

New laws to end mobile coverage 'no bar blues'

- New rules to connect countryside to 4G quicker and accelerate 5G roll out
- Law changes will reduce need for new phone masts and boost signal on roads
- Comes with protections to preserve rural scenery and minimise impact of new infrastructure

Reforms to planning laws will mean fewer phone masts will be needed overall to level up the country with improved 4G and 5G mobile coverage as telecoms firms will be able to upgrade existing infrastructure over building new masts.

Mobile network operators will get more freedom to make new and existing phone masts up to five metres taller and two metres wider than current rules permit. This will boost the range of masts, create room for the extra equipment needed for faster networks and make it easier for operators to share infrastructure.

The government will put tough new legal duties on operators to minimise the visual impact of network equipment, particularly in protected areas such as national parks, conservation areas, world heritage sites and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez said:

We've all felt the frustration of having the 'no bar blues' when struggling to get a phone signal, so we're changing the law to wipe out mobile 'not spots' and dial up the roll out of next-generation 5G.

Phone users across the country will benefit – whether they are in a city, village or on the road – and tighter rules on the visual impact of new infrastructure will ensure our cherished countryside is protected.

5G offers download speeds up to 100 times that of 4G and is set to revolutionise our daily lives, industries and public services by powering game-changing technologies such as virtual and augmented reality services and autonomous cars.

The move will help deliver the government-led £1 billion [Shared Rural Network](#) being built to eliminate 4G mobile 'not spots' in the countryside and enable communities to enjoy the revolutionary benefits of 5G technologies sooner, including specialised robots and drones driving productivity in agricultural industries.

The plans will also bring better mobile coverage to road users by allowing building-based masts to be placed nearer to highways. Families and businesses will also benefit from faster 5G roll out by making it easier for operators to use buildings to host their kit.

Hamish MacLeod, Chief Executive of Mobile UK, said:

Building the mobile networks that provide the connectivity on which we all rely is both complex and challenging. The industry welcomes the reforms to planning regulations proposed by the Government. They will enable operators to deploy mobile networks more efficiently to meet ambitious targets for rural and urban coverage, including next-generation 5G.

In its [response](#) to an extensive consultation on the plans published today, the government confirmed it will make amendments to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015.

The changes to existing permitted development rights include:

- Existing mobile masts to be strengthened without prior approval, so they can be upgraded for 5G and shared between mobile operators. This would allow increases to the width of existing masts by up to either 50 per cent or two metres (whichever is greatest) and, in unprotected areas, allow increases in height up to a maximum of 25 metres (previously 20 metres). Greater increases will also be permitted subject to approval by the local authority;
- New masts to be built up to five metres higher – meaning a maximum of 30 metres in unprotected areas and 25 metres in protected areas, subject to approval by the planning authority;
- Buildings to host smaller masts (up to six metres in height above building) in unprotected areas without prior approval to accelerate network upgrades and reduce need to build new masts;
- Building-based masts to be set up nearer to public roads subject to prior approval to improve mobile coverage for road users;
- Cabinets containing radio equipment to be deployed alongside masts without prior approval and to allow greater flexibility for installing cabinets in existing compounds (fenced-off sites containing masts and other communications equipment) to support new 5G networks;
- Conditions to ensure telecoms equipment does not block pavements and access to properties.

Mobile operators will still need to obtain agreement from the landowner before building any new infrastructure. All new ground-based masts will also need to be approved by local authorities which will continue to have a say on where they are placed and their appearance.

Robust conditions and limits will also remain in place to make sure communities and stakeholders are properly consulted and the environment is protected. A new [Code of Practice for Wireless Network Development in England](#)

has been published today to provide operators and councils with guidance to ensure that the impact of mobile infrastructure is minimised and that appropriate engagement takes place with local communities.

Housing Minister Stuart Andrew said:

Ensuring as many people as possible, wherever they live in the country, have access to fast, reliable mobile coverage and digital connectivity is crucial to our levelling up vision.

These changes to planning rules will help providers to give more people access to improved 4G and cutting edge 5G coverage, while also protecting our cherished natural landscape.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The government intends to bring forward the changes via secondary legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.
- In addition to the changes to permitted development rights, the government will amend the definition of small cell systems to ensure it encompasses new and emerging types of wireless technology.
- Operators will also be required to notify relevant authorities when constructing new infrastructure near to aerodromes and defence assets.
- Planning permission requires a planning application to be submitted to the relevant local planning authority to consider. Permitted development rights grant planning permission, without the need for a planning application, for specific types of development. Some permitted development rights are subject to a requirement to seek the prior approval of the local planning authority for the location and appearance of infrastructure before carrying out development. Where prior approval is not required, the developer must notify the local planning authority of its intention to deploy.
- Planning is a devolved policy area. As such, the reforms will apply in England only.