



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London, SW1A 2BQ

11th May 2018

Dear Matt,

Re: Improving 4G in Rural Areas – Rural Business APPG

As MPs representing rural constituencies we continue to be concerned by the progress that has been made in improving 4G mobile signals. We would ask you to challenge the current speed and ambition of coverage roll out in rural areas.

In December your Department indicated an ambition to deliver mobile coverage to 95% of the geographic landmass of the UK by the end of 2022. The Government's estimated at the time that meeting this benchmark would add £75 billion to UK GDP. This is a realistic and vital ambition. We support it fully.

We believe that this ambition must be clear and unambiguous. It means quality coverage that consumers can rely on to make uninterrupted calls and use data services at home, at work and on the move across the countryside.

It also means a choice of providers. In the UK this means all consumers must be able to access services provided by all four of the major networks, and no localised monopolies should be tolerated.

Recent evidence shows that the market alone is not providing the roll out necessary to meet the needs of rural areas. This means that regulation has a key role to play. The main regulation required is a legally binding coverage obligation imposed on all four major operators.

We are concerned as of the end of 2017, there are no legally binding targets in place for the mobile operators to extend roll out. Every day that goes by where this is the case presents the risk of further delay and obfuscation on the part of the industry.

We note the recent announcement by Ofcom of its intention to include coverage conditions to the auction of licences to use the 700Mhz spectrum that will be sold next year and released in 2020.



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Aside from the frustratingly long wait for the release of this spectrum, which brings significant potential for extending reach of coverage in to rural areas, we are concerned that these conditions Ofcom propose fall significantly short of the 95% ambition.

We ask you to take urgent action to reassure us, and more importantly our constituents, that Government will take the action necessary to deliver the coverage they need. We believe that this includes:

- a rethink of Ofcom's statutory obligations that clarifies that its main purpose must be to work towards the delivery of universal quality mobile coverage and;
- a significant change in the rules on transparency that prevent mobile operators hiding behind 'commercial confidentiality' and refusing to tell communities where and when they plan to roll out coverage

Today's economy and way of life relies on access to effective mobile coverage. It is a utility service alongside electricity, water and fixed line broadband. We have legislated in the past year to provide significant advantages to the industry on issues like access to land and planning permission because of this. I am sure you agree that now is the time for the industry to deliver coverage.

We look forward to hearing from you and would be happy to meet to discuss.

Chair, All Party Parliamentary Group for Rural Business

Alan Brown MP SNP
Angus Brendan McNeil MP SNP
Alex Sobel MP Labour
Alistair Carmichael MP Liberal Democrat
Alister Jack MP Conservative
Angela Smith MP Labour
Anne-Marie Morris MP Conservative
Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP Conservative
Antoinette Sandbach MP Conservative
Ben Lake MP Plaid Cymru
Bill Wiggin MP Conservative
Caroline Flint MP Labour
Chris Elmore MP Labour



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