



Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy **2020-25**

**2023-2024
Update**

Foreword From Digital Champions Christopher Southward and Dyan Jones

Improved digital infrastructure remains a top priority across Cumbria given the significant economic and social benefits for residents and businesses. Building on Superfast broadband works started in 2012, the Digital Infrastructure Strategy was launched in November 2020 by Cumbria County Council and continues to be progressed across the county by Connecting Cumbria working on behalf of Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils.

Currently broadband services of at least 30Mbps are available to almost 95% of properties in Cumbria, with more than 46% of properties able to access gigabit capable services. Outdoor 4G mobile services from at least one mobile network are available across over 90% of Cumbrian geography and almost 63% from all four. Whilst significant improvements have been made, continuing to improve our digital connectivity will remain essential over the coming years to support the needs for Cumbrian residents, businesses, services and visitors.



“Improving digital infrastructure is a top priority in Cumberland Council’s plans to be a high performing organisation which provides excellent, efficient and enterprising services for everyone, supporting the growth of a low carbon economy and help for those affected by extreme weather events, tackling inequality and exclusion in all aspects of society. Digital connectivity and technology, in close collaboration with residents and partners, are central to achieving these aims. I am proud to work alongside the Connecting Cumbria service to strive towards expanding access to resilient connectivity to ensure that no one and no place in Cumbria is left behind.”



Cllr Christopher Southward
Cumberland Council’s Cabinet Member of Digital Connectivity and Customer Focus and Digital Champion



“A huge amount of progress has been made in improving digital connectivity and it essential that we continue this work to support our vision for Westmorland and Furness to be ‘a great place to live, work and thrive’. There is still a lot of work to do to help develop the universal futureproof infrastructure our businesses and services need in tandem with ensuring that all of our communities catch up with the rest of the UK. Digital connectivity will play a central and ongoing role in supporting greater social inclusion to all local businesses and residents in Cumbria.”



Cllr Dyan Jones
Westmorland and Furness Council’s Cabinet Member Customer and Waste Services and Digital Champion

Introduction and Background

Providing digital infrastructure, either through supporting commercial deployments, or working with central government to secure funding where intervention is required, is a key enabler to facilitate delivery of the services, strategies and ambitions of both Cumberland and Westmorland and Furness Councils. Digital infrastructure in this context includes fixed line gigabit capable connections, the availability of mobile 4G services and ensuring that Cumbria is able to benefit from new services enabled by 5G technology as it develops. In November 2020, Cumbria County Council committed to the Digital Infrastructure Strategy 2020-2025 to maximise deployment of full fibre and mobile infrastructure, in order to support:

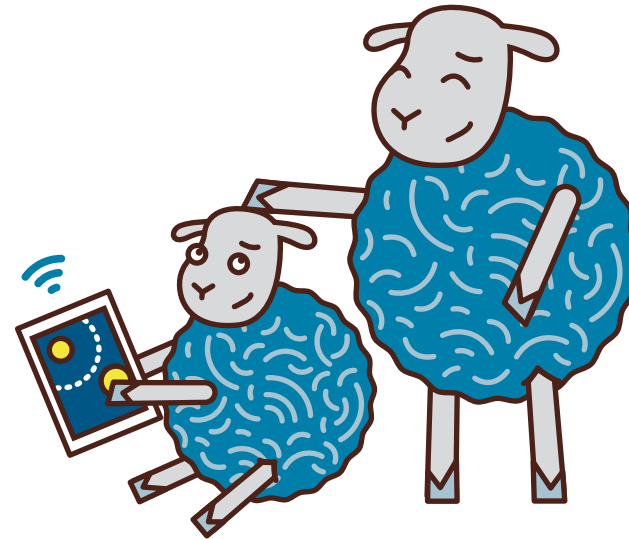
- **Economic growth of our businesses.**
- **Digital inclusion so that no resident or business is left behind.**
- **Delivery of more effective and efficient provision of local public services.**

Our objectives are aligned with the UK Government's ambitions and Connecting Cumbria is working to support the UK Government's two main programmes to deliver its commitments in relation to digital connectivity:

- **UK Gigabit Programme – Public investment to deliver gigabit connectivity to the most challenging 20% of UK properties and stimulation of commercial investment into the remaining 80% of the UK.**

- **Shared Rural Network – A combination of commercial and public investment to deliver 95% geographical 4G coverage across the UK from at least one mobile network operator and 80% from all four.**

We are working closely with the Borderlands Partnership, recognising that digital infrastructure is a shared challenge and opportunity for the region's economy. Through the Borderlands Inclusive Growth Deal that was signed in March 2021, there is the commitment to invest in digital infrastructure (borderlandsgrowth.com) that supports delivery of the Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy.



Action Plan Progress

A lot of progress has been made in just over a year with the Cumbria Digital Infrastructure Strategy as summarised in Figure 1:
an updated infographic summarising achievements in 2023/24



More than 400 further properties supported with top-up vouchers in community schemes which are delivering gigabit capable connectivity to up to 5,900 premises

Increase in Cumbria wide Gigabit Coverage from 6% in 2020 to over 46% today

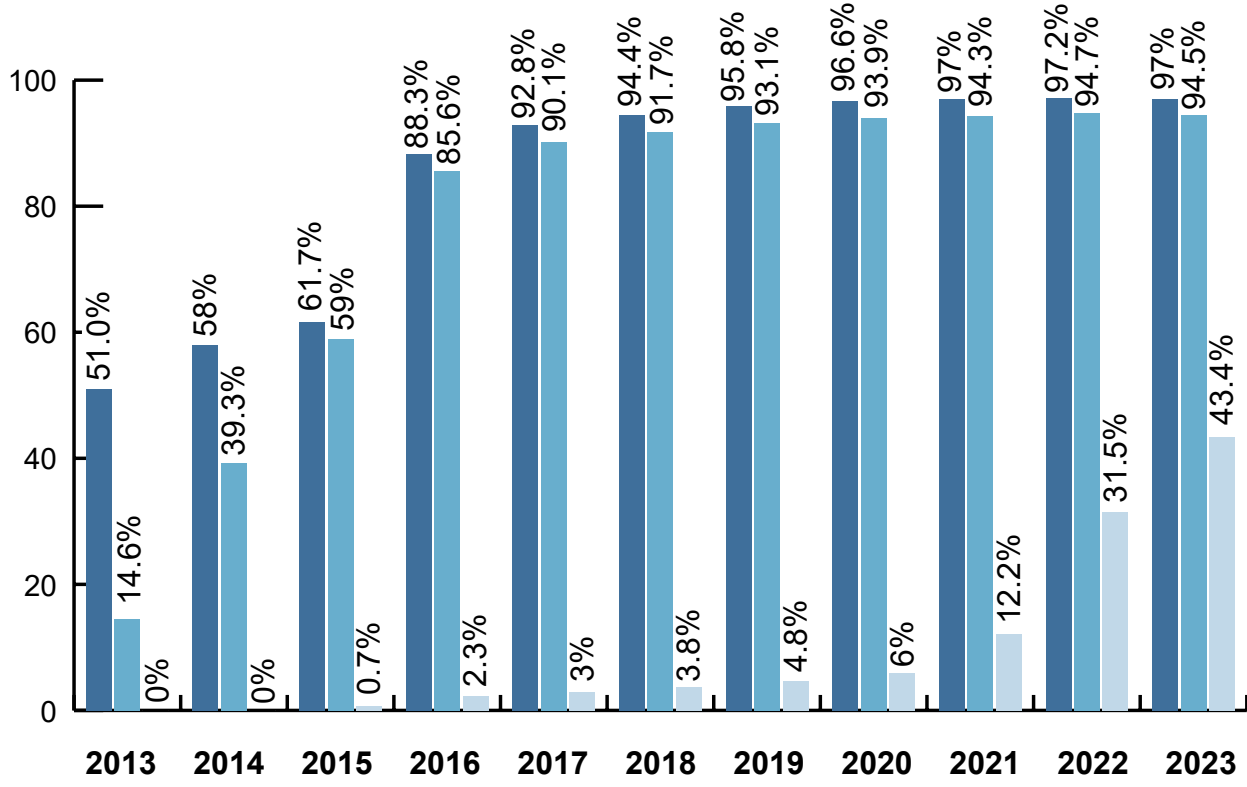


Increase in superfast coverage of at least 30Mbps from 14.6% to almost 95%

More than £108m Public Investment into Gigabit Broadband awarded November 2022 – gigabit made available to more than 2,000 premises already.



Fixed broadband coverage



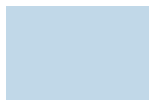
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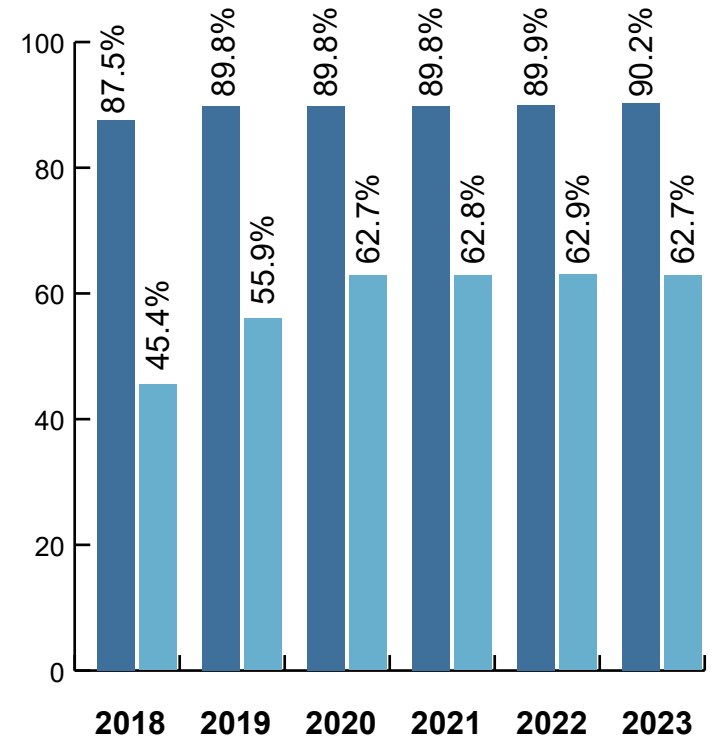
>30Mbps



