



CRISPIN BLUNT MP
Member of Parliament for Reigate

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Our Reference: CB/SK

Edward Goodman

Redhill

19 December 2016

Dear Mr Goodman,

Thank you for contacting me about the Digital Economy Bill.

The UK is a world leader in the digital economy and efforts to support this position formed a core part of the 2015 Conservative manifesto. The UK has the highest per capita rate of online sales of all major economies and a rate of job creation in digital industries nearly three times as fast as in the rest of the economy.

Through the Digital Economy Bill, the Government is working tirelessly to help people and businesses to benefit from the digital economy. It is vital that we ensure our laws and infrastructure keep pace with technological change, tackle the problems the change brings and seize on the opportunities.

The Government is already investing £1.7 billion in broadband roll-out and nine out of every 10 homes and businesses can now access superfast speeds. It is also on track to achieve its manifesto commitment to deliver access to superfast broadband to at least 95 per cent of the UK by the end of 2017. The Bill will introduce a Universal Service Obligation so every premise in the country will have access to broadband at a speed of 10Mbps as an absolute minimum by the end of this Parliament. The measures in this Bill will also drive investment in digital infrastructure by giving communications providers the ability to install and update equipment at less cost and with fewer regulatory hurdles.

In addition, we need a legal framework that enables information to be used and processed for the public benefit. The Bill contains a number of new provisions that will prevent spam email and nuisance calls unless you have given consent, introduce age verification measures to protect children from viewing online pornography and give new powers for Ofcom in respect of information provision allowing for greater access to the information that matters to consumers.

In regards to your concerns about censorship, I believe that measures to block certain websites are appropriate when carefully considered and measured. For example, the Government is seeking, through the Digital Economy Bill, to ensure that pornographic websites that refuse to stop children accessing explicit content will be blocked. The risks and harm to young children

who view pornography are real. Not only can it distress them, it can have a damaging impact on how they view sex and relationships for the rest of their lives. A recent survey by the NSPCC found that 47 per cent of 11-16 year olds had accessed an adult site and that one in five 11-17 year olds said they had seen pornographic images that shocked or upset them.

The changes will mean that if websites have sufficient age verification measures, as determined by the regulator (the BBFC), they will not be blocked. However the BBFC will be given the powers to direct Internet Service Providers to prevent access to any site that does not have age verification in place. If sites won't take the step to ensure children cannot access their content, this new power will make sure they can't by preventing viewers accessing the site.

The Government has made clear that these measures are not about censoring consenting adults for viewing content that is legal. The key focus of the Government's policy is making sure children are protected online just as they are offline. This means putting protections in place to ensure those accessing pornographic websites are over-18, just as we would not expect or accept the sale of age inappropriate products such as knives, tobacco or alcohol to children.

The BBFC is not being asked to police the Internet. The focus of this legislation is to protect children with the same safeguards online as they have offline. The BBFC is already working positively with adult pornography sites to ensure the protections in this bill will achieve this objective.

Yours sincerely,



Crispin Blunt