

## **New campaign calls for fair deal for people and businesses whose rights are being eroded by telecoms companies**

- **Protect & Connect launches campaign against rent cuts of up to 90 per cent by telecoms companies**
  - **Campaign to be chaired by former MP Anna Turley**
- **Calls on UK government to revisit broken legislation and scrap new proposals to grant telecoms companies even greater powers**
- **Protect & Connect wants to see both sides working together to speed up 5G rollout and keep issues out of the courts**

*18 February 2021*

*Embargoed 0900 hrs*

A new campaign group launched today to demand a fair deal for the people and companies whose property is used by telecoms companies - some of whom face rent cuts of up to 90% from telecoms companies and infrastructure providers.

Protect & Connect will campaign on behalf of:

- individuals
- not-for-profit organisations
- farmers
- local councils
- churches
- hospital and other healthcare facilities
- property funds and real estate investment trusts
- all other companies who own properties

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Protect & Connect is backed by APWireless, the largest UK owner of properties underlying mobile network cell sites - which include mobile phone masts and antennas located on rooftops.

It will be chaired by former MP and former Shadow Minister Anna Turley.

There are around 33,000 mobile phone masts in the UK and many more are contracted to be built. The majority are owned by small interests at the heart of their local communities, including thousands of farmers, local councils, churches, sport clubs and small businesses.

Telecoms companies are using rights given to them in 2017, under legislation called the Electronic Communications Code (the Code) to demand dramatic rent reductions of up to 90 per cent from landowners, hurting thousands of small businesses and individuals at a time when many are already facing hardship.

In some cases, the owners of land or buildings on which infrastructure is located have seen their annual rent cut from several thousand pounds to less than £50 a year, putting livelihoods at risk. Demands from telecoms companies have often been followed by threats of court action that small property owners are ill-equipped to fight.

This approach has inevitably led to drawn out and acrimonious contract negotiations, causing hold ups in the installation of vital new digital infrastructure and slowing 5G rollout in the process.

The Protect & Connect campaign wants to get back to a market that works for both sides – and for the country. The UK's digital future should not be fought and decided in the courts.

But telecoms companies are now demanding changes to the Code that would give them even greater rights by removing the limited legal protections

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landowners are currently entitled to. This would make the situation worse, not better.

A UK government consultation into the Code was announced by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport on January 27<sup>th</sup> 2021. It closes on March 24<sup>th</sup>.

## **Protect & Connect is calling on the UK government to:**

**Review** the valuation methods set out in the Code which result in landowners and property owners being forced to accept significantly less for the use of their assets and substantially less than was originally promised.

**Strengthen** the industry code of practice that governs the conduct of third parties and their representatives when seeking to implement the Code in order to guard against harassment or intimidation of landlords and property owners.

**Scrap** the proposals set out in the consultation that would further erode landowners' property rights over their own land, including by compelling them to rip up existing agreements.

The campaign will highlight the unfair and unjust treatment of land and property owners by telecoms and infrastructure companies including EE, CTIL, Vodafone's Vantage Towers, Vodafone, MBNL, Telefonica (O2), Cellnex (On Tower, Arqiva and Shere Group) and H3G.

The telecoms companies' unreasonable demands have resulted in huge financial and personal costs, and placed a significant toll on the mental health and wellbeing of thousands of property owners and their families at a time when people and businesses across the UK are facing significant financial hardship.

Anna Turley said: "Time is running out to get a fair deal for small property owners across the country. The UK needs high speed digital connectivity, but it is wrong to expect local communities to foot the bill.

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“Telecoms companies are hugely profitable and have recently been handed generous state subsidies to roll out high speed networks, particularly in rural areas.

“The individuals and organisations that have been forced to accept rental reductions of up to 90 per cent include farming families, amateur sports clubs, small business and parish councils. We will campaign tirelessly on their behalf to expose the tactics employed by telecoms operators and their agents and ensure property owners get a fair deal.”

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For more information please contact:

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## **Notes to Editors**

1. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport announced a consultation on changes to the Electronic Communications Code on January 27th 2021: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-changes-to-the-electronic-communications-code>. The consultation closes on March 24th 2021. The ECC was last amended in the 2017 Digital Economy Act 2017: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/digital-economy-bill-2016>

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2. APWireless is the largest UK owner of properties underlying mobile network cell sites - which include mobile phone masts and antennas located on rooftops. It is the largest specialist property financing source for more than 30,000 individual landlords who currently lease their properties to mobile network operators and mast owners in the UK <https://www.apwireless.co.uk>
3. Campaign chair Anna Turley was Labour MP for Redcar, a semi-rural constituency in North Yorkshire, from 2015 to 2019. During this time, Turley served as Shadow Civil Society Minister and on the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee.