



Digital connectivity has become essential infrastructure for modern life.

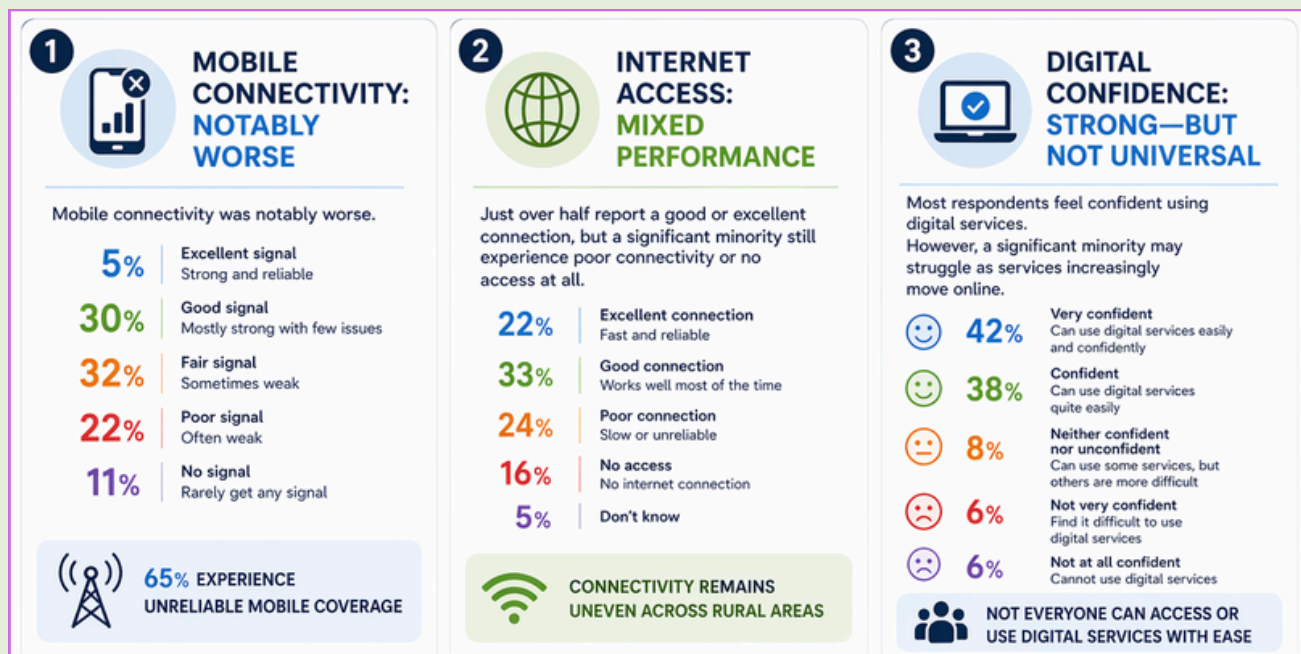
From accessing healthcare and banking services to working from home, completing homework and staying in touch with family, reliable internet and mobile phone signal are no longer luxuries but necessities.

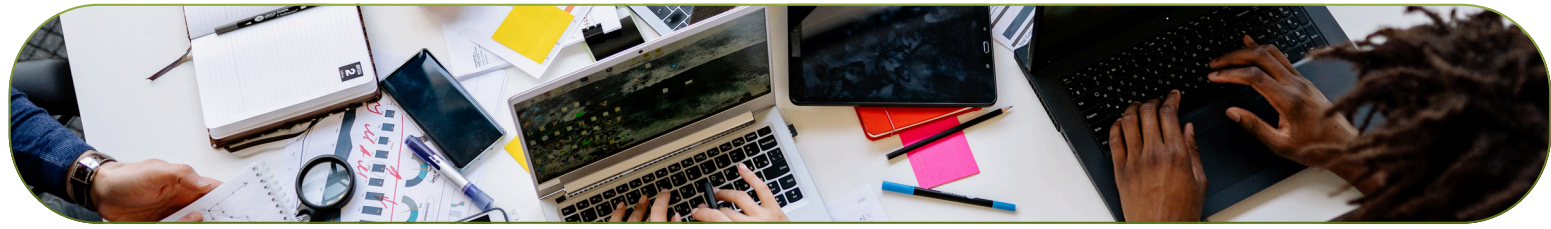
For rural communities, good connectivity can help overcome some of the challenges of distance and remoteness, enabling access to services that might otherwise require lengthy journeys.

