

Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire: Aide memoire

Introduction

This aide memoire has been produced to help you with questions you may receive regarding the evolving Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme.

Programme certainties

When combined with the commercial rollout plans of the telecommunications market i.e. the likes of BT, Virgin Media etc., the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire Programme would, at the very least, achieve the national government target of providing 90% of Nottinghamshire with a fibre-based broadband network. This would be a network capable of delivering superfast broadband speeds of 24 Mbps. The contract with BT stipulates milestones dates. The entire programme should be completed by 2016; however we are trying to ensure that the timelines are accelerated. We are pleased to state that the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme will deliver significantly over the original aspiration of 90% of premises in Nottinghamshire and is currently on target to reach close to 94% by its conclusion in 2015-16.

We have always known that the current funding would be insufficient to cover the whole of the area. This is simply because some places are more challenging, typically due to geography, i.e. due to their remoteness from existing infrastructure and/or because of the local topography or a combination of these factors and other issues. That is why we have always stated that approximately 5% of rural premises across Nottinghamshire would not get access to a network capable of delivering superfast broadband through either the commercial or Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme.

Which areas are in and when and which areas are out

Work is taking place in several phases and we will keep you regularly updated via the Council's broadband webpage. The website confirms, down to postcode level, which areas are in and which are out: The online postcode checker gives the best guess, as things currently stand, of coverage for each of the postcodes included in the Programme and overrides any conflicting data which may be seen elsewhere. The Postcode Checker information is updated regularly to reflect the progress of the programme and you are urged to routinely check it for any movements in the plan. This same site includes details on when a fibre cabinet has gone 'live' and is ready to take customer orders:

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/living/business/broadband/where-and-when>

The rollout takes into account many factors, including local demographics and geography, planning requirements, the existing engineering infrastructure and the availability of suitable technologies to provide a service. It is not possible with a programme of this size to plan every area at the same time so some areas will be planned and then enabled before others. Although regrettable, at present the provision of fibre-based broadband will not be achievable for some locations due to cost or technical reasons. It is prudent to point out that it is possible that some areas that are currently under investigation for the provision of fibre-based broadband will in fact transpire to be not viable. In such cases, additional areas will be investigated. As already mentioned, the current contract with BT states that when combined with the telecommunications market commercial rollouts, we should achieve close to 94% next generation broadband coverage.

Can communities, Parish Councils and Homeowners get involved in deciding the chosen location of cabinets?

No. Communities, Parish Councils and Homeowners are not involved in the decision making process around cabinet locations. To support economic growth it is vital that fixed broadband is rolled out as quickly as possible as this will create jobs and support the Nottinghamshire's long-term economic future. In an attempt to make it cheaper, quicker and easier to roll-out the new infrastructure, existing planning rules have been softened for five years. This means that broadband street cabinets and new poles can be installed under permitted development rights in any location, other than a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), without the need for prior approval from local planning authorities.

To that end, the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire Programme operates within the *Cabinet Siting and Pole Siting Code of Practice* (Issue 1, June 2013), which was agreed by English Heritage, Planning Officer's Society, National Parks England, to name but a few. The County Council (highways, conservation and broadband team), BT Group, BT Openreach and the network installation sub-contractors routinely meet to discuss the planned rollout and cabinet locations. It has been agreed that the district and borough conservation officers will only be consulted with (for a second opinion) in some situations if a proposed cabinet location is likely to be contentious. Where possible, cabinets will be installed on the publically maintained highway.

Do residents and businesses get automatic upgrades to fibre once their Exchange or the green street cabinet in their locality gets upgraded?

No. An upgrade to fibre broadband is NOT automatic. The Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire programme is best viewed as a civil engineering programme where we are effectively delivering the necessary infrastructure to the actual new green roadside cabinet only. The programme is not providing nor paying for the eventual customer connection(s).

We are installing a wholesale network, which means that any Internet Service Provider (ISP) can offer broadband and there will be a wide range of packages available. Although the fibre to the cabinet (FTTC) infrastructure will be owned exclusively by BT Wholesale, it will be made available through all of their leading retail and aggregation partners, not just BT Retail under their Infinity brand. It is an engineer installed service on a 1 or 2 year contract.

Those interested in purchasing a fibre-based broadband service should shop around. They should also check that they are able to actually achieve the speeds that are advertised, as geographic issues will apply in all cases.

What can be done for those areas not covered by the Better Broadband for Nottinghamshire Programme?

Even for those postcodes where the online postcode checker on the County Council webpage states 'currently outside the current rollout plan', it is not necessarily true that they won't get any improvement. The government recently announced additional funds of £2.63 million to take superfast broadband coverage across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire to close to 97% (our current programme will achieve close to 94%). However, there is a mandatory pound for pound match funding requirement. We are cautiously optimistic that a recent submission made through the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership's 'Local Growth Fund' will be fruitful. As ever though, we continue to actively investigate any and all other funding sources.

We are currently looking at procurement options for the additional coverage. The areas to be covered by any additional funding will not be known until after the procurement is complete.

Should communities be encouraged to go it alone and look for a community solution?

It is entirely possible for a community to decide to raise funding and to employ their own solution. The problem with this approach is that smaller suppliers do not always have the resilience of the larger companies. If communities were to go with their own solution and employed a smaller company then they could be facing sustainability issues further down the line. You should also be aware that once an area has superfast broadband then our programme will consider it to have turned grey and we can no longer consider it for inclusion under our funding. This is because of State Aid rules which, quite rightly, say that we should not use public money to compete with the private sector.

One final consideration is that the infrastructure that we are providing is a wholesale network. This means that any Internet Service Provider can use the network to provide services to its customers. By offering a range of providers the idea is that there will be competition which will lead to a choice of packages and a range of price-points. This is not achieved with a single-supplier network. Communities could, of course, choose to pay BT Openreach to upgrade the infrastructure in their area, but the costs are likely to be significant. For those communities choosing to privately fund fibre, further details on this route (which the County Council would have no involvement in) can be found at:

<https://www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/rural-broadband/Fibre-roll-out.aspx>

Where should I refer interested individuals and business who want more information?

The County Council website remains your best post of call to update yourself and to refer interested individuals and businesses to:

<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/living/business/broadband/where-and-when>

Where possible we also aim to make significant announcements on Nottinghamshire County Council's official Twitter feed too:

<https://twitter.com/NottsCC>

Find us online via our Facebook page. Just 'like' the page to access the site dedicated to people experiencing the fibre-broadband rollout across Nottinghamshire. We are inviting 'friends' to take and post photos with the hashtag #hugacabinet

www.facebook.com/nottinghamshirebroadband

Information correct as at the date of publication of 30th July 2014