

New law tightens grip on YouTube

VIDEO-sharing websites such as YouTube could be blocked in Britain after a last-minute change to a new law.

They are facing a major clampdown on using copyright material under an amendment passed by the House of Lords.

The change grants TV and music companies the right to demand their material is taken down. If the request is refused, they can take their challenge to court, where high legal costs will make it pointless to launch a defence.

Critics say the Digital Economy Bill is a blow to web freedom and hands far too much power to big entertainment companies.

They say the reasoning behind the amendment is 'wholly misguided'.

Websites such as YouTube and its smaller rivals such as Daily Motion and Vimeo have long been under pressure for posting music videos, film and TV clips without consent.

Under the new law, copyright holders must ask internet service providers – companies such as Virgin, BT, TalkTalk and Orange – and the website itself to remove the material or any links to other sites hosting it.

If it is not taken down, a court order can force the ISP to block the site.

The amendment is aimed at websites

By **Miles Erwin**

with 'substantial' amounts of copyrighted material. However, critics say the law, which is set to be passed in April, is unclear about what 'substantial' means and that it is unfair to block an entire site over a few minor breaches.

They say ISPs would simply shut out a site rather than risk the high legal costs of defending a case.

Jim Killock, executive director of the Open Rights Group, said: 'ISPs are almost certain to cave into rights holders' demands rather than go through a lengthy court process.

'It's hard on ISPs because they have no power to change what websites are doing but, if they block them, they could lose users.'

Nicholas Lansman, secretary-general of the Internet Service Providers Association, said: 'Our members are extremely concerned that the full implications of the amendment have not been understood.'

Liberal Democrat peer Lord Clement-Jones, who put forward the amendment, said ISPs should have little cause for concern as an injunction would be granted only where a website had been warned repeatedly of copyright breaches.