

75,000 telemarketing calls land solar panel directors with bans

Solartech North East Ltd was incorporated in July 2010 with Christopher Snaith (51), from Stockton-on-Tees, appointed as director. He was followed by Jeffrey Allan Hall (40), also from Stockton-on-Tees, who was appointed in February 2012.

The company originally operated as a renewable energy company, selling and installing high-quality solar panels to the domestic market in the UK.

Initially, the company was successful but due to legislative changes in 2016, it became less cost-effective for the homeowner to install solar panels.

This impacted on Solartech North East's success and in response, they diversified into installing boilers and other home improvement services before succumbing to economic pressures and entering into Creditors Voluntary Liquidation in February 2019.

The liquidation triggered an Insolvency Service investigation into the company's activities.

During 2017, Solartech North East had been investigated by Trading Standards and the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) following complaints made by customers and other individuals.

Investigations by the ICO found that between 1 January 2017 and 30 June 2017, Solartech North East made 74,902 unsolicited calls for direct marketing purposes to subscribers whose numbers were registered with the [Telephone Preference Service](#).

The ICO issued Solartech with a £90,000 fine for serious breaches of the [Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations](#), which remained outstanding as of the date of liquidation in February 2019.

On 4 September 2019 the Secretary of State accepted disqualification undertakings from Christopher Snaith and Jeffrey Hall after they did not dispute that they had failed to ensure that Solartech North East complied with Regulation 21 of the Privacy and Electronic Communications (EC Directive) Regulations 2003.

Effective from 25 September 2019, the pair cannot, without the permission of the court, be involved in the formation, promotion or management of a company, directly or indirectly, for 6-years.

Jane Knight, Deputy Head of Insolvent Investigations from the Insolvency Service, said:

Making tens of thousands of unsolicited marketing calls to people

who had specifically opted out from receiving them is unacceptable trading practice.

The disqualifications mean Christopher Snaith and Jeffrey Hall will not be able to run a limited company for 6 years and will protect the public from unwanted sales calls.

David Clancy, ICO Enforcement Group Manager, said:

By partnering with the Insolvency Service in cases like this we are disrupting the ruthless operations of directors of companies plaguing the public with illegal nuisance calls.

Christopher Snaith is of Stockton-on-Tees and his date of birth is April 1968

Jeffrey Hall is of Stockton-on-Tees and his date of birth is June 1979.

Solartech North East Ltd (Company no. 07327707).

Disqualification undertakings are the administrative equivalent of a disqualification order but do not involve court proceedings. Persons subject to a disqualification order are bound by a [range of restrictions](#).

[Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct.](#)

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day: Simon Collis' message](#)

Tomorrow is International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day.

Over the last 5 years, I have had the honour to serve as HM's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, a country which is the home to two of the holiest sites of pilgrimage in Islam.

Every year Saudi Arabia welcomes millions of pilgrims who visit the Kingdom to perform Hajj and Umrah. Of these, over 125,000 are British nationals.

Islam, together with other religions, is part of what defines the fabric of modern Britain, and its rich tapestry of faiths and beliefs. In the UK, there are 73 denominations of Islam, and over 3000 mosques. Diversity is a strength, and part of our national identity.

Lord Ahmad, the FC0 Minister for Human Rights, recently visited Saudi Arabia and talked about Freedom of Religion and Belief with his counterparts from the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, the MFA, and the Human Rights Commission.

Islam is a religion that teaches harmony, tolerance and diversity. Peace and tolerance are values that King Salman, The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques highlighted in his speech at the end of Ramadan. From my 5 years here, I can say that Eid in Saudi Arabia is a great occasion for harmony, solidarity, tolerance and happiness.

The Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has also emphasised the values of coexistence, moderation and tolerance. During his visit to the UK last year the Crown Prince met with the Archbishop of Canterbury and emphasised his commitment to promote the flourishing of different faith traditions and interfaith dialogue in Saudi Arabia.

International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day is a reminder to all of us to promote coexistence and respect between people of different cultures and religions. International Freedom of Religion or Belief Day is a reminder to all of us to promote coexistence and respect between people of different cultures and religions. We make this effort not just because the right to freedom of religion or belief is a principle worth defending but also because we believe that societies in which people are free to practice their faith or belief are, by their very nature, more stable and more prosperous.

[£1 billion deal set to solve poor mobile coverage](#)

- Moves to cement plans to give high-quality 4G coverage to 95 per cent of the UK by 2025, meaning consumers will get good 4G signal on the go wherever they live, work or travel
- Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan supports deal with UK Mobile Network Operators to provide additional coverage to 280,000 homes and businesses and 16,000km of roads
- New plans for all operators to share phone masts to improve UK coverage is a world first

The move will bring 4G coverage to 95 per cent of the UK by 2025 and be a huge boost for consumers. More people in rural areas will benefit from the speed and efficiency of services on the go – from booking travel, shopping

online or speaking to friends and family.

Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan is supportive of a £530 million proposal from the UK's mobile network operators for a Shared Rural Network with the potential for it to be matched by £500 million investment from Government.

This would be a world-first deal with EE, O2, Three and Vodafone investing in a network of new and existing phone masts they would all share. Consumers will be able to rely on their own provider's network to use their mobile phones wherever they are.

It follows Government proposals for an overhaul of planning rules and is part of the Prime Minister's plan to level up the country with world-class digital infrastructure across the country to make sure homes and businesses are better connected.

Better 4G connectivity will make flexible working easier, boost regional economic growth and close the digital divide that exists across the country. The benefits will be felt across all four nations of the UK with the greatest coverage improvements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan said:

We are determined to make sure no part of the country is left behind when it comes to mobile connectivity. We are closing in on a deal with the mobile network operators so those living in rural areas will be able to get the fast and reliable mobile coverage they need and deserve.

Brokering an agreement for mast sharing between networks alongside new investment in mobile infrastructure will mean people get good 4G signal no matter where they are or which provider they're with.

But it is not yet a done deal and I want to see industry move quickly so we can reach a final agreement early next year.

Strong competition promotes industry investment in mobile coverage in dense urban areas, but rural areas have fewer potential customers and have not seen the level of investment needed to provide good coverage.

The deal would see all four operators come together to create a new organisation to deliver the Shared Rural Network, in what would be an innovative and unique solution to the persistent problem of poor mobile coverage in the countryside. It would get the maximum use out of existing and new phone masts by allowing all four operators to host equipment on them.

Under the proposal, the four operators will invest £530 million to open up and share existing masts and infrastructure to close almost all partial not-spots – areas where there is currently only coverage from at least one but not all operators. It would also mean additional mobile coverage for 280,000 premises and 16,000 kilometres of roads.

If the operators agree to meet these ambitions on partial not spots, the Digital Secretary Nicky Morgan has been clear government will commit up to £500 million of investment to go even further to eliminate total not-spots – those hard-to-reach areas where there is currently no coverage from any operator.

Government-owned mobile infrastructure built as part of the Emergency Services Network will also be made available to all four operators, taking full advantage of government assets. This is expected to contribute to the coverage target by delivering up to an additional 2% of geographic coverage per operator, in some of the most remote, rural locations.

The Shared Rural Network proposal is subject to legal agreement. The Government's ambition is to reach a formal agreement on it early next year.

Nick Jeffery, CEO of Vodafone UK, said:

There is no other scheme like this in the world. It will spell an end to annoying mobile 'not spots' for hundreds of thousands of people living, working and travelling in the more remote parts of the UK. By working together, we will deliver better coverage while offering more choice for consumers and businesses using far fewer masts.

Mark Evans, CEO of Telefonica UK (O2), said:

These proposals represent a step-change in the way that mobile coverage is delivered. They are the most ambitious solution, of all proposals on the table and will ensure that customers across all corners of the UK can access a good connection. By providing a much-needed boost to rural communities, the Shared Rural Network represents a vital step in bridging the digital divide.

