



PRCC.37 16/17

Prosperous Communities  
Committee

6 December 2016

**B**

**Subject: Broadband Provision Across the District – Current Position  
and Future Options**

Report by:

Director of Resources

Contact Officer:

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Purpose / Summary:

To provide Members with an up to date position with regard to Broadband Provision across the District. The report also sets out high level options for future consideration.

**RECOMMENDATION(S):**

That Officers are requested to investigate the options available to the Authority to assist residents in obtaining access to superfast broadband services and working with the Chair of this committee to bring forward a further paper in March 2017.

## IMPLICATIONS

**Legal:**

**Financial :**

**Financial Implications: FIN/108/17**

A Capital Budget of £555k was approved as part of the 2013/14 Capital Programme to support the BDUK roll out within West Lindsey as detailed within the report. This was to be funded from Capital Receipts. Any reduction in the amount paid will result in capital receipts being available for future capital investment.

**Staffing :**

**Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :**

*NB: Please explain how you have considered the policy's impact on different groups (for example: young people, elderly, ethnic minorities, LGBT community, rural residents, disabled, others).*

**Risk Assessment :**

**Climate Related Risks and Opportunities :**

**Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

*Wherever possible please provide a hyperlink to the background paper/s  
If a document is confidential and not for public viewing it should not be listed.*

**Call in and Urgency:**

**Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?**

*i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)*

**Yes**

**No**

**Key Decision:**

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

**Yes**

**No**

## **Definitions**

To aid the clarity of this report the following definitions will be used:

Superfast (UK) = speeds of 24mbps or greater

Superfast (EU) = speeds of 30mbps or greater

Basic Broadband = speeds 2mbps or greater

BDUK Coverage = the number of houses where the BT cabinet has been upgraded

Thinkbroadband.com coverage = An independent assessment of coverage by BT, Virgin and KC. Speed assessment uses members of the public speed tests by postcode.

## **1 Introduction**

- 1.1 In 2012 WLDC agreed to be part of the BDUK partnership in Lincolnshire to be known as Onlincolnshire. This partnership was to be led by a team based within Lincolnshire County Council.
- 1.2 The district of West Lindsey was identified within the project as being part of what was known as Phase 7. This was due to be initiated in March 2015 and completed in March 2016. BDUK Phase 1 was expected to provide coverage to 90% (including commercial roll out) of households in West Lindsey.
- 1.3 Given that BDUK would not provide 100% coverage WLDC determined in June 2014, to enter into a commercial loan with Quickline Ltd on an interest bearing basis at market rates. This decision was taken to ensure that, ahead of the BDUK work, which at the time had still to begin in West Lindsey (apart from some work overlapping with other districts at the boundary) the district was able to begin its development of Broadband provision in the harder to reach areas.
- 1.4 As has become much discussed, whilst WLDC received appropriate advice regarding its own responsibilities for State Aid issues (hence the Commercial Loan does not contravene any state aid regulations), officers at BDUK determined that the loan, and in particular its reference to WLDC achieving 100% coverage, would cause BDUK to contravene the state aid regulations applicable to their use of Government Funds should they allocate further funding to West Lindsey. BDUK could not provide funding where it would constitute 'overbuild' (development of broadband infrastructure where there was already an infrastructure in place).
- 1.5 Despite challenging this determination over many communications with BDUK, including representations by colleagues at LCC, we have been unable to change the BDUK opinion on this matter.

## **2. Phase 1 Contract**

- 2.1 The first phase of BDUK was intended to deliver 90% coverage at Superfast UK levels and 100% coverage of basic broadband.
- 2.2 The first phase of BDUK included West Lindsey and along with BT's commercial coverage accounts for the 85.53% coverage achieved to date (using UK definitions from <http://labs.thinkbroadband.com/local/index.php> ).
- 2.3 In the Capital Programme for 2012/13, Committee agreed a contribution to the Onlincolnshire Partnership of between £375k to £500k.
- 2.4 This amount has not yet been paid and we are awaiting the partnership contract to be resubmitted to the Authority for sealing and signature.

- 2.5 There is a reported underspend on Phase 1 of £9m which West Lindsey is currently prohibited from benefitting from due to the direction of BDUK. This amounts to a 25% underspend on the overall project.

### **3. Coverage**

- 3.1 The overall coverage for Lincolnshire as at November 2016 (thinkbroadband.com) is 88.86%, whilst in West Lindsey coverage of 85.53% is reportable.
- 3.2 It is worth noting that BT/BDUK assess coverage based on a 'houses past basis', which means that all houses supported by an upgraded cabinet are considered to have superfast coverage irrespective as to whether it is actually available (residents more than a mile away from the cabinet may not be able to obtain superfast (UK) speeds.
- 3.3 The maps at Appendix A show those areas understood to be covered by either BDUK (BT) and Quickline. We have been unable at this stage to obtain the commercial roll out data from BT. It is considered that provision from any other providers, such as Virgin Media, is incidental to their provision in neighbouring areas although we are aware that Virgin Media have begun to introduce their own fibre to the premise in the southern part of the district. Quickline coverage is based on signal reach but there may need to be additional masts to receive that signal in some cases.
- 3.4 The areas that remain without coverage are shown in grey on the maps and are the difficult to reach areas that will need specialist solutions.

### **4. Comparisons with neighbours**

- 4.1 At this time it has not been possible to obtain figures on coverage from Onlincolnshire however there is a website that I was referred to by Paul Bimson, Regional Partnership Director for BT.
- 4.2 The Website thinkbroadband.com provides comparisons both locally and nationally in terms of coverage. It attempts to draw on both formal data and the experiences of local residents. To that end it serves to provide a comparison with others but should not be taken as the absolute position with regards coverage.

- 4.3 The table below shows some comparisons for local coverage and national. (It is understood that these figures do not include Quickline coverage)

	Superfast (UK) (>24mbps)	Superfast (EU) (>30mbps)
England	92.80%	92.30%
Lincolnshire	88.86%	87.60%
West Lindsey	85.53%	83.20%
Boston	88.57%	87.10%
East Lindsey	81.54%	80.10%
Lincoln	99.33%	99.20%
North Kesteven	91.05%	90.50%
South Holland	85.30%	83.20%
South Kesteven	92.31%	91.50%
North East Lincolnshire	96.51%	96.34%
North Lincolnshire	91.29%	90.31%

- 4.4 Our neighbours to the North have been included for comparison purposes as they have their own arrangements with BDUK.

## 5. Onlincolnshire partnership

- 5.1 I have asked Onlincolnshire to send the Partnership Agreement for our signature.
- 5.2 Members need to consider whether or not to pay the amount agreed in 2012.
- 5.3 The figure indicated at that time was between £375k to £555k. The figure being requested by Onlincolnshire is £550k.
- 5.4 However it should be noted that there is a £9m underspend within the Partnership and commercial 'payback' (BT provide cashback to Onlincolnshire where take up of a supported cabinet exceeds agreed levels) this takes the available figure upto £16m.
- 5.5 However, given the circumstances explained above, Onlincolnshire advises that they are unable to use any of these surplus funds to support residents in West Lindsey.
- 5.6 In addition, whilst BDUK Phase 1 has been completed the assessment of coverage in West Lindsey using ThinkBroadband.com suggests only 85% coverage has been achieved. Whilst this website may lag behind the latest position we are awaiting the final information on coverage from Onlincolnshire.

## **6. Current offers to residents**

- 6.1 Whilst Onlincolnshire is unable to use Partnership funds to support West Lindsey residents there are two offers that are available funded directly by DCMS through local providers.
- 6.2 There are 2 current offers which can be available for communities in West Lindsey through either BT or Quickline.
- 6.3 BT offer a Community Fibre Partnership grant which enables communities that fall into the 5% of the UK excluded from national fibre broadband rollout plans to apply for funding of up to £20,000 toward the cost of their new fibre infrastructure, if that new infrastructure also serves the local school.
- 6.4 Quickline have subscribed to the 'better broadband subsidy scheme' which means residents could be eligible for a free connection. To be eligible their current speed needs to be less than 2Mbps. They apply through a portal depending on which local authority they belong to and it normally takes a couple of days to receive a code if eligible. If they are not eligible and feel that they receive speeds of less than 2Mbps they can challenge and supply speed checks.

