

By email to: Home Secretary Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP email amber.rudd.mp@parliament.uk

Sunday, 16 October 2016
Manafon Community Council
C/O Green Acres
Manafon
Welshpool
Powys SY21 8BJ

Dear Home Secretary,

We are writing to you to express our concerns at the lack of coverage for mobile phone users in the Rhiew Valley and surrounding areas in Powys. Given that there has been no progress over the last 2/3 years to ensure that adequate network coverage is available, we as a community must act to ensure our voice is heard at a senior level of Government.

The idiom applied is, "a mobile not spot". In terms of local identification of the area it covers a huge area as specified in the attached map of post codes and in fact beyond these areas but the Rhiew/Manafon valley is our primary concern.

Over the last 3 to 4 years members of our Community Council have been actively involved in meetings and correspondence with a broad spectrum of organisations in trying to secure a commitment that our need for access to mobile coverage will be met. These activities have included numerous meetings, public and individual, the involvement of Ofcom; Russell George AM has been particularly supportive as has Alex Williams from the Assembly Wales office.

We live in an age whereby technology is an integral part of everyday life, our local communities are being excluded from access to something that is part and parcel of everyday life and indeed in rural communities such as ours is with an ageing population it is critical, and we believe there are a number of consequences for not having access to a robust, sustainable mobile network.

We understand that Ofcom has placed an obligation on O2 to provide 4G to a minimum of 95% of Wales by 2017 however; our concerns are that our community will be part of the remaining 5% and that there seems to be a lack of initiative from the Welsh Government on the provision on mobile coverage in rural areas. **The impacts of inadequate mobile networks can be summarised as follows;**

Financial and economic impact particularly on small independent businesses deters businesses from being able to develop their business and employee status. Some businesses have found alternative methods but these are not sustainable due to prohibitive costs.

Negative effect on **tourism**, we currently have several caravan parks in the region and lack of mobile coverage deters visitors and therefore impacts the local economy.

Health, because satellite navigation/PDA systems do not work there are serious issues affecting locum doctors, carers and the emergency services from accessing patients quickly. Residents regularly get called upon to direct emergency services to the right property.

Care in the community is affected as residents cannot be easily located, many elderly residents rely on home deliveries of basic things like food and again such services are impacted.

Road traffic accidents do occur and again this can have serious implications if the emergency services cannot be summoned quickly and effectively.

BT is in the process of decommissioning several telephone boxes in the valley which again removes another vital piece of communications equipment necessary in cases of emergencies.

Action/Solutions;

Taking a view of all the correspondence on this matter there are some key areas where Government action is needed to accelerate the infrastructure that would enable access to mobile networks, these are summarised below:

For the Welsh Government to follow the UK Government's lead in liberalising the planning regime to allow for masts to be built in rural areas (where there is community consent).

For network operators to rollout their infrastructure to locations such as the Manafon Valley, it is likely that a more flexible planning and regulatory framework will be necessary which is better suited to deployment of new sites and technologies.

Government has a responsibility to remove barriers that impede the provision of mobile communications coverage.

Operators have stated that current planning policies in Wales are far too restrictive in order to meet customer demands. Earlier this year, the UK Government announced revised planning restrictions which would allow masts up to 25m (82ft) to be built in England without planning permission. The current limit in Wales is 15m. Therefore, current regulations and barriers to planning need to change.

Long-overdue reform of the Electronic Communications Code in Westminster will go some way towards this, giving operators better access to sites at fairer rents

Ofcom need to increase pressure on network providers to invest in areas lacking network coverage.

ESN upgrade for provision of network service under the new scheme for the emergency services - for rural areas surely this could incorporate access to mobile networks for the public as same infrastructure would be utilised.

We look forward to hearing some positive news as to when rural communities but specifically the Manafon/Rhiew Valley can expect access to a resilient mobile network.

Yours faithfully



Lorraine Stanton

Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer

For and on behalf of Manafon Community Council

Tel No: 01686 651112 email: clerk@manafoncommunitycouncil.co.uk

Enclosed: Post code map

Copies by email to:

Rt. Hon Alun Cairns MP, Secretary of State for Wales alun.cairns.mp@parliament.uk

Home Office Gordon Shipley gordon.shipley@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Russell George AM Russell.George@assembly.wales ;

Glyn Davies MP glyn.davies.mp@parliament.uk

Diane Poston-Jones Diane.Jones-Poston@assembly.wales

Members of Manafon Community Council