Mobile has become so much more than the phone in your hand; it's the glue that powers the UK's economy and will be a fundamental component of our national success in the years to come.

David Dyson, CEO of Three UK, said:

We welcome the Shared Rural Network. It is the best way to enhance mobile connectivity for the 9.3 million living in the UK's countryside: it brings mobile coverage to more places in the UK and it gives people in rural areas a similar choice as those living in towns and cities.

Marc Allera, CEO of BT's Consumer division, said:

While EE already has the UK's largest 4G network, we're always looking at new ways to efficiently deliver more 4G to areas that are hardest to reach.

This ambitious proposal combined with critical Government support, will remove the key barriers to tackling the tricky not-spot problem, ensuring people and businesses right across the UK get access to the digital connectivity they need, wherever they are.

Country Land and Business Association Deputy President Mark Bridgeman said:

We know the countryside has huge potential for job creation and new economic growth, but in order for this to happen we must ensure every community in the country is fully-connected. Today's news is a big step towards achieving that goal.

This announcement will be welcomed by everyone who lives or works in the countryside. We have been hugely frustrated at the lack of progress in improving mobile reception to date, but the legal coverage obligations now put on operators to improve the situation, through the delivery of a Single Rural Network, will ensure demonstrable improvements over the next few years for rural communities.

Hamish MacLeod, Director at Mobile UK, said:

The mobile industry has a shared commitment with the Government to invest in and accelerate rural coverage improvements, and I am delighted that with the Shared Rural Network we have a proposal of action to deliver.

Working in partnership with the Government all four mobile operators, through a programme of shared infrastructure, will virtually eliminate partial not-spots and then go further to bring 4G coverage to the most rural parts of the UK. This is good news for consumers and businesses across the whole of the UK.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

- To date, the Government has considered Ofcom's forthcoming spectrum auction to be the best opportunity for improving mobile coverage. Ofcom

plan to auction licences for 5G spectrum for use of the airwaves in the 700 MHz and 3.6-3.8 GHz spectrum bands in 2020. Typically, the mobile network operators will bid for national licences to expand their network capability. Historically, Ofcom has used coverage obligations attached to the operators' licences to improve mobile coverage. Ofcom has proposed to include two coverage obligations in the auction which would require the two operators who acquire them to reach 90 per cent coverage by 2024, in exchange for a discount in the auction.

- The SRN is an alternative proposal from the mobile operators, which relies on Ofcom removing the two coverage obligations from the auction and on the Government funding roll out in total not spots. The Government believes the SRN will deliver a better result for UK consumers and do so at a lower public cost overall because it enables industry to work collaboratively on improving coverage, rather than bidding competitively to do so individually. The SRN proposal would see each individual operator reach 92 per cent coverage by 2025, with licence obligations taking effect in 2026. The collective effect of this will deliver coverage to 95% of the UK.
- To make sure the SRN is delivered, the MNOs would adopt new, legally-binding licence conditions. There will be interim coverage updates every year up to 2025. Ofcom will report regularly on progress in their Connected Nations reports.
- The industry will collectively fund up to £532m over the 20 year lifetime of the programme, with each operator's planned spend reflecting their different starting positions on rural coverage and prior investment.
- The Government and MNOs have agreed in principle terms for the SRN. The proposal is subject to legal agreement and the ambition is to reach a formal agreement on the SRN.
- The Government's funding for the SRN would be classified as state aid and will be subject to the approval of the European Commission or (depending on the circumstances of EU Exit) the Competition and Markets Authority.
- The UK has a vibrant telecoms industry and we are keen that the SRN proposal reflects that. The programme would be delivered jointly by all four MNOs but it is expected that organisations across the industry would have the opportunity to get involved in the delivery of the programme at various levels of the supply chain, building the required infrastructure in an open, fair and transparent way.

