

Dear Ms Jackson

### **DAB in North Devon**

I am writing about the concerns I have of the potential affect the proposal to extend the south Devon digital multiples in to north Devon will have on the people in the north of the county.

There are two issues within this debate, unfortunately one is clouding the other, and the outcome of one will have a major impact on the other. And most importantly and sadly, the main reason for this consultation is an attempt to influence the main issue that is being hidden behind a smoke screen.

### **Digital expansion**

Firstly let me say that I am not against the idea of digital in principal providing a full and comprehensive service is to be considered, but the manner in which it is currently proposed is wholly unacceptable and will greatly disadvantage many people in north Devon.

Many people who receive a good FM service now will not receive the proposed digital signal, and once the FM signal is eventually switched off, which I appreciate could be any time between 2015 and 2020, they will receive nothing other than national networks. Having said that the majority of services on the south Devon regional multiplex are national syndicated services anyway!

To give an adequate and acceptable coverage (currently enjoyed on FM), would require a far more comprehensive transmitter network than is currently proposed. I appreciate that the number of transmitters could be increased in the future, but you are asking us to respond to the application currently being proposed, and on that basis I strongly urge you to reject this application on the grounds that it does not propose satisfactory or acceptable coverage now or at any time in the future. The topography of north Devon does not allow for easy coverage of a digital signal without a comprehensive transmitter network, Now Digital IS NOT proposing this and they should have researched more thoroughly.

### **Local Radio**

The other major consequence of approving this application is the automatic renewal of a local radio licence for the region, currently held by Heart / Global. For many years Lantern Radio provided a very popular and well liked local radio station. This service was not only popular with locals as it provided a totally local service, which became invaluable to our communities, but it was also a profitable business.

Since closing its operations in Barnstaple and networking from Exeter to the whole of Devon, North Devon has effectively been ignored, with the only real local content being localised adverts for local businesses, the odd news story and occasional traffic report and then not always accurate – they recently reported that a street which was pedestrianised some years ago was “*running smoothly with no holdups*” !!! Real local radio is about local knowledge.

Ed Richards, CEO of Ofcom has talked about the importance of localness in local radio. The Myers Review on 2009 stated “*Radio is important to the very fabric of our society, and local radio particularly so*”.

So why isn't North Devon allowed the chance of its own local radio station, approving this application would deny the right of another group the chance of applying to operate and provide the region with its own truly local service – the right to enjoy a local radio is enjoyed by almost every other community in the country, why is north Devon to be denied this right.

**I strongly urge Ofcom to refuse this application on two grounds:**

Firstly the proposed DAB coverage for North Devon is wholly inadequate and totally unsatisfactory as there are whole communities that will not receive a DAB signal at all, the most worrying of all is the regions largest seaside town and the second largest population centre – Ilfracombe, as well as other villages and communities along the Bristol Channel coastline.

This application has not been researched and thought through and no provision has been made for future expansion of the transmitter network to give sufficient cover to that currently being enjoyed on FM. This I am sure is due to the huge investment that will be required to give a robust coverage on DAB over an area of difficult terrain.

The people of North Devon should not have to pay the price of a poor and inferior service because of where they live, when FM offers a perfectly acceptable service.

Secondly, the plan to expand digital with a hastily put together application has been proposed to act as a smoke screen and to allow the automatic renewal of a current FM local licence. This is totally immoral and very underhand, and the two issues should be dealt with totally separately.

Every other community in Devon and Cornwall has a choice of local radio stations, so why should north Devon - an area the size of Derbyshire with a population of around 130,000 - be denied this basic choice. We are being treated like second rate citizens as the only “local” service is broadcast from 60 miles away from a part of the county that those in north Devon do not relate to either socially and editorially. This service pays scant regard to those in the north of the county as its main focus is Exeter, Torbay and Plymouth.

If Heart / Global want to broadcast to north Devon on DAB then that is fine, but not at the expense of an alternative truly local radio station for the region. As with the rest of the south west , north Devon should be allowed a choice of local radio. Therefore Ofcom should re advertise the current FM licence or allow a second service.

Paul Andrews