The importance of local authority collaboration to deliver mobile connectivity

cornerstone

Recognising the benefits of digital connectivity for local authorities and regional 'combined authorities'.

Mobile connectivity offers countless benefits to individuals, communities and businesses across the UK. It has become part of our daily lives, allowing us to do many things like communicating with family and friends, manage businesses online, get remote access to services such as doctor appointments or banking, or shopping for our groceries.

Recognising the rapid increase of smartphone usage over the years, many local authorities and organisations have introduced their services online for their residents and local businesses.

Furthermore, with the opportunities that 5G will bring, the need for digital connectivity will be in greater demand. Trials have already begun across the UK to demonstrate the potential of 5G and how it can drive improved productivity and efficiency.

In June 2019, West Midlands 5G partnered with BT and University Hospitals Birmingham to trial the UK's first 5G Connected Ambulance. Real-time communication between the paramedics and the hospital doctors enabled the effective diagnosis of the patient at an early stage of care.

The trial showcased how a paramedic performed a remote-controlled ultrasound scan on a patient in an ambulance over a public 5G network. These trials show how digital connectivity and technology can reduce patient waiting times and save lives. (Source: WM5G)

Mobile connectivity.

Covid-19 has emphasised these benefits and dependence on mobile connectivity

Helps local councils to offer online services such as school admissions and local information for residents.

Helps local businesses to offer a broader range of services, boosting the local economy.

Councils can introduce technologies like smart lighting.

Supports local companies by facilitating working from home.

Enables councils to introduce smart refuse collection services, which saves costs.

Promotes economic growth by attracting investment from business, which creates jobs and regional prosperity in line with national and local economic strategies.

Helps local councils to offer online services such as paying council tax bills which provides a more efficient service.

Offers social benefits such as being able to connect with vulnerable family and friends or contact the emergency services 24/7.

Supports Internet of Things (IoT), resulting in quicker and more efficient services for businesses and residents.

Mobile infrastructure underpins Smart City initiatives, opening the door to Government funding for local authorities.

Working together to deliver mobile connectivity.

Delivering reliable mobile services across the UK by telecom operators requires the effective deployment of mobile infrastructure. As the UK's leading mobile infrastructure services company, Cornerstone works with landowners, institutions, and public authorities to place mobile equipment on rooftops, greenfield sites and street-works.

Preparing for the next generation of mobile technology is at the forefront of telecom operators' and the government's agenda. Recognising how it will improve businesses and individuals' daily lives, Cornerstone is working collaboratively with the different government bodies and local authorities to ensure that we are all supporting each other and sharing best practices for deploying 5G in the UK.

Central and devolved governments of the UK appreciate and understand the significance of modern digital connectivity to the socio-economic wellbeing of the UK and the devolved nations. This is clearly outlined in documents such as the 'Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review' and 'Statement of Strategic Priorities.'

The UK Government has also tried to facilitate a positive environment for 5G rollout by establishing testbeds via the Urban and Rural 'Connected Communities' projects.

These central government initiatives closely align with efforts in the devolved nations such as Scottish Government's 5G and Digital Strategy documents and 'Mobile Action Plan.'

The Welsh Government has implemented a similar 'Mobile Action Plan.'

Most notably, the UK Government and the four main UK Mobile Network Operators (MNO's) have now agreed the 'Shared Rural Network', worth £1bn of investment, to deliver rural mobile connectivity. The deal will lead to increases in coverage in some areas by more than a third, with the most prominent coverage improvements in rural parts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Digital connectivity is vital for the UK's post-COVID economic recovery plan. Digital infrastructure will be fundamental to the UK Governments 'Project Speed' initiative, aimed at cutting down the time it takes to develop, design and deliver vital infrastructure projects. In July 2020, the UK Government published their Permitted Development Legislation Consultation Response for England, aimed at removing restriction on mobile telecoms infrastructure deployment, with new legislation expected later in the year.

There is clearly an appetite for improved coverage at government level. Still, these initiatives and investments towards a national network must be delivered at a local level - local collaboration is critical.

Case studies of successful collaboration between Cornerstone & public authorities

Cornerstone is highly involved in significant engagement with various local and combined authorities across the UK. This engagement and collaboration have resulted in numerous positive relationships and practical benefits that are mutually advantageous in delivering new mobile telecommunications services to an area.

The following are a few examples and outcomes of that collaborative working.

WM5G.

WM5G is wholly owned by the West Midlands Combined Authority (who represent Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Dudley, Sandwell, Solihull and Walsall local authorities). It works in partnership with public and private sector organisations to deliver 5G. WM5G was set up as part of the West Midlands, winning the DCMS 'Urban Connected Communities' 5G testbed project.

