

Date: 7th September 2018



Mr Kit Malthouse MP
Minister of State
Housing, Communities and Local Government
House of Commons,
London, SW1A 0AA

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Dear Minister,

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of State for Housing. Camden look forward to working together on behalf of all Londoners.

As you will know from your own experience as a councillor in Westminster, and from your time at City Hall, London faces a sizeable challenge in harnessing economic growth to the benefit of those who live and work here. Part of this challenge is making sure that development delivers on providing the homes, jobs, and infrastructure that our communities so desperately need. From a planning perspective, however, we also have a duty to ensure that any changes to the environment create places and spaces that have a positive effect on the lives of the people who use them.

We are writing to you today, following recent LGA coverage on the issue, to highlight our own concerns around the proliferation of unnecessary telephone boxes in Camden, and more broadly across the city. This is a problem partly due to the retention of payphones, which no longer seem to be in use. As a council, however, we have also observed a significant rise in the number of new boxes being installed by telecoms providers at a time when demand for the service appears to be declining. Over the last two years, we have seen 170 applications, compared to just 9 in the previous 2 years. This is a rise of 927 per cent, and this trend is increasing.

In an era of mass mobile phone usage, this is clearly not reflecting a dramatic increase in demand, but instead a desire by the companies behind the applications to get lucrative advertising space by the back-door. The result is a blight on public highway. Whilst we welcome companies' willingness to invest, it is important that communications infrastructure properly serve the needs of the community.

We believe the benefit of this encroachment to local residents and businesses to be minimal. Aside from creating unwelcome street clutter, unused telephone boxes regularly have a negative impact on their surroundings, serving as a focus for drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour. This is something local residents are reporting more and more, as well as the local police.

At present, our powers to control their numbers are limited. The General Permitted Development Order, which applies, to phone boxes restricts our powers as Local Planning Authorities to challenge the need for their installation; we are only able to consider siting

and appearance. Once installed, the burden on Councils to demonstrate that boxes are redundant makes it even more difficult to remove them.

We would welcome the Government's support to reform these rules to give Councils greater powers to tackle this problem. Amendments to the permitted development rights relating to telephone boxes will restore balance to the planning system, ensuring that new telecoms infrastructure meets the highest standards and properly channels the innovation taking place within the sector. We want to work with telecoms companies to deliver on this objective. In order to do so, however, Councils need to be able to act as effective custodians of the public realm, with the power to intervene where providers are falling short. We hope that you will share our assessment that the current rules are no longer fit for purpose. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Danny

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danny Beales". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cllr Danny Beales
Cabinet Member for Community Investment
(Including Planning, Regeneration & Economic Growth)
Labour Councillor for Cantelowes ward