



Q4 2020



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# Foreword

by Juliette Wallace, Business Planning and Property Director

**Welcome to the first issue of MBNL InSite – our dedicated newsletter to bring you up to speed on the latest news about MBNL, our industry and everything that’s close to the heart of our site provider community.**

As we approach the end of 2020 – an unprecedented and challenging year in so many ways, we wish to connect with our site provider community with this brand-new quarterly newsletter.

Since its establishment in 2007, MBNL has been delivering best-in-class network performance to enable EE and Three to provide differentiated and outstanding services and experiences for their customers in the UK. Digital Britain is realised through MBNL’s infrastructure which forms the backbone to mobile connectivity. This could not be achieved without the critical support of our site providers. Your collaboration with MBNL enables us to install and operate mobile network infrastructure at over 20,000 sites across the country, providing robust mobile connectivity to tens of millions of EE and Three’s customers.

“...making sure our networks continue to deliver high-quality, reliable connectivity in every part of the country during the festive period is more important than ever.”

Christmas is just around the corner. In normal times, we would be getting excited about seeing and gathering with family and friends. COVID-19 means this year’s celebrations will be different, however, as we may not be able to see our loved ones in person. But all is not lost – we can still see each other virtually, sharing the festive joy thanks to the array of digital communications available to us. That’s why making sure our networks continue to deliver high-quality, reliable connectivity in every part of the country during the festive period is more important than ever. See latest [government guidance on local restrictions](#) for tips on how to have a safe holiday.

This first issue of MBNL InSite features updates on the mobile industry’s critical role during the pandemic, and how MBNL has been working with our industry, the government and our site provider community to ensure that the country can rely on digital connectivity to get through this difficult period and revive the economy. There is also a special update from our Site Access Team.

I hope you enjoy reading our newsletter.

**All of us at MBNL wish you a Merry & Connected Christmas, and a Safe & Happy 2021.**



# How mobile operators are helping the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the critical role of telecommunications networks during a nationwide crisis. Indeed, the UK Government fully recognises the ongoing importance of the telecommunications industry, including mobile networks, and has designated the industry as one of the critical sectors in new government regulations and legislation for dealing with the pandemic. Acknowledging that individuals and businesses are unequivocally reliant on digital communications, especially during these challenging times, the mobile industry has united to take unprecedented actions to keep the country connected, helping to make life a bit easier for everyone.

## Safeguarding the integrity of the UK's networks

The mobile industry responded to the pandemic by mobilising their personnel and resources to focus on keeping the networks running amid surges in demand and significant changes in the ways people are using mobile services. All these add to the strain on the networks. Operators have prioritised support for emergency services such as the NHS, the Emergency Services Network (ESN), critical national infrastructure and vulnerable customers whilst maintaining the integrity of their mobile networks, continuing to deliver the critical connectivity services needed by individuals and businesses.

## Supporting the national response to the pandemic and the NHS

From supporting the government with their “stay at home” text to all mobile users in the country at the onset of the outbreak, to offering free access to the NHS UK websites and zero-rating usage of the NHS COVID-19 contact tracing app, the mobile industry has united, collectively supporting the national response and emergency services. For instance, in collaboration with the government, the industry offered a joint support package for NHS frontline staff, offering them free mobile data access, voice calls and text they use for work purposes on their personal mobiles. In addition, MBNL has also helped with building connectivity at the Nightingale Hospitals across the UK.

## Maintaining customer service and protecting the vulnerable

Despite nationwide lockdowns and social distancing restrictions, the UK's mobile operators have managed to maintain critical customer service by focusing their staff and resources on call centres and the provision of virtual customer care. Operators have also agreed generous data allowances for vulnerable mobile customers. Some, including EE and Three, have even donated devices and connectivity to vulnerable customers, care workers, NHS workers and charities. These actions are crucial to ensuring that everyone, particularly the more vulnerable, can have access to reliable mobile connectivity as a lifeline during such difficult times.

Click [here](#) to view Mobile UK's illustrative diagram for more details on how the UK's mobile industry is helping with the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.





# Speed Up Britain – all aboard the high-speed train to a digital future



In July, MBNL joined forces with leading mobile infrastructure industry players to launch Speed Up Britain – a cross-industry campaign to accelerate the rollout of world-class mobile networks enabling Britain to meet current digital connectivity demand and future needs. The UK Government has set ambitious targets for mobile networks to achieve 95% geographical coverage across the country by 2025 and the majority of the population to be covered by a 5G signal by 2027. Digital connectivity has been crucial for the new way of life under COVID-19 and will play an even more critical role in the country's post-pandemic recovery. A recent report by the **Centre for Policy Studies (CPS)** '[Upwardly Mobile: How the UK can gain the full benefits of the 5G revolution](#)' warns that the UK's "levelling up" agenda and Covid-19 recovery could be at risk if 5G rollout veers off track. The report, supported by Speed Up Britain, points out that targeted amendments to the Government's Electronic Communications Code could speed up 5G rollout and provide a £41 billion boost to the UK economy by 2027.

Specifically, we are calling for the government to make the Electronic Communications Code (the Code) more effective in assisting the rapid deployment of mobile infrastructure in the UK. The Code governs the relationship between operators of electronic communications networks and site providers to host mobile network equipment. Despite a reform in 2017, the Code is not working as effectively as intended and some key areas need to be reviewed and amended to provide clarity. It is envisaged that these amendments will enable all parties to work collaboratively and successfully to deliver the infrastructure needed for better mobile connectivity in every part of the country.



