

Claxton Parish Council

Parish Clerk
Mike Balmer
01508 484162
mbalmer@btinternet.com

6 Claxton Mill
Claxton
Norwich
Norfolk NR14 7UG

19 January 2016

Dear Mr Bacon

RURAL BROADBAND - FEELING NEGLECTED

Residents of Claxton and their Parish Council were encouraged that, when you were re-elected last May, you publicly said that your first priority was to sort out broadband for rural communities in your constituency. At their meeting last week, the Parish Council took stock of progress in delivering an acceptable service to Claxton. It didn't take long because, frankly, there hadn't been any progress. I have therefore been instructed to draw your attention to the plight of our village, and many others around us.

The next morning I heard you speaking on Radio Norfolk about the very same subject. I could not find any fault with what you said. The fact is that rural communities like Claxton are getting a raw deal when it comes to broadband, and it doesn't look like anyone is doing anything about it.

Late last year our attention was drawn to the chosen "alternative" solution for the Claxtons of this world, ie those locations which would not get a fibre-optic solution, which is the Satellite Broadband Voucher scheme. This is designed to assist with the, mostly hardware, costs of installing a satellite dish, modem and router so that households can enjoy a decent broadband service.

That's fine as far as it goes. But I wonder if anyone has done the sums? This solution comes with a cost of around £400 a year for broadband alone (excluding telephone services). But every week I get e-mail offers and flyers through my door offering amazing deals to sign with a new internet service provider. The latest from SKY offers me free broadband for 12 months (on a 12-month contract!) as well as £50 of M&S vouchers. BT are offering the first 6 months free. SSE will give me free broadband and line rental for 6 months. What do the satellite broadband providers offer? Nothing. Plus their cheapest contracts (£25 per month) only allow a miserly 10GB of downloads which effectively prevents anyone from using the internet to anything like its full potential. Pushing to a decent monthly limit can cost well north of £50 a month. How is that a fair alternative solution for us?

What would we like to see? Firstly there are many people, me included, who would like to see the relationship between BT and Openreach put on a new footing. It cannot

Claxton Parish Council

be right or healthy that BT has so much control without the accountability of delivering an acceptable service to the population. Secondly, David Cameron's commitment to a minimum of 10Mbps for every household by 2020 is simply not deliverable while BT and Openreach have such close links.

But more fundamentally we believe there has to be a complete rethink about rural communities. Claxton is a small village of 291 people (2011 figures) but there is no shortage of people who work from home and need a better service. They aren't all architects needing to send large plans, or graphic designers needing to send rich images. But we have some of those too. Broadband is - as you yourself have stated - nowadays as essential a utility as electricity, water, telephone etc. So surely it's time to accept the obligation and extend the fibre-optic service beyond previous targets? We hope that you will raise this matter with the appropriate Parliamentary, government and industry authorities, ie those who have real influence on policy, so as to end this discrimination against those who live in rural areas.

As with previous correspondence I am copying this letter to our local member on South Norfolk Council, our member on Norfolk County Council and to Karen O'Kane at the BBfN project, as well as to our Parish Councillors. A copy will also be placed on the village website for all to see.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely



M A Balmer
Clerk to Claxton Parish Council

Richard Bacon MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

cc: Jaan Larnar, South Norfolk Council
Barry Stone, Norfolk County Council
Karen O'Kane, BBfN Programme Director, Norfolk County Council
Claxton Parish Council