## **7. Future Options**

- 7.1 Given the circumstances outlined in the introduction we are currently not being supported by BDUK and therefore Onlincolnshire, in our attempts to support West Lindsey neighbourhoods to obtain high speed broadband.
- 7.2 We need to consider how we support residents in delivering the last 10-15% of coverage.
- 7.3 At this time there is no financial provision within the Authority for any direct support and therefore any additional provision would need to be ranked alongside other commitments in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 7.4 Options might include:

### **1 – Work with Onlincolnshire and BDUK to remove the barrier to providing funding in West Lindsey**

Members and Officers have attempted to engage with the officers and Members with this portfolio at the County without success. The potential to use this option would depend entirely on being able to change the view of BDUK with regards their ability and hence the ability of Onlincolnshire to provide funding in the West Lindsey district.



## **2 – Direct support by the Authority**

Whilst there is no allocated funding for this purpose, it maybe an option if members wished, subject to appropriate legal advice.

As there is an underspend within the BDUK Phase 1 members may wish to consider withholding the West Lindsey share of the underspend for use within West Lindsey should it be legally possible. A higher level of withholding amount maybe justifiable given the current assessment of coverage is below the target 90%.

## **3 – Provide Broadband expertise to support local neighbourhoods**

One of the issues for localities is obtaining appropriate advice on the options available to them, given their individual and specific difficulties. Each neighbourhood is likely to have different challenges where broadband is concerned and will need a tailored solution.

The Authority may wish to consider providing specialist support to localities in a similar way that we support Neighbourhood plans. This would require additional funding.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 Whilst the current position ensures that residents across West Lindsey had access to Superfast Broadband earlier than might have otherwise been expected, the current position leaves many neighbourhoods with no support for facilitating a faster and consistent broadband service.
- 8.2 Without intervention, it is likely that West Lindsey residents will continue to be left behind other areas of the County and the Country.

## **9. Recommendations**

- 9.1 It is therefore recommended that officers are asked to investigate the options available to the Authority to assist residents in obtaining access to superfast broadband services and working with the Chair of this committee to bring forward a further paper in March 2017.

Broadband Coverage

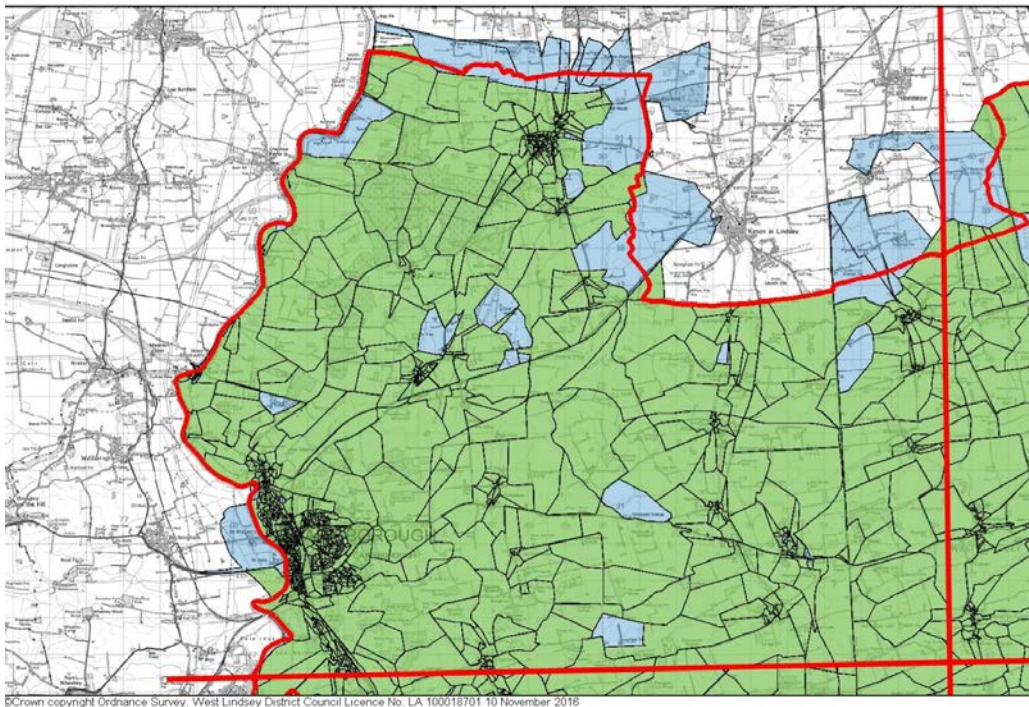
Key

- District Boundary WL
- Quickline data
  - Quickline coverage Nov2016
- BDUK Coverage
  - Broadband Rollout as at July 2015
    - Phase 1
    - Phase 2
    - Phase 3
    - Phase 4
    - Phase 5

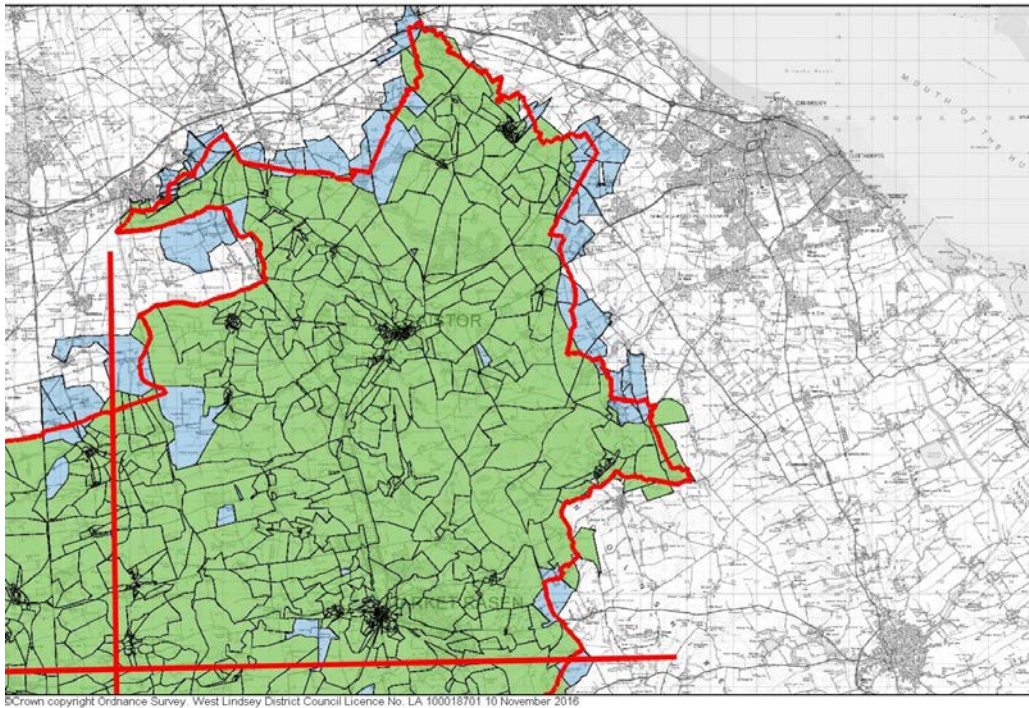
Also a red line which is used to “quarter” WL for print purposes only.

Blue areas are the WL postcodes and the green is showing which postcodes are covered by quickline, the gaps showing blue are areas not covered.

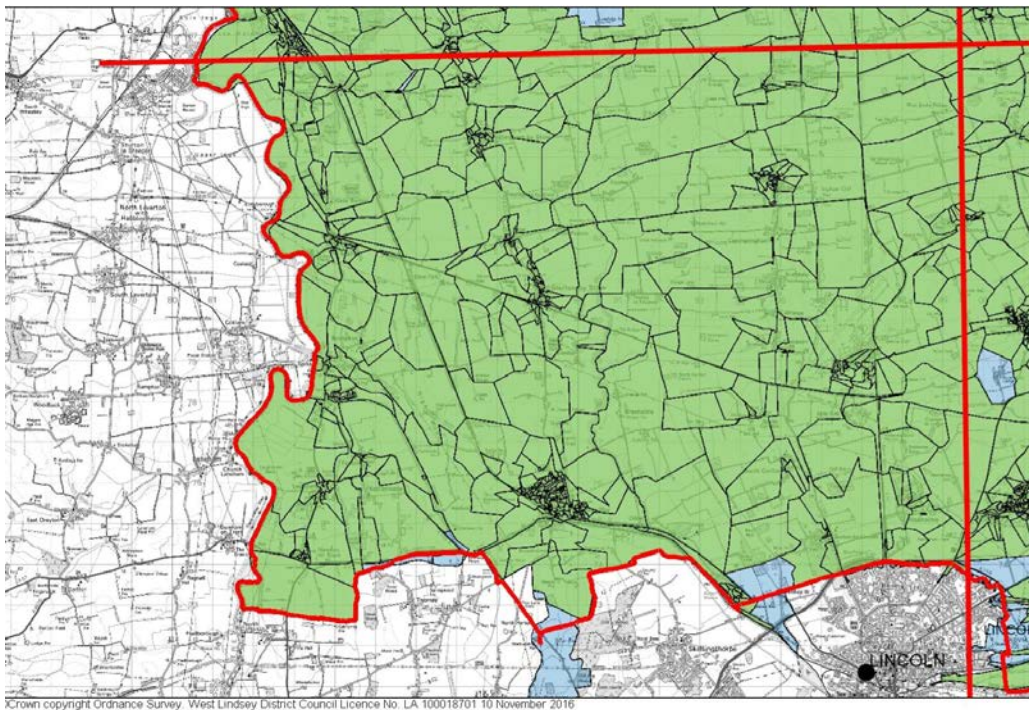
**Quickline coverage in the North West section.**



