

# pursuing growth



Above: Map 1 – An example from the Map for England, showing the current availability of superfast broadband, overlain onto areas of highest predicted household growth 2008-33.

THE PAST 18 MONTHS have seen arguments raised from across the political spectrum as to how best to pursue growth nationwide, with a consensus

in the local economy – showing how vitally important it is to make sure that these developments are planned for across sectors. Importantly, a Map for England highlights how essential easily manageable GIS systems can be to all professions involved in planning for our future infrastructure developments.

Despite the generally recognised and accepted need to ensure such a joined up approach to planning infrastructure and services, there is remarkably still no single place or data source within government that makes all the relevant maps available to view. Good progress has been made in various areas, but with an overarching framework – a Map for England – policy makers could make better judgements about how individual policy proposals interact with and affect the development of the country as a whole. It would increase consistency in appraisal, improve security and resilience, and provide a better understanding of sectoral issues that may compliment or conflict with one another.

**Research findings** Our debate began by the release of research commissioned by the RTPI and

## A map for England

The Royal Town Planning Institute has opened a debate about using GIS to map key information for planning development sustainably. The RTPI's solution is to create a "Map for England" to act as a single data source for planning new infrastructure and services. Project manager, **Peter Shand**, offers some background on this debate and explains why they need GIS professionals to contribute to it.

emerging that the route to growth was via pursuit across the country as a whole – spreading the relative success attained in London and the South East.

This was a viewpoint taken up by **Lord Heseltine** in his recent independent report on how to improve the UK's ability to create wealth (*No Stone Unturned in the Pursuit of Growth*), and echoed by comments from such organisations as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

**A joined up approach** It is in the pursuit of growth that the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the largest professional institute for planners in Europe, representing some 23,000 spatial planners, initiated a debate about whether we need a "Map for England", to provide a manageable way of presenting datasets in an open and accessible fashion.

A Map for England would provide a truly joined up approach to planning infrastructure and services, helping to boost both growth and save time and money by encouraging quicker and better informed investment decisions. The CBI have estimated that even before new infrastructure becomes operational, the building of it is estimated to generate £2.84 to the economy for every £1 spent; 90% of which is retained

published by the Centre of Urban Policy Studies at the University of Manchester. The research shows that individual government departments now have more than 100 major maps for England relating to these policies and programmes, but when overlain onto one another they will have unintended consequences upon different parts of the country.

It was a major task in itself for the researchers to pull together almost 100 policy maps. In about one third of these documents, the implications for different places are made explicit but in fully two thirds they're not. The research focused on three key policies for growth (the *National Infrastructure Plan*, *Unlocking Growth in Cities* report and the draft *National Planning Policy Framework*) and analysed whether or not they were spatially aware documents.

By overlaying a number of these maps and diagrams together, the researchers demonstrated that some policies and programmes, when considered against each other in relation to different parts of the country, may have unintended consequences. The research highlighted many of the issues that the country faces in delivering future infrastructure for telecommunications, environmental issues, housing and transport.

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**The Map for England website** In order to show what a future Map for England may look like, the RTPI, in conjunction with software specialists Idox, launched a pilot website in October 2012, which can be found at [www.idoxgroup.com/mapforengland](http://www.idoxgroup.com/mapforengland).

Results from the Map for England have recently been used by the Secretary of State for Business and Enterprise, the Rt Hon **Michael Fallon** MP, during the debates on the Growth and Infrastructure Bill and, in particular, the provision of superfast broadband in national parks. As the map (see Map 2) demonstrates, coverage is particularly poor in national parks in the north of England.

Since the launch of the debate in March 2012, the RTPI has been encouraged by the positive response from businesses, communities and the wider public alike with regards to the initiative. We have found that there is a great desire across all sectors for a mapping tool that would enable users to view the way in which a range of national data could affect their areas and plans for future development. The advantages of a streamlined, more cost-effective approach to developing plans and strategies was keenly felt across, and within, the levels of governing authorities, private and public sector respondents that took part in the consultation – with many replying to say that a “one-stop shop” for such vital information is a necessity. Such an initiative really helps to highlight the power of GIS to both the wider public and policy makers.

