

National Parks England and Mobile UK Joint Accord / Memorandum of Understanding

June 2018

This Accord is between National Parks England and Mobile UK. It has been jointly developed to complement the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development (2016), recognising the special nature of the National Parks as sensitive environments that seek to support thriving communities, and the public benefit of current and future mobile telecommunications to national park areas in providing connectivity to residents and to help boost tourism, farming, and local businesses.

Both parties to this Accord will work together in recognition that a modern telecommunications infrastructure is vital for a modern economy and society; and that the installation and maintenance of which needs to respect the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the areas. To this end we seek to achieve the following objectives:

- To endeavour to deliver high quality mobile coverage and customer experience to communities living in, working at and visiting our National Parks in recognition of the essential nature of mobile connectivity in line with UK Government ambitions to ensure comprehensive mobile coverage;
- Protect the special qualities of the National Parks by minimising any adverse environmental impacts in providing mobile coverage in recognition of their national importance, while recognising the practical difficulties of providing coverage in areas of high landscape value; and
- Work together proactively and pragmatically to achieve these aims, recognising that telecommunications infrastructure has siting and design requirements driven by the technology and that National Parks are an important national designation.

We recognise the importance of the spatial planning process for adopting a strategic approach that can assist in mediating different objectives and finding solutions and improving mobile coverage to rural communities.

National Parks as sensitive environments that seek to support thriving communities

- The National Parks are iconic landscapes, rich in wildlife and cultural heritage. They have been recognised as such by Parliament and successive Governments.
- The Statutory purposes of National Parks are to conserve and enhance the landscape, wildlife and cultural heritage of their areas and to promote understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Parks by the public. In furthering these, the National Park Authorities seek to foster the social and economic wellbeing of their local communities.
- The sensitivity of, and need to protect, the National Parks has been recognised in Government planning policy through the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Parks and Broads Circular.
- National Parks England has a shared Vision for National Parks with the Government that sees the National Parks as places where there are thriving, working landscapes, where sustainable development can be seen in action and where the communities of the Parks take an active part in decisions about their future. As part of this National Park Authorities are keen to facilitate appropriate development of mobile network infrastructure, as vital to delivering connectivity.
- National Parks England recognises the importance of modern mobile telecommunications as part of the nation's critical infrastructure and the role it plays in providing essential connectivity to the varied visitors, businesses and residents within the parks. National Parks England are keen to ensure that as technology progresses further

engagement and discussions will be maintained to ensure the parks are able to benefit from the long term economic benefits of mobile connectivity

- The benefits of modern communications technology are likely to be greater in National Parks than other rural locations because of their high volume of tourists (approximately 94m visitors a year in England) in addition to the needs of their resident population, supporting the local economy and viability of the National Parks in themselves.

A range of economic factors can affect investment decisions for new infrastructure

- The availability of land at consideration levels compatible with the Government's Digital Economy Act 2017.
- The capital cost of building sites which may well include the provision of an access track.
- The annual running costs of a site, and the revenue likely to be generated from the traffic the site supports.
- The provision/availability of an electricity supply to the site.
- The provision of a link into the main telephone/broadband network (known as 'backhaul').

These factors affect investment decisions in all areas, but can be particularly challenging in rural areas, especially upland areas, where the provision of an electricity supply and backhaul connections may not readily be available, and where low population density means little revenue will be generated to cover the capital expenditure and on-going operating costs of a site.

Constraints on the practical functioning of the network

- For mobile networks to function, they need a network of base stations ('masts') to provide sufficient radio coverage in any geographical area to handle customer voice, text, or data. Hence if there are no base stations in a particular area, there is less likely to be mobile signal.
- Mobile base stations and devices use radio waves, like those used by broadcast radio or TV channels. These radio waves travel in straight lines and are affected by obstructions that can alter the radio signal. However, unlike broadcast radio or TV, mobile radio waves travel significantly less distances and therefore more base stations are required to support a network, particularly when the local topography acts as a blocker.
- Services in some areas are therefore limited and may remain so because of terrain or the built environment. In all areas, the quality of indoor signal coverage will also be affected by the type of building in which the device is being used: for example, a stone building may have poorer indoor coverage than a brick-built one, because it is harder for radio waves to penetrate stone.
- These issues are explained in more detail in the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development (2016).

To aid the achievement of our shared objectives:

- The National Park Authorities (NPAs) and Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) will work together to identify key link people for the purposes of constructive early dialogue over operators' plans for new site rollout
- The MNOs will engage with NPAs at an early stage if there is a major phase of new site rollout in the area, and will undertake pre-application discussion with the NPA, in line with the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development.
- In proposing new site locations, MNOs will provide appropriate technical information to demonstrate to NPAs that an acceptable environmental and network coverage location has been located.
- The MNOs acquisition agents/planning consultants will initiate appropriate pre-application discussions with the relevant NPA prior to the submission of any full planning application or prior approval application for new

telecommunications sites within a National Park to explore acceptable environmental and network solutions, in line with the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development. The information provided should include any alternative sites that have been considered with an analysis of why they have not been pursued.

- As part of any pre-application discussions, the NPAs will aim to provide certainty of timescales for decision-making on planning applications, for example using Planning Performance Agreements.
- Options to minimise adverse landscape effects in National Parks should include consideration of mast-sharing, site-sharing, equipment-sharing, and any other technical advances where this would provide the required mobile coverage and represent an acceptable environmental solution, noting that the coverage requirements of MNOs will differ (due to spectrum usage, existing site location and technologies employed). If a mast is to be shared, it is understood that the antennas may need to be separated and this may lead to a taller mast or more substantial mast and additional equipment housing and associated equipment.
- The NPAs and MNOs will be open to consideration of alternative designs, innovative proposals and network solutions, or mitigation measures to facilitate network deployment in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- Both parties will seek to find solutions in recognition of the fact that many of the harder to reach rural areas are, as well as being environmentally sensitive, also less attractive to invest in financially.
- The NPAs and MNOs will discuss from time to time, any plans or aspirations to remove or repurpose redundant infrastructure on the basis that it no longer has a viable use.
- National Parks England and Mobile UK will work together to share and promote good practice in design solutions, including through discussions with Government on the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Network Development.
- To ensure that the objectives of this Accord are achieved, the signatories will meet once a year to monitor progress.



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