

# House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS631)

## Department for Communities and Local Government

Written Statement made by: **Minister of State for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis)** on 17 Mar 2016.

### Boosting Mobile Connectivity

I wish to set out, along with my hon Friend the Minister of State for Culture and the Digital Economy (Ed Vaizey), how the Government will support digital connectivity to provide the opportunity for everyone to connect to the information superhighway and boost our economic prosperity.

“Fixing the foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation” (Cm 9098) set out our commitment to support market investment and streamline legislation to make it easier to roll out the mobile infrastructure that this country needs.

Views on how this could best be achieved were sought through the Call for Evidence: “Review of how the planning system in England can support the delivery of mobile connectivity” published on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2015. The review also sought evidence on the effectiveness of planning freedoms introduced in 2013.

The Government is firmly committed to ensuring there is sufficient capacity to meet the growing demand for mobile connectivity. The majority of respondents recognised that digital connectivity is an essential service that communities and business want and need. There was support for the Government’s ambition to maximise coverage and for commercial investment.

Importantly it has been recognised that there are opportunities to support mobile connectivity whilst ensuring local communities retain their role in influencing the visual impact of new infrastructure.

This Government intends to bring forward provisions in England to provide greater freedoms and flexibilities for the deployment of mobile infrastructure. The changes outlined below are vital for our continued economic prosperity and social inclusion for all. They will help ensure that mobile operators have the confidence to invest in their network coverage and boost capacity for both voice and data.

Where a site is already used for telecommunications infrastructure, we will extend permitted development rights to allow taller ground based masts to be built. The threshold for new ground based masts will increase from 15 metres to 25 metres in non-protected areas and a new permitted development right allowing new masts of up to 20 metres will be introduced in protected areas. To ensure that there is appropriate community engagement a prior approval will apply where a new mast is being built, meaning consideration will always be given to how to minimise the visual impact of masts.

Operators will also be able to increase the height of existing masts to 20 metres in both non-protected and protected areas without prior approval; between 20 metres and 25 metres in non-protected areas with a prior approval; and have a new automatic right to upgrade the infrastructure on their masts in protected areas to align with existing rights in non-protected areas. There will be a height restriction of 20 metres on highways and residential areas to accommodate vehicle lines of sight and pedestrian access.

In addition, we will lift restrictions on the number of antennae allowed on structures above 30

metres, while removing the prior approval requirement for individual antenna greater than 6 metres in height in non-protected areas and for 2 small cell antenna on residential premises in both non-protected and protected areas as the visual impact is limited.

We will also grant rights so small cell antenna on residential and commercial premises can face highways, and increase from 6 to 18 months the right for operators to be able to install emergency moveable transmission equipment.

To complement these changes, we will work with the industry and interested parties to strengthen the sector-owned Code of Practice to ensure best practice is always applied when it comes to the siting and design of mobile infrastructure.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport will be consulting key stakeholders for 6 weeks commencing 17 March on changes to the Electronic Communications Code (Conditions and Restrictions) Regulations 2003 to complement planning legislation. These changes will apply to the whole of the UK.

The Code regulations deal with the operational aspects of the way in which telecoms operators exercise their permitted development rights and include requirements to consult with planning authorities. These requirements will be revised to ensure that there is consistency in how operators consult planning authorities where there is no prior approval.

We intend that the planning changes will come into effect from summer 2016 and will apply to England only. The changes to the Code regulations will apply throughout the United Kingdom, as telecommunications is a reserved matter, and will also commence in summer 2016.