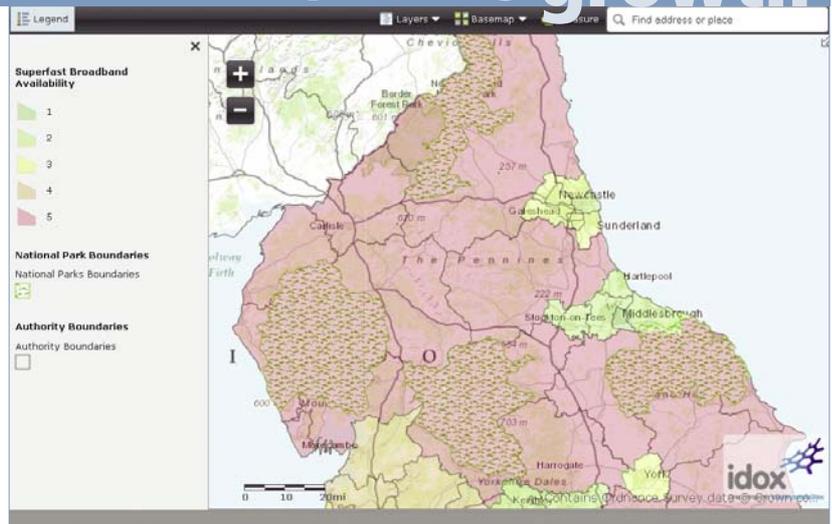
### How does this fit with government policy?

The UK government is fully committed to its Open Data drive, with the minister in charge of reforming access to public information, **Francis Maude**, describing data as ‘the raw material of our age’. The Map for England is a way of harnessing this raw material and pushing forward the government’s current Open Data drive across departments. The Map for England is about using GIS and standardised data to foster collaboration and joint working across contrasting, and normally conflicting, sectors.

Various schemes and initiatives in the UK that have begun over the past few years have shown that the public has a great appetite for using data to make conclusions and challenge the information that they are given. In particular, [mysociety.org](http://mysociety.org) runs pages such as [theyworkforyou.com](http://theyworkforyou.com), dedicated to sharing public information.

Additional benefits of the Map include:

- **Helping to boost growth** – Housing, industry and business would be able to make quicker and better informed investment decisions, which are more closely aligned to public sector infrastructure funding plans.
- **Being more transparent** – Local communities would be able to find out about how government plans affect their areas and to influence them.
- **Saving time and money** – When writing new strategies, government departments could see



**Above: Map 2 – This example from the Map for England shows that the provision and coverage of superfast broadband in national parks is particularly poor in the north of England.**

the existing plans for different parts of the country and relate their new strategies to them.

- **Helping to coordinate infrastructure** – across borders with Scotland and Wales.

As well as the acknowledged recognition from a variety of sources that a new spatial vision for the country is needed if we are to grow, a number of programmes towards the end of 2012 highlighted the need for England to consider the ways in which the development of infrastructure will affect the country in the future – and to plan now, in a sustainable fashion, to improve the services that make Britain tick. One startling revelation was that without any developments to key infrastructure services in the next decade (water, telecoms, energy, housing and transport) the cost to the country would be £500bn. The stark message was that we cannot add 10 million people to our population and “make do” with the current level of services.

**What can you do?** The Map for England has received further coverage by the way of Radio 4’s *Today Programme* and has been picked up by numerous trade and local press articles.

You can log onto [www.mapforengland.co.uk](http://www.mapforengland.co.uk) and contribute to the debate. We want to know if you agree with us that a Map for England is a good idea, and advise us on what further information should be included on future versions. We are also taking the debate to Twitter, via [#map4england](https://twitter.com/map4england). We are aware that, in its current form, the map is some way from the finished product – but this pilot period is about highlighting and developing how a future Map for England *could* function. We are particularly keen to hear from GIS professionals about their views on the project and how you think we can best develop the Map for England.

### About the author



**Peter Shand is the RTPI project officer for the Map for England and can be contacted by emailing to: [peter.shand@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:peter.shand@rtpi.org.uk)**