

FROM THE INDUSTRY

A New Approach to Fibre



AN INTERVIEW WITH
4FIBRE OPERATIONS
DIRECTOR AT SCCI
ALPHATRACK, STEVE
CHESTERMAN.

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4Fibre

The logo graphic for 4Fibre, featuring four horizontal, slightly wavy lines in green, orange, blue, and red.

As demand for faster, broader connectivity grows, the need for smarter, safer fibre deployment becomes increasingly urgent. We spoke with Steve Chesterman—the mind behind 4Fibre—about his decades-long career, the origins of 4Fibre, and how it's addressing some of the toughest challenges in MDU fibre rollout.

GOOD TO HAVE YOU HERE, STEVE; CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND?

It's a pleasure to be here. I've been in the business of installation, maintenance, and cabling for commercial and residential buildings for almost 40 years—37 of those with SCCI. One of my first jobs was the installation of a TV network at Pebble Mill in Birmingham (you'd need to be of a certain age to remember the BBC's Pebble Mill at One!). Soon after, I put all the TV and satellite networks into Sky's Osterley campus, and I've since been involved in countless exciting implementations. I love this industry!

WE'RE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN 4FIBRE. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

SCCI has long deployed and maintained networks in multi-dwelling units (MDUs) for councils, housing associations and private freeholders. More recently, we've delivered HFC and fibre for various ISPs.

What stood out for me was the aesthetic and structural damage early fibre deployments cause. Multiple wayleaves lead to overbuild—numerous new cables on top of multiple (and messy) old cables. Think spaghetti and Swiss cheese!

Having seen this firsthand, I thought, "There must be a better way." And SCCI already had the technical experience and long-term relationships to offer something smarter—something that worked for both freeholders and ISPs...

A CLEAR NEED IDENTIFIED! SO, HOW DOES 4FIBRE ENTER THE FOLD?

4Fibre is a simple, unique 'shared neutral hosted full fibre network' deployment methodology. It's designed to meet ISP demands while protecting the freeholder's asset—the MDUs.

It's particularly suited to high-risk and complex buildings but works within any MDU environment. The approach is purpose-built to address freeholder concerns and remove barriers to fibre deployment.

By completing the work in a single operation, the block is opened up to multiple ISPs—reducing installation time and risk by up to 75%, compared to four separate installations (when it comes to carbon efficiency, 4Fibre is especially compelling).

We achieve segregation by incorporating four separate fibre cables within a single, outer sheath. These are managed independently, allowing providers to remain fully segregated. Additionally, the outer sheath increases durability by up to 50 times compared to alternative solutions.

4Fibre is an example of how smart technology can remove deployment roadblocks without compromising safety, aesthetics or choice.

THAT SOUNDS EFFICIENT. WHAT BENEFITS DOES 4FIBRE OFFER FREEHOLDERS AND RESIDENTS?

It gives residents ISP choice without repeated disruption and keeps the building's integrity and aesthetic intact.

We reduce penetrations through risers, fire-stopping and cable routes. It's safer and more elegant than repeated overbuilds. It also eases management; a single install is easier to oversee and maintain, especially in space-constrained or high-rise, high-risk MDUs.

Environmentally, we cut emissions by over 50%—fewer truck rolls, less material, less chaos...

HOW IS 4FIBRE AFFECTED BY THE COMMUNICATIONS CODE?

Well, the Code was created to support efficient, cost-effective digital networks while balancing public interest and property rights. That's exactly what 4Fibre does.

Paragraph 17 of the Code encourages shared apparatus, and the same report states that "upgrades and sharing should be permitted when the site impact is minimal."

Benefits include more operator choice, reduced cost, less visual clutter and better use of capital. The review concluded:

"The overall benefits of apparatus sharing are so extensive that operators have a legal duty to do this whenever this is practicable."

That's exactly what 4Fibre delivers—segregated ISP lines within shared containment, fire-stopping, and cableways. We align with both the letter and the spirit of the Code.

BEYOND THE CODE, WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST BLOCKERS TO FIBRE DEPLOYMENT IN MDUS TODAY?

Focus used to be on rural broadband, but - thanks in part to BDUK and DSIT - there's growing recognition that urban broadband faces serious obstacles, particularly when it comes to MDUs.

There are commercial issues: cautious investors, high interest rates, inflation and a general lack of trust in government.

In parallel, alternative networks (altnets) rushed to build without fully engaging consumers (and continue to fail to raise consumer awareness about the copper switch-off) - now they're facing tougher competition and price sensitivity.

In urban environments, those challenges are compounded. Since Grenfell, there's been a sharper focus on building safety—particularly in MDUs. Add landlords who've had poor ISP experiences - rushed installs, low-quality work, etc. - and you get real resistance. Some freeholders now block deployments entirely, using building safety as a default reason. This is where 4Fibre can help.

DO YOU THINK INCREASING CODE POWERS FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS ALONE CAN OVERCOME THESE CHALLENGES?

Improving MDU access is a hot topic, with pressure on OFCOM to relax the current planning rules and give automatic upgrade rights. But I don't see that happening. If someone finds a way to bypass access agreements and planning rules, it risks creating a free-for-all for MDU owners.

Multiple wayleaves lead to overbuild—numerous new cables on top of multiple (and messy) old cables. Think spaghetti and Swiss cheese!

Much of the noise around automatic rights stems from underestimating how difficult it is to secure permissions for MDU deployments. Altnets have been working at this for years.

The challenge is especially acute in high-density areas, where other ISPs have already been in and, frankly, done a poor job. Ironically, these poor installs can create a kind of accidental exclusivity—freeholders don't want to be burnt twice.