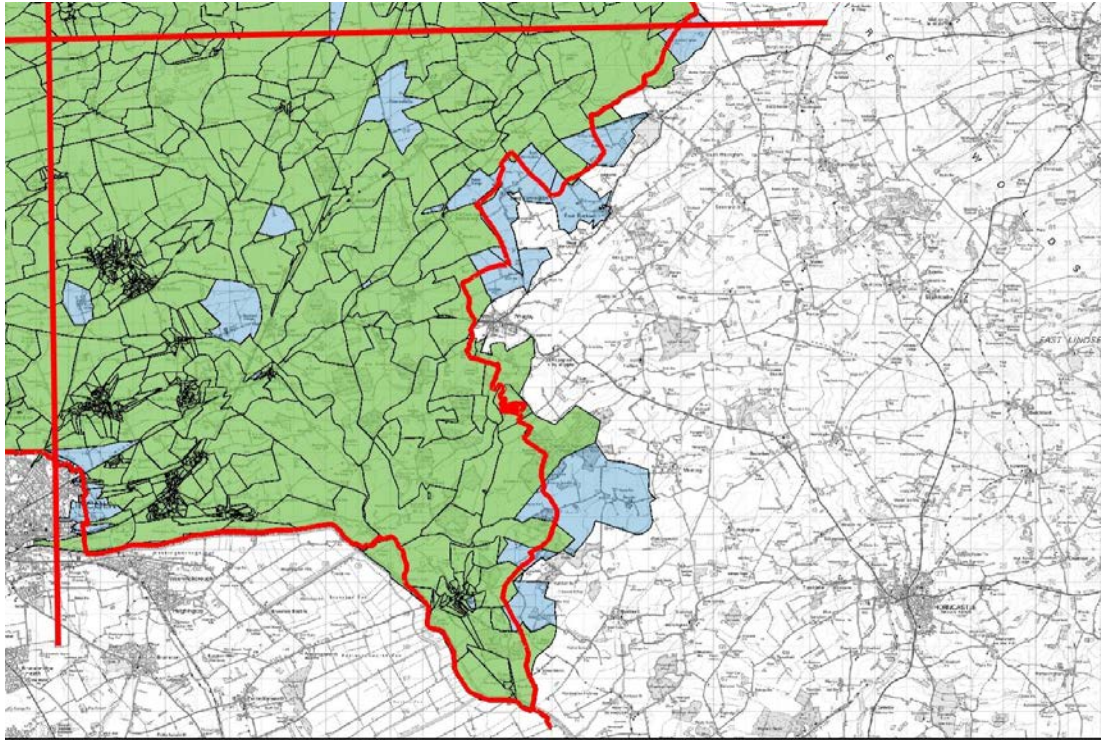
**Quickline coverage in the North East section.**



**Quickline coverage in the South West section.**









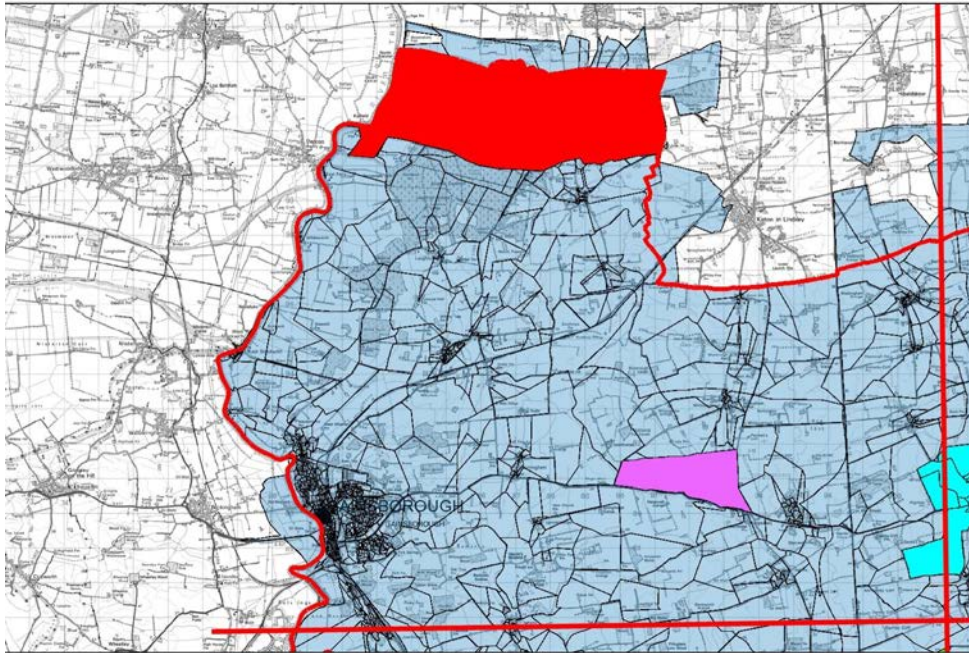
**Quickline coverage in the South East section.**



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## BDUK coverage in the North West section.

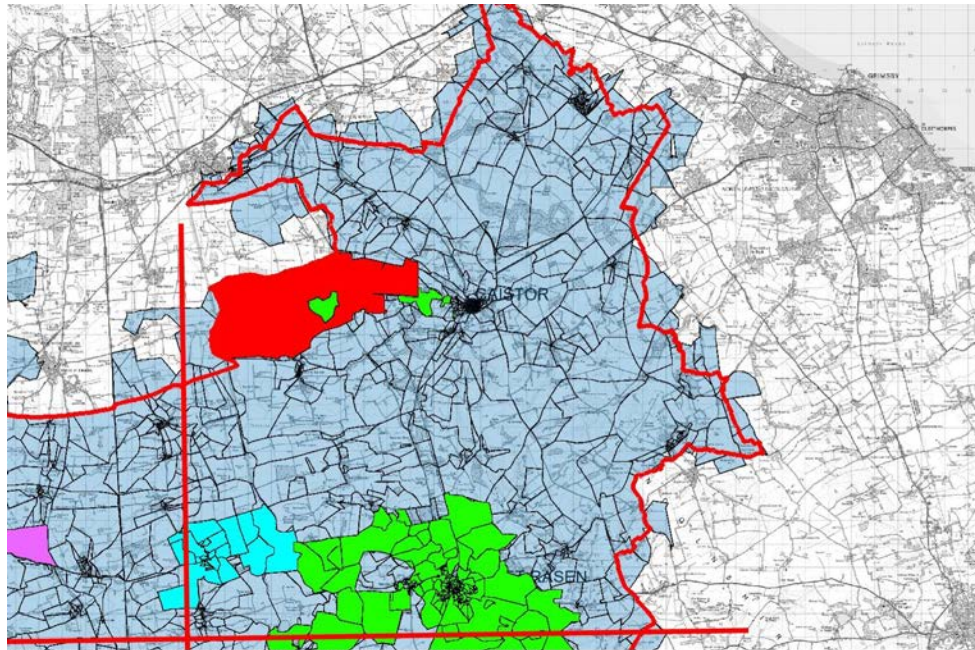
BDUK Coverage	
	Broadband Rollout as at July 2015
	Phase 1
	Phase 2
	Phase 3
	Phase 4
	Phase 5



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## BDUK coverage in the North East section.