>1000Mbps



Mobile 4G Geographic Coverage



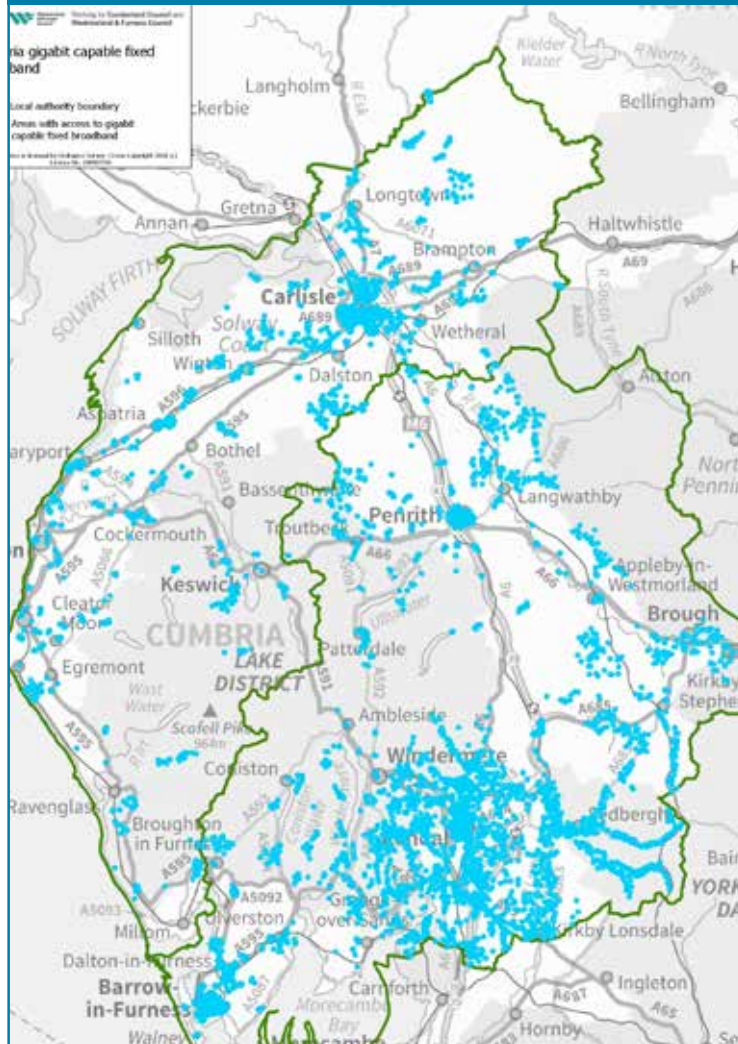
From at least 1 MNO



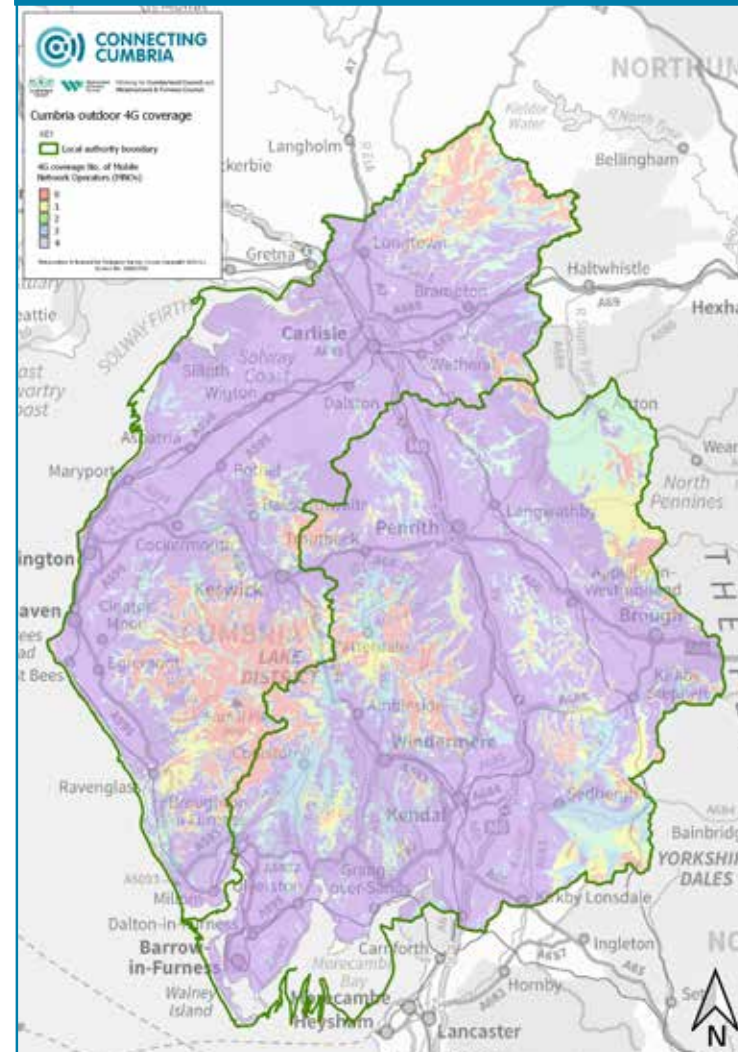
From all 4 MNO's



Cumbria gigabit broadband



Cumbria outdoor 4G coverage



Gigabit Capable Infrastructure

Progress on each of the actions in the Digital Infrastructure Strategy is summarised in the following update.



We said we would...

Through the Digital Borderlands voucher top-up scheme provide up to £1,500 for residential premises and £3,000 to business premises to provide gigabit capable connectivity to communities in the last 5% to 6% of superfast not-spots. This funding worked with the UK Rural Gigabit Connectivity scheme vouchers giving a combined funding of up to £3,000 for residential premises and £7,000 to business premises.

Progress so far...

This Digital Borderlands Voucher Top-Up scheme, one of the first projects under the Borderlands Growth Deal, ran from June 2020 to May 2022. This funding directly supported more than 1,668 voucher top-ups and through community schemes contributed to more than 10,600 properties being able to access gigabit capable connectivity through its £4m budget; of which over £1.8m was spent in Cumbria.

Because communities remained keen for support, Cumbria County Council launched in June 2022 a Cumbria specific voucher top-up scheme; providing £2m of further funding to support residents and businesses. Six community schemes, with top ups to 411 properties, have been allocated support through this further funding with up to 5,900 properties expected to benefit.



Further applications to the scheme are currently paused due to anticipated delivery through the UK Gigabit Programme contract with Fibrus. However, the Connecting Cumbria team is continuing to engage with UK Government to understand how further voucher supported scheme might work alongside other delivery routes to ensure that no one and no place is left behind.



