



Growing Sussex

Insights - Engaging Landowners for 5G Innovation

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Growing Sussex is a forward-thinking initiative led by West Sussex County Council, funded by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). As part of the UK's 5G Innovation Regions programme, the project aims to accelerate the adoption of advanced wireless technologies - 5G, IoT, and AI - across the food, drink and plant production sector.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Demonstrate how advanced wireless-enabled technologies (e.g. sensors, drones, cameras) can improve productivity and sustainability in growing food, drink and plants.
- Develop a repeatable model for commercial investment in advanced wireless deployment in rural growing areas.
- Develop affordable, scalable connectivity supporting data driven decision making across the sector - on land and under glass.

THE CHALLENGE

Landowners are essential to enabling deployment of digital infrastructure, yet they often:

- Receive limited direct benefit from installations.
- Face disruption from access, digging, and multiple contractors.
- Navigate complex legal and planning processes.

THIS IS ESPECIALLY CRITICAL IN SUSSEX, WHERE:

- 22% of land is woodland, and 12% is ancient woodland - compared to less than 3% nationally. Sussex is likely to be the second most wooded county in England.
- Some landowners own large areas, meaning poor engagement at the outset can limit future opportunities across the wider region.

THE AGRICULTURAL CONTEXT ¹

- 69% of UK land (16.8 million hectares) is used for agriculture.
- Horticulture covers just 0.8% of this land (142,000 hectares), yet it is high-value and innovation-sensitive.
- Vegetables and salad make up 68% of horticultural land, though this area declined by 3.5% in 2024.
- Many UK growers rent land under short-to-medium-term tenancies (1 - 5 years), this is especially true for field crops requiring rotation.
- Glasshouse growers often lease land with existing glasshouses, to expand their production and extend their footprint. This is often quicker than securing planning or funding for a new glasshouse.
- Glasshouse production, vital for year-round growing, represents only 2% of horticultural land but is energy-intensive and infrastructure-dependent.

THE OPPORTUNITY

To scale 5G adoption in real-world growing environments, the project must:

- Build trust with landowners.
- Minimise disruption.
- Demonstrate environmental and economic value.

¹ [Agricultural Land Use in United Kingdom at 1 June 2024 - GOV.UK](#)



STRATEGIC APPROACH

1. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Provide clear, accessible information packs outlining benefits, responsibilities, previous relevant case studies and technical standards (e.g. trench dimensions).
- Involve both leaseholders and landowners from the outset. A pre-engagement meeting can be useful.
- Be informed – understand the environmental, ownership and legal considerations up front, ahead of any initial conversations.
- Offer a single point of contact through the whole process, to reduce confusion and site disruption.

2. COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

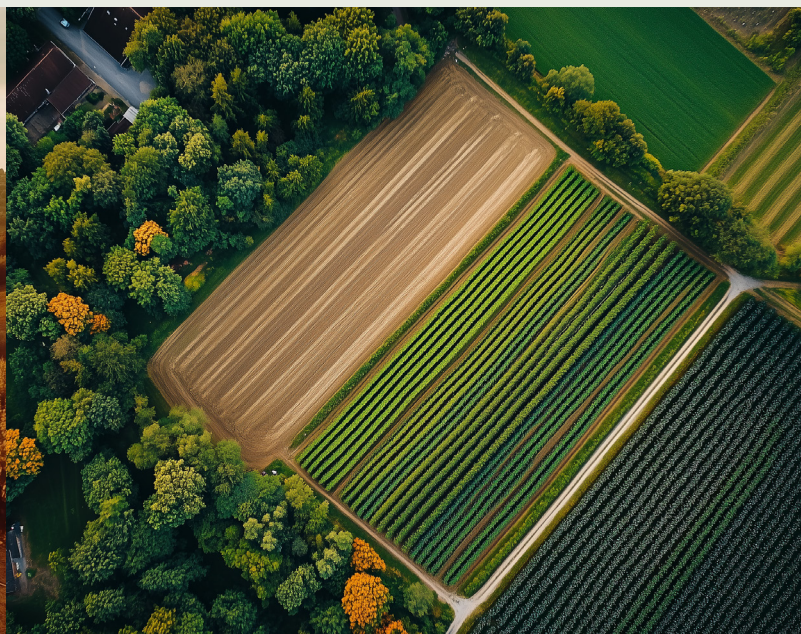
- Share overview plans with clear decision points and sign-off stages.
- Offer design options rather than fixed proposals, including reinstatement timelines and actions to minimise inconvenience.
- Ensure designs are sympathetic to rural and ecological settings.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL DUE DILIGENCE

- Conduct early feasibility studies to avoid sensitive areas (e.g. Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), ancient woodland, veteran trees).
- Seek arboriculture advice and follow BS 5837 standards for arboriculture assessments.
- Align with planning duties for tree protection and habitat preservation.

4. LEGAL AND LAND CONSIDERATIONS

- Use Land Registry tools to clarify ownership, covenants, and restrictions.
- Confirm leaseholder rights and landowner permissions for infrastructure.
- Consider tripartite agreements where necessary, e.g. where infrastructure crosses ownership boundaries.
- Address up front insurance, indemnity, and removal responsibilities at contract end.



5. MOTIVATING LANDOWNERS

- Communicate clearly and factually—no surprises or ambiguity.
- Highlight contributions to regenerative farming and land stewardship.
- Agree upfront to cover reasonable legal costs where appropriate, including those incurred during early design discussions.
- When setting a cap on legal costs, ensure it reflects the true costs of the engagement. Setting it too low may discourage landowner participation.
- Ensure fair compensation for land use, proportionate to the scale and impact of the digital infrastructure being deployed. This should take into account factors such as whether the installation is freestanding or mounted on an existing structure, as well as the height and visibility of any poles or equipment, and the perceived level of disruption for the landowner.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Successful deployment of 5G in rural growing areas hinges on early, respectful, and well-informed engagement with landowners. By aligning digital innovation with environmental care and economic value, Growing Sussex sets a replicable model enabling the accelerated deployment of advanced wireless technologies to support the UK's agricultural future.

USEFUL LINKS

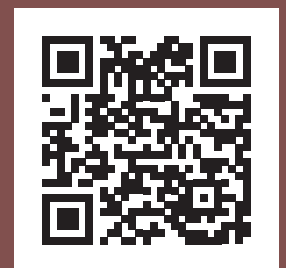
- Further information can be found from the Association of Tree Officers relating to the rollout of new telecoms infrastructure, [Trees and Telecommunications](#)
- Title documents are available on the land registry website eservices.landregistry.gov.uk/eservices
- Anyone can create an account at the land registry – you can apply for an account here [Application for HM Land Registry Business e-services \(AFS1\) - GOV.UK](#) A single application covers an entire legal entity, including all departments, branches and sub-offices.

LEARN MORE

Visit our site for more information.

CONTACT US

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Led by West Sussex County Council and funded by DSIT, Growing Sussex is an exciting project to advance digital technology and data driven decision making in food, wine and plant production.

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