In many cases, ISPs have prioritised speed and cost, taking shortcuts that compromise quality—before you even get to the question of safety, durability, or suitability. So, if ISPs are handed automatic rights, what control does the freeholder have over their building? And when something goes wrong, who's accountable?

This is where the idea of automatic access rights crashes into building safety regulation particularly on high-risk buildings.

Installing fibre isn't a minor upgrade—it's an entirely new network. Freeholders deserve to approve plans, understand the impact, and keep leaseholders informed. Where their concerns are valid, 4Fibre offers a safe, smart alternative.

IT SEEMS THERE'S A CLASH BETWEEN INCREASED BUILDING SAFETY REGULATIONS AND THE CALL FOR AUTOMATIC UPGRADE RIGHTS IN MDUS?

Definitely. Some providers want the right to upgrade without permission, while freeholders are being told to follow safety regulations that are a little unclear.

SO, WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

With the copper switch-off looming, fibre rollout is urgent. BDUK, DSIT or the government needs to clarify how building safety regulations apply to fibre.

The regulations do allow for exemptions where 'competent person' schemes or relevant accreditations apply.

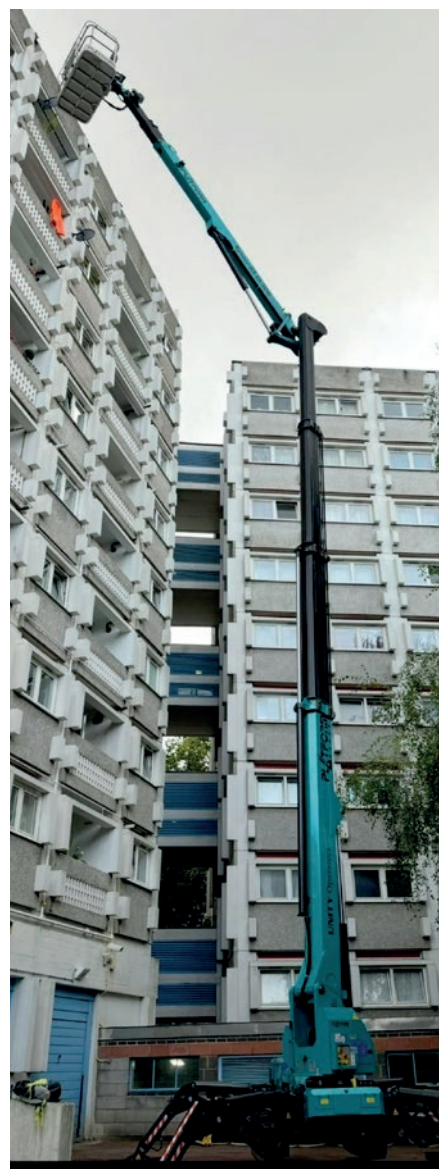
SCCI holds accreditations with NICEIC (electrical), FIRAS (fire stopping), and BM Trada (fire) which, being competent person schemes, we believe qualify for exemption. That's why we advise freeholders that, in our case, formal building safety approval may not be required. Although it is true that ISPs without those accreditations can't claim the same exemption.

So, this needs clearer guidance—it's a big issue!

WHAT IS THE TYPICAL COST FOR A FREEHOLDER TO IMPLEMENT 4FIBRE?

Typically, nothing. 4Fibre funds the network installation and ISPs buy a line to serve the building. The cost to the ISP is broadly in line with what they'd spend deploying their own network.

Each ISP then owns their line. 4Fibre isn't leased, it's purchased. That said, we offer lease-purchase options to support ISPs, and we're working with BDUK's urban voucher scheme to expand further.



It's worth noting that costs can spiral if freeholders and/or their consultants demand payment of unreasonable fees (another industry problem!).

WHAT'S 4FIBRE'S LIABILITY WHEN IT COMES TO NETWORK PERFORMANCE?

ISPs own their lines - one of four colour-coded cables - as if they'd installed it themselves. SCCI terminates the cable outside the flat, ready for the ISP's customer installation. From that point the ISP is responsible for first-line service and maintenance.

In the rare event of damage to the main ruggedised cable, SCCI handles the repair under a long-term warranty provided to the ISP. Our setup is much more robust than conventional multiple cable installs. Fewer and more robust cables mean far less chance of damage.

FINALLY, CAN YOU GIVE US AN EXAMPLE OF A PROJECT WHERE 4FIBRE OVERCAME A SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO FIBRE DEPLOYMENT?

Weston Rise in Islington was a particularly challenging project involving brutalist architecture, very challenging access and high aesthetic expectations. 4Fibre engineered a solution using abseiling, MEWPs (mobile elevating work platform) as well as discreet trays and conduits along walkways to build a high-performance, low-visibility network route.

Despite the technical and logistical hurdles, we delivered a robust, full-fibre system supporting up to four ISPs via a single shared infrastructure.

Once labelled a BDUK 'not spot', Weston Rise now benefits from resilient, multi-provider connectivity—proof that with smart engineering, intelligent design and strong collaboration that even the toughest rollouts are possible.

www.sccigroup.com/news-case-studies/weston-rise-islington

Steve Chesterman is Operations Director at SCCI Alphatrack boasting nearly 40 years of experience in network infrastructure, cabling, and engineering management for residential and commercial properties. He has led the company's installation and service operations since 2005, overseeing the delivery of structured cabling, access control, TV, and fibre systems across a wide portfolio. In 2020, he developed the 4Fibre solution—an open-access network designed to streamline fibre installation in multi-dwelling buildings. His responsibilities include operational strategy, project execution, and the development of engineering teams across the SCCI Group.

If you're interested in our 4Fibre or other fibre solutions - please do come and see us at Connected Britain 2025 at ExCel London on 24th and 25th September

We will be on the Teleste Stand, No 47 (take the Right Hand Entrance, and 2nd line - just behind stand No 1)