Poor connectivity, by contrast, compounds existing disadvantages, leaving rural residents unable to access the same opportunities as their urban counterparts. This also can limit the potential of rural businesses to grow.

Key Survey Findings

The survey revealed a mixed picture on rural connectivity, with broadband generally performing better than mobile phone signal.





The focus groups revealed the real-world consequences of connectivity challenges, and the frustration felt by those living with inadequate services.

For many, particularly those working from home, inconsistent internet access directly affects their ability to work. Participants also reported paying high costs for relatively slow speeds, often in contrast to faster, cheaper services available elsewhere.

Mobile coverage remains uneven, with noticeable gaps even within short distances and limited access to newer technologies such as 5G.

The transition to digital Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) systems raised concerns about reliability, particularly for older residents and those with additional needs. A recurring theme was that services may be technically available but not always usable in practice.

Participants also highlighted risks around telecare devices and the impact of power cuts, which can disrupt internet, phone access, and essential daily activities, including running businesses.

As physical services decline in rural areas, digital connectivity is becoming increasingly essential. Without it, residents face barriers to accessing basic services and support.

Frustration was also expressed about the lack of accessible human support from telecommunications providers, particularly for those less confident online. Affordability remains a significant challenge. Connectivity is increasingly a necessity, yet costs can be prohibitive for lower-income households, reinforcing digital exclusion.

WHAT RURAL RESIDENTS TOLD US ABOUT... RURAL CONNECTIVITY

“My partner is a solicitor, and she works from home a lot, and sometimes she’s working, **the internet’s dropping when she’s on calls... she can’t do her job.**”



“It’s probably patchy, because Cornwall’s just full of valleys... **some places are good and some places aren’t.**”



“I’ve got a couple of friends in the village who are now in their 80s. One’s got dementia, and one’s got a physical disability. They’re both very connected. However, there’s... **you can be connected and still not be able to utilise, and I think that’s really important.**”



“I’m keeping my landline because I **can rely upon my landline – the mobile’s a bit hit and miss.**”



“There’s a lot of telecare devices that connect that don’t work with the new systems. **What happens when the power goes off?**”



“That doesn’t help that you can’t have stable electricity, because if you’ve got no electric, **you have no internet, and your phones don’t work these days either.**”



“My village has no pub, no post office, no nothing – **digital access is essential.**”



“Telecommunications companies don’t put phone numbers on their websites, because **they don’t want you to ring them.**”



“We’re paying 40-odd pound a month – that’s a lot of money for someone who’s only on minimum wage, or a single parent.”



Rural residents rely on connectivity every day – for work, wellbeing, safety and essential services. But patchy signals, power outages, high costs and lack of support make it harder to stay connected.



KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

What rural residents told us about digital connectivity



1

Mobile phone signal remains unreliable across much of rural England, with a third of respondents experiencing poor or very poor coverage.



2

Broadband speeds vary significantly, with some rural areas still receiving inadequate connections despite being willing to pay for upgrades.



3

The switch from copper landlines to digital services poses risks for vulnerable people, particularly during power cuts.



4

Residents generally feel confident with digital skills, however the infrastructure is not there for them to utilise.



5

Power supply instability compounds connectivity problems, affecting both residents and businesses.



6

Service providers show limited understanding of rural-specific challenges.



7

The closure of physical services (banks, post offices) has made digital connectivity essential, yet not everyone can access or use digital services.



8

Cost of connectivity is a burden for lower-income households, yet is increasingly necessary to access other services and deals.



9

Older people and those with disabilities face particular challenges, and people's digital skills can decline over their lifetime due to illness or cognitive changes.



Reliable, affordable digital connectivity is essential for rural communities to access services, stay connected, and take part in modern life. Addressing these issues must be a priority for policymakers and service providers.

