

Voices

Infrastructure woe leaves West in the telecoms slow lane

The UK is suffering from a lack of telecoms infrastructure and the short-term prospects are not encouraging, writes **Dave Millett**

What is apparent to anyone who travels abroad is how far the telecoms infrastructure in the UK is lagging behind other countries. Recent reports have shown that the UK ranks 54th in the world for 4G coverage, bottom in Europe for availability of fibre broadband 'to the premise' and that almost half of businesses had no access to cheap fibre broadband.

Also, within the country there are wide variations, including across our region. Telecoms consultancy Equinix looked at the broadband and mobile coverage. Using two very popular pub names - the Royal Oak and the Red Lion - as reference points, it is clear there is no equality in the services we receive.

Looking at broadband speeds, they ranged from 2.5Mbps to 78Mbps

Location	Fibre Broadband	Speed (Mbps)
Arlingham	Yes	75
Avebury	Yes	34
Chebenham	Yes	34
Consham	No	17
North	No	2.5
Brewham		
Salisbury	Yes	41
Withypool	Yes	78
Woolverton	No	3
Wotton		
Under-Edge	No	15

Just over half the pubs had access to fibre broadband, which rather undermines BT's claim that 95 per cent of properties have access to fibre broadband. It is much closer to the experience of most small businesses, where barely half have access to it.

This reflects the approach of favouring residential areas, where they can sell their TV packages. It shows that even in larger towns speeds in some areas can be as slow as remoter rural areas.

Also worth noting is that just because a building has fibre to the cabinet does not mean you will get the maximum speed of 80Mbps. This is because the last leg is over copper, reducing the speed.

Other countries have made fibre to the premise a priority. For example, South Korea has 90 per cent FTTP coverage.

If you look at the mobile cover-

age across the various networks, the variation is similar.

The information is taken from the networks' own coverage maps and shows the level at which they rate it as good indoors and outdoors.

Location	EE	O2	3	Vodafone
Arlingham	2G	4G	3G	4G
Avebury	No	No	No	2G
Chebenham	No	2G	No	4G
Consham	No	4G	3G	4G
North				
Brewham	4G	2G	3G	2G
Salisbury	4G	4G	3G	4G
Withypool	No	No	No	No
Woolverton	No	2G	No	4G
Wotton				
Under-Edge	4G	3G	3G	4G

It is a set of patchy results made more frustrating in that the industry has blocked attempts to allow UK roaming that is enjoyed by tourists but not UK citizens.

Mobile coverage is becoming increasingly important. In the UK, mobile data traffic soared by 64 per cent. This in part is due to new uses for devices such as augmented reality - business applications are emerging, such as floor plans appearing as you stand outside houses for sale or insurance quotes by viewing your car through your phone.

In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, the Government committed to invest more than £1 billion over the next four years on the roll-out of new fibre networks and 5G. That sounds good, but look at the success or lack of it of previous programmes and plans. Japan is aiming to have 5G operational in time for the 2020 Olympics; we hope for it by 2025.

In summary, the UK is in the slow lane and the short term prospects are not encouraging. The Government needs to do more to encourage the industry to make the necessary investments. And if the carrot approach does not work, then it should not be frightened to wield the stick.

Dave Millett has over 35 years' experience in the telecoms industry. He has worked in European director roles for several global companies. He now runs Equinix, a leading independent brokerage and consultancy firm working with companies, charities and other organisations. He also regularly advises telecom suppliers on improving their products. www.equinixcomms.co.uk



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Steve England

My recipe for an early spring treat

Walking through the woods recently, looking around at the early springtime delights, listening to the great spotted woodpecker tapping away on a dead tree, the sun was warming the woodland floor and early spring plants are popping up fast.

I couldn't resist having a sit-down and a nice cup of hot soup, thinking to myself it won't be long now before the sun rises higher in the sky, bringing with it its glorious warmth again that always puts the bounce back in our steps.

There is something very magical about being in the woods in spring, looking at the kaleidoscope of colours carpeting the woodland floor as the scent of the bluebells wafts through the woods.

I could stay in these woods forever, obviously with a small camp fire - the smell of wood smoke for some reason has a very relaxing effect on me. All the day-to-day worries seem to just vanish.

As I walked on through the woods I suddenly stopped dead in my tracks - I could smell woodland garlic wafting through the air.

My heart started to pound with excitement; that smell means one thing - the leaves are emerging somewhere.

I was zigzagging through the woods like a shark following a 'chum trail', and eventually found them.

Having first ensured I identified them correctly, as there are many poisonous plants growing among them, too, I soon had a bag full of fresh leaves and when I returned home I made up my favourite garlic treat - wild garlic leaf butter.

It is amazing; I love to make the butter or, indeed, a low-fat spread. Every part of the plant is edible, including the bulbs, stems, leaves and flowers.

Here is my recipe: Take a handful of fresh leaves, blend them to a sludge, add a teaspoon of mixed spices, then a tablespoon of cracked black peppers and a pinch of sea salt, roll all together and, "hey presto", a wild butter that is incredibly mouth-watering.

It's great to use on toasted baguettes, or anything you fancy.

Garlic species can be found all year round if you know where to look, even during the mid summer months when the woodland garlic have vanished, which is what I will be teaching throughout this year. Please find my contact details below.

Steve England is an (RHS) horticulturist and amateur naturalist. Contact him at Twitter @steveengland300 or email newlook388@aol.com