

Lindsey Annison knows better than most the problems and frustrations of trying to get terrestrial broadband in rural areas. She's been trying for over 14 years: not just for herself but also on behalf of others as co-founder of the Access to Broadband Campaign and the Association of Broadband Communities - now the Community Broadband Network.

In the days before flat-rate dial-up she managed to run up a £1600 phone bill at her home in the Yorkshire dales, but the internet was so vital for her she even considered a T1 line, until she discovered it would cost around £28,000 a year.

Lindsey was so frustrated by the fact broadband wasn't available to her that in 2001 she moved to Cumbria in the hope things would be better. She was wrong: and so began a search for alternatives that led to satellite broadband.

Although satellite broadband was relatively expensive, it was still considerably cheaper than the alternatives, and made it possible, and commercially viable, to run her internet marketing business from home.

Lindsey now has a rudimentary terrestrial broadband service at her new house in Appleby - about 30 minutes from Kendal in the Lake District - but she's still searching for cost-effective alternatives for those in the village, Cumbria and elsewhere who are not so lucky. So when she recently stumbled on Eurosat's BeyonDSL satellite broadband, she was sufficiently impressed by the service to approach the company about providing a demonstration system for the village.

BeyonDSL uses an innovative satellite platform called *ASTRA2Connect* and delivers broadband speeds of up to 2Mbps to homes and businesses anywhere in the UK. Lindsey installed the system herself, including the satellite dish, and was struck by just how easy it was. She believes that most people will self-install in rural areas, especially farmers - one group who are almost always on the wrong side of the digital divide.

The demo system is a 1Mbps package and the feedback from not-spot homes and businesses has been excellent. For many the service has been a revelation. "Some people have only ever experienced the internet via dial-up, so it's not just that they can't do the things that many of us take for granted, in many instances they simply don't know about such things as iPlayer, Google Earth or You Tube," says Lindsey.

"Even for people who've had some experience of these things via mobile broadband, half the time mobiles don't work around here, so a stable and reliable broadband internet connection is something of a novelty in itself."

Lindsey is impressed with BeyonDSL and is busily introducing others to the service. Ultimately though, she's unlikely to stop campaigning until everyone in the UK has access to terrestrial broadband through fibre optics, but she admits there's still some way to go.

"For many in Cumbria, broadband access is the least of their worries, not having a terrestrial phoneline is a far bigger issue," says Lindsey. "One of the nearby hamlets has fifteen houses but only ten phonelines. They've been trying to get the problem resolved for over 20 years but no one's interested. There's a phonebox about a mile out of the

village but, to add insult to injury, BT is removing it. This is typical of rural areas. Because these problems only affect a small number of people, nothing gets done about it.”

It’s a similar story in neighbouring Smardale where there aren’t enough phonelines into the village and no prospect of getting any more. Some homes have had to resort to expensive mobile phone boosters.

In Appleby, one of the houses that used to have broadband has had it taken away and replaced by a party line - a shared phoneline - so the capacity can be used for a new housing development in the village. This is another problem Lindsey comes across quite frequently.

“Because the Government has got this massive house building policy, and because it’s running out of places to build in towns and cities, we’re seeing lots more houses being built in rural areas, so the strain on existing phonelines means that people who had ADSL broadband are losing it as new build goes up.

“A further problem is the copper in the first mile. It’s been in the ground for 100 years, and is deteriorating rapidly so people are losing ADSL where they previously had it working. I recently introduced someone to BeyondDSL who BT has just told it will not repair the copper because it still supports the phone service it’s obliged to provide. He’s getting 37kbps on dial-up and he’s had enough.”

All of which means that for thousands of homes and businesses up and down the country, satellite broadband is the only cost-effective way people can have any stake in digital Britain for many years to come. *ASTRA2Connect* and *BeyondDSL* make it simple, affordable and available to everyone now.