We said we would...

Work with UK Government to secure funding for gigabit capable connections in line with the policy of providing £5bn of subsidy for the hardest to reach 20% of premises across the UK and to ensure that Cumbria is not left behind. UK Government targets completion by 2025.

Progress so far...

Cumbria is the pilot area in the UK Gigabit Programme and in November 2022 was the first area to have a regional contract awarded to extend gigabit capable connections to some of the harder to reach premises that won't benefit from commercial deployments. This contract, valued at up to £108m and benefiting up to 60,000 properties, has been awarded to Fibrus by Building Digital UK (BDUK) who are overseeing the delivery of Project Gigabit.

Works under this contract have commenced, with gigabit connectivity made available to more than 2,000 properties; all delivery is targeted for completion by end of 2026. Subject to completion of all declared commercial plans and the works under the Project Gigabit contract it is predicted that over 99% of properties in Cumbria will be able to access gigabit services.

Works delivered through this contract will be available on a wholesale basis, allowing consumers to choose between internet suppliers, through Hyperfast GB, a part of Fibrus. More information can be found at <https://hyperfastgb.com/cumbria/>. As part of this contract Fibrus, and their delivery partner Viberoptix, have committed to create at least 90 apprenticeships in Cumbria by 2026.

Cumbria is also a pilot area for the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), Alpha Trials using Low Earth Orbit (LEO) satellite connectivity to connect some of the very hardest-to-reach premises in the UK. The focus of this trial, which will run until 2025, will be the Mountain Rescue post in Wasdale. In parallel, the Connecting Cumbria team are working with UK Government to look at a range of solutions for reaching the most challenging 0.3% of properties in the UK to ensure no one and no place is left behind.



We said we would...

Work in partnership with planning authorities and other bodies to ensure provision for gigabit capable digital connectivity is strongly encouraged at the planning stage for new developments.

Progress so far...

The Connecting Cumbria team continues to work with planning authorities including The Lake District National Park and The Yorkshire Dales National Park to encourage the submission of a broadband plan in all planning applications and in particular for applications of more than one property.



Mobile Connectivity

We said we would...

Work with the UK Government Shared Rural Network (SRN) mobile programme, which is seeking to deliver 95% geographical 4G coverage in the UK from at least one Mobile Network Operator by 2025, to maximise investment in Cumbria.

Progress so far...

SRN targets 80% 4G geographic coverage from all four Mobile Network Operators and 95% from at least one by 2025. This work will be accomplished by a combination of commercial investment in areas with partial coverage and £500m of public funded investment into areas with no coverage from any operator (total not-spots). The Connecting Cumbria team has continued to engage with Digital Mobile Spectrum Limited, who are delivering the SRN programme, to seek to understand how they will be delivering their commitments in Cumbria and how we can encourage prioritisation for the county.

The Connecting Cumbria team have also worked with the Home Office, whose Extended Area Scheme for the Emergency Services is seeking to deliver in the most rural total not-spots and will contribute to the SRN programme, to maximise the availability of consumer services.



We said we would...

Work with partners on 5G research and development to create trials in Cumbria and the broader Borderlands region subject to further funding. Create trials in Cumbria and the broader Borderlands region subject to further funding.

Progress so far...

Borderlands 5G Innovation Regions

Following a successful bid, Cumberland Council has been awarded £3.8m on behalf of Borderlands to deliver the Borderlands 5G innovation Region programme which focuses on the tourist economy. Five use case venues are currently planned:

- **Destination Tweed**
- **Hadrian's Wall and The Sill**
- **Kielder Castle and Water**
- **Stranraer Marina**
- **Windermere Ferry.**

