

Dear

Mobile phone reception in Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire

We are writing to invite you to effect a significant improvement to the poor mobile phone reception in our village. Over the last few months we have made representations to all the major mobile phone companies about the situation here. They all assure us that the reception in Steeple Aston is fine. This is simply not true. In order to demonstrate this, we invited villagers to contact us and provide details of where they live, the phone company they use, and the quality of reception they receive. We have had 50 respondents and I enclose the findings of our research. They reveal just how poor the reception is in the village.

To give a simple example: a local resident recently explained what he has to do to gain access to his HMRC account. First he logs on. Then he runs up the road to get a mobile phone signal so that he can find the one-time passcode. Having got that, he runs back to his house and shouts the code over the wall so that his wife can enter it on the computer before the time runs out. This is just not acceptable.

It is not only the HMRC website that inconveniences our residents. Increasingly, banks and building societies are instigating the use of one-time passcodes sent to a mobile phone. Shopping websites too are starting to use these codes. There are a number of small businesses operating out of our village which are affected by the lack of good reception: not just for their financial arrangements, but for their day-to-day operation. The NHS is contacting patients by phone to make, cancel and remind people of their appointments. Many of our residents are unable to have smart meters fitted for their gas and electricity supplies. A reliable and good mobile phone service is vital. Surely in a first world country, in western Europe, in the 21st century, this is not too much to expect.

Significantly, between drafting and sending this letter, I received an email from a villager which contained the following paragraph: "Given the implementation of SCA for online payments via card (debit/credit), some of the issuing banks have now turned on their 2 factor authentication, which relies on SMS. Whilst the FCA have allowed a period of transition, many issuers are moving forward and I have experienced this for the first time today. We have a Tesco Credit Card and I went online with Staples to buy something (which I have done many times before) only to be told that I was going to be sent a one time passcode to my mobile (by my issuer) which I would need to enter into the Staples site in order to be able to complete my transaction. As this was sent by SMS, I didn't get it and so the transaction failed. I have since spoken to Tesco Bank to ask for this code to be sent via another method (e.g. text to voice - so I would receive a message with a

recorded voice delivering my code) and was told that they will not be supporting any other method (I did point out that they were allowed to - but the fact remains that they aren't going to and I've since discovered that this is the case with a number of the other issuers who are now moving forward with the implementation of SCA). The final conclusion of my call with Tesco was that unless I can receive an SMS then I will not be able to transact online at home with my Tesco Credit Card going forward, purely because I can't get an SMS."

Over recent years, many individuals in the village have complained to the mobile phone companies about the reception here. They have always been fobbed off with the notion that "it is fine". Well, it is palpably not, as you can see from what our residents say. We are now taking collective community action and demanding an improvement to the service which you are obviously telling government you are providing but which, in reality, you are not.

We are copying this letter to all the major phone companies; to our MP, Victoria Prentis; and to the Communications Ombudsman. Our next council meeting is on Monday 17th February and if we do not have a positive response and the promise of action by then, we shall seriously consider escalating our campaign.

Yours sincerely

cc:

Mark Evans, O2

Marc Allera, EE

Lutz Schuler, Virgin Media

Philip Jansen, BT

Victoria Prentis, MP

Nick Read, Vodafone

Dave Dyson, Three

Claire Lorains, Tesco Mobile

Mike Fairman, Giff Gaff

Communications Ombudsman