

# CROSS-INDUSTRY APPROACH CAN SUPPORT UK'S DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

*Cooperation is vital to make the Electronic Communications Code work. But is everyone playing their part?*

It's been three years this month since the Government revised the Electronic Communications Code (ECC). It's been a challenging journey as a mobile infrastructure services provider, but let's look at how we as an industry have embraced the highs and tackled the lows.

Since the updated legislation was introduced, it has caused misinterpretations and a reluctance to accept the new code rights by the landowner community. But, tribunal cases between telecom operators and landlords have provided us with further clarity. Whether it's been about the land valuation principles or code rights or other matters, the tribunals have helped guide us on what the new code entails.

But going to trial hasn't been enough for the industry to understand what the code means, three years on. We have certainly seen a rise in consensual code deals over the past few months and experienced the industry growing in confidence in using the code.

Still, we are not quite where we need to be if we want the code to help us deliver the UK's digital connected future.

## What's the impact if completing deals continue to take too long?

A recent report by the Centre of Policy Studies stated: "If the average time to complete a deal remained at 11 months (five months beyond the six months intended by the ECC), it would mean an accumulative 10,400 sites would need negotiations completed within 2027, affecting 8.8m premises. The impacts are, of course, subject to a number of variations, but what is clear is that a substantial part of the population will not be receiving the best connectivity they could be without action to reduce these delays."\*

We need to recognise that if we want to benefit from enhanced digital services and explore the opportunities presented by 5G and future technologies, then we need to enable the telecoms industry to deliver its services quickly, cost-effectively and efficiently – the prime objective of introducing the code.

Stalling new site agreements or maintenance and upgrade works to existing infrastructure can create delays and impact the coverage and connectivity within an area. Therefore, we need the code to work. We need to take a lead and act on this rapidly to ensure we deliver public and business demands for reliable connectivity.

## Cross-industry support will make a difference

Cornerstone supports the Speed Up Britain campaign with other industry peers, calling on the Government to make the necessary changes to the code. We have made progress and the Government has recognised that there are loopholes in the code which must be addressed. We are working closely with them to ensure that the code provides a clear legal framework for landowners and operators to enter into agreements to allow for easier deployment and maintenance of telecoms infrastructure within the UK.

Rt Hon Patricia Hewitt, Speed Up Britain's Campaign Chair stated: "There aren't many low-cost ways to unlock serious economic growth, but small changes to the Electronic Communication Code could unlock billions of pounds in our economy, drive the UK's COVID-19 recovery, and deliver significant regional growth."

Connectivity continues to play a critical part in our lives. Although many of us already relied on mobile connectivity before the pandemic, the impact of Covid-19 has forced us to turn to digital services even more. Undoubtedly, this emphasises the need for us to work together even more closely as an industry to improve and deliver digital connectivity across the UK. We can all play our part in achieving this.

Cross-industry engagement between the legal, property and telecoms industries is needed to make this work. We need to aim for one goal, and that's to achieve greater UK connectivity.



Carlos Pierce, head of strategic legal projects and The Code Programme

\* Upwardly Mobile - How the UK can gain the full benefits of the 5G revolution, 2020. By Alex Jackman and Nick King.



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