

JULIAN STURDY MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sharon White
Chief Executive
Ofcom
Riverside House
London, SE1 9HA

February 2019

Dear Ms White,

Re: Improving 4G in rural areas – Rural Business APPG

We are writing to you as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Rural Business, the group has been running an ongoing inquiry into 4G coverage across rural areas. Last autumn we published our report, *4G in rural areas; how to close the digital divide*, please find a copy enclosed.

The report set out several recommendations for how coverage could be improved in line with the upcoming sale of the 700Mhz spectrum, including increasing transparency and the accountability of the mobile operators.

We were initially pleased by Ofcom's announcement of its intended coverage obligations in the consultation announced in December 2018. A reduction of spectrum cost in return for maximising coverage, a 90% 4G geographic coverage target and the announcement of 500 new mobile masts in rural areas which, has the opportunity to revolutionise coverage across the countryside.

However as a group we are greatly concerned by the recently published consultation into how the mobile operators will be monitored during the time period of the obligations (2020-2024) and that it will be only at the end of this date, when the operators have to provide evidence that they have built the proposed masts. Ofcom has acknowledged across several reports and especially in its guidance to government (September 18) that mobile operators are reluctant to build masts in rural areas due to significant cost involvement required, therefore it seems irresponsible for there to be a lack of monitoring during this period.

Ofcom in its proposals for the spectrum sale, describes its desire to be more transparent to the consumer about the level of coverage available from the mobile operators, and progress being made to improve. Ofcom must incorporate progress on this obligation within the annual Connected Nations report in order to deliver on its intentions to assure consumers and rural people that improvements are being made to 4G availability.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Julian Sturdy MP - Chair, Rural Business APPG

Robert Courts MP Conservative
Simon Hart MP Conservative
David Drew MP Labour
Anne Marie Morris MP Conservative
Ruth George MP Labour
Ben Lake MP Plaid Cymru
Peter Aldous MP Conservative
Tom Tugenhat MP Conservative
David Warburton MP Conservative
Jonathan Edwards MP Plaid Cymru
Michael Tomlinson MP Conservative
Kevin Hollinrake MP Conservative
Scott Mann MP Conservative
Rosie Cooper MP Labour
John Lamont MP Conservative
Sir Roger Gale MP Conservative
Owen Paterson MP Conservative
Mark Menzies MP Conservative
Caroline Flint MP Labour
Sir Oliver Heald QC MP Conservative
Sir Henry Bellingham MP Conservative
Richard Benyon MP Conservative
Ranil Jayawardena MP Conservative
Alan Brown MP SNP
David Duguid MP Conservative
Nigel Evans MP Conservative
Stephen Crabb MP Conservative
Gordon Henderson MP Conservative
Alistair Carmichael MP Liberal Democrat
Dr Daniel Poulter MP Conservative
Sir Michael Fallon MP Conservative
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Neil Parish MP Conservative
Steve Double MP Conservative
Maria Caulfield MP Conservative
Sir Bernard Jenkin MP Conservative
Angus Brendan MacNeil MP SNP
Tim Farron MP Liberal Democrat
Chris Elmore MP Labour
Bill Grant MP Conservative