

**MICHAEL DARLOW**

Claire Vickers  
Department of Culture, Media and Sport  
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London SW1Y 5DH

27<sup>th</sup> May 2005

Dear Claire,

Thank you very much indeed for all your help in tracking down a copy of the video of the Ferryside-Llansteffan digital switchover trial for showing at the start of the public meeting we held in Bradford On Avon last week about digital switchover, BBC Charter Renewal and other changes in broadcasting regulation. I am delighted to say that a copy of the video did come to light just in time for us to run it at the start of our meeting and that it was very well received by everyone who attended. I provided a really useful introduction to the issues under discussion. Thank you very much indeed for all you did – without your help I don't think we would have been able to get hold of a copy.

I have done a report of the meeting which I have submitted on behalf of those who took part to the BBC Charter Review and also sent to David Mortimer of SwitchCo, who had hoped to be able to attend to observe but then was unable to do so. I thought that you and the Secretary of State might also find it helpful to see a copy. The meeting was pretty well attended (66 members of the public took part, which in Bradford on Avon with a total population of about 9,000 equates to some 0.73% of the population. They seemed to come from a good cross section of residents). We had very good speakers from Ofcom, the BBC, ITV and The Voice of the Listener and Viewer and people were able to get expert advice and express their views to them on a range of issues. As you will see from pages 4 and 5 of the report, the people who took part had serious concerns about both digital switchover and BBC Charter Review and content de-regulation.

Once again, very many thanks for all your help. If I can provide you with further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

  
Michael Darlow

## **WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO OUR TV?**

**Public meeting held in St Margarets Hall, Bradford On Avon, Wilts  
From 7.15pm to 10.00pm on Wednesday, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2005**

**Report by Michael Darlow (member of organising committee)**

### **1. Background and Planning**

The idea of holding a public meeting arose out of conversations between Sir Donald Maitland, formerly Deputy chairman of the IBA (1986-9) and Michael Darlow, programme maker and writer who had spent much of the previous few months speaking about broadcasting to audiences across the country, ranging from members of the major political parties to community welfare groups. The idea grew out their shared concern about a lack of public awareness of digital switchover and the extent of public ignorance about current regulatory issues, including BBC Charter renewal, and changes to public service broadcasting regulation following the 2003 Communications Act and the establishment of Ofcom. They were also concerned by evidence of the low level of public participation in the public consultations on such issues.

As a result of these conversations they decided to try to organise a public meeting in the small west Wiltshire town where they live, Bradford On Avon. The purpose of the meeting would be to increase public awareness about digital switchover (due in Bradford On Avon in 2009 under proposals published by Ofcom in February 2005) and provide people with an opportunity to seek advice from technical experts, to inform them about BBC Charter renewal, provide information about other regulatory changes and create a forum through which they could make their views known to the authorities ahead of 31<sup>st</sup> May (the date when submissions to BBC Charter Review close). They also hoped that if the meeting succeeded it might provide lessons for others involved in achieving digital switchover or organising public consultations on broadcasting.

The first steps were to seek the approval of Bradford On Avon Town Council and the support of a range of local community groups, including the Chamber of Commerce, Senior Citizens Forum, local schools, churches, residents associations, etc. The idea was enthusiastically embraced by all concerned and in early April a small working party, which included a town councillor, the vicar of the largest church, a member of the Chamber of Commerce and people connected with local community groups and schools was established.

Entrance to the meeting was to be free but at the end of it people attending the meeting would be invited to contribute to costs, any shortfall being met by members of the working party themselves. Total costs of staging the meeting and other related costs amounted to about £100, plus some materials in kind (e.g. phone calls, paper, copying).

Because the main purpose of the meeting was to provide information, to give everyone who attended the chance to get their questions answered by experts and express their views, the usual form of public meeting, in which speakers stand on a

platform and talk to the assembled audience, followed by a general question and answer session would not be appropriate. A more participatory and informal approach was needed. Drawing on experience from meetings over the last eight or nine years in Bradford over a controversial road proposal and a recent contested planning application on a prominent site in the centre of the town, plus informal advice from Michael and Penelope Tollitt (professional planners with recent successful experience in organising community participation in planning decisions), the organisers came up with a scheme (see copy of programme) the main element of which, after a short introductory video about the switchover trial in Ferryside-Llansteffan and brief (300-400 word, 2-3 minutes) introductory remarks by the six speaker/experts, would be to have members of the public seated in groups around tables which each of speaker/expert would visit in turn to answer questions, listen to views, explain policies, etc. Each table would include a facilitator, a member of the public who had been briefed in advance to help the speakers and all the people at the table to express their views and ask their questions, while at the same time preventing any one person from hogging all the discussion. The facilitators would also help with keeping the meeting to schedule. These informal question and answer sessions were to be followed by brief public reports-back to the whole meeting by the facilitators from each table. After which the Dean of Science from Bath University would give a brief summing up of the main issues raised by the public, their concerns and worries.

