

News story: Consultation on solving online auction competition concerns

The CMA is consulting on ATG Media's proposal to change its practices to address concerns it unlawfully shut rivals out of the market.

ATG Media is the largest provider of live online bidding platforms in the UK. These platforms are used by auction houses to allow people to bid online, while an auction is ongoing, without having to be there in person.

Last November the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) opened an investigation into concerns that the company's practices may be anti-competitive. In particular, the concerns were that ATG Media may be excluding rivals from the market by:

- requiring exclusivity from its auction house customers (that is, stopping them from also using competing platforms)
- preventing its auction house customers from allowing bidders to use rival platforms at lower cost (a form of 'most favoured nation' or 'parity' provision)
- preventing auction houses from advertising and promoting the services of competitors to ATG Media

ATG Media has offered legally binding assurances (known as commitments) to remove all of these restrictions. The CMA considers that the proposed commitments address the competition concerns identified, but first invites comments from those who are likely to be affected. If accepted by the CMA, the commitments will bring the investigation to an end.

Further details about how to respond to this consultation are set out in the [notice](#) of the proposed commitments, which the CMA has issued today. Further details about the CMA's investigation can be found on the [case page](#). Comments on the proposed commitments should be received by no later than 19 June 2017.

Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority.
2. The Chapter I prohibition in the Competition Act 1998 (the Act) prohibits anti-competitive agreements and concerted practices between businesses which have as their object or effect the prevention, restriction or distortion of competition within the UK. The Chapter II prohibition in the Act prohibits the abuse of a dominant position by one or more companies which may affect trade within the UK or a part of it. Articles 101 and 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) contain equivalent provisions applicable where there may be an effect on trade between EU Member States.
3. On 22 November 2016, the CMA launched an investigation into suspected breaches of competition law in respect of the supply of auction services

in the UK. The investigation is under Chapters I and II of the Act, and Articles 101 and 102 TFEU. The investigation relates to suspected anti-competitive agreement(s) or concerted practice(s) and suspected abuse of dominance in the supply of auction services in the UK, in particular, suspected exclusionary and restrictive pricing practices, including most favoured nation provisions in respect of online sales.

4. Where the CMA has begun an investigation under section 25 of the Act, it may accept commitments to take such action as it considers appropriate for the purposes of addressing the competition concerns it has identified. If the CMA proposes to accept the commitments offered, the CMA will consult those who are likely to be affected by them and give them an opportunity to give the CMA their views. The CMA will take any such representations into account before making a final decision on whether to accept the commitments.
5. Formal acceptance of commitments would result in the CMA terminating its investigation and not proceeding to a decision on whether the Act or the TFEU has been infringed.
6. The CMA also received an application under section 35 of the Act for interim measures in connection with this case. Formal acceptance of commitments would make the giving of any interim measures directions superfluous.

[News story: CMA opens Tesco/Booker merger investigation](#)

The CMA has opened its investigation into Tesco's proposed acquisition of Booker.

The first phase of the investigation runs until 25 July 2017. During this period, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will assess whether the deal could reduce competition and choice for shoppers and other customers, such as stores currently supplied by Booker.

After this first phase, the merger will either be cleared or, if the CMA identifies a potential reduction in competition, it will be referred for an in-depth investigation lasting up to 24 weeks – unless the merging parties can offer proposals following the first phase of the investigation which address any concerns identified.

Having ensured it has all the necessary information from the companies before opening the investigation, the CMA is now seeking views on the merger from all interested parties.

Those interested are invited to submit their views by 13 June 2017. Further details will be available on the investigation [case page](#).

Press release: April 2017 Price Paid Data

HM Land Registry Price Paid Data tracks land and property sales in England and Wales submitted to us for registration.

This month's Price Paid Data includes details of more than 75,400 residential and commercial land and property sales in England and Wales lodged for registration in April 2017.

Of the 75,412 sales lodged for registration:

- 54,761 were freehold
- 9,165 were newly built
- 22,546 sales took place in April 2017
- 429 were residential sales in April 2017 in England and Wales for £1 million and over
- 247 were residential sales in April 2017 in London for £1 million and over.

Number of sales lodged for registration by property type

Property type	Number of properties
Detached	16,271
Semi-detached	18,504
Terraced	19,858
Flat/maisonette	15,042
Other	5,737
Total	75,412

The most expensive residential sale in April 2017 was of a flat in Knightsbridge, central London for £90m. The cheapest residential sales in April 2017 were of terraced properties in Ferryhill and Bishop Auckland, County Durham, each for £10,000.

The most expensive commercial sale in April 2017 was in the London Borough of

Camden, for £98,446,300. The cheapest commercial sales in April 2017 were in Mitcham, London, each for £500.