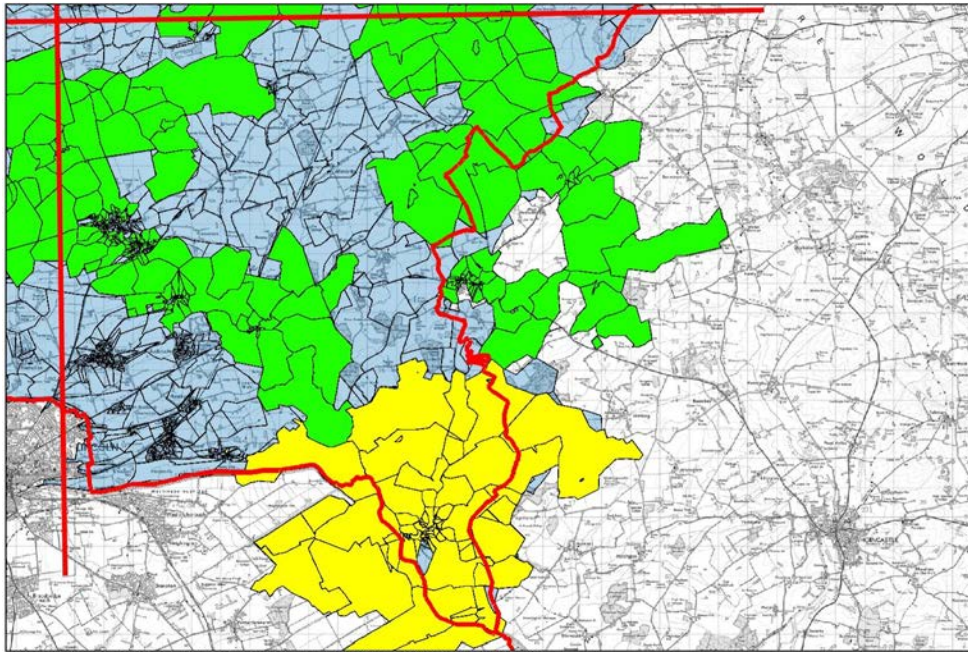
BDUK Coverage	
	Broadband Rollout as at July 2015
	Phase 1
	Phase 2
	Phase 3
	Phase 4
	Phase 5



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## BDUK coverage in the South West section.

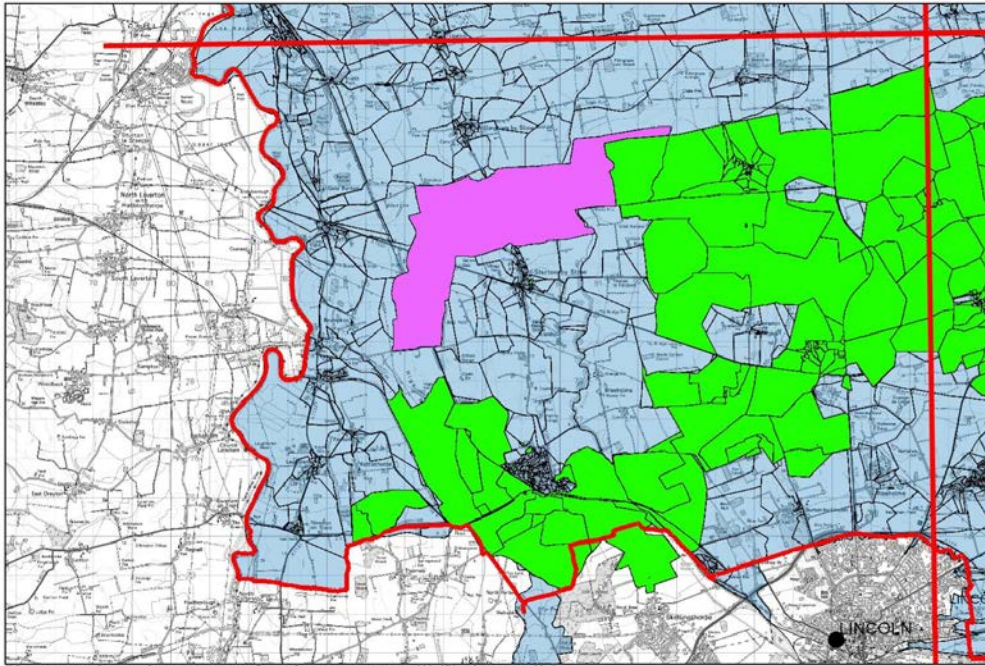
BDUK Coverage	
	Broadband Rollout as at July 2015
	Phase 1
	Phase 2
	Phase 3
	Phase 4
	Phase 5



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## BDUK coverage in the South East section.

BDUK Coverage	
	Broadband Rollout as at July 2015
	Phase 1
	Phase 2
	Phase 3
	Phase 4
	Phase 5



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