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CMS 256473/asg
24th October 2014

Dr Bill

Mobile Phone Coverage in Fownhope

Thank you for coming to see me to present the petition signed by Fownhope residents requesting that a previous plan to build a Mobile Infrastructure Project mast in the area is reinstated.

Improving digital infrastructure in the UK is a key priority for me. My Department is currently exploring with Ofcom and the mobile network operators what can be done to further improve mobile coverage in areas with partial not-spots, something which particularly affects rural communities such as Fownhope.

As we discussed on Tuesday, the latest mobile phone coverage data on complete not-spots provided to us by Ofcom has shown a reduction of complete not spots in the Fownhope area, to the point at which we are no longer able to provide public funding for a mast. I understand the frustrations with this, and I am sorry for the raised expectations in Fownhope. You shared the concerns of your constituents that coverage in the area remains poor, and that you and they feel strongly that they are receiving a service that does not compare favourably with the cost of owning and using a mobile phone.

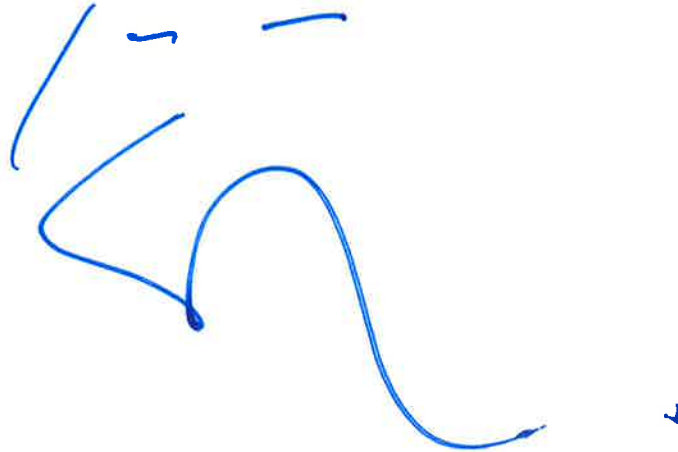
In order to provide you with further assurance on our assessment of coverage in Fownhope I offered to make a request to Ofcom to undertake some independent testing in and around the village. I understand that Ofcom are currently doing some on the ground testing in a small number of selected areas as part of their work towards the next National Infrastructure Report, and as a way of testing/confirming the data provided by the Mobile Network Operators for this.



I am pleased to confirm that Ofcom expect to be able to include Fownhope in this testing. I would be grateful if you could bear in mind that this has been done on the basis of an exception, and should not set a precedent for any further testing in other areas, as to extend testing on this basis would incur prohibitive costs.

The results of the testing are likely to be made available to us in mid-November, at which point I should be able to share with you Ofcom's conclusions specific to the Fownhope area.

A further avenue that you may wish to explore with the residents of Fownhope is to directly approach the Mobile Network Operators to investigate what community schemes they have in place to improve coverage in rural areas, such as Vodafone's Rural Open Sure Signal programme. This programme provides a low-powered 3G mobile base station which works with a basic local broadband connection to create a 3G signal, and further details can be found at www.vodafone.co.uk/rural . I understand that the application process is open until 7 November.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'S. Javid', written over a light blue circular watermark.

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport