

**Minister for Small Business, Innovation, Tourism
and Trade**

Ministear airson Gnìomhachasan Beaga, Ùr-ghnàthachadh,
Turasachd agus Malairt
Richard Lochhead MSP/BPA



Scottish Government
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Raymond Bremner

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Our Reference: 202400395790

Your Reference: Shared Rural Network

8 February 2024

Dear Raymond,

Thank you for your email regarding the rollout of the Shared Rural Network (SRN) in the Highland Council area. I am aware that the programme's rollout is an area of concern for a number of organisations.

The Scottish Government's role in SRN is limited as we have no investment in the programme (which is a joint venture between the four main network operators and the UK Government) and telecommunications remains a reserved policy area. In practice this means that we are unable to directly shape or indeed instruct the SRN programme team. The UK Government and the mobile network operators are responsible for leading the community and stakeholder engagement that form the pre-build phase of the rollout. This would include discussion on the requirement for access tracks, the requirement for delivery in environmentally sensitive areas and explaining why a new mast may be required in the same area as existing one.

The Scottish Government has been actively sharing our experience of deploying the Scottish 4G Infill programme, which successfully built and activated 55 masts in rural and island communities (with a significant focus on the Highlands and Islands). This experience includes stressing the vital importance of sustained local stakeholder engagement at the mast site selection and acquisition stage. My officials have worked closely with counterparts in the UK Government's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology as well as SRN programme leads. Certainly we remain very open to further discussion with SRN partners.

In more practical terms, we brokered a number of meetings between the SRN programme, the mobile Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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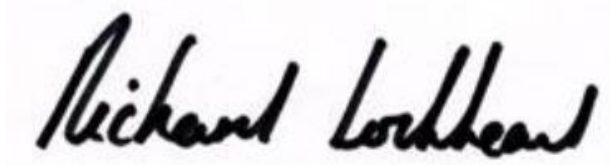


network operators and key stakeholders including NatureScot and the National Parks. These meetings, held throughout the second half of 2023, involved senior representatives from all parties and allowed an exploration of issues and challenges. Flowing from these meetings, we have encouraged ongoing meaningful consultation and further discussion with all relevant parties with view to reaching mutually acceptable outcomes and a shared understanding of priorities and sensitivities.

We remain committed to working with all partners involved in SRN to facilitate further discussion to identify solutions that benefit rural and island communities across the Highlands.

I hope this letter is useful.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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