[Access the full dataset](#)

Notes to editors

1. Price Paid Data (PPD) is published at 11am on the 20th working day of each month. The next dataset will be published on 28 June 2017.
2. [Price Paid Data](#) is property price data for all residential and commercial property sales in England and Wales that are lodged with HM Land Registry for registration in that month, [subject to exclusions](#).
3. The following information is available for each property:
 - the full address
 - the price paid
 - the date of transfer
 - the property type
 - whether it is new build or not
 - whether it is freehold or leasehold
4. Price Paid Data can be downloaded in txt, csv format and in a machine readable format as [linked data](#) and is released under [Open Government Licence \(OGL\)](#). Under the OGL, HM Land Registry permits use of Price Paid Data for commercial or non-commercial purposes. However, the OGL does not cover the use of [third party rights](#), which HMLR is not authorised to license.
5. Price Paid Data includes Standard Price Paid Data (SPPD) for single residential property sales at full market value and Additional Price Paid Data (APPD) for transactions previously excluded from SPPD such as:
 - transfers to a non-private individual, for example a company, corporate body or business
 - transfers under a power of sale (repossessions)
 - buy-to-lets (where they can be identified by a mortgage). The information available for each property will indicate whether it is APPD or SPPD and the record's status – addition/change/deletion (A/C/D).
6. The [Price Paid Data report builder](#) allows users to build bespoke reports using the data. Reports can be based on location, estate type, price paid or property type over a defined period of time.
7. As a government department established in 1862, executive agency and trading fund responsible to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, HM Land Registry keeps and maintains the Land Register for England and Wales. The Land Register has been open to public inspection since 1990.

8. With the largest transactional database of its kind detailing over 24 million titles, HM Land Registry underpins the economy by safeguarding ownership of many billions of pounds worth of property.

9. For further information about HM Land Registry visit www.gov.uk/land-registry.

10. Follow us on:

News story: Customer enquiry service changes

How you contact UK Visas and Immigration is changing.

From 1 June, all customer enquiries will be handled by a new commercial partner Sitel UK.

The new contract will see a number of changes for customers. These changes help the government reduce costs and ensure those who benefit directly from the UK immigration system make an appropriate contribution.

The main changes for customers applying from outside the UK are:

- all phone numbers and opening hours will change
- the number of languages offered is reducing to 8 including English
- customers who contact UK Visas and Immigration by email will be charged £5.48

You will need to pay using a credit or debit card for contacting us by email. The charge includes the first email enquiry you send and any follow-up emails to and from the contact centre relating to the same enquiry.

The way you pay to use the telephone service will remain the same using a credit or debit card.

If you do not have access to a credit or debit card, you may choose to use a trusted 3rd party such as an agent or sponsor.

There are no changes to services if you are contacting us from inside the UK.

World news story: Speech by His Royal Highness Prince of Wales in Romania

Check against delivery

Domnule Rector, Doamnelor și Domnilor,

Sunt profund mișcat și foarte recunoscător pentru marea și deosebita onoare pe care mi-o faceți în această după-amiază.

To have a doctorate bestowed on me by the oldest university in Romania, not to say one of the most prestigious in Europe, is very flattering indeed. It is now almost exactly twenty years since my first visit to this part of your wonderful country, in 1997. In the intervening period I have managed to travel to other parts of Romania, but that first visit to Transylvania made an indelible impression on me. I saw a hilly, wooded and fertile landscape, still cared for by the small-scale farming communities that created them, and an extraordinary cultural continuity – in many villages, the family names are closely associated, historically, with these places – the same families have been caring for the land for hundreds of years.

Since that visit I have grown to appreciate and to love these landscapes and communities more and more.

It is rare, perhaps unique, in Europe to find well preserved and functional, productive landscapes at such a large scale. I was astonished to find how the grasslands are so wonderfully rich in wildflowers, and also in butterflies – with over two hundred butterfly species in Romania, compared to forty in the United Kingdom – other invertebrates and vertebrates, including important wolf, bear and raptor populations. These species all indicate the overall health of the whole ecology of these landscapes. And yet they are very productive. Studies carried out by the European Union show that smaller-scale farms in Romania, and more widely in Europe, are actually twice as productive per hectare than larger-scale farms. These special producers are farming with Nature, but they do need help to obtain a proper value for what they make, and a proper connection to the market. Given an integrated approach to rural development, these problems can be solved and, if they are, the communities will continue to prosper, and to protect wildlife-friendly farming.

All of us in the wider world have a lot to learn from Transylvania's farmed landscapes. They have spiritual as well as social, economic and ecological significance. Does this matter in today's more cynical age when there is such an obsession with "efficiency" and convenience? Yes, it does – because the essential point is that in these landscapes Man is still living in harmony with Nature – a harmony that has been largely lost in most parts of Europe, and with disastrous results to our environment. Here Man produces food in a truly sustainable way, without destroying Nature or fighting Nature, but in partnership with Nature.

□This is an important theme that I have been trying to stress for many years – to a chorus of scepticism. However, it would seem that the tide is beginning to turn and more and more people can see the costs of the industrialization of landscapes and food production, with a loss of the natural capital that sustains us all. Short-term gains will be followed by the collapse of natural systems in the longer-term. This is a collapse that can already be seen.

In contrast, the Transylvanian farmed landscapes offer many models of sustainable living, food production and biodiversity conservation. Conventional Nature reserves are probably not the answer to saving these special places for posterity, which require an holistic, landscape-scale approach that avoids creating islands of diversity surrounded by damaged lands. The existing richness of animal and plant life, certainly by comparison with other countries in Europe, demonstrates that farming and biodiversity can indeed survive together to enhance and complement each other.

There is no doubt that grassland is central to this farmed landscape. A long history and continuation of traditional, non-intensive management practices – mixed farming, little or no fertilizer input and low stocking densities – has allowed the great diversity of wildflowers and wildlife to survive. These low-input, permanent grasslands still possess an abundance of wild plants and animals that have disappeared from much of the rest of Europe. As you know far better than me, they yield meat, milk and cheese, and other commercial products such as honey, wild fruits and medicinal plants. It is a buffered, productive ecosystem.

The diversity of grasses and wildflowers, including numerous orchids, wild sages and other mint relatives, and twenty to thirty or more clovers, trefoils, vetches and other legumes, provides quality feed for farm animals. These grasslands represent more or less intact, traditionally managed ecosystems, including soils and soil micro-flora. Pockets of dry steppic grassland on South-facing slopes and the steep hummocks, or movile, that are a feature of the Saxon Villages, and damp grassland in valley bottoms with a rich wet meadow flora are especially rich.

They maintain both rich biodiversity and the “goods and services” of a healthy and stable environment. They reduce or prevent soil erosion, they lock up carbon and they soak up rain and slowly release clean water into wells, streams and rivers, providing both flood prevention in wet conditions and a secure water supply in dry periods. The mosaic of wildflower-rich grasslands and adjacent ancient woodlands generate income from tourism, being ideally suited to activities such as mountain bike trails, horse riding, walking, painting and natural history. Food products from this most healthy environment, of high quality and with a distinct regional identity, will increasingly attract consumers prepared to pay premium prices. Honey and jams made locally from wild meadow and woodland edge fruits are literally “bottled biodiversity”...

These farmed landscapes and the villages that support them are at the very heart of Romania’s rural economy and culture. Nevertheless, this valuable

ecosystem and its wild plants and wildlife are every bit as threatened as any in the modern world, even if the whole system appears substantially intact. The impressive legacy of the historical Romanian, Saxon and Székely farming communities should surely be integral to future economic growth, and conservationists can help local people and Nature by showing how to combine the best traditional farming practices with innovative technology. It would be a complete tragedy to lose that intangible sense of place, which can happen so easily. Instead, it is vital to ensure that an enhanced rural economy can again provide a good livelihood – and one linked directly to the landscape – for farming communities in Transylvania. And in a countryside that combines natural beauty and a living productive ecosystem...

I have been asked many times why I come so often to Romania, what is it that makes it so special, so attractive?

For me, the answer is clear: you, my Romanian friends; your natural and cultural landscape, your traditions, but also your capacity to innovate and change. What you are after centuries of history – your identity, and what you can do; the energy of change you can mobilize. This is what makes you special in the world.

Your architecture, your beautiful farmland, your biodiversity, your pastures, meadows and orchards, the mosaic of habitats and the diversity of your communities and traditions, in Transylvania and across Romania; all these, together, are a treasure – your treasure to the world.

It seems to me that, sometimes, you are not fully aware of all this. It is easy to forget, lured by the rhythm and challenges of our modern society. When you are looking to the future, please keep these values in mind. They are unique. When you want to modernize, to change, to transform – and Romania has so many things to do, to change, to modernize – I do so hope that you will be able to do it in a way that would give more value to your treasure; that will preserve your communities and your landscapes; that would bring what you are already into what you want to become.

I am always amazed by the exceptional creativity of your youth – in IT, research and innovation, creative arts. This is part of your treasure as well.

Your brand as a country is precisely this blend of values and authentic traditions; the architecture, the taste of your food, the ancestral fabric of your communities, of natural values; the unique biodiversity, the landscapes – as well as your capacity to innovate. This is what makes you special. This is why I always return to Romania and this is why a part of my soul is always here.

Modern life doesn't mean to forget the values of the past and to replace everything with new things, but to combine in a smart way the fundamental values of our cultures and traditions with innovation and new technologies – without severing the bond between human society and Nature.

Romania has a fascinatingly diverse and ancient history inherited from the

Dacians, and on which to build a life based on a harmonious relationship with Nature. During previous centuries, other civilizations enriched the local one with cultures, traditions and architecture based on the same principle of respect for a harmonious relationship with Nature. This is a richness which could be an asset for modern Romania. It would be wonderful, indeed, if schools and universities in Romania could cultivate the idea that Nature and living traditions are an asset for modern life. That is the only way to build a sustainable material and spiritual future – and one in which Romania would be uniquely placed to innovate without ever losing her precious soul.