

Ultra-fast broadband plan for rural areas ‘abandoned’, MPs warn

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The government pledged to provide “gigabit” broadband across the country by 2025
ALAMY

Rural areas could be locked out of having cutting-edge gigabit broadband for years because of a litany of government failures, MPs have concluded.

In a report by the Commons public accounts committee (PAC) the government has been accused of “yet again failing to prioritise” rural areas.

Gigabit broadband would allow a two-hour film to be downloaded in 30 seconds. About eight million premises in the UK can access such speeds. Gigabit broadband is

considered “future-proof” as it can handle new technologies that use a lot of data. It will also not slow if several people in a household are using the same service.

However, the PAC said that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport took too long to admit that it [would not meet a 2019 Conservative election pledge](#) of providing gigabit broadband across the country by 2025.

It was not until its spending review last November that the government revealed that it was adjusting its target, aiming for at least 85 per cent of all UK premises instead.

However, the PAC said that even with this reduced target the government had failed to make any meaningful progress on the problems that the telecoms industry and experts raised.

These include changes to planning regulations, business rates and requirements for new-build properties.

The committee said it feared that in the event of [delays to its 2025 target](#), the government would look to reach as many premises as possible in concentrated areas, and rural areas “would once more go to the back of the queue”.

It added that the government had also announced that for now it was committing less than a quarter of the £5 billion it [promised for the introduction](#), with the rest not allocated until 2024. This “heightens concerns” that consumers in remote areas “will have to wait until well beyond 2025 for gigabit broadband speeds and may not even get superfast speeds before then”, the report says.

Meg Hillier, the Labour chairwoman of the committee, said the government’s promises on digital connectivity “are more

important than ever” with people increasingly working from home.

“But due to a litany of planning and implementation failures at [the department], those promises are slipping farther and farther out of reach — even worse news for the ‘rural excluded’ who face years trying to recover with substandard internet connectivity.”

The report added: “The government cannot allow digital inequality to continue.”