5G New Thinking

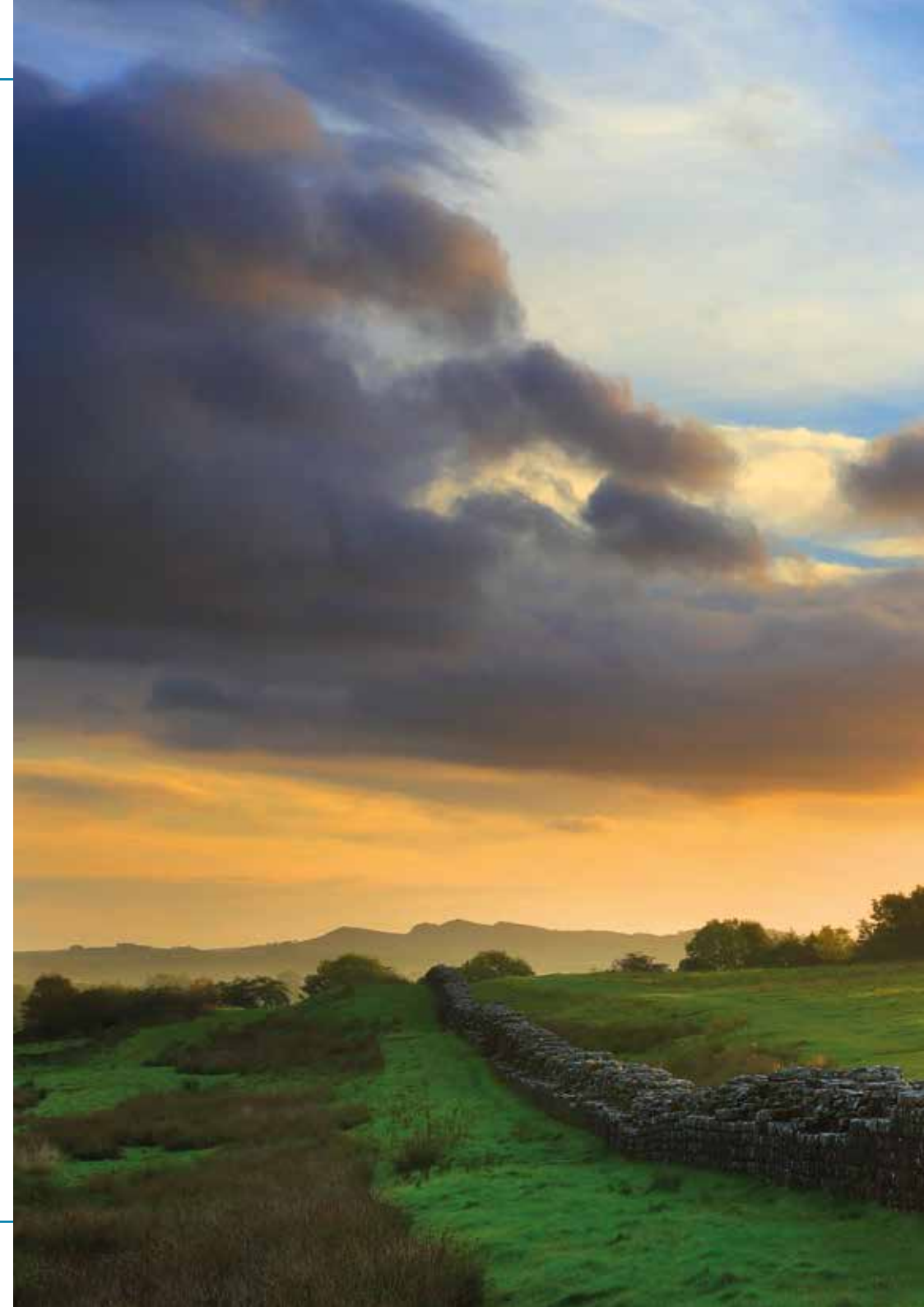
Connecting Cumbria, on behalf of the Borderlands, was a member of the 5G New Thinking consortium. This project developed a toolkit of solutions to allow 5G technology to be tested in rural areas and this has now been published at [https:// toolkit.5gnewthinking.org/](https://toolkit.5gnewthinking.org/).

We said we would...

Facilitate the engagement between digital infrastructure providers and planning authorities and securing the necessary wayleaves to ensure that mobile infrastructure can be deployed where appropriate and enable maximum mobile coverage.

Progress so far...