Promotion/publicity for the meeting consisted mainly of word of mouth via announcements through local community organisations and at local public events in the two weeks before the meeting (including announcements in at least two churches on the Sunday before the meeting), leaflets and posters displayed in about half the shops in the town and other public places such as the public library and railway station, plus some limited leafleting in the streets, at the market, etc over the weekend before the meeting and articles in the local press. By calling the event "What Are They Doing To Our TV?" and stressing the possible costs of digital switchover and changes in programme regulation, the organisers aimed to highlight the possible impact of planned changes on ordinary viewers and so encourage members of the public to attend. In talking to people the organisers stressed that this meeting would be their chance to have their views heard and get answers to their questions – "This meeting is for you! It is your chance to tell them what you think and get them to answer your questions, rather than for them to stand there and just tell you."

The meeting was called for 7.15pm to end at 10.00pm, in St Margarets Hall, the largest hall in the town (owned by the local authority), which has ample free parking outside in the evenings.

In contacting the various authorities to supply speakers the organisers did not offer to meet travel expenses or pay fees, but did offer to provide overnight accommodation in Bradford On Avon if needed. (In the event one speaker stayed overnight in Bradford with friends who were involved in planning the meeting). Refreshments were made available for speakers and facilitators in a hotel near the hall before the meeting.

## 2. The Meeting

66 members of the public attended (Bradford On Avon has a total population of just over 9,000), amounting to approx 0.73% of the population. Although no proper

survey of the audience was attempted both organisers and speakers felt that the people attending represented a fairly good cross section of Bradford's population as a whole.

On entering the hall each person was given a programme (see copy), containing a timetable, a brief summary of the issues and short details of the speakers and invited to sit at whichever table they liked. Each table was provided with paper, pencils and maps showing the timetable for switchover across the country. A range of free leaflets was on display about the subjects under discussion, information sheets containing details of how to contact the BBC Charter Review team, Ofcom, the DCMS, etc, and from organisations interested in broadcasting matters, such as The Voice of the Listener and Viewer and The Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom and people were invited to help themselves.

The meeting started five minutes late because the car park outside the hall filled up ahead of the meeting because of another event being held nearby. Thereafter it ran more or less according to schedule.

After a brief introduction by Michael Darlow and showing of the Ferryside-Llansteffan video (approx 6 mins) the six speakers were introduced in turn and spoke from the stage for 3-4 mins. each. The audience were asked to save any questions or comments for the question and answer sessions conducted at each table by each speaker.

First to speak was Andrew Dumbreck of Ofcom's Technological Research and Development Unit. He provided an overview of the roll out of digital and how this would affect the Bradford On Avon area. Bradford On Avon lies in a steep sided valley and is currently served mainly by the Mendip transmitter, many people currently being unable to receive Channel 5 except via satellite or cable.

He was followed by Tim Moss, managing director of a major independent domestic equipment retailer, who outlined the equipment options and some possible costs. Much of Bradford On Avon is in a conservation area and there are restrictions on the size, type and placing of aerials.

Next David Farwig, BBC Regional Co-ordinator in the BBC Charter Review team, gave an outline of Charter renewal, the BBC services covered and the timetable. James Garrett, the Head of Features and Current Affairs at the local ITV company HTV West, then outlined ITV's current public service broadcasting obligations, in particular in local programmes, and the way in which these are likely to change. Kath Worrall of Ofcom's Content Board, who herself lives in the Border region and so will be affected by switchover immediately ahead of the HTV West area, provided an overview of Ofcom's regulatory role since coming into existence following the 2003 Communications Act and the changes in ITV's public service obligations that Ofcom has already introduced.

Finally Peter Meneer, of the national viewers and listeners lobby organisation, The Voice of the Listener and Viewer, outlined concerns raised by VLV about the future of the BBC, deregulation and digital switchover and its costs, particularly for less well off families, and the fact that the government has not so far indicated the extent to which it may provide financial or technical assistance.

