

CB/290914/Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy

PR14-14

Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy Team
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Fourth Floor, 100 Parliament Street
London, SW1A 2BQ

Dear Sir / Madam,

CONSULTATION ON DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

I am writing in response to your consultation on the Government's Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy.

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised membership and support organisation representing the interests of around 9,000 parish and town councils and many parish meetings in England.

NALC in principle welcomes the opportunity to comment on the four main themes included in your Department's consultation on how best to inform a new Digital Communications Infrastructure Strategy, into the long term, building on existing UK digital foundations. The Association comments below on what it thinks the challenges will be for residents in parished areas (in particular rural areas), when relevant bodies attempt to provide the infrastructure to meet future demands.

Our main observations on the four main themes considered in the consultation are as below;

- **The Role of Government:** The Association understands completely the need for the Government now and in future to take advantage of the growth potential of the communications sector, including boosting innovation and creativity, maintaining global competitiveness and ensuring that a world class infrastructure is in place. **The Association strongly calls for the Government to use the Strategy to give local councils the legal power to promote, contribute towards and / or run electronic communications networks and services, for the benefit of their local communities in their areas.** This has been raised as crucial in rurally sparsely populated areas such as Northumberland;
- **User Demand And Technological Developments Set Against A Backdrop of A Range Of Influencing Factors:** The Association is very much in favour of the Government encouraging the private sector to invest – particularly in rural areas – in technological development to deliver broadband to rurally sparsely populated parished areas – working with parish councils in those areas to ensure that residents receive the best targeted service obtainable – so as to allow parish councils to promote and support service delivery;
- **Regulatory Framework: The Association supports the regulatory framework being strengthened but simplified so as to allow quality internet providers the chance to deliver much needed broadband services in rural parished areas.** This would and should be applicable to both parish councils wishing to promote incoming rural broadband services to their areas; and to private sector providers wishing to physically deliver such broadband connection in rural parished areas; &

- **The Scale Of Private Investment Required: The Association supported the Final Third First campaign led by CLA in 2010-11 and supported by British Telecom and other private sector bodies – to ensure that the Government put the final third of the country not internet connected at that time – first online.** Our position has changed little since then. We ask the Department to ensure that relevant funding and communications programmes are put in place to ensure that DEFRA, ACRE, BDUK and other partners are able in principle to offer support to local councils who are seeking to develop Broadband improvements in their communities.

About the National Association

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) is the nationally recognised membership and support organisation representing the interests of around 9,000 parish councils and many parish meetings in England. Our councils serve over 15 million people in places ranging from small rural communities to large towns and small cities.

NALC provides support and advice directly to our member councils through a network of county associations. Working with and for our member councils, we are actively involved in working with, and influencing, Government and other bodies at a national level to advance and protect the interests of local councils and the communities they serve.

About our local councils

The parish councils and parish meetings we support and represent serve electorates ranging from small rural communities to major cities, and raise a precept from the local community. Together, they can be identified as among the nation's most influential grouping of grassroots opinion-formers. Over 15 million people live in communities served by our parish councils, around 35% of the population, whilst over 200 new local councils have been created in the last 10 years.

Parish councils and parish meetings work towards improving community well-being and providing better services at a local level. Their work falls into three main categories:

- representing the local community;
- delivering services to meet local needs; and
- striving to improve quality of life in the community.

Through a range of powers, parish councils provide and maintain a variety of important and visible local services including allotments, bridleways, burial grounds, bus shelters, car parks, commons, community transport schemes, crime reduction measures, footpaths, leisure facilities, local youth projects, open spaces, public lavatories, planning, street cleaning, street lighting, tourism activities, traffic calming measures, village greens and litter bins.

I hope that the Department finds this submission helpful. Should you require any further information on this matter then please do not hesitate to contact me on 020 7290 0741 or via email at chris.borg@nalc.gov.uk .

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CBorg' with a stylized flourish at the end.

CHRIS BORG
POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGER