

RESPONSE FROM THE PARISH OF CHALLACOMBE, NORTH DEVON

Dear Andrea,
June 2011

5th

I am writing regarding the consultation on extending digital radio to North Devon.

Should the Exeter & Torbay multiplex be allowed to extend to North Devon, I can see that it will not help our area whatsoever, - infact it will have serious consequences.

Firstly, the proposed 'initial' coverage of 53% from a transmitter at Huntshaw Cross is extremely sub-standard. If the service is then extended to Okehampton and Barnstaple, this will even then only give us about a 70% coverage. Again totally inadequate, and for one main reason.

North Devon's hills, deep valleys, and general extreme changes in height of the countryside is just not compatible with Digital radio. There are bound to be many areas that would not receive a signal, - thus why the plans just say 70% coverage after the full proposed scheme is completed. In my experience with digital in other areas, unlike analogue where you might receive some reception - not the greatest quality but you receive something, - with digital it seems to be 'all or nothing'. Being that if digital is introduced, FM eventually gets switched off, 30% of North Devon not being able to receive local commercial and BBC radio is totally unacceptable.

Our village of Challacombe would be unlikely to receive a digital signal, and even-more-so would be all of the North Devon coastal areas, such as Woolacombe, Ilfracombe, Hele Bay, Combe Martin, Parracombe, Lynton and Lynmouth, and Brendon. The current FM signal reaches most of these, - the quality might not be great admittedly, but you can get a reception. With Digital you would recieve nothing.

Furthermore, some years ago, the local commercial radio licence holder, the former Lantern Radio, introduced a relay FM transmitter so that Ilfracombe could receive local radio on 97.3FM. I understand that there are no plans to bring a digital transmitter to Ilfracombe, - therefore Ilfracombe, a major North Devon seaside town will eventually lose its local radio broadcasts. There is no way that the three proposed digital transmitters would get to Ilfracombe, and so that is extremely unfair on those that live there.

I do hope you can see where I am coming from. Basically yes digital might serve inland North Devon, but there is a huge amount that it won't.

Going away from this point, there are further points that further lead us to reject the digital proposal.

We have just recovered here from going digital with TV. Going digital would mean all FM radio's and car stereo's would have to be replaced. With the greatest of respect, we in this area of the country do not have the money that is seen in the South East, especially in the current climate. To have to, or 'feel obliged' to replace radio's would be just another burden that I am not sure we are ready for.

Our present licensee of our local commercial FM licence, Global Radio/Heart FM, following the changes in licensing guidelines, now provide North Devon with a totally substandard 'local' service. Since it went regional, Heart don't contribute to North Devon, or provide us with any of the services that we have been used to. There is no 'local feel' . We have no North Devon travel news,- all we hear is content for South Devon. There is also no local knowledge

in times of bad weather, such as school buses being cancelled and school closures in snow. We get hit hard with bad weather, and we need a comprehensive local service.

As I understand it, the acceptance of Digital means the local commercial licence will not be re-advertised as it should be, and we will have this substandard service from Heart for another seven years, - and we get digital too, and so that in turn will eventually reduce the coverage of our BBC Radio Devon when FM gets switched off.

If this digital proposal is allowed to go ahead, it will have a huge negative impact on North Devon and Torridge.

Therefore we strongly urge you to reject this application. We also ask that the local commercial licence be re-advertised, to give a more local based radio station the chance of giving us the local service we both need and expect.

North Devon desperately needs a good local FM service again, - this is what we want. We do not need or want Digital extended into this area.

Yours sincerely

Mr M.J Webber

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