



**Sir Chris Bryant MP**

Minister of State for Data Protection and Telecoms

100 Parliament Street

London SW1A 2BQ

1<sup>st</sup> September 2025

Dear Minister,

**Re: Removing Barriers to Digital Infrastructure Deployment**

Thank you for your letter of 22 July and for setting out the Government's priorities to accelerate rollout. On behalf of the Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA) and our members, I am pleased to respond.

Our members – the UK's Alternative Network Providers (Altnets) – have been at the forefront of delivering competitive fibre and wireless infrastructure across towns, cities and rural communities. Collectively they have built networks to more than 17 million premises, committed billions in private investment, and are critical to meeting the UK's connectivity targets. This is especially important given Openreach's recently released reduction in its roll out ambitions and seeking to strong-arm Ofcom to relax regulation that supports introduction and embedding of network competition.

We welcome your focus on tackling barriers to deployment. Below we address each of the points in your letter:

**1. Deployment in blocks of flats (MDUs)**

- Altnets often face disproportionate challenges in securing wayleaves and permissions in MDUs, this often makes MDUs a difficult choice when rolling out network at pace. The Building Safety Act has inadvertently created further uncertainty, with landlords and managing agents increasingly reluctant to grant access. We strongly support government action to simplify permissions, standardise access rights, and provide clarity to landlords that telecoms installation is essential and safe. In general, Altnets do not wish to pursue landlords in court, as that creates unproductive relationships and is also costly and time consuming. INCA, therefore, supports efforts to standardise the permission process and incentives for landlords to allow access.

**2. High-Risk Building Safety Legislation (HRBs)**

- The interpretation by the Building Safety Regulator and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) that any drilling constitutes "building works" requiring prior approval poses an existential risk to rollout to MDUs. Even with immediate fire-stopping, if approvals are mandated, installation timescales could stretch to nine months (and potentially much longer), halting fibre connections for tens

of thousands of residents and businesses. By way of example an INCA member has a 19,000 student accommodation fibre programme on hold ahead of the academic year with no realistic date for completion.

- We urge government to provide a clear exemption for telecoms works where appropriate safety standards are met. We are happy to demonstrate our current and past working practices that engage with third party expertise as a matter of course when dealing with HRBs.
- We would also welcome DSIT engaging directly with us, and working in conjunction with industry, to help secure MHCLG's support for a pragmatic solution. Without this, there is a clear risk that the government will miss its targets for Project Gigabit and digital inclusion, and future investment will avoid difficult to build areas.

### **3. Underground infrastructure and permitting**

- Altnets regularly encounter Local Authorities reluctant to use flexible permitting powers. While trials have shown these reduce workloads and improve efficiency, many Highways teams remain opposed. Government support is needed to mandate or incentivise uptake, backed by secondary legislation if necessary.

### **4. Planning reform**

- We welcome a call for evidence released today and urge early reform to accelerate deployment. Current processes are slow, inconsistent across authorities and landlords, and create unnecessary costs for operators.

### **5. Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure Act 2022 (PSTI)**

- We support full implementation of the PSTI provisions. Certainty and timely delivery of the remaining elements will enable operators to plan investment with confidence.

### **Sector-wide engagement**

We are coordinating with ISPA and other stakeholders to ensure industry alignment. We also stress the importance of DSIT's ongoing involvement. While the regulations originate in MHCLG, the impact on digital rollout means DSIT must remain closely engaged if government is to meet its own connectivity ambitions.

### **Summit invitation**

We would be delighted if you could join us at the **INCA Summit on 21–22 October 2025**, which brings together Altnets, suppliers, investors and policy makers. Last year you kindly provided a video message; however, given the urgency



of the issues above, we believe your presence in person this year would send a powerful signal of this Government's commitment to removing barriers and supporting competition. Our summit attracts over 400 representatives and is a real opportunity for you to hear first-hand some of the exciting innovations Altnets are doing across the country. It would also provide a valuable opportunity for you to engage directly with industry leaders and hear first-hand the impact of current policies.

We would be very pleased to work with your office to schedule a speaking slot that fits your availability.

Thank you again for your leadership on these important matters. We look forward to your response and to welcoming you to the Summit.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paddy Paddison".

Paddy Paddison  
Chief Executive  
Independent Networks Cooperative Association