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Peter Aldous MP
Daniel Zeichner MP
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Dear Peter and Daniel,

Thank you for your correspondence of 21 December, on behalf of East of England APPG, regarding digital infrastructure priorities in the East of England. Please accept my apologies for the delay in you receiving a response.

Fast, reliable connectivity promised from gigabit-capable networks can deliver economic, social and wellbeing benefits for businesses and residents. The importance of world class digital infrastructure has been highlighted by the response to COVID-19. Among a number of voluntary measures, the telecommunications sector has undertaken to help vulnerable people who rely on their digital connectivity, providers have committed to working with vulnerable consumers who are finding it difficult to pay their bill as a result of COVID-19 to ensure that they were treated fairly and appropriately supported, in addition to providing new and generous landline and mobile offers, such as free or low cost mobile data boosts. Furthermore, a number of websites, including the NHS and the victims of crime websites have been zero-rated.

Going forward the government is determined to become a world leader in connectivity, boost the economy and meet future consumer and business demand. Our target is a minimum of 85% gigabit-capable coverage by 2025, with an ambition to get as close to 100% as possible. The government will continue to implement an ambitious programme of work to remove barriers to broadband deployment and maximise coverage in the hardest to reach areas of the country.

We share your belief that all parts of the United Kingdom should have the connectivity they need to run a business, connect with friends and family through video calls, and engage in the digital economy. For the majority of the country we believe that encouraging commercial deployment through supporting competition is the best way to deliver these ambitions. We are supporting commercial roll-out through a range of policy and regulatory interventions. For example, we have introduced the Telecoms Infrastructure (Leasehold Property) Bill in Parliament, which will make it easier to connect premises where there is an unresponsive landlord.

However, approximately 20% of the UK will not support commercial deployment. This is why the government is investing an unprecedented £5 billion to further subsidise deployment of gigabit broadband to the hardest to reach areas of the country. This will be delivered by the UK Gigabit programme, managed by Building Digital UK (BDUK). With this funding, we will prioritise its initial deployment to maximise delivery to premises without access to superfast (30Mbps) broadband. We are already delivering gigabit-capable broadband through the Rural Gigabit Connectivity



(RGC) and Superfast broadband programmes. The new investment will build upon these existing programmes.

Existing programmes have successfully delivered in the East of England through demand side interventions and the Superfast programme, which continues apace with projects in delivery through partnerships with the respective Local Bodies, a variety of suppliers and BDUK. Our [Gigabit Voucher Scheme](#) has been successfully accessed in the East of England and as of January 2021 pipelined and connected vouchers exceeds £6 million. I have provided a funding and coverage breakdown by county in the Annex.

In respect of the Shared Rural Network, I am pleased that since signing the agreement in March of last year, initial radio plans have been submitted to the regulator, Ofcom, and an open, fair and transparent competitive procurement process for the publicly funded elements of the programme has commenced.

The exact site deployment plans will, however, be managed by the mobile network operators themselves in order for them to best deliver the agreed coverage outcomes. At this time, and until the operators' final radio planning exercise is complete, I am unable to provide any details on the precise location or number of new or upgraded masts. However, I am personally encouraging operators to be transparent about their plans, and the programme is already delivering improved mobile coverage in Devauden, Wales and Longnor in the Peak District where new masts have gone live.

My officials are happy to put Mobile UK and DMSL, who are leading on engagement matters for the industry on the Shared Rural Network, in contact with you both to provide you with an opportunity to ascertain their plans. However, we expect that operators will consult with local communities and consumers will feel the benefit of the programme long before it reaches its conclusion.

Thank you again for your letter. You can find out more about the government's efforts to improve digital connectivity at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/building-digital-uk>.

Thank you also for your invitation to speak at the APPG, I would be delighted to accept and my Private Office will be in contact to confirm timings.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Warman', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Matt Warman MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Digital Infrastructure