Government launches call for evidence on the welfare of primates

Action to improve the welfare of primates is a step closer today, following the launch of [a call for evidence](#) which will inform the case for banning these animals being kept as pets.

Primates are a group of mammals which includes lemurs, monkeys and apes. The [latest estimate from the RSPCA](#) is that approximately 4,000-5,000 primates are currently kept as pets in the UK.

Primates have complex welfare and social needs, which those in favour of banning people from keeping them as pets say cannot be met in a domestic environment. It is an offence under the Animal Welfare Act to keep a primate while not providing for their welfare needs or to cause them unnecessary suffering.

Animal Welfare Minister Zac Goldsmith said:

Primates are very intelligent and curious wild animals with highly complex welfare and social needs which must be respected. Through the extraordinary work of Monkey World's Dr Alison Cronin, I have seen first-hand how keeping them as pets can cause immense suffering.

That is why the government is today launching this crucial call for evidence to help understand how we can better protect these wild animals. If the evidence supports it, I will ask the department to draw up a consultation on banning the practice.

This action is part of our strong commitment to protecting animals and follows steps we have already taken, including banning wild animals in travelling circuses and a commitment to increasing maximum sentencing for animal cruelty from six months to five years.

This call for evidence requests views on the welfare of primates kept as pets in England, including opinions on restricting the ownership, sale and breeding of primates. It builds on reforms that came into force in October last year meaning anyone trading in pets both online and offline will be subject to the same strict licensing conditions as other breeders and pet shops.

Pet shops are also required to give buyers written information about the animals they buy, with details of the five welfare needs owners must meet

under the Animal Welfare Act around environment, diet, behaviour, housing and freedom from pain. This advice is particularly important when buying exotic pets, which can have very specific welfare needs.

Monkey World CEO Dr Alison Cronin MBE said:

Monkey World has rescued primates from the British pet trade for more than 30 years, and we have experienced a dramatic increase in the numbers. We have rescued 72 in the last 10 years, and now have a waiting list numbering more than 100.

Current laws are not protecting the monkeys from abuse or neglect, as they arrive at the park malnourished, with rickets, mobility problems and psychologically damaged as a result of living in solitary confinement, inside people's houses.

Many people are also victim of this unnecessary trade when they are taken in by unscrupulous dealers, scam ads and social media pressure. We are asking people to let Defra know that this trade is unacceptable and the current legislation is not working. The laws must change.

It is an offence not to provide for an animal's welfare needs and anyone breaking this law can face an unlimited fine or a prison sentence.

[Extension of pub opening hours in celebration of the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe \(VE\) Day](#)

The Home Secretary has today announced plans to extend pub licensing hours across England and Wales to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day.

Under the proposals, pubs, clubs and bars which are licensed to trade until 11pm could be allowed to open until 1am on both Friday 8 May and Saturday 9 May 2020.

The news follows the government's decision to move the early May bank holiday in 2020 from Monday 4 May to Friday 8 May to make the 75th anniversary of VE Day a public holiday.

The occasion will see celebrations and community events across the country to remember the contribution of British, Commonwealth and Allied Armed Forces personnel and all those citizens who contributed to the war effort and safeguarded the home front.

Government plans for VE Day 75, which will be announced in due course, will look to evoke the spirit and significance of this year's D-Day 75 tributes which saw large-scale events with veterans at the heart of commemorations.

Home Secretary Priti Patel said:

VE Day is a landmark day in our history. Extending licensing hours will pave the way for commemorative events across the UK, so we can pay tribute to the courage and determination of the millions who fought for our freedom or supported the war effort at home.

The extension of pub opening hours will be subject to a short consultation with partners including the police, licensing authorities, industry, community groups and veterans organisations.

Past national occasions where the government has extended licensing hours have included the Royal Wedding in 2018, the Queen's 90th birthday in 2016, the 2014 World Cup, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012 and the Royal Wedding in 2011.