**Written evidence submitted by Pam Feltbower and Ken Howard, residents of Piddington, Oxfordshire**

* **Another example of discrimination against rural areas**
* **Anyone who is without their own transport struggles to access services**
* **Young people’s education and social development is increasingly reliant on technology, and is hampered by poor broadband**
* **Lack of insight into alternatives to fibre optic for rural areas**
* **Potential for rural depopulation as families and working people find they cannot live a life that would be normal in a city where services are concentrated**
* **People who have to move find it difficult to sell their property because buyers research broadband speeds and mobile phone signal before buying**
* **Why should it be thought rural residents should pay twice over for this?**
1. The small rural community of Piddington Oxfordshire consists of about 170 houses and 370 people on the Oxfordshire boundary with Buckinghamshire. We have finally been officially identified in Oxfordshire, as part of the 5% who will not be able to access superfast, or even acceptable, broadband in the foreseeable future.
2. The young people, especially those in education, are discriminated against because they struggle to do homework or carry out research for coursework and their social activities are restricted. They cannot stay at school to take part in extra-curricular activities because the school bus leaves at the end of the official school day.
3. Working people, which includes our farmers, find it difficult to work from home, which would have the social benefit of cutting down on travel. Piddington has above the national average of such people, but several have been forced to move elsewhere because they cannot do their work, but their property has become hard to sell because prospective buyers check broadband speed before buying.
4. Government, having invested in persuading older people to buy in to modern technology, with some success, denies those who live in communities such as Piddington the opportunity to use the essential services they need so they are becoming second-class citizens.
5. Our community assets are a village hall and a church only. Essential services such as postal are declining and more is being pushed on to the Parish Council without any corresponding transfer of funding. Anybody who does not drive, or does not have the use of a vehicle, has either to arrange their day around the infrequent buses or to use some other means of carrying out their day-to-day responsibilities. Broadband is more important to us than it is in a city.
6. The average broadband speed available in the village through BT landlines is less than 1Mbps. Mobile phone signal is not much better and non-existent in places.
7. The Government’s initiative to offer universal fibre optic broadband failed to identify the haves and the have nots and direct funding towards the have nots. Consequently BT, who won all the contracts, understandably determined that they would concentrate the money on locations that were not “hard to reach”, that already had speeds that residents of places such as Piddington would die for. This smacks to us of the tail wagging the dog. Where were our elected representatives in this? There was also a lack of consultation resulting in poor insight into the possibilities of alternative technologies, which would be more economical in the so-called hard-to-reach areas, and would serve them well.
8. Someone decided that 2 Mbps would suffice for the likes of us. Even application forms on Government websites do not work properly at this speed, let alone BBC iPlayer who themselves recommend 3Mbps. What happened to e-Government for rural areas?
9. We now learn of another government initiative to give the haves more by offering free wi-fi to British cities. In this area, the main beneficiaries appear to be students and tourists – no mention of rural tax payers.
10. The community has made efforts to improve its own situation through investment by both the Parish Council and individuals, with no assistance from any other organisation, in a fixed wireless solution, which offers some benefit. However, there is growing resistance in the community to spending more of their own money to achieve a standard of service that is being given many times over from taxpayers’ money to places where it is commercially viable and where the service was already acceptable.