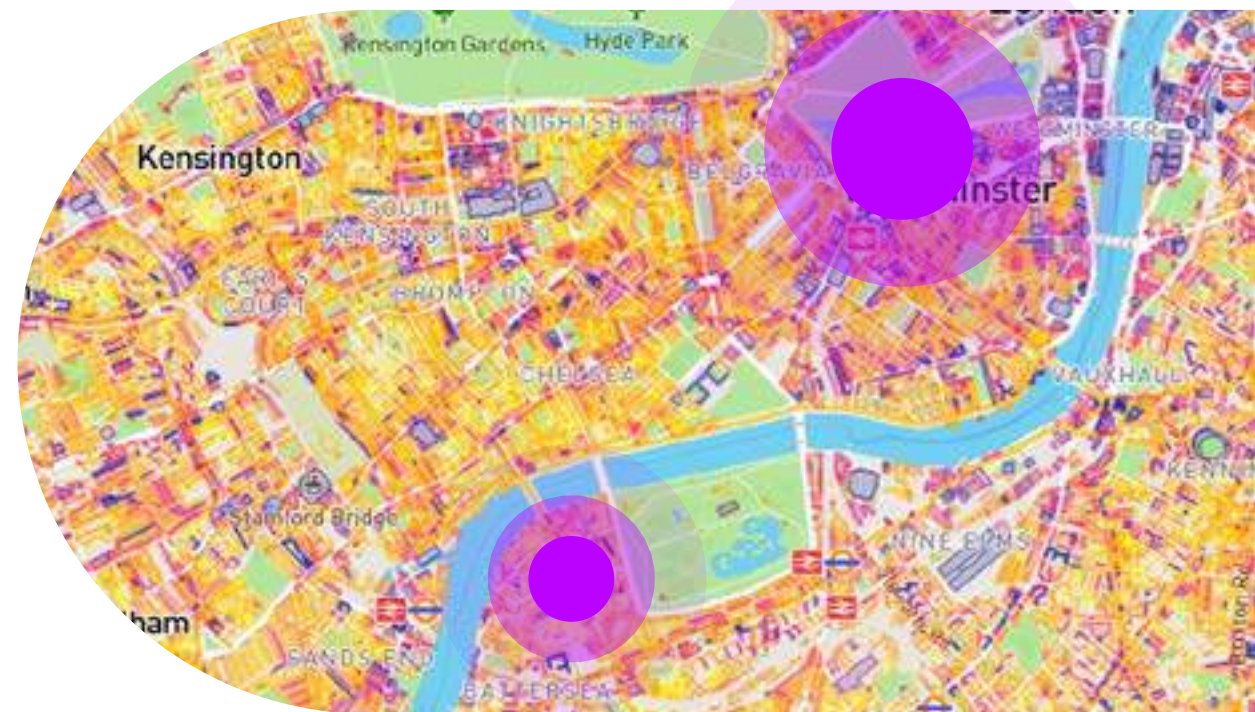# Turning strategy into action to support digital infrastructure rollout

A guide to practical steps Local Authorities can take to enable and support the deployment of digital connectivity in rural and underserved areas. Guided by the Joint Operator Technical Specification (JOTS).

IONX

Practical Steps

What practical steps should Local Authorities take to enable and streamline where connectivity is delivered?

Following the strategic foundations set out in Part 1 (Strategic Actions to Accelerate and Influence Where Connectivity is Delivered), this second instalment focuses on practical operational steps Local Authorities can implement to reduce deployment barriers and become active enablers of digital connectivity.

With the JOTS Neutral Host Outdoor (NHOD) specification removing key technical and commercial barriers, Local Authorities now have the opportunity to identify infrastructure gaps, unlock public assets and facilitate rapid deployment through smart policy and streamlined internal processes.
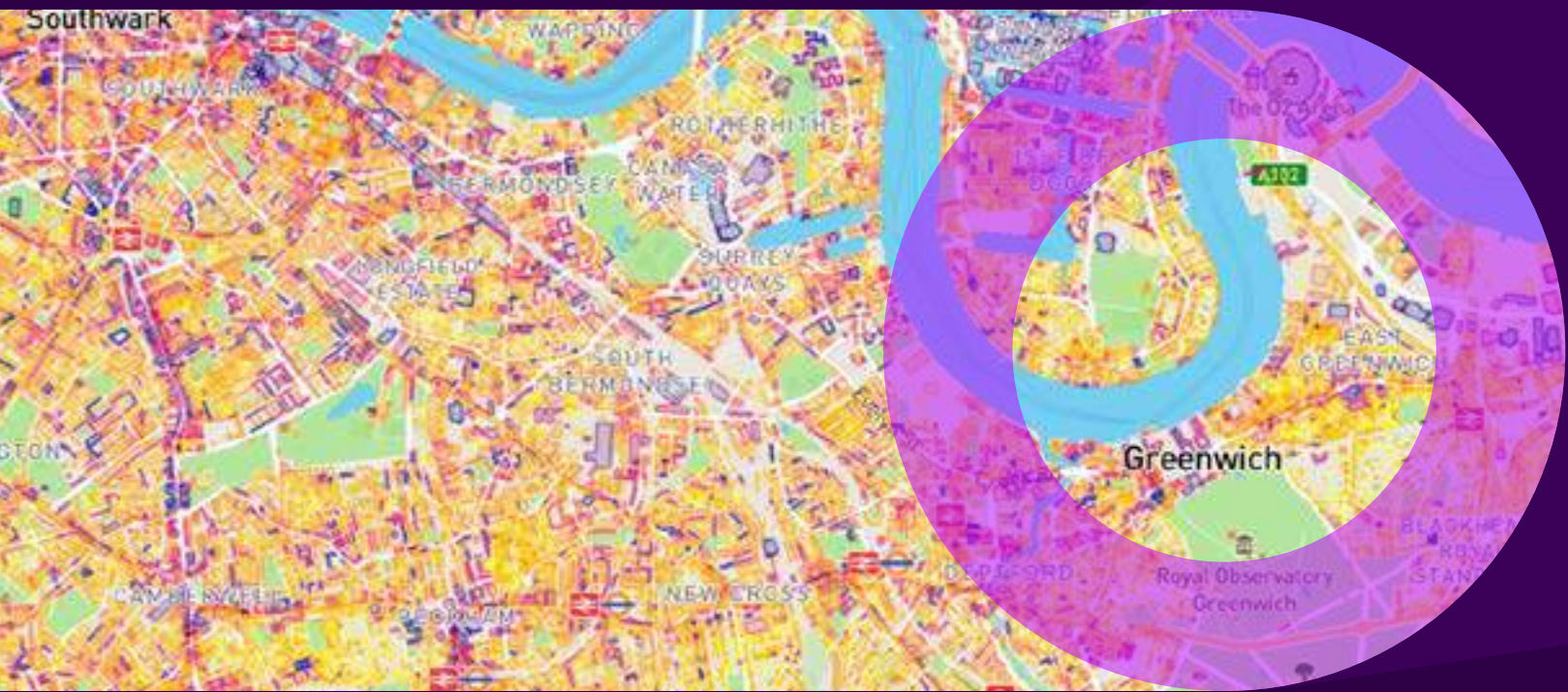
Identify Coverage Gaps

Before infrastructure can be deployed, Local Authorities must develop a robust understanding of existing coverage levels, unmet demand and geographic or structural barriers to connectivity.

This step is foundational - it ensures that resources and efforts are targeted effectively and aligned with areas of greatest need.

Leverage Crowd-Sourced and Industry Data

Local Authorities can tap into a growing ecosystem of crowd-sourced and operator-supplied datasets to pinpoint where coverage gaps persist. Tools that aggregate signal strength, latency and usage metrics across all four MNOs (e.g. Opensignal, CellMapper, or third-party neutral host platforms such as IONX) provide a real-world view of user experience.

Neutral Host toolsets are particularly valuable, as they offer a consolidated view across networks, highlighting shared pain points such as "notspots" or unreliable service in key public areas. Additionally, Local Authorities should actively engage with operators to gather qualitative input about coverage challenges - such as difficulties securing permissions or street furniture access.

As a first step, IONX provides partners and Local Authorities with access to advanced toolkits. By leveraging cutting-edge big data network analytics, IONX visualizes each operator's network performance to pinpoint optimal locations for potential small cell deployments.

TARGET YOUR RESOURCES & EFFORT BASED ON DATA DRIVEN INSIGHTS.

Alignment with Local Development Plans

Once data has identified the problem areas, Local Authorities should align digital connectivity goals with broader development strategies. Overlaying this information onto Local Area Development Plans (LADPs) can highlight synergies with:

- Upcoming transport corridors
- Planned housing or business park developments
- Emergency services communications infrastructure
- Educational or health facility upgrades

This approach allows for joint planning and co-investment opportunities, while helping to justify funding or investment requests with a broader public value case.

Engage with Local Communities and Stakeholders

Community engagement is more than a regulatory checkbox - it is a critical success factor in shaping demand-driven digital infrastructure strategies. Local Authorities must actively involve parish councils, residents, businesses and public service users to uncover localised connectivity challenges, build trust, and secure public support for infrastructure deployment.

While technical assessments can identify broad coverage gaps, they often miss granular, day-to-day connectivity issues experienced by communities - such as inconsistent mobile reception, degraded performance during peak hours, or challenges with digital access across both indoor and outdoor environments. Public engagement bridges this knowledge gap.

ENSURE CONNECTIVITY ROLLOUT CONTRIBUTES TO LONG-TERM, REAL-WORLD COMMUNITY NEEDS.

Mapping Assets and Access

Once coverage priorities are identified, Local Authorities can unlock deployment opportunities by actively inventorying and promoting the assets under their control - many of which are ideal for small cell and neutral host infrastructure.

