

Point Topic data proves “vital” to the planning of Nottinghamshire’s NGA strategy

Nottinghamshire County Council’s plans for implementing next generation access (NGA) are moving swiftly forward following the announcement that it has secured an indicative allocation of £4.25 million funding from BDUK. This allocation is subject to the county council and its partners agreeing a Local Broadband Plan (LBP) with Government and securing match funding for the new programme with its partners, as BDUK will only fund up to 50% of the total cost of the new infrastructure. In identifying areas where such funds will be best spent, Point Topic’s data on broadband supply and demand continues to play a crucial role in the development of the Local Broadband Plan.

It was back in October 2010 that Nottinghamshire County Council first approached Point Topic for support with the provision of UK broadband data. Jonathan Hall, Research & Information Officer in the Research & Information Team and Strategic Analytical Unit (SAU) at the council, is responsible for analysing the information Point Topic provides. He said: *“Initially we crunched the data to identify the ‘final third’ areas as defined by BDUK, where there are no plans for BT to upgrade exchanges to provide fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) and where Virgin Media cable presence is less than 70%. These are mainly the rural areas of Bassetlaw, Newark and Sherwood and Rushcliffe Districts. We then used Point-Topic’s data to prioritise sub-areas within the main area to target first, based on current available download speeds and the estimated probability of achieving NGA over the next 4 years to 2015.”*

The ‘digital divide’ between urban and rural Nottinghamshire in terms of speed and future levels of investment is obvious when mapped out (see map on next page).

The main Point Topic service used by Nottinghamshire County Council is BroadBand Geography, which analyses the UK broadband internet market, from penetration rates and take-up demographics to speeds by postcode and technology breakdowns (DSL v cable v dial-up).

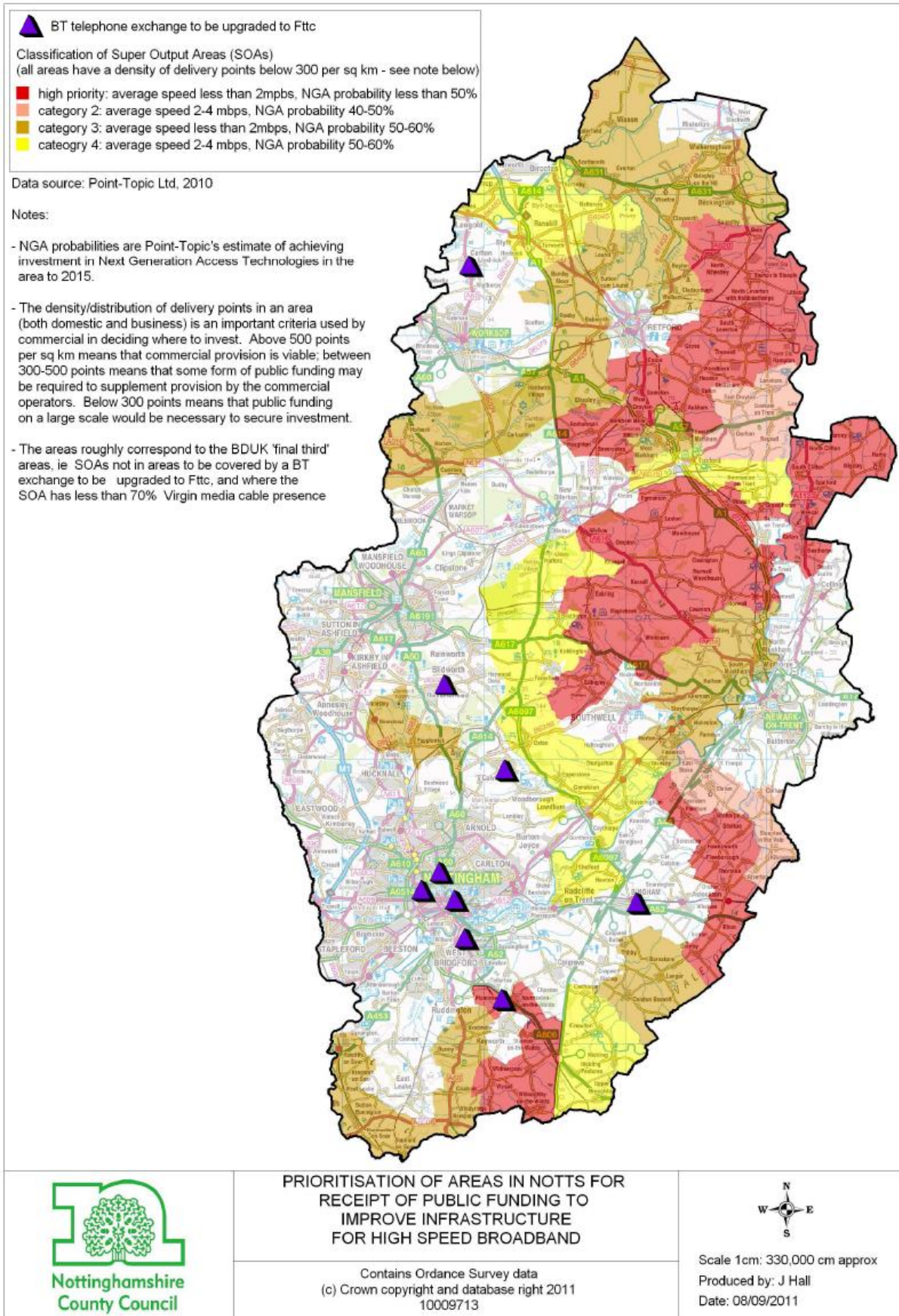
“Point Topic is the only firm to offer detailed data at small area level and they are highly regarded in the telecoms industry,” remarked Jonathan. *“Careful interpretation of their data is needed and you certainly have to know the terminology used, but throughout our working with them they have been very helpful and responsive with any questions we have had.”*

