

Matt Warman's Keynote Speech at Connected Britain 2020

Hello, I'm Matt Warman, the Minister for Digital Infrastructure, and I am delighted to be joining you all virtually at this exciting event.

The theme this year is the future of UK connectivity. But before I talk about that, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in the industry for their tireless efforts at keeping us all connected through an unprecedented period of disruption.

You have kept school children connected with their teachers, allowed isolated grandparents to speak to their grandchildren, and enabled great British businesses to power the economy through these difficult times. Without a good connection, I would not be able to join you all at Connected Britain. Thank you.

In my speech, I am going to touch upon the exciting work that the Government is doing on broadband and 5G, and also the efforts that we are taking to make these networks more secure for the long term.

But, first, I thought that I would reflect on the changed times that we are living in. COVID has altered the way we live, work and, most importantly, stay connected with our family and friends. The digital infrastructure that keeps us all connected was essential to our daily way of life under lockdown – and is now more important than ever as we head into recovery. Many of these changes – such as increased working from home – will stay with us for the foreseeable future.

People in this sector have long referred to the internet as “the fourth utility” – and it's true. For countless people across the country, having fast and reliable broadband and a good mobile connection is as essential and vital to our daily lives as gas, water and electricity.

That's why I'm committed to working with you all to ensure the entire nation has access to world-class, next generation gigabit connectivity that is secure and resilient enough to deal with all sorts of future challenges.

This government is ambitious for the UK's digital infrastructure.

We want to deliver nationwide gigabit capable broadband connectivity as soon as possible.

In addition, thanks to our landmark Shared Rural Network agreement with the MNOs – the first of its kind in the world – 95% of the UK will have 4G coverage by the end of 2025.

And because we know that more citizens are increasingly living their lives online, we will be one of the earliest adopters of 5G coverage, with the majority of the population able to access 5G by 2027.

Turning to gigabit broadband rollout, we are already making great progress. Two years ago, only around 1.4 million homes could access full fibre broadband.

I am pleased to say that nearly five million premises can now access full fibre broadband. Gigabit capable coverage is even higher and around eight million premises can now access these speeds – a significant increase from 2018.

We remain committed to delivering gigabit broadband, the 2025 ambition still stands but we know it's going to be tough and that's why we need to work together to maximise the opportunity.

We know that there is plenty that we can do to make it easier and cheaper for the industry to deploy digital infrastructure commercially and we are committed to doing so through our Barrier Busting taskforce.

We are taking forward legislative reforms to make it easier for you to deploy broadband in blocks of flats and to deploy or upgrade mobile phone masts. We have also committed to legislate to mandate gigabit connectivity in new builds.

We are continuing to work with the Department for Transport on reforms to Streetworks, following the introduction of Street Manager.

We know how important local authorities are to the delivery of digital infrastructure, which is why I have written to them, together with the Local Government Minister, to outline how they can work more effectively with the industry.

And, we are actively looking at the more radical ideas that you have brought to us recently and will be coming back on what the future implementation of those might look like shortly.

In advance of that, I did, however, want to acknowledge the points that you have all made about the domestic Electronic Communications Code and highlight our intention to consult on further reforms in due course.

Alongside our Barrier Busting work, we are continuing to invest billions in supporting you to deliver better connectivity to the least commercial areas of the UK.

I would like to highlight our Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme in particular. It is targeted at rural, hard to reach areas that are not likely to be connected through the commercial rollout of gigabit networks in the immediate future.

The Scheme is open until March next year and there is £70 million worth of vouchers on offer.

But as part of this programme, we have been looking into how we can support communities to demonstrate their demand for faster, more reliable broadband in their areas, whilst, at the same time, encouraging suppliers to build to

these harder-to-reach areas.

That's why we have been conducting a pilot in Cornwall, West Wales, Cumbria and Northumberland through an initiative called the Broadband Upgrade Fund. If we can show suppliers where the demand for gigabit-capable broadband is strongest, they can then use the voucher funding that we provide through our Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme to offset build and installation costs to these rural communities.

In that pilot, in less than two months, over 10,000 people and businesses have used the scheme to register their interest in upgrading their broadband.

We are pleased with the number of registrations to date and are going to work closely with local stakeholders and the industry to develop projects and to develop that fund.

In addition to our existing schemes, we have committed a record £5 billion of public funding for our new UK Gigabit Programme to close the digital divide and ensure hard-to-reach areas are not left behind.

I know that Building Digital UK has been engaging with you on the design of that programme, and that Raj Kalia, the Chief Executive, and his team are speaking to you on Thursday. So please make the most of that opportunity and continue to work with us to support the most successful launch we possibly can, as soon as we possibly can.

