

Connecting Cambridgeshire Mobile Workshop – East Cambridgeshire - 17/11/2022

The Connecting Cambridgeshire programme is working with district planning teams and Mobile Network Providers to improve mobile coverage with expert support from WM5G, which has made significant progress in facilitating the rollout of 5G in the West Midlands authority area.

Attendees

East Cambs District Council: Cllr Lisa Stubbs, Cllr Lorna Dupre, Cllr Alison Whelan, Cllr Christine Ambrose-Smith, Cllr Alan Sharp, Cllr Anna Bailey, Martin Smith, Holly Chapman
Connecting Cambridgeshire: Noelle Godfrey, Michael Stevens, Jane Sneesby
WM5G: Judith Ferrarin

Speakers and links to presentations

- Focus on mobile connectivity as part of the [Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Digital Connectivity Strategy 2021-2025](#) - Noelle Godfrey, Connecting Cambridgeshire Programme Director (NG)
- National perspective 'Are You Ready for 5G?' and [Electronic Communications Code \(ECC\) and Planning overview](#) - Judith Ferrarin, WM5G Barrier Busting lead (JF)
- Local perspective – [Mobile Coverage in East Cambridgeshire](#) - Michael Stevens, Enabling Digital Delivery Manager (MS)
- Holly Chapman, ECDC Planning Officer (HC)

Q&As

Q: Are MNOs making best use of church towers and/or tall pylons to site mobile antenna? Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith, Littleport ward

A: Ely Cathedral has been used to site a mobile mast to improve coverage, however churches are often listed buildings and planning permission is likely to be required to assess the visual and technical impact of additional infrastructure (HC). Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) tend to only use churches for mobile masts as a last option as it is more complex and expensive to deploy. Tall pylons such as those in Fenland are often used by mobile networks (JF.)

Q: What can be done to help older and vulnerable people in an emergency if they are in 'notspots' where there is no mobile coverage? Cllr Lorna Dupre, Sutton ward

A: This is an important issue as the 'copper switch off' means copper telephone landlines are due to be phased out from 2026 and replaced with telephone calls being made over broadband connections. People without a broadband connection to the internet will be reliant on mobile phones for emergency calls. Connecting Cambridgeshire has raised this issue with Ofcom and is lobbying to make people aware of the forthcoming copper switch off. Drive testing surveys of mobile coverage by the 4 main providers (EE, VMO2, Three, Vodafone) are being conducted to obtain more accurate data and map 'partial notspots' to better understand the extent of the issue. (NG)

Q: What redress do residents have if mobile masts are erected without consultation as there have been cases in other areas of MNOs blocking driveways? Cllr Lorna Dupre, Sutton ward

A: Nationally, there have been some rogue deployments by MNOs which have blocked driveways and windows. These cases are complex to resolve, however WM5G has some experience of getting masts moved if they are shown to be in the wrong place. (JF)

Q: How can communications be improved between MNOs and local communities to answer queries about notices of work to deploy mobile masts? Cllr Lorna Dupre, Sutton ward

A: Formal notices about forthcoming work on mobile infrastructure are physically posted on site via a national agent so only provide the Head Office contact details, which is not very helpful. (JF)

Going forward with the support of specialist planning resource, the Connecting Cambridgeshire team aims to be able to pre-empt these issues by liaising with MNOs and local authority planning teams to share information and ensure residents are aware of the proposals and the benefits (NG)

Some permitted development can go ahead without planning permission but where planning permission is required it is considered best practice for MNOs to consult with local stakeholders prior to submitting a planning application. (NG).

Q: Does planning permission for taller mobile masts need to take account of covenants on land, as in a recent case in South Cambs? Cllr Alan Sharp, Stetchworth ward

A: It is complicated and there may be covenants, which restrict developments, any covenant would need to be adhered to in addition to any standard planning regulations. (HC) The role of Connecting Cambridgeshire is to liaise with MNOs to keep an eye on their network plans and liaise with the ECDC planning team and local Members to overcome any issues. (NG)

Q: How will the switch off in 3G affect areas with poor 4G coverage? Cllr Alan Sharp, Stetchworth ward

A: There are plans to switch off 3G networks from 2024, which is a concern as it could affect a lot of vulnerable people and old mobile phone handsets may not be able to access 4G. MNOs say that coverage will be better with 4G/5G as there is wider spectrum with more capacity and they will be able to re-use the old 3G spectrum to provide additional coverage and capacity on 4G networks. (JF) We are liaising with the Government's digital programme and working with other authorities to flag this issue and put pressure on Ofcom to address this issue. (MS)

Q: What guidance can we use to advise residents who may be concerned about the safety of 5G? Cllr Alan Sharp, Stetchworth ward

A: 5G, or fifth generation, is the latest wireless mobile phone technology, first widely deployed in 2019. 5G is expected to increase performance and enable a wide range of new applications. All MNOs operating in the UK must comply with both nationally and internationally recognised safety standards when deploying 5G equipment that have been developed by an independent body of experts.

Links to further detailed information on 5G mobile networks and health:

World Health Organisation [Q&As on 5G mobile network and health](#)

HM Government guide [5G Technology](#)

Public Health England [5G technologies: radiowaves and health](#)

Ofcom [Summary of consultation responses from individuals and groups with health concerns about 5G mobile and related technologies](#)

Health and Safety Executive looks at the [major issues relating to non-ionising radiation](#)

Mobile Coverage Factsheet

Further background information and useful links are provided in the [Connecting Cambridgeshire Mobile factsheet November 2022](#)

Please note: The Connecting Cambridgeshire team is aware that MNO, Three, has recently applied for planning permission for a new mobile mast in Ely, and will be keeping this under review.

Contact us: If you have any queries on this topic or would like to arrange a briefing to discuss further any aspect of the Connecting Cambridgeshire Programme please contact us by emailing connecting.cambridgeshire@cambridgeshire.gov.uk