- WM5G has worked closely with a member Council to facilitate an agreement for a 20-year estates moratorium, that prohibited the use of Council property to host telecoms equipment, to be abolished.
- Birmingham City, Wolverhampton City and Dudley Councils, are all in advanced discussions in agreeing on a Template Code Agreement with Cornerstone, to utilise Council owned assets to host telecommunications infrastructure.
- WM5G has worked holistically with its 7-member local authorities to ensure that they each have Digital Co-ordinators and Champions in place to streamline their telecommunications service rollout and 'bust barriers.'
- WM5G has facilitated meetings between Cornerstone and the elected Planning Committees of Birmingham and Solihull Councils.
- WM5G has facilitated 'pre-rollout' strategic engagement between Cornerstone and senior officers within the 7-member local authority planning departments. This has provided a collaborative relationship where all parties can raise site-specific issues to find mutual solutions.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) represents the 10 Councils of Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan.

- Engagement with GMCA has made it possible for Cornerstone to have a positive influence on various strategic planning and economic development policy documents that will assist in guiding development across Greater Manchester. These include the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework, GM Industrial Strategy, GM Infrastructure Framework and the GM Digital Blueprint.
- GMCA has facilitated pre-rollout engagement with the Development Managers of the 10 GM local authorities. This has assisted in building relationships for collaboration on mutual solutions that assist delivery of 5G connectivity.
- GMCA hosted a conference titled 'Accelerating the rollout of 5G across Greater Manchester.' This provided a platform for the industry to discuss various elements with stakeholders over multiple departments, across all 10-member local authorities. Discussion points included planning, estates, health concerns and the practical benefits to local authorities and their constituents.

Glasgow City Council.

Glasgow City Council has been extremely pro-active in their attitude to 5G rollout and digital connectivity.

Glasgow CC has established their own 'in-house' 5G delivery department to streamline various departments and engage with the industry.

- Glasgow City Council has been working with their own Estates department and engaging with third party landlords to open assets and create siting options that Cornerstone can use to place the necessary infrastructure. This will deliver improved mobile connectivity to the businesses and residents of Glasgow.
- Glasgow City Council's 5G delivery department has facilitated a workshop between Cornerstone and numerous officers from the Planning department. This is to discuss rollout, material benefits, technical constraints that dictate siting and design, and generally assist in building a collaborative relationship.
- The Glasgow City Council 5G delivery department has been pro-active in their engagement in acting as a facilitator between Cornerstone Planning and Heritage officers at the Council around a specific site. The site in question was significant to the socio-economic framework of Glasgow City Centre, as the site provided service to Queens Street Station, George Square and the many numerous businesses, tourists and residents who use this part of the city centre every day. The engagement led to a mutually suitable solution and grant of Listed Building Consent for the necessary infrastructure to maintain service provision.

How can local authorities work collaboratively with Mobile Network Operators to deliver the future of mobile connectivity?

Without the continuous installation of mobile infrastructure, the UK would lag in providing constant mobile connectivity and coverage. We need a national network of base stations.

It's therefore vital that local authorities offer their support at a very early stage to ensure that the process of mobile infrastructure deployment can be delivered as effectively and quickly as possible.

With the emergence of toolkits such as the DCMS Digital Connectivity Portal, Code of Best Practice and the MobileUK 'Councils and Connectivity2' document, there is an abundance of guidance on how local authorities should work collaboratively with MNOs to deliver mobile connectivity.

In Aug 2020, DCMS updated their guidance on access agreements between property owners and network operators for the deployment of digital infrastructure. Local authorities are being encouraged by ministers to consider the wider social and economic benefits for bringing connectivity to an area.

The guidance forms part of the government's plan to ensure people can access better broadband and mobile connectivity more quickly and is considered crucial to the UK's coronavirus recovery.

Visit https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-on-access-agreements for more information

The key steps

- Building a collaborative partnership – this saves both local authorities and MNO's time and money to deliver infrastructure that residents and businesses depend on, in a quicker and more streamlined approach
- Facilitate 'barrier busting' – this encourages an 'open door' on both sides to discuss issues and solutions
- Understand the relationship between infrastructure rollout and local/regional/national aspirations around economic and digital goals
- Work with embedded 'Digital Champions' – they holistically 'join the dots' between various Council departments and elected members – Planning, Estates, Highways, Econ Development departments. They can help develop a digital infrastructure strategy
- Local authorities make assets available and work with MNOs to agree on Template Code Agreements – this helps to identify mutual ways of working around acquiring Public Estate and speeds the delivery of service to local people, saving legal and estate agent costs
- Engage with Planning departments – this facilitates pre-application discussion, a greater understanding of socio-economic material considerations and technical elements/constraints associated with infrastructure that governs design. In effect, this then results in better proposals coming forward into an application, improved planning approval rates and fewer appeals
- Assist LPAs in training planning committee members about telecoms developments
- Promote positive local planning policy and digital strategies in line with national policies
- Assist with pro-active working around procedural issues, for example, the problems created by the COVID-19 pandemic

With early engagement and cooperation between authorities and telecom operators, we can build a better-connected society quickly and cost-effectively.

Let's join the future together.

For more information, please contact us on Community@ctil.co.uk

in working together.

Proud to be delivering sites for the future of UK mobile connectivity.

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