

POOR FOUNDATIONS: THE STATE OF UK HOME CONNECTIVITY.

A WIREScore REPORT



THE CONNECTIVITY CRISIS

Over the past decade, our digital consumption has dramatically evolved. Most adult internet users (88%) now spend an average of 24 hours online each week - almost double the time spent in 2007.

While the government's move to a focus on full fibre connectivity is welcome, the UK's digital connectivity infrastructure, both mobile and fixed, has not evolved at the same speed as our consumption. According to Ofcom, just 6% of UK premises have access to full, fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) connections which deliver ultrafast and consistent connections.

THE CONSUMER COST OF POOR CONNECTIVITY

What impact does this have on everyday consumers and how they choose property? According to a recent survey of consumers we conducted, 85% face WiFi connectivity issues, despite paying an average of £312 per annum for their home internet service. This equates to around 20 service breakdowns per month.

Affected UK homeowners and renters are forced to use on average 2.5GB of extra mobile data each month to compensate for their poor WiFi – the additional cost of this totals £153 over the course of the year, totalling £2.2 billion across the country.

The net result is that over a quarter say that they would never have moved into their property had they known about connectivity issues beforehand.

STRONGER CONNECTIONS, BETTER PRICES – THE DEVELOPER OPPORTUNITY

Good connectivity is increasingly becoming a point of differentiation when choosing a new home. Over two-fifths (42%) of residential landlords and developers report being asked about the digital connectivity services of their properties by prospective purchasers or renters.

Those operating in the rental market are seeing particular opportunity, with nearly two-thirds (61%) reporting that quality digital connectivity allows them to rent their properties at a higher price and/or with a greater yield. That's on top of 40% seeing increased demand for properties with better digital connectivity, and more than half (56%) enjoying longer tenancies due to the improved in-home experience.

The benefits also translate into the purchase market, with nearly half (47%) of developers selling properties for a greater price thanks to stronger broadband and mobile coverage.



“High quality digital connectivity is a critical requirement of the modern-day renter. As this report highlights, they are too often let down. Build-to-Rent landlords in particular have been setting out to fix this problem and provide a better service and superior experience. To achieve this, they need to know that the buildings they are investing in can provide for renters today, and also deliver the technology renters will be using tomorrow. WiredScore’s rating scheme is a welcome development in the Build-to-Rent market and will help set the standard for best in class digital infrastructure.”

Dave Butler, Chief Executive of UK Apartment Association

BUILDING BETTER DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS

Forward-thinking developers are therefore capitalising on this opportunity by ensuring their developments can support improved connectivity, in line with the recently updated National Planning Policy Framework.

More than half (60%) have improved their existing planning applications to ensure that they reflect the need to support future 5G coverage and full fibre connections, with a further 29% intending to align future applications with the new guidelines.

This includes changing the way they build. Traditional building techniques - including treated glass, metalised insulation and steel frames - negatively impact in-home cellular coverage, leading over half (59%) of developers to adopt different techniques that have a lesser impact. Fifty-five per cent are also proactively conducting wireless site (RF) surveys, with 54% installing signal boosting technologies to improve coverage, such as distributed antenna systems (DAS) and small cells.

Full fibre connections are also a priority in newer developments: three-quarters (75%) of developers report at least some projects will have full fibre, with 19% having full fibre in all current projects. Even the remaining 6% with no full fibre in their current projects are looking into it for future developments.

FURTHER HELP SOUGHT

While residential developers are proactively making great strides to deliver better digital connectivity, all respondents wanted more guidance.

More than three-quarters (77%) reported that they would like to better understand their developments' digital connectivity levels and how best to improve them, while 57% want support to implement improved levels of infrastructure in their projects. Finally, almost one-third (31%) believe it would be useful to have information on how different building materials and practices could impact cellular connectivity.

GETTING IT RIGHT

The rapid evolution in our consumption of digital connectivity services means that developers now face the significant challenge of transforming their design of buildings to meet current requirements. Failure to do so will result in residents continuing to supplement and shoulder the cost of underperforming WiFi with mobile data.

What both residents and developers need is greater transparency in the quality of digital connectivity services available, in how it can be improved in new and existing properties, and in how it is communicated when choosing a home. If that can be achieved, then both residents and developers will be able to enjoy connected homes that meet the requirements of the way we live today – and tomorrow.

METHODOLOGY

WiredScore commissioned Opinium to survey 2,000 UK adults, split 50:50 homeowners and renters, and Censuswide to survey 150 UK residential building developers, in April 2019.