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OPEN LETTER

Dear Editor and Mr Paul Coles

On the 19th of October you kindly published my letter¹ in your Opinion section. As explained it was my attempt to personally counter the never ending barrage of publicity emanating from BT regarding so called "Superfast" Broadband. I referred in particular to an article posted on October 13², 2015 by Jon Reynolds, BT South West regional director. He suggested that communities in the South West currently designated by BT as being "Out of Programme" may wish to raise their own funds to co invest with BT in order to get a service upgrade. I suggested that this could be considered to be grossly unfair when the community next door may have been upgraded by the use of public funds! In particular I gave some verified facts about the Rousden Somerset) community investment case study quoted in Mr Reynolds' article.

In my letter I gave your editorial staff fully verified sources supporting each and every quote and assertion made in my article. Unfortunately my letter has prompted yet another article titled "BT fibre broadband rollout on schedule",³ this time the author is Mr Paul Coles, BT South West Regional Manager, While referring to my letter as the reason for writing to your paper, he chose not to challenge or comment on a single one of the statements I made, Readers may draw their own conclusions), but instead decided to repeat more of the same old uncorroborated "good news propaganda" that prompted me to contact you in the first place!. Through your journal, I would politely ask Mr Coles to publish **all** the sources of his assertions in order that the staff of the Western Morning News and customers of BT such as me, are able to draw our own conclusions. Before addressing the mainly financial aspects of Mr Coles' letter, I would like to make the following general comment about BT.

- BT is one of Britain's biggest and most successful corporations and in some areas has done a reasonable job looking after the national communications infrastructure, our 4th utility. Like any successful private corporation, BT has to maximise shareholder profit, extract every penny from their assets and influence politicians in order to gain competitive opportunity. But, I am not aware of any other successful UK corporation that feels the need to regularly publish letters and articles publicising how good they are at just doing their job! - I don't see South West Water feeling the need to boast about delivering clean water to my village! I also don't regularly read about Western Power Distribution feeling the need to tell us about the latest upgrade to their power network. No, I believe they just get on quietly with their job, looking after and upgrading their networks and delivering services to their customers. I believe the readership of the Western Morning News is intelligent enough to draw their own conclusions as to why BT feel the need to carry on like this.

To directly respond to Mr Coles:-

¹ My article <http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Comment-Devon-Somerset-rural-broadband-roll/story-27997380-detail/story.html>

² Jon Reynolds article <http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/Opinion-Working-communities-fibre-solution/story-27967679-detail/story.html#ixzz3pDkKgr8t>

³ Mr Coles letter <http://www.westernmorningnews.co.uk/WMN-Letters-BT-fibre-broadband-rollout-schedule/story-28026103-detail/story.html>

1. First of all I could take exception to his assertion that I have “a misunderstanding of the position of the program here in the South West”. On the contrary, I think I may have a better than average grasp of what is going on down here!
2. Mr Coles suggests that I “failed to mention” all the good news about the programme. No, Mr Coles, I am just a BT customer, - propagating good news appears to be your full time job, and, if instead of wasting your time, BT concentrated a little more on listening to their customers I feel everyone may be a little better off.
3. I feel Mr Coles should be held to account for publishing emotive statements such as “*BT has invested hundreds of millions of pounds in the region*”. I am in receipt of funding breakdowns provided by CDS and UK Gov. showing central and regional sources of funds. I would therefore ask Mr Coles to support this assertion by publishing in the Western Morning news a breakdown of the detailed BT spend of his “millions of pounds”. Oh and BTW Mr Coles, no one is interested in what BT spends on the commercial role out, what income you generate in wholesale services, business services or even what you spend in Cornwall (Different source of public funds). No please just publish your “investment” to date through the BDUK. Gap funding Framework model administered by Connecting Devon & Somerset only.
4. Mr Coles may also like to publicly answer the following questions on behalf of BT:-
 - a. Can Mr Coles tell us exactly where is the promised BT capital contribution of £22.5m from the £40m funding?
 - b. In January 2015 the National Audit office identified that BT had an excess of 38% margin built into their costs (!) Could Mr Cole please identify when and if these funds are ever going to be returned?
 - c. Can Mr Coles and BT confirm that at 40% take up in Devon & Somerset BT will hand back to the CDS programme a further £19.2m?
5. Further, in July this year analysts at the Wall Street Journal confirmed that BT group returned a **profit of £3.17Billion for the year to April 2015**⁴. But they also showed that since 2008, their in house cash cow **BT Openreach** (in charge of our infrastructure) have almost doubled their sales, while the capital investment in the network infrastructure itself (which is what we are all really interested in) unfortunately has not been upgraded and remained static. This contributes considerably to BT group margins being typically 20% higher than the norm in the European telecom sector. How can Mr Coles boast about BT’s investment in the region when there are many miles of crumbling aluminium cable yet to be replaced? Therefore please ask Mr Coles to assure the readers of this journal that BT Openreach profits are being ploughed back into upgrading the network infrastructure and are not in fact being used to purchase BT Sport TV rights, purchasing EE (for£12.5Bilion) or contributing to filling a nominal £7Billion hole in BT’s pension fund?⁵
6. Mr Coles may very well be right about the programme being on schedule, but why do we need to know about it? This is what we are paying you for! (However, he neglects to inform your readers that the programme completion has been put back a couple of year, - it was originally scheduled to be completed by the end of this year!)

At the end of his article Mr Coles suggests he as has never met me, well in fact we have met and I have heard him speak at several public meeting throughout the South West. Although I do not think he has anything to tell me, I confirm I am happy to meet him, **once he has written to the Western Morning News with answers to the questions.**

In the interests of balanced journalism I do hope you are able to publish this article.

Yours Sincerely

⁴ Wall Street Journal Article <http://www.wsj.com/articles/bt-investors-should-brace-for-openreach-static-1437055955>

⁵ Financial Times Article on BT Pension Fund <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c42b91ac-ad48-11e4-a5c1-00144feab7de.html#axzz3pleKjpi0>

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