"As an industry, we are committed to delivering better mobile connectivity to build the digital future of the UK and everyone in the country. However, we also face numerous challenges in deploying this critical infrastructure. Many of the challenges are due to the shortcomings that currently exist in the Code. The Speed Up Britain campaign aims to deliver solutions for overcoming these issues by engaging and collaborating with the government, public sector and private landowners, as well as the wider industry. I firmly believe that by working together we can resolve differences, bridge divides, find common understandings and agreeable ways to enable the industry to deliver critical mobile connectivity for the country more efficiently, for the benefit of everyone."

**Juliette Wallace, Business Planning & Property Director at MBNL**



Riding on the momentum of our cross-industry collaboration, MBNL has engaged with industry peers in a nationwide campaign for reform to Town and Country Permitted Development Rights to make the telecommunications infrastructure planning application and approval processes simpler and quicker. We welcome the recent announcement by the Government of Northern Ireland that [updated legislation](#) will come into force on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2020. This will facilitate the efficient rollout of world-class mobile connectivity across Northern Ireland, enabling a wide array of associated benefits to be delivered to its people and businesses now and into the future. We look forward to welcoming similar reform to the rest of the UK.

Learn more about [Speed Up Britain](#)

Check out our [Code fact sheet](#) for more information about the Electronic Communications Code

# Lead by example – government urges local councils to support connectivity infrastructure rollout

MBNL welcomes [the government's recent publication of an updated version of the Best Value Statutory Guidance](#), confirming that enabling better mobile connectivity in an area is a valid way for local authorities to discharge the duty to obtain best value from the assets they control. The government fully recognises that the availability of better digital connectivity is crucial to the UK's coronavirus recovery as well as its future growth and calls on local councils to help ensure people can access better connectivity. Ministers urge local authorities to consider wider societal and economic benefits created by enhanced digital connectivity when making their assets available for mobile infrastructure.

Many forward-looking local authorities have been working co-operatively with mobile operators under the Electronic Communications Code to improve local connectivity. For instance, MBNL has recently signed new Code agreements with Birmingham City Council to accelerate the rollout of EE and Three's 5G networks across the city. Birmingham City Council recognises that the rapid expansion of its 5G networks is fundamental to the delivery of the technology and innovation needed for future-proofing its social infrastructure and economic development. The extended networks will enable more EE and Three customers, both individuals and businesses, to benefit from 5G's superfast speeds and unprecedented reliability and capacity. The partnership demonstrates that Code agreements provide an effective and efficient way for local authorities to collaborate with mobile operators to deliver improved connectivity and the associated benefits for their communities. This fully resonates with the government's intentions in updating the Best Value Statutory Guidance. The updated guidance provides local authorities with the assurance they need and will encourage more engagement with mobile operators to deliver the government's digital connectivity ambitions.

“Councils have a vital role to play in the rollout of digital infrastructure and while there is good work going on up and down the country, there is more we can do.”

**Minister for Digital Infrastructure Matt Warman**





# Site access is key to keeping the UK connected, and it's getting smarter



Last but not least, we wanted to extend our gratitude and appreciation to all of our site providers for your continued support in facilitating access to our telecommunications apparatus during this challenging year. Your cooperation has enabled us to keep the UK's mobile networks running to support the new way of life under the COVID-19 pandemic. With nationwide lockdowns and tight restrictions imposed in different parts of the country, all of us are unequivocally reliant on digital communications. Your unwavering support has enabled us to carry out critical repair and upgrade works in a timely manner, minimising the impact on the user communities. This is particularly vital to ensuring our networks can continue to deliver resilient connectivity to support mass homeworking and the effective operations of the NHS and emergency services. Maintaining the integrity of our communications networks is of paramount importance to keep individuals and businesses connected to get through the pandemic and to level up for recovery afterwards.

As always, the health and safety of our employees, partners, the general public, and not least our site providers remain our top

priority. In addition to stringent adherence to all national and regional government health & safety guidelines when visiting your premises for essential repair and upgrade works, we are pleased to announce that access processes to all MBNL sites are now managed via our newly launched MBNL MyLocken App – a smart access solution that enables centralised control and individual real-time access management to provide all of our sites with a level of security usually restricted to online access control systems.

This new system enables MBNL to execute our site access processes and procedures with further enhanced levels of security and safety. Great news for our colleagues, partners and site providers alike! It will also boost our access schedule management, meaning fewer and more efficient visits to your premises. Again, your continued support for facilitating access to our apparatus is vital to the delivery of our repair and upgrade works. Please email [site.access@mbnl.co.uk](mailto:site.access@mbnl.co.uk) (stating the premises name and postcode in the subject heading) to tell us of any changes to your site access arrangements and procedures, including any interim arrangements for the holiday season.



# Event update: Greater London Authority Connectivity Workshops

As part of our continuous effort to build collaborative relationships with local authorities for improving mobile connectivity throughout the country, MBNL is hosting a series of workshops in conjunction with industry peers and Digital Champions at the Greater London Authority (GLA) over the coming months. The GLA was formed in 2000 to improve the co-ordination between the 32 local authorities in Greater London. Designed with the Digital Champions and Property Managers of each of the GLA boroughs in mind, the theme of the workshops revolves around the importance of digital connectivity, not only across our capital city, but for the whole of the UK. Various topics are covered, including the Electronic Communications Code, Planning Legislation and how the industry can work with local authorities to improve communications and efficiency for telecommunications infrastructure planning. The first workshop successfully took place on 10<sup>th</sup> December, attended by 28 representatives from across the GLA boroughs. Further workshops will take place in early 2021. MBNL is committed to working closely with the GLA and other local authorities to connect communities in order to help the government achieve its digital ambitions.





# We'd love to hear your feedback

Please complete our 20-second survey