Mapping of Point Topic’s broadband supply datasets showed typical broadband speeds throughout Nottinghamshire at various levels of geography, including areas with connections of less than 2Mbps. Another useful variable in the dataset is broadband density of demand which measures the total number of delivery points (both residential and business) over an area. Using the data on the estimated probabilities of achieving NGA access and Point Topic’s suggestion of key thresholds for the density data, the council has been able to highlight areas which fall below the density threshold to warrant future investment on a commercial basis from the major providers, but which either fall outside of the ‘final third areas’ or areas where BT will upgrade exchanges to FTTC. It was found that such areas tended to lie in the fringe areas surrounding large settlements, were generally scattered over Nottinghamshire and certainly did not form contiguous areas like those rural areas in the ‘final third’. This would suggest that different small scale approaches might need to be taken to upgrade these areas to NGA in the future.

Point Topic’s broadband demand dataset is now being used by Nottinghamshire County Council to help identify why take up of broadband differs in certain areas and where there may be a need to persuade or educate residents of its advantages.

“Point Topic has provided us with 2010 data at a national level showing a 67% household take up of broadband, but in Nottinghamshire the rate is only 57%. So what we’re trying to determine

is why this is less and identify certain population groups that may be unaware of the benefits of broadband or choose not to have it," said Jonathan. "This point is becoming important given that



the BDUK models used to determine the funding allocations to local authorities have assumed a take-up of 70% of the new broadband lines. Recently BDUK have stressed the importance of carrying out demand stimulation exercises to raise awareness of the potential benefits to households and businesses of NGA, which will ultimately improve the business case for investing in NGA.”

“Even when there is NGA access we cannot assume that people will take up the service so we need to look at where we will need to carry out demand stimulation exercises. So far, looking above postcode level, we have identified no correlation between deprived and less deprived areas in rates of household take-up. Point Topic, however, has also just provided us with detailed household take up estimates at postcode level, giving us the means to process the Point Topic data using geodemographic tools such as MOSAIC and OAC. Results have shown that take-up is lowest in the OAC sub-group of ‘senior communities’ and the MOSAIC groups L (‘active elderly people living in pleasant retirement locations’) and M (‘elderly people reliant on state support’). Household take-up is highest in the OAC sub-group of ‘prospering younger families’ and MOSAIC group F (‘couples with young children in comfortable modern homes’)”

Alongside Point Topic’s information, Nottinghamshire County Council has also carried out three surveys to assess potential take up across communities, residents and businesses. These surveys have indicated that limited broadband access is resulting in young people leaving rural locations, restricted ability for businesses to secure international trade opportunities, reduced access to online learning and education opportunities, as well as increased social isolation for disabled people unable to access email and SKYPE.

