

£30m to spark rollout of next generation 5G in rural areas and help countryside capitalise on tech revolution

Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan has launched a £30 million UK-wide competition to spark a tech revolution in countryside communities and help rural Britain seize the opportunities of 5G technology.

Up to ten rural locations will be chosen to run innovative trials of 5G applications and stimulate commercial investment in 5G technology which offers mobile speeds 10 to 20 times faster than previous generations.

The Rural Connected Communities [competition](#) is the latest wave of £200 million funding to pioneer 5G testbeds across the country and deliver the benefits of the highest speeds of mobile connectivity available.

This technology is already being used in the Orkney Islands to remotely monitor salmon fisheries and improve efficiency of wind farms, and in Shropshire, the 5G trials are showing how farming can be transformed through targeted crop-spraying and soil analysis with drones and tractors.

The new funding will build on projects like these and trial other uses of 5G in rural communities to help drive business growth, enhance lives and encourage innovation.

Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan said:

The British countryside has always been a hotbed of pioneering industries and we're making sure our rural communities aren't left behind in the digital age.

We're investing millions so the whole country can grasp the opportunities and economic benefits of next generation 5G technology.

In modern Britain people expect to be connected wherever they are. And so we're committed to securing widespread mobile coverage and must make sure we have the right planning laws to give the UK the best infrastructure to stay ahead.

The Government has today also launched a [consultation](#) on proposals to simplify planning rules to improve rural mobile coverage.

Reforming planning laws for mobile infrastructure is part of the Prime Minister's plan to level-up connectivity for communities across the UK,

further support the roll-out of 5G and boost our economy. The consultation on potential changes to permitted development rights for mobile infrastructure in England includes proposals on:

- changing the permitted height of new masts to deliver better mobile coverage, promote mast sharing and minimise the need to build more infrastructure;
- allowing existing ground-based masts to be strengthened without prior approval to enable sites to be upgraded for 5G and for mast sharing;
- deploying radio equipment cabinets on protected and unprotected land without prior approval, excluding sites of special scientific interest; and
- allowing building-based masts nearer to roads to support 5G and increase mobile coverage.

The Government is also seeking views on what measures industry could offer to mitigate the impact of any new infrastructure, including assurances of a greater use of existing sites and the removal of redundant masts.

Minister of State for Housing and Planning, Rt Hon Esther McVey MP said:

We're committed to delivering the homes people across the country need, and that includes delivering the right infrastructure such as broadband connectivity and good mobile coverage. There is nothing more frustrating than moving into your new home to find signal is poor.

That's why we are proposing to simplify planning rules for installing the latest mobile technology – helping to extend coverage and banish more of those signal blackspots, particularly for those living in rural areas.

Mark Bridgeman, Deputy President of the Country Land and Business Association, said:

The vast potential of the rural economy will only be fulfilled when everyone in the countryside has full mobile connectivity, and we welcome DCMS's intent to deliver the Prime Minister's promise of internet access for all.

The current situation, where only 67% of the country can access a decent signal, is unacceptable and Government is right to focus on planning reform as a means to removing current barriers but there

must also be a balance between the interests of landowners and mobile operators.

Hamish MacLeod, Director at Mobile UK, said:

The current planning system does not support the fast, efficient rollout of 5G technology that is vital for the UK's digital economy. We welcome the Government looking at simplifying planning processes to deliver better connectivity, and we stand ready to work in partnership to ensure these much-needed reforms happen as quickly as possible.

Julian David, CEO, techUK said:

5G is an essential component of the UK's digital fabric. It underpins innovative technologies from drones to AI. techUK welcomes this initiative and sees this Government has long recognised the benefits offered by 5G to businesses and consumers, making considerable investment already in 5G testbeds and trials, including 5G RuralFirst, led by techUK member Cisco.

As important as the financial support for innovative uses for 5G is, the recognition that the way planning rules are implemented is a big factor in the level of connectivity. I am pleased the Government is now proposing to simplify those rules as they apply to mobile masts in England and urges them to move swiftly to make these changes.

ENDS

Notes to editors

Contact the DCMS press office for more information: 0207 2112210

The deadline for RCC applications is 25 October 2019 with the winning projects expected to be announced before the end of the year. For information about the RCC competition and the process for submitting an application please go to the [competition page](#).

The [consultation](#) on planning reform, which closes on 5 November 2019, is part of the Government's long-term strategy for meeting its digital connectivity targets, outlined in the Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review. The consultation seeks evidence from industry, communities and other stakeholders on the scope of the proposed planning reforms and the impact they could have. Subject to the outcome of this consultation a second consultation on the detailed proposals is likely to be required before introducing any legislation. The consultation proposals relate to England only.

The Government has committed to extend geographical 4G mobile coverage to 95%, to ensure continuous mobile connectivity is provided to all major roads, and to be a world leader in 5G.