Develop a GIS-Based Asset Register

A centralised digital map of deployable public infrastructure enables proactive planning and reduces negotiation friction with commercial partners. This should include:

- Street lighting columns
- Traffic signals
- Rooftops and building facades
- Bus shelters and signage
- CCTV poles and highway assets

Ideally, this data should be mapped in GIS format and include key attributes such as:

- Height, power availability and structural integrity
- Access arrangements and ownership
- Nearby fibre or backhaul routes

This process allows for proactive site planning and easier feasibility analysis by MNOs and neutral host providers.

Prequalify and Incentivise Assets

Once mapped, assets can be technically prequalified based on deployment readiness. Prequalification may include structural assessment, access permissions and existing backhaul. Pre-approved sites help to significantly reduce planning timelines and improve investment confidence for infrastructure partners.

To further encourage use, Local Authorities can offer:

- Discounted access fees for high-priority areas
- Zero-cost pilots in rural or socially critical locations
- Revenue-sharing models that reinvest into community digital services

ACTIVELY INVENTORYING & PROMOTING ASSETS
UNDER YOUR CONTROL.

Open Access Portals for Stakeholders

By making asset data discoverable through open-access portals or third-party platforms (e.g. Digdat, Connected Kerb's GIS tools), Local Authorities empower MNOs, neutral hosts and investors to visualise potential deployments and make quicker decisions.
This visibility drives proactive engagement, reduces speculative site surveying and creates a "digital marketplace" for infrastructure use.

Facilitating Deployment

Deployment processes often stall due to siloed decision-making, complex permitting workflows and a lack of internal alignment. Local Authorities can overcome these challenges by building internal capacity and creating streamlined governance structures.

Establish a Digital Infrastructure Taskforce

Creating a cross-departmental taskforce sends a clear signal of intent to external partners. This taskforce should include representatives from:

- Planning and Development Control
- Highways and Transportation
- Estates and Facilities
- Street Lighting and Highways Maintenance
- Legal and Procurement

Its role is to act as a central coordination point for all digital infrastructure deployment efforts. It should own key processes such as planning application reviews, wayleave approvals and asset access policies.

Build Internal Awareness and Capacity

Many delays stem from uncertainty within local departments. Investing in internal awareness - through workshops, playbooks, or CPD-accredited training - can significantly improve response times and reduce friction.

Each department should understand:
- The importance of digital infrastructure to public services and economic growth
- The role of neutral host models in simplifying rollout
- What processes and decisions are required from them

Simplify Planning and Wayleave Processes

Local Authorities should proactively develop and publish:

- Standardised planning guidance for small cells and neutral host infrastructure
- Template wayleave agreements that remove legal complexity
- Design principles for deployments on public furniture (e.g. lamppost-mounted radios)

Fast-tracking permissions for prequalified sites - particularly those meeting JOTS NHOD compliance - can enable deployment within weeks rather than months.

Develop a 'Neutral Host Ready' Certification

A formal site certification programme provides clarity to the market on which public assets are truly deployment-ready. A certified site would typically include:

- Structural and load-bearing assessment
- Available power connection
- Existing or nearby fibre connection
- Legal permissions and site access agreements

Promoting these sites on the open market increases confidence and attracts earlier investment.

Introduce Standardised SLAs

Clear Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for asset access, planning response times, and maintenance coordination can significantly reduce the friction MNOs and neutral hosts often encounter. These should be published and applied consistently across all departments.

Industry Alignment: JOTS Neutral Host Outdoor

The [JOTS Neutral Host Outdoor (NHOD) Specification](#) represents a significant advancement in enabling technically compliant, multi-operator mobile coverage via shared infrastructure. Developed by the UK's four national MNOs (EE, Vodafone, Three, and Virgin Media O2), the specification defines the interface, performance and security requirements that neutral host providers must meet to deliver outdoor small cell solutions capable of supporting multiple MNOs from a single physical footprint.

Industry Standardisation: Service Assurance

Crucially, JOTS NHOD aligns technical requirements across operators, removing the historical need for bespoke deployments and streamlining integration with each operator's core network. This opens the door for new As-A-Service models, where neutral hosts like IONX can integrate the RAN layer with multiple Operators. This ensures the delivery and management of wireless services maintain full compliance with operator SLAs, latency, backhaul and QoS expectations, providing operators with complete assurance in the delivery of their mobile services.

JOTS Compliance: IONX as a Trusted Partner

As an early adopter and trusted implementation partner, IONX has aligned the development of its service delivery platform with the JOTS NHOD specification. Working collaboratively with Local Authorities, IONX enables the delivery of targeted, future-proof mobile coverage into underserved communities. This collaboration model de-risks investment and simplifies procurement allowing faster deployment of multi-operator, small cell infrastructure in areas where traditional macro solutions are either cost-prohibitive or technically constrained.

THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES TO LEAD FROM THE FRONT

IONX

For more information visit our website or reach out directly at:
hello@ionxnetworks.com