The audience was then given about 3 minutes to confer amongst themselves. After which the speakers started going round individually to each of the six tables in turn to answer questions and listen to people's views. Each speaker given approximately 13 minutes at each table. After which they were moved on to the next table and so on until they had each been to all of them. Strict time keeping was essential throughout the evening, but particularly during this, the real heart of the event.

Then, at about 9.25pm, people were given five minutes to confer with others at their tables and facilitators so as to assemble a summary of the most important views, questions and concerns identified at their table during the question and answer sessions with the speakers. Professor Christopher Jennison, the Dean of Science at Bath University, then took over the running of the meeting and invited the facilitator from each table to read out a summary of views and questions from each table. The main views expressed were as follows (numbers refer to the order in which tables reported):

- i. Re. digital switchover considerable technical confusion remains even after listening to the technical experts, plus considerable concern about the potential costs. Re. regulation and programme content there was concern over de-regulation leading to an influx of low quality programmes. There was also concern about TV violence, reductions in children's programme obligations and the quality of programmes on some of the new children's channels.
- ii. Re. digital switchover confusion remained, even after questioning the experts, together with concern about the potential costs. Re. regulation people wanted to know if Ofcom has enough "clout" and whether individuals would have any real influence over decisions about BBC Charter renewal.
- iii. All the technical questions were, people felt, answered well, but "in the negative". Wanted to know why "can't we do away with channels altogether" and just get TV on demand?
- iv. Re. switchover there was concern that, because of Bradford's geography, there would be no alternative after switchover but to adopt satellite - "How do we avoid Murdoch?" People wanted to know what would happen to the money raised from sale of the vacated analogue frequencies.
- v. People felt happier about digital switchover having talked to the experts but were still concerned about the possible cost and the quality of programmes in future as a result of de-regulation.
- vi. There was concern about the length of advertising breaks and that sound levels were too loud during ad. breaks. Wanted more faith programmes and news, and less politics on BBC channels.

Professor Jennison then summed up. He said that he, like others who had taken part, even after hearing from the technical experts three times about the equipment that would be needed and how it would have to be installed, was still confused. What was going to be needed was not only a matter of cost but of physical assistance, of people coming round to the house to plug in and wire up the equipment. Would Ofcom perhaps have a role in this?

The retailer had suggested that the simplest answer for people might be to purchase an integrated TV set. It was worrying that people had seemed to get different answers from the different technical experts to the same questions. On top of this there

remained considerable worry about the costs people would have to shoulder. Concerns were also voiced about the amount of waste likely to be generated as people disposed of old TV equipment, raising environmental issues. What is needed, Professor Jennison said, is simple equipment or simple advice, or alternatively enough technicians to come round to each household. There were also concerns in our area about aerials and their direction.

On content, regulation and the BBC Charter Professor Jennison said that people wanted to be able to continue to rely on the BBC and generally favoured the BBC adopting "the public service broadcasting high ground" rather than aiming for more populism. People felt that there was too much concentration among all broadcasters on the 16-34 year old age group, the group which ironically watches the least TV. There was also a strong feeling that there were too many commercials and that they were too loud. People wanted to know why there were so many, too many, TV reality shows. Professor Jennison ended by quoting Humphrey Lyttleton: "If this is reality, pass me the mind altering drugs".

### **3. Follow up**

Feedback to the organisers since the meeting, from both the speakers and members of the public who took part, has been favourable. All felt that it had been useful and members of the public felt that they learned a lot.

It is hoped that the speakers will report back the views expressed by the public to their respective organisations. Reports of the meeting will be sent to the BBC Charter Review team, to the DCMS and SwitchCo.

The organisers will report back any results from the meeting to those who took part via the local organisations that helped in its organisation and through the local press.

# What are they doing to our TV?

## FORCING US TO BUY DIGITAL

By 2009, you will only be able to watch TV if you have bought digital equipment, such as a Freeview box (and maybe a new aerial), or if you subscribe to satellite or pay cable services. The same goes for every TV set or video recorder in your house.

## CHANGING PROGRAMMES

Changes in the regulations will also result in fewer local, religious and children's programmes on ITV, with knock-on effects on programmes on the BBC and other channels and the arrival of hundreds of new, virtually unregulated, channels.

## GUESS WHO PAYS?

One estimate puts the average cost of conversion to digital TV at £200 per household. Billions of pounds must also be found by the BBC to pay for new services and by the government to install new transmission systems, all of which will have an impact on tax and the licence fee.

These changes are open to public consultation until 31 May. So far few people have bothered to make their views known to the government or the broadcasting authorities.

## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

To find out what the changes involve (including possible costs), and provide a forum to help you make your views known to the authorities, a public meeting is being held in

**St Margaret's Hall on Wednesday, 18 May at 7.15pm.**

backed by the Town Council, local and national voluntary groups.

Get your views across to the Head of Features & Current Affairs at HTV, the BBC's local man in charge of the review of the BBC Charter, senior staff from the regulator Ofcom, one of the founders of the Voice of the Listener & Viewer lobby group – and, for expert advice on equipment, Tim Moss from Moss of Bath.

**DO COME! THIS IS YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE A SAY  
ON THE FUTURE OF YOUR TV!**

## WHAT ARE THEY DOING TO OUR TV?

- 7.15pm **Introduction and short video about switchover.** (Michael Darlow)
- 7.30pm **Introducing the issues.** Experts from BBC, HTV, Ofcom, domestic equipment suppliers and viewers organisation VLV.
- 8.00pm **Group question and answer sessions with each of the speakers.**
- 9.20pm **Report back** from group question and answer sessions.
- 9.40pm **Summing up, conclusions and further action.**  
(Professor Christopher Jennison, Dean of Science, Bath University.)
- 9.55pm **Close.** (Gerald Milward-Oliver – organising committee)

In 2009, under current plans, the analogue TV signal in our area will be switched off and replaced by digital transmissions. By then to receive TV you will have to have installed new digital TV reception equipment, such as a "Freeview box" (and maybe a new TV aerial), or to subscribe to satellite or pay cable services. Similar arrangements will have to be made for each TV set or piece of video recording equipment.

Simultaneously far-reaching changes are underway in broadcasting regulation. The BBC Charter, which governs how the BBC functions and the nature of its programmes, has to be renewed by Parliament by 2006 and the government regulator Ofcom is already reducing public service obligations on ITV – cutting the number of local, children's and religious programmes and promising further cuts to come. At the same time it is licensing hundreds of new, virtually unregulated channels.

The effects of this can already be seen in television for children. There are now around 20 children's channels, many commissioning no original programmes at all. Today it is really only the BBC that produces new programmes in areas such as children's drama. Similar effects are likely to be seen across the board, in arts, drama documentary and religious programmes.

All this will have a profound effect on what we see and what we pay for our TV. *Which* estimates average cost of conversion to digital TV at £300 per household, on top of which there may be knock-on effects on the licence fee and taxation. To subscribe to satellite or cable services can cost four times as much as the TV Licence alone.

