

New Build Developments: Delivering gigabit-capable connections

GLA response

Introduction

The GLA is pleased to see Government is exploring legislative changes to this important issue and supports the need for New Build Developments (NBDs) to be designed and built with gigabit capable connectivity from the outset. This will ensure that installations to NBDs do not require costly and disruptive upgrades to connectivity.

The GLA recommends that Government uses this opportunity of legislative changes by ensuring future facing connectivity needs are addressed now, by ensuring that Fibre to the Unit or Dwelling which is capable of delivering multi-gigabit connectivity is the standard.

1. Connected London

- 1.1. As set out in the Smarter London Together Roadmap, the Mayor's ambition is to secure ubiquitous gigabit-capable digital connectivity and to prepare London for the rollout of 5G. To achieve this, we have appointed a Connected London team which works across London to coordinate investment, mobilise public and private land and assets, lower costs for providers and consumers, and deliver increased choice.
- 1.2. New developments pose an opportunity to deliver future facing connectivity by ensuring buildings are designed will full fibre from the planning stage. As highlighted in the Smarter London Together Roadmap, our new approach proposes that the provision of digital infrastructure is as important for the proper functioning of the city as energy, water and waste management services. As such, it should be treated with the same importance.

2. London Plan approach

- 2.1. The draft London Plan is underpinned by the principles of Good Growth, realising the Mayor's vision of creating a city for all Londoners

where no one is left behind. Planning for a 'smarter' and better-connected city is a component of Good Growth; access to world-class digital connectivity is essential for the future of the capital. The policy proposals outlined in the 'New Build Developments: Delivering gigabyte-capable connections' would support the ambition of the Mayor in ensuring London is a world-leading tech hub with world-class digital connectivity.

- 2.2. Policy SI6 of the draft London Plan is consistent with the aims of DCMS' Full Fibre Connectivity Plan, addressing full fibre connectivity infrastructure in new developments as well as addressing mobile connectivity demand and mobile digital infrastructure. Consultation responses to the draft London Plan largely supported the inclusion of a policy on digital connectivity, with many calling upon the policy to be strengthened to provide a clear direction of travel and requirements for the delivery of digital infrastructure. In response, the GLA strengthened the requirements for development proposals as part of the Minor Suggested Changes to the London Plan.

3. **Question 3 – Connectivity Plans**

- 3.1. The proposed requirement for the provision of a 'connectivity plan' for new developments is consistent with the aims of Policy SI6 of the draft London Plan. Clause A2 states that development proposals should ensure that there is sufficient space to provide full fibre connectivity to all end users within new developments, or an alternative 1GB/s capable connection. The supporting statements for Policy SI6 also highlight the importance of developers engaging early with a range of network providers, as identified in the consultation document.
- 3.2. Currently it is not clear at which point a connectivity plan would be required to be submitted and what mechanisms local authorities would have to enforce this requirement. The GLA suggests that the policy proposal is better integrated with planning process at the local authority level. Requiring 'connectivity plans' as part of development proposals would send a clear signal to developers on the expectations of government.
- 3.3. It is also suggested that if this policy is implemented, information on best practice connectivity plans would be required to assist local authorities when assessing development proposals.

- 3.4. As implementation on this recommendation would align with our implementation of the London Plan Policy SI6, we are very happy to work with DCMS teams to ensure our aims are aligned. We have been discussing the policy with London Local Authorities and have gathered a number of examples of implementation.

4. **Question 4 (a) – Gigabit capable networks best achieved in planning stages**

- 4.1. The GLA agrees that it is much more efficient to consider digital connectivity early in development planning, which is why Policy SI6 of the draft London Plan suggests development proposals include information on full fibre connection and mobile connectivity. This ensures developments have consulted with network operators, allowed appropriate space for full fibre connectivity, considered potential impacts to mobile connectivity and anticipating the rising demand for mobile connections because of their development.

5. **Further Comments**

- 5.1. We encourage DCMS colleagues to use this opportunity to align policy with the intention of designing new build developments to deliver full fibre to the unit or dwelling, as opposed to the property boundary or basement. Designing new builds to ensure they accommodate accessibility for the delivery of full fibre to every unit or dwelling would ensure the intention of this policy to deliver future facing digital connectivity. Stopping short of full fibre to the unit or dwelling may risk some developments falling behind, and thus requiring to address legalisation in years to come.
- 5.2. DCMS is proposing primary legislation to mandate the requirement for full fibre for all new build developments. This would provide a powerful tool for local authorities when assessing development proposals. However, it will be important to provide a link in national planning policy to implement this requirement. Currently, Section 10 of the 2018 National Planning Policy Framework directs planning policies and decisions to consider access to high quality digital infrastructure and prioritise full-fibre connections to new and existing developments. How is it intended to link the policy proposal outlined in the consultation documents with national planning policy?
- 5.3. Do DCMS propose making changes to the Building Regulations as part of this initiative? If so, what are the timescales involved and how

would it align with the development of a separate legislative tool requiring full fibre connectivity.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The GLA supports this policy, and urges Government to consider full fibre to the unit or dwelling which will allow for multi-gigabit capable connectivity, and is happy to work with DCMS on its implementation.
- 6.2. We encourage Government to pursue the swiftest route possible to implementation of a full fibre to the unit policy.