Vodafone UK has pioneered the use of this technology with its Vodafone Sure Signal product. Launched in 2009, Vodafone Sure Signal is used by hundreds of thousands of people across the UK every day to boost their in-building 3G coverage and it is the only home coverage solution provided by a mobile phone company in the UK. It plugs straight into a home broadband line, but home owners must register the Vodafone mobile phones that can use it.

For the past year, Vodafone has been testing the technology behind Vodafone Sure Signal with its trusted technology partner Alcatel-Lucent to see whether it can be used to provide wider areas of local coverage that any Vodafone customer can use. These small 'open femto' devices can bring coverage to important local areas such as the centre of rural communities, pubs, village halls, Post Offices and rural trading estates. Vodafone has selected Alcatel-Lucent, a pioneer in the development of the technology, to deploy their end-to-end femtocell solution. **Paul Gamble, Head of the Vodafone account at Alcatel-Lucent UK & Ireland** comments: *"Vodafone's intimate understanding of the needs of its customers has been complemented by our technical knowledge and service expertise."*

# news release



## **The experience in East Garston**

Vodafone has tested the first generation of open femto devices at several sites near its headquarters in Newbury, West Berkshire, including the village of East Garston. Situated in the Lambourn Valley, home to a number of racehorse trainers and rural businesses, East Garston is in a difficult location for the delivery of a mobile signal by traditional means. The continuing trial in East Garston has seen 'open femto' devices placed in the local pub (The Queen's Arms), outside the village hall, social club and post office and even in the roof of an old red telephone box. The trial was begun after the parish council and local MP asked for Vodafone's help in securing coverage in the area and has involved co-operation between local people and businesses as well as other infrastructure providers. Early results have been encouraging.

**Alan Breadmore, clerk to the parish council in East Garston** who was instrumental in getting local support for the trial, comments: *"There was no mobile signal in the village from any provider and that presented some very basic problems for local people. Like many rural communities there are no road names in the village so when delivery drivers arrived and could not find the right house, they were unable to phone anyone. I know there were also people in the village who had residential Vodafone Sure Signals in their houses, plugged into their broadband lines, and their neighbours often used to pop over to use their phones."*

There are now open femto units inside and on the village hall, which is in the middle of the village and overlooks the local post office and social club.

Breadmore adds: *"The bar in the social club is open most evenings and I'm sure it's helped boost their business because people now go down there in the evening to use their phones. There is not a week goes by without someone tapping me on the shoulder when I'm walking through the village and asking when they are going to get coverage in their area."*

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