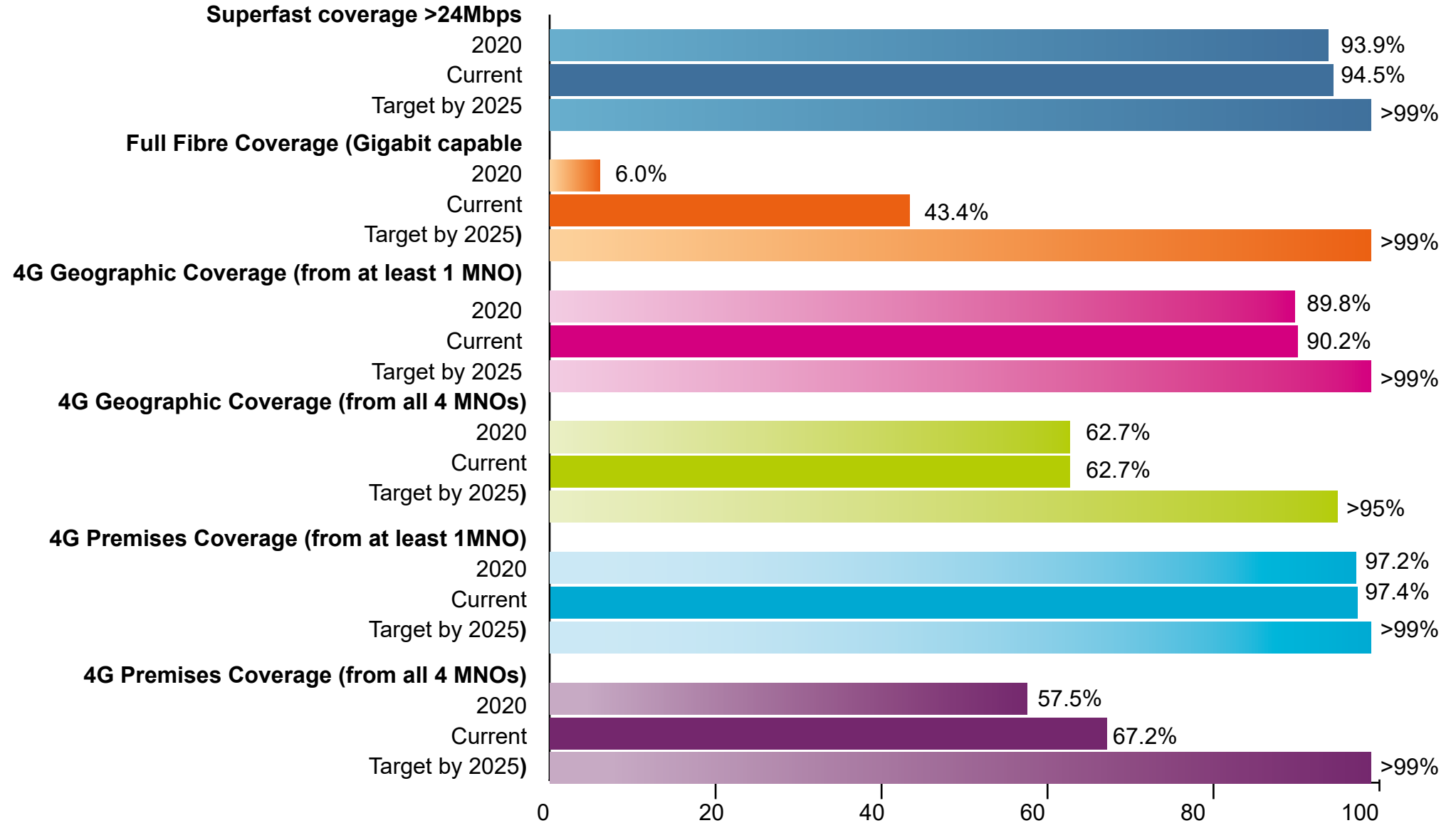
Connecting Cumbria continues to liaise with planning authorities and National Parks to support planning requests for additional mobile infrastructure, where appropriate, while recognising the sensitivity of such deployments in rural areas. This policy aims to ensure that no one and no place is left behind and looks at various deployment options for infrastructure. Engagement also takes place with landowners such as Forestry England and the National Trust to facilitate the granting of wayleaves where mobile infrastructure needs to cross private land.





Measuring our Success

We are making good progress with the delivery of the Digital Infrastructure Strategy, but there is still a great deal to do Figure 1 below illustrates performance against some of the key metrics:



We and our partners have a lot of work to do to achieve our vision of delivering our targets and world class digital connectivity in Cumbria. As each aspect of our action plan is further developed, we will share more detail and updates on our website and via Council publications.

Further information can be found using the following website link:

www.connectingcumbria.org.uk

