

Work begins on first major broadband upgrade under £5 billion Project Gigabit

- New data shows lightning-fast gigabit broadband now available for 70% of UK homes and businesses
- Prime Minister visits Dorset as first Project Gigabit contract awarded, putting more than 7,000 hard-to-reach properties in the digital fast lane by 2025
- Coverage has soared from seven per cent in 2019, meaning nearly 20m premises connected since the Prime Minister took office

The Prime Minister has announced a lightning-fast broadband boost for homes and businesses in rural Dorset, as new data shows gigabit broadband now available for 70% of UK homes and businesses.

It comes as work kicks off on the first major contract under the government's £5 billion Project Gigabit – the biggest broadband roll out in British history.

New data to be published by independent website [ThinkBroadband](#), shows 7 in 10 UK properties can access the fastest and most reliable internet connections needed for families and businesses to take full advantage of revolutionary new advances in technology in the coming decades.

This represents a meteoric rise since Prime Minister Boris Johnson took office in 2019 when gigabit coverage stood at just 7%, demonstrating levelling up in action with a total of nearly 20 million premises connected since then and turbocharged progress by industry towards the government's target of 85% coverage by 2025.

In the last five months alone, one million premises have been connected to gigabit networks, a tremendous achievement given the first million premises took more than eight years to connect. The rate at which gigabit-capable internet connections are installed has increased threefold, with companies like Wessex Internet connecting premises at a rate of one every seven seconds.

The Prime Minister is in North Dorset today to see plans and preparations for how more than 7,000 hard-to-reach premises struggling with slow speeds will be connected under a £6 million contract awarded by the government to Wessex Internet. The first home will be connected by the end of the year, with an expected completion date for all by 2025. The project will cover the rural outskirts of towns, villages and hamlets across the region from Sherborne to Verwood and Shaftesbury to Blandford Forum.

The signing marks the start of a flurry of Project Gigabit delivery contracts to be awarded over the coming months. As part of the programme, the

government has already launched procurements totalling over £690 million aiming to cover up to 498,000 premises, with work due to begin to connect hard-to-reach areas in Cornwall, Cambridgeshire, Cumbria, and several areas across north east England before the end of the year.

Project Gigabit is the government's record £5 billion scheme to bring the fastest, most reliable broadband to areas considered too difficult or expensive to connect under the broadband industry's commercial plans. Government funding will complement industry investment to ensure that these harder to reach areas benefit from the same gigabit broadband as the rest of the country, enabling businesses to grow by using digital technology to boost their productivity and giving people living in more remote areas better access to good jobs.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

"From Sherbourne to Stirling, lightning-fast broadband is levelling up towns and villages across the country.

"In just three years we have increased the coverage of gigabit broadband from seven per cent of households to 70%, and I am proud that today more than 20 million households, businesses and organisations are able to tap into rapid and reliable internet, unleashing their potential, creating opportunities and driving growth across the country."

Digital Secretary Nadine Dorries said:

"Today we enter an exciting new phase of our £5 billion Project Gigabit digital connectivity programme by signing our first major contract in Dorset. Thousands of hard-to-reach homes and businesses in the region will get access to faster connections and join the 20 million properties we've helped connect over the last three years.

"The benefits of better broadband connectivity cannot be underestimated and this work will mean those living in rural areas can enjoy 21st century speeds in the home and workplace, making their lives easier and more productive"

Gigabit broadband can provide speeds of more than 1,000 megabits per second, more than thirty times faster than copper-based superfast broadband, which is currently available to 97 per cent of UK premises. While superfast is fast enough for most people's needs today, gigabit-capable connections will provide the speeds and reliability Britain needs for decades into the future.

Entire families will be able stream movies, TV and video games in high quality 4K and 8K definition onto multiple devices at the same time with no slowdowns in speed. It will underpin revolutionary new technologies such as Virtual and Augmented Reality and more internet-connected appliances in the home and the workplace to make our lives easier and more productive.

It will enable anyone to start-up and run a business of any size from even the most remote areas of the UK.

