



07 October 2024

To: All MPs

Dear Colleague,

Deployment of new broadband infrastructure

I am writing to you as the Minister for Data Protection and Telecoms. I know that the deployment of new broadband infrastructure – in particular telegraph poles – has attracted significant public attention and discontent.

I am aware of the strong feelings some communities up and down the country have on this issue, and I wanted to update you on the action I'm taking to address this, and help you reassure your constituents.

I completely agree that operators should share existing infrastructure wherever possible, and that where new infrastructure is needed, underground ducts should be prioritised over the use of new telegraph poles.

However, telegraph poles can play an important role in bringing connectivity to the people we represent. They help deliver efficient and cost-effective coverage and connectivity to communities. This is particularly important in areas that do not yet benefit from gigabit-capable connectivity, especially where existing infrastructure cannot be readily accessed. In areas that already benefit from gigabit-capable broadband, competition is important as it can bring greater choice to consumers and lower prices.

As you may know, on 16 August, I wrote to UK network operators and called on them to share existing infrastructure as the default approach; and where new infrastructure is needed, to install underground wherever possible before deploying new telegraph poles. I have also asked them to consider revising the Cabinet Siting and Pole Siting Code of Practice to take into account communities' concerns, and made it clear that the Government will not shy away from exploring changing the law, should companies fail to listen to communities.

Following this, on 12 September, I held a roundtable discussion with these operators. At this meeting, they committed to finding ways to collaborate and share infrastructure, consult residents more consistently and effectively, and document examples of best practice when deploying telegraph poles. They have committed to update me on their progress later this year. I have strongly stressed the urgency of the situation to them and made it clear that I reserve the right to take further steps if insufficient progress is made on a voluntary basis.

To be clear, I hope that industry can find a way to address public concerns around engagement and siting, without the need for Government to intervene. However, I will not rule out changing the current regulations, should it become apparent that industry cannot meet the challenge. In the meantime, I would be grateful if you could share this letter with your constituents if they contact you regarding the issue. If your constituents raise concerns around the deployment of telegraph poles, or operators' adherence with legal requirements and guidelines in place, these

concerns should be referred to the local planning authority in the first instance. The local planning authority can then refer these complaints to Ofcom, the independent regulator, who can investigate and take action if it deems it appropriate. Local planning authorities should be notified in advance of most pole deployment and can suggest conditions.

Although Ofcom is independent of the Government, they have stated that they would investigate any cases where poles are sited in a way which is not consistent with the legal requirements and guidelines in place – including where they block residents' drives or where operators systematically fail to engage with local planning authorities' suggestions. I would also encourage you to try and facilitate discussions between broadband operators and the local community, where this is feasible, including by sharing community concerns and asking operators to engage with local planning and highways authorities.

Finally, I would like to invite you to a discussion to hear more about the concerns constituents have been raising, and to share more about what my Department is doing to address this issue. This will be held in 100 Parliament Street on the 21st of October from 3.00-3.45pm.

I hope that this information will help you reassure your constituents. Please contact my office at [REDACTED] if you would like to attend the meeting.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bryant', with a large, stylized initial 'C'.

Sir Chris Bryant MP
Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms