

Title:

Ms

Forename:

Suzanne

Surname:

Bongartz

Representing:

Self

Organisation (if applicable):

Email:

What do you want Ofcom to keep confidential?:

Keep nothing confidential

If you want part of your response kept confidential, which parts?:

N/A

Ofcom may publish a response summary:

Yes

I confirm that I have read the declaration:

Yes

Ofcom should only publish this response after the consultation has ended:

You may publish my response on receipt

Additional comments:

It is interesting that other than being made aware of this proposal through The Voice, this proposal seems to be more in the style of a silent takeover! Neither myself or my friends were aware that this proposal existed and the effects it could have, let alone the opportunity existed for us to have a say.

Question 1: Do you think that allowing Now Digital to extend the coverage area of its Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex licence to include North Devon would unacceptably narrow the range of DAB programme services available in the Exeter and Torbay area? Please explain the reasons for your view.:

Yes for the following reasons:

There are several reasons why I feel it is important to keep maximum coverage and a local as possible radio station:

Firstly, because of the area in which we live "North Devon" the population is so spread out and rural, it is important to be able to spend on-air time on things like school closures, road closures, local accidents and traffic hotspots, often these things are only reported by locals and are listened to religiously as such.

Secondly, because a lot of our local events can ONLY be covered by local radio as they have the time to dedicate to these things. This also has the benefit of making advertising on the local station a cost effective way of promoting local services and product thus ensuring a thriving business community. By the by, we also have a large forces contingent which hosts a variety of events which need local support.

Thirdly, that whilst a 70% coverage may seem adequate to some, such a large portion of our demographic is elderly and the radio is their only lifeline to the world outside of their homes. It seems cruel to cut them off from local happenings if something can be done to prevent this. I, myself have a blind aunt who relies on the radio for such information and for whom the radio is good company. It also allows her to converse on music and current affairs with all the generations in our family precisely because she has listened to the radio.

Question 2: Do you think that allowing Now Digital to extend the coverage area of its Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex licence to include North Devon would be calculated to maintain or promote the development of digital sound broadcasting in the UK otherwise than by satellite? Please explain the reasons for your view.:

The simple answer is YES. It would give more choice and promote more choice, but the cost of that is not financial, but the cost is that eventually there will no longer be any truly local radio station serving the needs of North Devon.

Question 3: Do you think that Now Digital's proposals for providing coverage of North Devon are satisfactory? Please explain the reasons for your view.:

I think that a 70% coverage in such a rural area is very unsatisfactory. To give you a specific example, having driven from the M5 on the A361 to Barnstaple and then up to Ilfracombe via the 3 different routes available it is impossible to find reliable traffic information consistently unless on the local radio station. Whilst the signal clearly drops off in some areas, I know that radio stations broadcasting from further afar (even Exeter for example) don't have the time or local knowledge to adequately describe traffic issues as they arise.

Question 4: Do you consider that Now Digital has the ability to maintain its local radio multiplex service if its request is granted? Please explain the reasons for your view.:

Well as with all things, nothing is guaranteed. Since I moved to North Devon in 2000, there have been 3 different Radio stations, I worked briefly for Lantern FM. It was a big change locally when Heart took over and then dropped off the grid. I saw a big change in the way that local events/businesses have been supported and find they often lack the support they need due to a lessening of "localness" in the broadcasts. I can't imagine therefore unless we have a dedicated local station that this decline will improve at all.

Question 5: (For programme service providers on the Exeter & Torbay local radio multiplex only) Do you consider that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect your rights and interests in the event that Now Digital is permitted to extend coverage to include North Devon?:

How could we possibly be guaranteed proper local coverage having explained the major benefits above of having a dedicated radio station. I have not commented on the music played as this tends to be popular music no matter which station would be broadcasting.

Question 6: Do you consider that there any other grounds on which Ofcom should approve, or not approve, the request from Now Digital? Please explain the reasons for your view.:

No