



Your Ref:
Our Ref: 214555/MH/03

Alan Reid MP
House of Commons

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5 September 2012

Dear Alan

Thank you for your letter of 27 August to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP, about access to broadband services and mobile phone coverage in your constituency. I am replying as the Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries.

As you may be aware UK Government has allocated £530 million during the current Spending Review period to stimulate commercial investment to roll out high speed broadband in rural communities where coverage is poor or non-existent, with over 100m of this having been allocated to Scotland. Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK), a unit within DCMS, is responsible for managing the Government's broadband funding. Individual project responsibility in Scotland rests with the Scottish Government, as set out in BDUK's delivery model. The ambition is to provide superfast broadband to at least 90 per cent of premises in the UK and to provide universal access to standard broadband with a speed of at least 2Mbps.

The Scottish Government has published its Digital Strategy and more recently its procurement plans. Both of these can be found on the Scottish Government's website, but you may also find it helpful to contact the Scottish Government directly to enquire about its plans for the Argyll & Bute area. The Scottish Government Minister responsible is the Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure and Capital Investment, Alex Neil MSP.

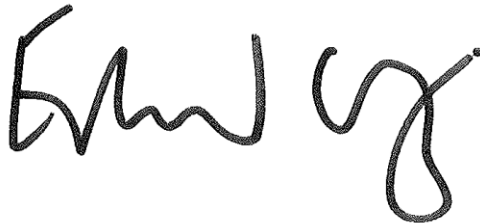
The Government recognises the concerns of those who have no mobile phone coverage or have very poor service. It is for that reason that on 3 October the Chancellor announced plans to invest £150m in improving mobile phone reception in areas of the UK where homes and businesses have poor or non-existent coverage, also referred to as not-spots. This planned investment, coupled with the on-going process for improved broadband access demonstrates the Government's commitment to ensure the UK consumer has access to one of the leading communications infrastructures in the world.

With respect to the Government's Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) it may be helpful if I lay out the timetable for the project. We have shortlisted six potential bidders from the nine companies who responded to our initial procurement notice. We expect to have appointed a MIP supplier by the end of the year.

As part of our planning process, Ofcom have provided us with a list of some 80,000 not-spots in the UK. We have undertaken an initial assessment of the average cost of providing MIP infrastructure to remedy not-spots and that suggests, subject to a range of cost variables and of course planning permission, that we should be able to treat a good proportion of those. That is also of course subject to the mobile phone network operators being prepared to meet the operating costs for the sites over their lifetime. This position will become clearer once we have the MIP supplier on board. Their first task will be to undertake UK-wide radio-planning which will then be used in selecting which of the not-spots can be put forward for the project.

It is at this point, expected in early 2013, that we will be looking to engage with Local Authorities in the areas where the radio-planning projects will be undertaken.

Further information about this project can be found on our website at <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/8771.aspx>.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Vaizey', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ed Vaizey MP

Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries

Approved by the Minister and signed electronically in his absence