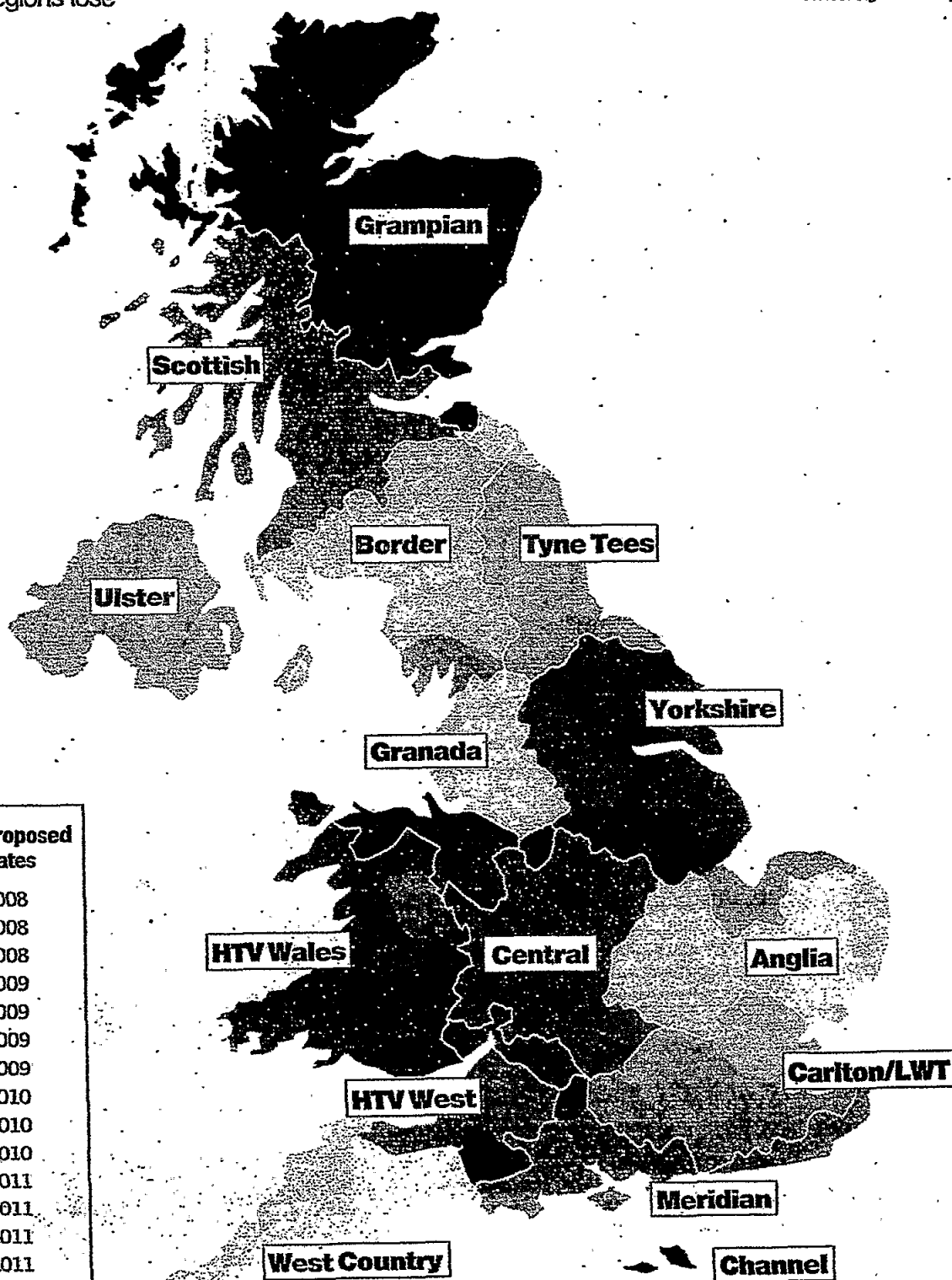
### TONIGHT'S SPEAKERS AND EXPERTS

- Andrew Dumbreck** – Ofcom Technological Research and Development Unit.  
**Tim Moss** – Managing Director, Moss of Bath Ltd  
**David Farwig** – BBC Regional Co-ordinator, BBC Charter Review.  
**James Garrett** – Head of Features & Current Affairs, HTV West.  
**Kath Worrall** – member of Ofcom Content Board (which oversees regulatory issues)  
**Peter Meneer** – Voice of Listener & Viewer – national viewers organisation.

# The big switch off

Planned dates for when regions lose their analogue signal

Source: Digital TV Group



Regional order	TV region	proposed Dates
1st	Border	2008
2nd	West country	2008
3rd	HTV Wales	2008
4th	Granada	2009
5th	HTV West	2009
6th	Grampian	2009
7th	Scottish TV	2009
8th	Central	2010
9th	Yorkshire	2010
10th	Anglia	2010
11th	Meridian	2011
12th	Carlton/LWT	2011
13th	Tyne Tees	2011
14th	Ulster	2011
15th	Channel	2012

## USEFUL ADDRESSES

Department of Media, Culture and Sport  
2-4 Cockspur Street  
London SW1Y 5DH  
Tel: 0207 7211 6000  
Email: [enquiries@culture.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@culture.gsi.gov.uk)  
(Secretary of State: Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP)

Ofcom  
Riverside House  
2A Southwark Bridge Road  
London SE1 9HA  
Tel: 0207 981 3000  
[www.ofcom.gov.uk](http://www.ofcom.gov.uk)

British Broadcasting Corporation  
Broadcasting House  
Portland Place  
London W1A 1AA  
Tel: 0207 580 4468  
(Submissions about the renewal of the BBC's Charter can also be sent to:  
BBC Charter Review, DCMS, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH,  
or by phone: 0207 211 6200 and fax: 0207 211 6330. Closing date 31<sup>st</sup> May)

HTV West  
Television Centre  
Bath Road  
Bristol BS4 3HG  
Tel: 01179 722722

Moss of Bath Ltd  
45 St James Parade  
Bath BA1  
Tel: 01225 331441

Voice of the Listener & Viewer  
101 Kings Drive  
Gravesend  
Kent DA12 5BQ  
Tel: 01474 352835  
[www.vlv.org.uk](http://www.vlv.org.uk)

Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom  
Vi & Garner Smith House  
23 Orford Road  
Walthamstow  
London E17 9NL