But it is not enough just to provide the infrastructure. We need people to take advantage of it. In August, I launched a new taskforce to drive consumer take-up of gigabit speed internet connections. This taskforce is being led by consumer and business groups such as Which?, the Federation of Small Businesses and Confederation of Small Businesses. I look forward to hearing the interim recommendations of the taskforce before the end of the year.

Turning to 5G, while the commercial rollout of 5G continues at pace, we're pushing ahead with plans to make sure all sorts of industries benefit from this game-changing technology.

Since the start of the 5G Testbeds and Trials programme, we've now funded 24 5G testbeds across the UK. Between them, those testbeds have trialled almost 70 different 5G technologies, products and applications. And more importantly than ever, we are investing in a range of sectors to foster, build and grow 5G across wider industry.

In February, we announced a £30 million open competition: 5G Create. This new package harnesses our Great British talent for creativity to discover innovative new uses for 5G – ones that will bring tangible benefits for consumers and businesses across the country.

We recently announced the first six winners of this competition – in Sunderland, Preston, Liverpool, Manchester, Brighton and Suffolk.

In Liverpool, for example, a team will build a 5G network designed to benefit local NHS and social care services, and other public bodies. It will use

private 5G networks to develop affordable connectivity for remote health and social care – improving future resilience and helping to reduce inequalities in the system.

But that's just one example. The opportunities provided by 5G are endless. The 5G Testbeds and Trials programme is yet another example of the way the government is committed to the levelling up agenda.

But if we want to make our digital infrastructure truly world class, we have to ensure that the security and resilience of our networks is at the forefront of their development both now and in the future.

That's why we are introducing legislation this autumn to safeguard the security of our telecoms infrastructure and provide the UK with one of the most robust telecommunication security frameworks in the world.

It will raise the height of the security bar, and will require telecoms operators, overseen by Ofcom and Government, to design and manage their networks to fight existing and future threats to our network security. And it will provide the government with powers to limit and control the use of high risk vendors.

I'm confident that this legislation will give us one of the most secure telecoms networks in the world, and I will be working closely with the sector to understand and guard against any future security risks.

It's also crucial that we diversify our telecoms supply chain – so that we're not overly reliant on a small number of vendors. But also because a growing and innovative market is good for competition and ultimately resilience.

With that in mind, we are developing an overarching strategy to increase and accelerate diversification.

I am pleased to announce today that the government has put together a Telecoms Diversification Taskforce to provide expert advice and challenge to the Government, with members from across industry and academia. Some of them are speaking here, at Connected Britain – Professor Dimitra Simeonidou from the University of Bristol, Ros Singleton, Chair of UK5G and Clive Selley, CEO of Openreach.

We've also got Scott Petty, CEO of Vodafone UK, and Professor Rahim Tafazolli from the University of Surrey. And members from the security and standards world.

I am also delighted that Lord Ian Livingston of Parkhead has agreed to take on the role of chair. I know that, under his guidance, the Taskforce will drive our strategy forward – ensuring it finds solutions to challenges where we find them and delivers sustainable and lasting change in the supply chain.

I truly believe that we have set up a taskforce that will bring the very best of industry and academic expertise to our diversification work.

As part of the task force's work, we are collaborating closely with

operators, UK and global vendors and new and emerging suppliers. And we're looking for opportunities to cooperate with vendors who are not present in the UK market.

In fact – all six of the first 5G Create projects demonstrate our commitment to diversification.

The majority will be working with new entrants or emerging vendors in the UK telecoms market, and those six projects alone have the involvement of 17 UK small and medium sized businesses. It gives me great pride that 5G Create is driving British enterprise, and helping to create opportunities for new vendors to enter the UK market in a competitive way.

In doing so, they are making the most of the UK's vibrant telecoms sector.

Underpinning all of this work is our new digital strategy, which the Secretary of State announced we will be publishing this Autumn.

The Strategy will set out how we will drive growth in the tech sector and economy, and ensure we maximise the benefits of a tech-led economic recovery.

And to bring us full circle, at the strategy's heart will be our vision for providing world-class digital infrastructure to all, in a way that is safe, secure and built for the future.

The world is in the middle of a digital revolution. COVID has accelerated this process, digitising almost every part of our everyday lives and making the infrastructure that connects us more important than ever. That's why it is at the top of the government's agenda.

Anyway, that's a little bit about what the government is doing to support the industry, but I know you've got lots of other exciting and insightful events to enjoy during the next two days. I look forward to hearing all about them.