

Local Authority
Chief Executives - England Only

INT2021/09526/DC
24 May 2021

Dear Chief Executives

Mobile Connectivity and 5G infrastructure - Planning

Digital connectivity is – now, more than ever – vital to enable people to stay connected and businesses to grow. The demand for mobile data is increasing rapidly, and the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how important it is that we all have access to reliable, high quality mobile connectivity.

The Government is committed to extending mobile network coverage across the UK and providing uninterrupted mobile signal on all major roads, and our ambition is for the majority of the population to have access to a 5G signal by 2027. Last year we agreed a £1 billion Shared Rural Network deal with the UK's mobile network operators to extend 4G mobile geographical coverage to 95% of the UK by 2025.

The Government is also investing £200 million in a programme of 5G testbeds and trials to encourage investment in 5G so that communities and businesses can benefit from this new technology. The increased capacity, reliability and functionality offered by 5G is opening-up the potential for new, innovative services for individuals and increased productivity for industry.

The planning system plays a key role in delivering the infrastructure that we need as households and businesses become increasingly reliant on mobile connectivity. Following our consultation on the principle of reforms to permitted development rights to support 5G deployment and extend mobile coverage¹, we recently published a technical consultation on the details of our proposed changes.²

¹ [Proposed reforms to permitted development rights to support the deployment of 5G and extend mobile coverage](#)

² [Changes to permitted development rights for electronic communications infrastructure: technical consultation](#)

The National Planning Policy Framework (“the Framework”) for England states that planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology, such as 5G.

The Framework is clear that decisions on applications should be made as quickly as possible, and within statutory timescales unless a longer period has been agreed by the applicant in writing. In relation to electronic communications development, it also states that local planning authorities must determine applications on planning grounds only and they should not seek to prevent competition between different operators, or question the need for an electronic communications system. As set out in planning practice guidance, it is in the public interest for local planning authorities to have effective delegation arrangements in place to ensure that decisions on planning applications that raise no significant planning issues are made quickly and that resources are appropriately concentrated on the applications of greatest significance to the local area.³

We know that some constituents have expressed concerns about the potential harmful effects on human health of 5G. Public Health England (PHE), the Government’s independent advisers on matters of public health, is clear that there is no credible evidence of a negative impact of mobile technology, including 5G on people’s health. Central to PHE’s advice are the guidelines published by the International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP), which is formally recognised by the World Health Organisation.⁴

The National Planning Policy Framework requires mobile infrastructure providers to self-certify their compliance with the ICNIRP guidelines. It also sets out that local planning authorities should not set health safeguards different from the International Commission guidelines for public exposure.

The Government has developed guidance to help councils and local politicians deal with queries from the public, counter misinformation and explain the facts about 5G.⁵ This will help support your role in facilitating the rollout of next-generation infrastructure, and prevent misleading claims becoming a barrier to rollout. As part of the support the Government is providing to local authorities on mobile infrastructure and the Town and Country Planning Regulations, we will be arranging a webinar on this topic for local authorities, and would encourage your planning teams to attend. Please contact the email address below for further information.

³ [Planning Practice Guidance - Determining a planning application](#)

⁴ A summary of Public Health England’s advice on radio waves can be accessed at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/electromagnetic-fields#radio-waves>; Ofcom takes frequent measurements of EMF levels near mobile base stations to ensure compliance with international guidelines. These measurements can be found on Ofcom’s website at: <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/spectrum/information/mobile-operational-enquiries/mobile-base-station-audits>.

⁵ [5G mobile technology: a guide](#); Mobile UK, the industry representative body, has also published a [Local Authority Toolkit](#) for councillors and officers to help explain how 5G technology works.

If you or any of your colleagues have any questions, please contact the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport at localconnectivity@dcms.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Warman MP
Minister for Digital Infrastructure

Cc: Local Authority Chief Planning Officer