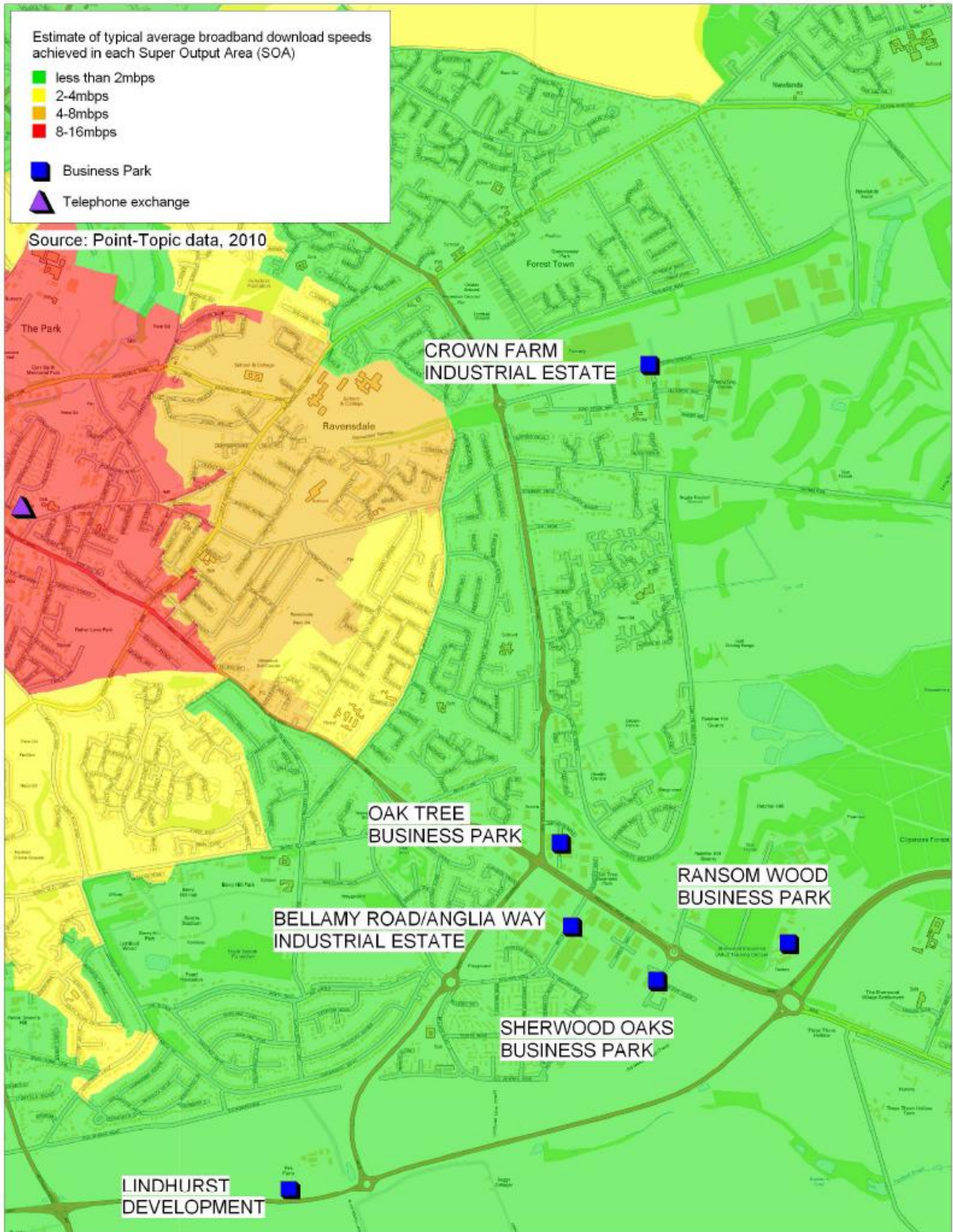
As work on the Nottinghamshire Local Broadband Plan progresses, Jonathan envisages that the Point Topic data will be used with costing data recently released under licence by BDUK to develop a number of options to put forward for consideration by elected members. He said: *“For instance, a base case option could be put forward which will cost ‘x’ amount providing ‘x’ amount of coverage, and would ensure that x % of the population would have speeds in excess of the minimum with x% having superfast broadband. However, with a few tweaks such as demand stimulation in certain areas and negotiating with main operators to provide match-funding to cover provision in ‘marginal’ areas, then costs could be reduced and coverage increased. Or by increasing the amount of public funding by ‘x’ amount would buy you ‘x’ amount extra of coverage. Maps could be produced using Point Topic’s data to visually display to members the benefits/coverage associated with each option.”*

When analysing the results of the business and residents survey, the council also became aware of the need to consider digital infrastructure requirements into the early stages of the planning and location of major residential and business developments. Jonathan said: *“I recently carried out some mapping work using Point Topic data for a funding bid which showed that many ‘out of town’ business parks in Mansfield built over the last decade were in areas with low broadband speeds and which had low probabilities of achieving NGA in the future due to the low densities of development. Whilst sites having good road access may have sufficed in previous years, I think a lot of businesses would now look to sites having fast broadband access to locate their operations. Enterprise zones really have to have superfast broadband and in the Local Broadband Plan we will be looking for ways to incorporate digital infrastructure requirements into the planning process. There may be some scope to negotiate and work with developers to contribute to the installation of digital infrastructures.”*

A map showing the location of business parks in south east Mansfield can be seen on the following page.

The same can also be said for the planning behind residential housing. Jonathan highlighted a case in the residential survey of a relatively new executive estate in Fernwood, near Newark, that attracted buyers and tenants who expected a good level of broadband but found this was not the case owing to its semi-rural location. So when deciding future housing allocations and in planning 'Sustainable Urban Extensions', districts could use Point Topic's data to identify areas where providing additional housing would raise the density thresholds to encourage the main operators to invest, thus bringing them 'on board' in the early stages of planning.

Nottinghamshire County Council believes that that the mapping and analysis of Point Topic's data has and continues to form a core part of the work associated with the development of its Local Broadband Plan, to develop its targeted broadband programme focussing specifically on those places which will really benefit from public resources to deliver NGA rollout effectively. The aim is to submit the Local Broadband Plan to BDUK in autumn 2011.



ERDF FUNDING BID
SOUTH EAST MANSFIELD BUSINESS PARKS
TYPICAL AVERAGE BROADBAND DOWNLOAD SPEEDS

Contains Ordnance Survey data
(c) Crown copyright and database right 2011
10009713



Scale 1cm: 30,000 cm approx
Produced by: J Hall
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