More than 740,000 premises have been connected through government funding so

far, mainly through extending the government's Superfast programme to provide gigabit-capable connections, the [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](#) and initiatives to put public services in the digital fast lane by connecting hospitals, GP surgeries, libraries and other public buildings.

Today's announcement for Dorset is the first large-scale scheme under Project Gigabit to deliver gigabit connections to a regional area en-masse. Millions of rural homes and businesses across the UK are in line for an upgrade thanks to dozens of these multi-million pound contracts, making Project Gigabit one of the largest national infrastructure projects of recent times.

The announcement follows the confirmation last [month](#) that hundreds of thousands of pupils living in the countryside will enjoy lessons powered by better digital connections as the government invests to level up internet access for up to 3,000 rural primary schools, with an £82 million investment to help an estimated half a million primary school children.

Now the contract in Dorset has been awarded, the government will work with Wessex Internet and the local authority to begin planning the construction of the gigabit-capable network, with spades set to enter the ground in the coming weeks.

Today's news follows the announcement of plans to connect more than 2,600 hard-to-reach premises in Scotland to gigabit speeds as part of a £36 million investment with the Scottish Government. The expansion of the R100 network includes a £16 million boost from Project Gigabit.

The latest Project Gigabit quarterly update from Building Digital UK (BDUK), an Executive Agency of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, details the progress being made to roll out gigabit broadband across the UK and will be published later this week.

Hector Gibson Fleming, CEO of Wessex Internet, said:

"We're thrilled to have been awarded the first contract under the government's £5 billion Project Gigabit programme.

"As a business based in North Dorset, our priority has always been to bring fast, reliable broadband to rural communities overlooked by other providers. We believe passionately that rural areas must have access to gigabit-capable connectivity and the exciting benefits it brings for homes, businesses and communities.

"Over the last four years, we have connected thousands of homes and businesses across the South West to full fibre broadband and are excited to accelerate our roll out further with this new contract."

Cllr Jill Haynes, Dorset Council's portfolio holder for Corporate Development and Transformation, said:

"This significant government investment in Dorset is great news for communities and businesses that would otherwise have been left behind as the country moves to gigabit-capable broadband.

“Good broadband connection has never been more important as we rebuild the economy after the pandemic.

“We look forward to working with Wessex Internet and the government on this exciting development in technology, which will greatly benefit some of the most rural parts of our county.”

Andrew Ferguson, Editor of thinkbroadband, said:

“With seven out of 10 premises now able to order a gigabit option and over half of those are actually future proof full fibre shows that the UK broadband market is generally delivering on its rollout targets.

“Of course at a time when many people are looking for savings on their household bills buying a gigabit service is going to seem a luxury but one of the advantages of full fibre is you can enjoy the improved reliability even when buying the entry level services and even an entry level Fibre to the Premise (FTTP) product will be faster than an old partial fibre service where speeds are impacted by distance to the cabinet.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The Project Gigabit Summer Update includes details of the positive impact of the government’s broadband voucher scheme on businesses and communities.
- The current £210 million government [Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme](#) (GBVS) provides a grant of up to £1,500 for residents and up to £3,500 for businesses towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband networks in communities. It enables households and businesses to club together to increase the total subsidy of a project to cover most or all of the costs for installation to eligible areas. To date, more than 110,000 premises are now able to access a gigabit-capable broadband connection thanks to this scheme.
- The Summer Update also highlights the results of a recent BDUK survey of over 1,700 small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that had received gigabit-capable broadband through the government’s broadband voucher schemes between 2017 and 2021. More than 80% of the SMEs surveyed reported an increase in productivity as a result of their upgraded connection, with the majority using improved connectivity to access digital tools such as cloud storage, video conferencing, high volume file data transfer and accounting services.
- Around 40% of businesses also reported that they were able to reduce business travel and gain new customers as a result of the connection, and nearly half are adopting more flexible working and business

practices.

- Critically, 70% of businesses say the upgrade helped them to adapt and continue to do business during the pandemic.