



infralink



INFRALINK CASE STUDY

West Midlands 5G
Standardising Digital
Infrastructure Management





Background

West Midlands 5G (WM5G) is a multi-million-pound programme set-up in 2019 by West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to establish and accelerate the benefits of 5G and develop the UK's first region-wide 5G testbed.

The WM5G Infrastructure Acceleration programme came from the UK Government recommendations to make public assets more widely available for digital infrastructure deployment, and the recognition that legal changes had resulted in a number of challenges for the market, especially around site valuation factors of compensation and consideration. Using WM5G's technical knowledge it wanted to get the best for both sides and streamline the existing process to accelerate the roll out of 5G in the area.

The Programme

Standardisation

WM5G was acutely aware of the scale of infrastructure required to achieve the desired 5G coverage and that the need was only going to grow. Lengthy, and in some cases hostile, negotiations over every new or upgraded mast site was not conducive to accelerating the roll-out of 5G. Therefore, to streamline this process, standardised processes, documentation, and agreements were developed by WM5G, removing the need for bespoke lease negotiations for each site. An interactive map supported this process representing public assets in a centralised view.

Standardisation was not easy though. Due to the changes to the Electronic Communications Code and the subsequent tribunal decisions, it meant that some thinking around the standardised terms had to change or adapt in accordance. It was an incredibly labour-intensive process to develop, agree and implement new standardised working practices and documentation. There was an element of trepidation at first, so education to ensure a mutual understanding of both parties' drivers and challenges was required to bring parties back around the table.

But the effort was worth it as all WMCA local authorities have published their assets (land, buildings, street furniture) on the interactive map which has already helped mobile network operators (MNOs) to save approximately 5-6 months when developing high-level network designs – they now completed in as little as two weeks. The roll out of the standardised agreement with the MNOs across all 7 WMCA local authorities is in progress and some great take up has already been seen.

Benefits

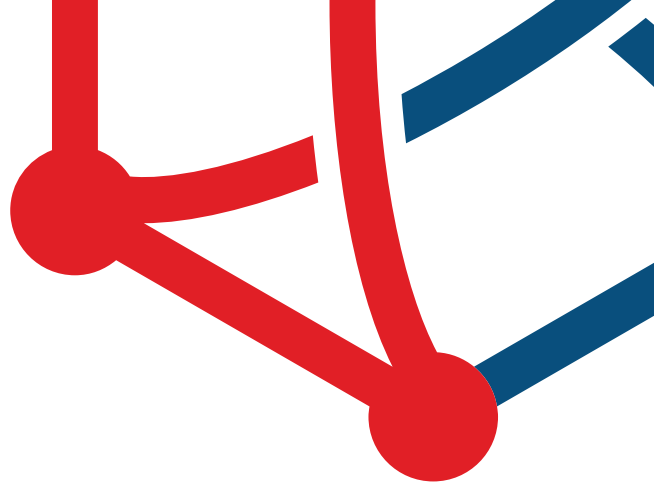
- No differentiation between suppliers, having a standard approach is beneficial for the organisation, its staff and also the market.
- Having a standardised and transparent approach can reduce the need to use agents and external expert resource, as work can be done in-house, potentially saving costs.
- Being able to respond to enquiries in a repeatable and consistent manner helps manage expectations.

The Results

- **Significantly improved Town & County planning application approval rates.**
- **Deployment of 5G in Dudley, Wolverhampton and Birmingham accelerated by 6-12 months when compared to other areas.**
- **West Midlands currently has the best 5G coverage in the UK according to the recent independent 5G Audit Report (December 2020) carried out by umlaut.**



infralink



What is Infralink?

The Infralink programme, led by infrastructure experts, the Scottish Futures Trust and funded by the Scotland 5G Centre, is establishing a framework that is workable at a national level, and is balanced and transparent to make the process of identifying a site for mobile digital infrastructure and agreeing the terms of the lease more efficient.

It builds off existing developments and local initiatives to set out best practice providing a basis for meaningful discussion.

The Infralink tools include

A Connectivity Marketplace - an online, map-based marketplace that publicises public sector assets that are available for digital infrastructure to be sited on.

Standard Documents - a balanced starting point removing the need to negotiate standard terms.

Payment Guidance - recommended methodology and prices to occupy/use the assets that build upon the principles of the Electronic Communications Code and recognise the impact of digital infrastructure as a tenant.

In the development of these tools, Infralink has engaged with the mobile industry and public sector organisations that have assets either in parts of Scotland or across the country. It covers rural and urban areas, land and buildings, areas of existing industry interest and new areas to support future opportunities such as the Shared Rural Network.

Benefits of Infralink

- A set of legislative compliant tools to make site identification and agreement quicker and operate more efficiently than the current process.
- Allows asset owners to put their requirements upfront so industry knows what the starting point is.
- Allows industry to plan their 4G and 5G network in an effective way knowing the location and owner of the sites.
- Using the tools will send a clear signal to the market that the organisation recognises the importance of connectivity to their area, encouraging engagement and discussion that could lead to new opportunities and investment.

“Any standardisation that can help councils function more efficiently is a benefit. The social and economic benefits of accelerating digital infrastructure such as 5G should resonate with public and private organisations.”

**Rhys Enfield, Head of Infrastructure
Acceleration at West Midlands 5G**

To find out more about Infralink please go to

infralink.scottishfuturestrust.org.uk

