

Please reply to:

BCS Administration, 15 The Crescent, Stanley Common, Ilkeston, Derby. DE7 6GL



## Consultation on Policy options for Geographic information from Ordnance Survey, Department for Communities and Local Government

### Response from the British Cartographic Society

The objective of the British Cartographic Society (BCS) is to promote the art and science of cartography. It has a broad membership involved in all aspects of cartography and the geographic information industry. Membership includes individuals from the government and commercial organisations such as Ordnance Survey, ICG (MOD), Harper Collins and The GeoInformation Group as well as small cartographic houses, independent home workers, academic institutions, and map libraries. It represents British cartographers internationally through the International Cartographic Association (ICA).

We welcome the opportunity to submit a response to the far-reaching proposals. Our aim is to provide a brief summary of what we believe to be the benefits to be gained and also issues of concern. The response is submitted by the Council of the BCS on behalf of its members. It incorporates views expressed by Council members and members of the Society. Because of the broad nature of the BCS membership, it cannot incorporate all members' views, which are often contradictory.

In general, the BCS wish to retain the UK's ongoing dynamic mapping industry and to enhance the UK's existing position as a world leader in the creation and collection of geographic data and production of high quality mapping. To achieve this it is important for the UK to have a robust Ordnance Survey, which is properly funded to create and maintain the quality UK map bases that we have today. Protecting the quality of this mapping must be the primary objective.

There are significant issues with the way Ordnance Survey operate, which have concerned British cartographers for many years. In particular:

- The vital importance of maintaining national datasets and map series to the extremely high quality provided by OS at present
- The question of OS claiming IPR on products derived from OS maps and data
- The complicated, expensive, inflexible and often inconsistently applied licensing arrangements for the use of OS data and maps
- OS competing with commercial GI and cartographic companies on unequal terms
- The requirement for central and local government departments and agencies to pay for the use of OS maps and data when this has already been created at tax-payers expense (whether directly through income tax, or by Council tax, utility bills, property registration, etc)
- The importance of maintaining an archive of maps and data to record changes in the British landscape over time

Whilst the proposals address some of these issues, others are not given the prominence we believe they deserve, and generally feel that the proposed Options 2 and 3 are both steps too far, too quickly – unnecessarily drastic changes to address the key issues that exist today, which could be dealt with in simpler, less far-reaching ways.

We understand the need to increased data sharing across government and increased business transparency, but feel these could be achieved in other ways, whether the whole structure and ethos of OS is changed or not.

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### Quality and extent of data

The question of data quality and coverage is the most critical issue, and is not emphasised sufficiently within the proposals. The current high quality of OS data and products must not be jeopardised in any way. This applies to all scales of OS data. There is a continuing need for consistently maintained national coverage of datasets and map series. It is not clear from the proposals just how these vital aspects will be safeguarded. Whatever changes do happen, it is critical that government fund the requirement for GI and maps where commercial return is limited to ensure quality, currency and extent of data and national map series are retained. Whether this is fully funded by government or by some (at least partly) commercial model isn't too crucial as long as long-term maintenance is assured.

Any commercialisation of particularly large-scale data, or any move towards privatisation of OS, would increase the risk of decreased data quality, inconsistency of data, duplication of effort and a geographically piecemeal approach to data maintenance and availability.

### Free data

The provision of selected mid-scale and small-scale data free is largely to be welcomed and will benefit the industry in many ways. However, the consultation does not make a clear enough distinction between data that can be directly used as a 'finished map', such as 1:10,000 and smaller scale raster products, and data, generally vector, which requires further input to generate a useable end product. This distinction between what are referred to briefly as 'digital display' and 'digital reference' products is critical to the impact on the cartographic industry.

While the availability of free data will benefit many of those currently licensing OS data for their own use in generating map products, it will be potentially devastating for producers of geographic data at comparable scales/resolutions – and it should be remembered that OS are **not** the only providers of such data, a fact which seems to be largely overlooked in the document.

Those currently using OS data under licence to generate their own products will be under threat from any OS data provided free which is in finished map (digital display) form, such as 1:25,000 and 1:50,000 raster data. Existing and potential customers may well compromise on their requirements and opt to use the free product directly, rather than a customised product more suited to their (and end users') needs. An alternative would be to only make vector data available for free, with any 'finished products' continuing to be made available under licence. Consideration could be given to free release of certain raster layers, or much simplified backdrop mapping.

A critical point here is the release of OS Street View. Clearly from a web and location based services provider point of view this is a highly desirable product for providing a map background in mash-ups and no doubt would stimulate new products, but would severely undermine several businesses (large and small) that current produce street/town maps.

The range of 'digital reference' products proposed to be free is sensible, although we would encourage the inclusion of 1:10,000 vector data (OS VectorMap Local) which could be a critical scale for encouraging innovation in applications and which naturally ties in with proposed free products such as Boundary\_Line and Code\_Point.

The challenge will then be for cartographers to add value to the OS data and apply their creative skills in generating products which will stand against the free offer. Some will obviously be better placed to do this than others. Indeed many cartographic companies have been applying such creativity and innovation for many years. It is not clear how innovation will be increased by a move to 'free' in this respect.

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The short-fall in revenues will need to be met from somewhere, for example by developing new licensing structures (see IPR and licensing below) which would see some revenues returned to the OS. Without this form of proviso the maintenance programme for the data (above) would be at risk.

### IPR and licensing

This is a critical issue, and the situation whereby OS claim IPR in products derived from OS base data must be changed. Even if no other changes were made, this would open the market to new innovative uses both under existing OS licence terms and through new third party products with no OS claims of IPR.

The GI industry is not the only area of business facing challenges on IPR, licensing, etc in the light of technological changes. Providing data free is not necessary to meet the current challenges. More innovative, creative and flexible licensing models could achieve similar results in increasing GI business and innovation.

### Government uses of OS data

Use of OS data at all scales by central and local government agencies should be free in order to ensure all government data is on a consistent geographical framework. The Government should directly fund any resultant short-fall in revenues. This should be in direct contrast to commercial uses of large-scale data which should generate revenues for OS at commercial rates. More flexible and creative licensing terms should be introduced to ensure most efficient and effective use of OS data throughout the private sector. There is no problem with different terms applying to government and commercial uses.

### Printed map series

It is not clear what the proposals for the future of our national map series are. There is a continuing need for such series, although these could be produced either by OS or commercial companies, as long as there is an obligation to maintain these **nationally** and provision in place for government to subsidise uneconomic areas of the country to ensure national consistency and maintenance.

### Archives

Retaining the capability of tracking change through time, on a national basis is very important – the future history of our landscape must be assured. It needs to be made clear where responsibility for this will lie.

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Mick Ashworth and David Forrest  
on behalf of BCS Council and membership

15 March 2010