



structure services company who own and manage sites for Telefónica

suffering from poor mobile phone coverage.

Cornerstone has entered into an agreement with the Church of England under the recent Electronic Communications Code to assist local churches that want to host facilities to improve local connectivity.

The deal will deliver improved connectivity across rural communities and inner cities and provide much-needed coverage in hard-to-reach areas.

The move follows an agreement with the Government last year encouraging the Church of England to use its buildings and other property to improve broadband, mobile and WiFi connectivity for local communities.

The deal, which takes the form of a memorandum of understanding, will help deliver improved mobile connectivity by providing an efficient, predictable and fair process. Each installation will need the support of the church concerned. The memorandum of understanding provides a framework to help both parties comply with relevant legal requirements including – crucially for churches – ecclesiastical law. And it simplifies the process, for example by providing template agreements for parishes and providers, with a trusted contractor to manage the process.

The National Church Institutions of the Church of England (NCIs) recognise that hosting digital infrastructure on churches brings numerous opportunities to local communities and businesses, particularly within rural areas.

Improving mobile connectivity provides better access to online services and offers greater social communication with family and friends. With good mobile coverage and better access to digital facilities, businesses can extend their reach, and benefit from the opportunity to enhance local economies.

The Electronic Communications Code was updated in 2017 by the Government to make it easier to install and maintain mobile infrastructure to improve mobile connectivity across the UK. This deal, under Code principles, supports those ambitions. It shows how collaboration can achieve outcomes that allow mobile network operators to fulfil their obligations to improve mobile coverage, whilst also respecting the importance of churches as historic buildings and community resources.

Matt Warman, Minister for Digital and Broadband, said: "We want to improve people's lives by boosting connectivity in some of our hardest-to-reach areas.

"Churches have always been at the heart of our communities and it is fitting this new agreement will support new infrastructure to better connect people in the surrounding area and help tackle social isolation and improve access to services."

Becky Clark, Director of Churches and Cathedrals, said: "Church of England churches have been hosting mobile-phone infrastructure to provide services to local people for over 25 years, and in that time the importance of having access to strong, reliable mobile network coverage has increased beyond measure.

"Our 16,000 church buildings are a Christian presence in every community and have always been used to provide local people with help and support – from food banks and night shelters to harvest festivals and weddings.

"This new agreement is in that same model; it does not place churches under any obligation, but for those which are well placed to support better mobile connectivity, it gives them a clear way forward which protects their interests and the building's historic importance. Churches provide for the needs of everyday life, and in the 21st century mobile connectivity is a key part of that."

Belinda Fawcett, General Counsel and Director of Property and Estates, Cornerstone, said: "We are delighted to be working with the Church of England to provide better mobile services. The Code legislation has assisted us in reaching an understanding and we are confident that the churches and their communities will greatly benefit from improved connectivity.

"We are also very aware that churches have a duty to look after the historic significance of their buildings when installing mobile infrastructure and won't let this be compromised in any way. This deal illustrates that working together benefits not only the parties involved but the wider community, whilst upholding the Government's ambitions for a digitally connected Britain."

More information

- Further information can be found on the Parish Buying website: <https://www.parishbuying.org.uk/categories/phone-and-broadband/mobile-phone-infrastructure> with guidance on connectivity in churches on <https://www.churchofengland.org/connectivity>
- Churches wishing to express an interest in hosting mobile telecoms infrastructure should contact the Church of England's delivery partner, NET Coverage Solutions Ltd, at CoE@netcs.eu

Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/press-releases/church-england-help-boost-digital-connectivity-local-communities>