

JULIAN SMITH MP

Skipton & Ripon



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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Response to consultation on the assessment of future mobile competition and proposals for the award of 800 MHz and 2.6 GHz spectrum and related issues

Rural Britain must not be left behind in the upcoming auction of the 800 MHz spectrum. The recent debate in Parliament, 'Motion relating to rural broadband and mobile coverage' on 19 May 2011, was a very strong message to Ofcom of the need to address this issue and I am writing to reiterate the message of that debate, as an MP of one of the most sparsely populated constituencies in England.

The 3G spectrum, sold off for so much money, has left so many parts of rural Britain not covered. We must make sure this does not happen with 4G. There is huge profit to be made by the telecommunication companies and Ofcom must ensure coverage is as widespread as possible and not just that maximum money is paid upfront.

Some will say it does not make economic sense and we must maximise the return from selling off the spectrum. But it is important we are also forward thinking and look at the broader economic benefits of extending rural coverage - economic benefits which will ultimately mean better returns for the taxpayer.

It does not make economic sense to hold back the entrepreneur who can't reach their potential and contribute to this country's economy in the years ahead because they cannot go online.

It also does not make sense to stop a business expanding and taking on more employees because when they need to grow, they cannot get a high speed connection. I have numerous examples of businesses in my constituency who are considering relocation as a result of this issue. Please let me know if you want specific examples of these.

If you live in London, Leeds or Birmingham you do not think about infrastructure - because you have decent connections. If you live in Darley, Appletreewick or Austwick in my constituency you do because you do not have decent connections - or, in many cases, any

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connection at all. 4G could help change that. It must extend to these unconnected areas and not just provide better connections for the areas that already have decent connections.

This auction is vital for the economic future of rural Britain. I therefore urge Ofcom to increase the coverage obligation attached to the 800MHz spectrum licence to 98 per cent.

Please let me know if you need further examples of how important this issue is for my constituency of Skipton and Ripon. I also enclose a copy of a recent article that I have written reiterating my concerns.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Smith', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JULIAN SMITH MP

End the scandal of rural internet



Julian Smith

For too many of our rural communities, being able to get on the internet reliably and at a decent speed is a pipe dream. Ironically, it is these rural areas that have the most need for the internet.

If you have one bus a day into your nearest town, if you struggle to get to a local college, an online connection makes a key difference.

The majority of businesses in many parts of my constituency in North Yorkshire, and across rural Britain, are small firms and farmers looking to diversify. The lack of decent internet connections in today's connected world limits the growth in the private sector that will be needed in the future. Only last week, one of the biggest businesses and employers in North Yorkshire

announced it would move out if broadband speeds didn't improve.

That is why I am pleased the Government is committed to improving broadband access to rural communities and has pilot schemes for better access and speeds in four parts of the country, including in North Yorkshire.

Rural Britain wants action, not words. We need solutions that are value for money and sustainable. It is vital we do not just get it right for today's needs and tomorrow's technology, but innovations for years to come. As with the Government's decision to press ahead with high-speed rail, we need to have vision.

That is why we must look at all available technologies - fibre, satellite, wireless and mobile. The latter will be a focus in the debate on rural

broadband and mobile coverage led by my brilliant colleague, Rory Stewart.

Making sure that when the 4G spectrum is put up for auction that rural Britain is not left behind is key to the Government's commitments. We should ensure 4G reaches rural communities and that is why a debate in Parliament today urges Ofcom to increase the coverage obligation attached to the 800 MHz spectrum licence to 98 per cent.

For those of us lucky enough to represent such beautiful rural constituencies, we are used to Fridays and weekends with little phone signal. The 3G spectrum, sold off for so much money, has left many parts of rural Britain not covered. We must make sure this does not happen with 4G.

Some will say it does not make economic sense. But it does not make economic sense to hold entrepreneurs back. To stop a business expanding because it cannot get a high-speed connection. Or to force a rural

British firm to move to China because it needs decent, affordable connectivity.

Broadband is becoming the glue that holds our economy together. Without it, businesses cannot function and people's lives are poorer.

It is important that MPs debate this issue, and we work together to push Ofcom, the telecoms companies and the Government to make sure rural Britain is not left behind. The telcos used all their might to ensure that the Government didn't pressurise Ofcom too much on coverage, now rural MPs will be lobbying equally hard to ensure that coverage is central to the forthcoming auction of the 4G 800 MHz spectrum.

Julian Smith is MP for Skipton and Ripon

A Parliament debate today urges Ofcom to increase coverage