

# **Broadband Rollout Update**

## **Summary of Gideon Amos MP's Rural Broadband Public Meeting**

**Cheddon Fitzpaine Memorial Hall, 16 July 2026**

Gideon Amos MP recently brought together representatives from Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS), Building Digital UK (BDUK), Openreach, parish councils and local residents to discuss the rollout of full fibre broadband across the Taunton and Wellington constituency. This update summarises the main issues raised and the answers provided during the meeting. A full meeting record is available separately.

### **Communities Represented**

- Neroche
- Hatch Beauchamp
- Pitminster
- Churchstanton
- West Buckland
- North Curry
- Stoke St Gregory
- West Hatch
- West Monkton
- Curland
- Stoke Hill
- Other parish councils, community representatives and residents

### **Why Can Fibre Be Visible But Unavailable?**

- Fibre infrastructure near a property does not guarantee that a connection can be provided.
- Network design, available capacity and engineering constraints can all affect availability.
- In some cases, visible fibre infrastructure may already be fully allocated within an existing network design.
- Openreach agreed to review specific cases raised during the meeting.

### **Communities Without a Clear Delivery Pathway**

- Several communities reported uncertainty about how or when they might receive full fibre broadband.
- Residents highlighted concerns about losing previously anticipated delivery routes and being left without a clearly identified alternative.
- Communities asked whether they remain under consideration for future Project Gigabit interventions.
- BDUK confirmed that affected premises remain under consideration for future interventions.
- Supplier availability remains a significant challenge in some rural areas.

### **Airband and Cluster 13**

- CDS confirmed that Airband remains contractually responsible for delivering its descoped programme by September 2027.
- Cluster 13 remains part of Airband's outstanding obligations.
- Residents raised concerns about Airband's reduced rollout commitment and the uncertainty this has created.
- CDS reported that approximately 713 premises remain within Airband's Cluster 13 obligations.
- CDS advised that responsibility cannot simply be transferred to another provider without a new procurement process.
- Concerns were raised regarding Airband's financial position and the implications this may have for future rollout.

### **Very Hard to Reach Premises (VHTRPs)**

- These premises are generally found in sparsely populated rural communities and are often the most difficult and expensive to connect.
- CDS estimates that approximately 7-9% of premises across Devon and Somerset fall within the VHTRP category.
- CDS advised that there is currently no formal mechanism for prioritising communities for full fibre delivery, with rollout remaining heavily influenced by supplier participation and commercial viability.
- BDUK advised that connection costs per premises may reach tens of thousands of pounds and, in exceptional circumstances, exceed £100,000.

- The meeting highlighted concerns about how these communities will be connected once commercially viable rollout opportunities have been exhausted.

### **Voucher Schemes and Alternative Delivery Routes**

- Residents highlighted frustration where voucher-led projects had been explored and, in some cases vouchers issued, but FTTP had failed to materialise.
- CDS explained that supplier participation remains essential for voucher-based delivery.
- Communities were encouraged to continue exploring viable opportunities where they arise.
- CDS confirmed that the previous 4G wireless voucher scheme had closed after available funding was exhausted.
- CDS indicated that similar schemes may emerge in future if funding becomes available.

### **Starlink and Alternative Technologies**

- CDS confirmed that satellite broadband can provide a solution for some hard-to-reach premises.
- Starlink may offer significant improvements where existing broadband speeds are poor.
- Satellite broadband was not regarded as a long-term solution for most rural communities.

### **Communication and Transparency**

- Many residents expressed frustration regarding changing timescales and difficulties obtaining reliable information.
- Parish councils reported challenges in securing updates on future rollout plans.
- CDS acknowledged concerns regarding communication and engagement with affected communities.
- Difficulties obtaining clear, timely and reliable information emerged as one of the strongest themes of the meeting.

### **Actions Agreed**

#### **Connecting Devon and Somerset (CDS)**

- Engage further with affected parish councils and communities.
- Continue supporting available voucher opportunities.

- Improve communication and stakeholder engagement.
- Explore alternative and viable routes to FTTP delivery for affected communities.

### **Openreach**

- Review specific cases where nearby fibre infrastructure exists but FTTP remains unavailable.
- Provide follow-up information where appropriate.

### **Building Digital UK (BDUK)**

- Continue seeking suppliers willing to undertake difficult rural broadband projects.
- Maintain oversight of communities affected by Airband's reduced rollout commitment.

### **Gideon Amos OBE MP**

- Continue advocating for improved rural broadband provision.
- Continue engaging with CDS, BDUK, Openreach and Government on behalf of affected communities.
- Continue pressing for defined delivery pathways and clearer communication for communities still awaiting full fibre broadband.

### **Update Since the Meeting**

- Gideon's office has continued discussions with CDS regarding communities that remain without a clear pathway to full fibre broadband.
- CDS and a number of local authority broadband partnerships across England are developing proposals for Government, focused on the remaining 7-9% of premises that are hardest and most expensive to connect.
- Many of these premises are located in dispersed rural communities similar to those represented at the meeting.
- Proposals under discussion include:
  - Greater local authority involvement in broadband delivery decisions.
  - Increased local control over Government broadband funding.
  - Higher subsidy levels for Very Hard to Reach Premises (VHTRPs).
  - Greater focus on communities that currently have no clearly defined delivery pathway.