

Consultation Stage 2: 2014-2020 Assisted Areas Map

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RTPI Response

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) has over 23,000 members who work in the public, private, voluntary and education sectors. It is a charity whose purpose is to develop the art and science of town planning for the benefit of the public. The RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards and supports members through continuous education, practice advice, training and development.

The RTPI is supportive of Government's process of consulting local businesses and stakeholders to help identify areas of need when drafting an Assisted Areas Map in response to European Commission guidelines on regional aid. We were particularly pleased to see that the minor amendments from the existing Assisted Areas Map have been made to reflect some of the more rural areas of the United Kingdom where deprivation can sometimes be concealed.

The Institute recognises the importance of rebalancing the UK economy and any efforts to do so should be robust so that the best possible outcome is achieved. Government has correctly linked the process of reviewing the Assisted Areas Map with its wider objective to achieve sustainable and balanced growth that is more evenly distributed. However, regional aid alone will not be enough and will need to be combined with other policies which would benefit from being visualised in concert with one another.

The RTPI believes there is great value in bringing together different maps in one place so that patterns of spatial synergies and conflicts arising from government policies can be identified. Despite the generally recognised and accepted need to ensure a joined up approach to planning infrastructure and services, there is remarkably still no single place or data source within government that makes all of these maps available to view.

It is important to acknowledge spatial implications of policies, and then to take measures to promote synergies and minimise conflicts arising from government policies. Furthermore, the Government will be aware that economic, social and spatial process does not stop at an administrative boundary, but instead result in 'spill over effects' which underscores the importance of mapping different policies together in one place. By doing so policy makers have an increased likelihood of properly understanding how policies interact, ultimately leading to better outcomes.

The RTPi with its partner The University of Manchester has done a substantial amount of work in the area of mapping different policies in the project Map for England.¹ However, the principles and conclusions of the work can be widened to the UK scale.

At the time of the Map for England research in 2012 the scanning exercise of policy documents and web sites identified 95 relevant sources that contain policies and programmes that have an explicit spatial expression and/or spatial consequences. After appraising the 95 sources, just over a third (37) of them are found to include explicit spatial expression of their policies and programmes by either providing maps/diagrams or clear text/data on the spatial dimension. The remaining 58 documents, nonetheless, consist of policies that have clear spatial consequences and outcomes but do not articulate such characteristics explicitly.

Despite specific projects not being identified within the Assisted Area Map there could still be spatial implications such as interrelations with investments in infrastructure, enterprise zones, broadband and core cities initiatives. These types of policies across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will have interactions which would be more fully understood if the policies could be found in one map.

For Further Information

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footnotes

¹ *A Map for England: Spatial Expression of Government Policies and Programmes*, Centre for Urban Policy Studies, The University of Manchester for the Royal Town Planning Institute, March 2012, Available at: http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/research/cups/map_for_england_final_report.pdf