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Privacy and Transparency.

The UK Government's Transparency Programme and its Implications for Privacy

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A Disclaimer

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The Transparency Agenda

- Citizens' access to information
  - To facilitate understanding of decision-making
  - To hold governments to account
  - To reduce opportunities for corruption
- Dates from ICT and WWW revolutions, late 1990s
- Examples from 1990s
  - Andhra Pradesh (e-government: cf. Naidu, *Plain Speaking*)
  - South Africa (procurement)
  - Mexico (electoral reform)
  - Lithuania (neutral civil service)

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From Medicine to Opportunity

- The agenda moves on (2010)
  - No longer a corrective for poorly functioning systems
  - Now an opportunity to improve government
  - From emerging nations to the rich democracies
- The technology is in place
  - World Wide Web (Web of Linked Documents)
  - Web of Linked Data
  - Massive number-crunching power
  - Democratisation of analysis: mashups/grids
  - Ideology of serendipitous reuse

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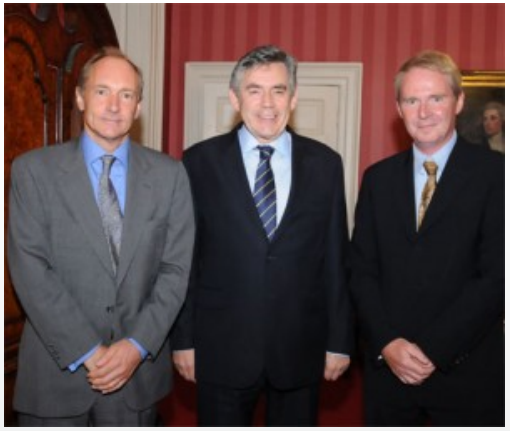
Initial Push Under Gordon Brown

- 2006-8: AKTive PSI (University of Southampton, OPSI, & various stakeholders including Camden & Lewisham councils)
- Summer 2009: Gordon Brown supports creation of data.gov.uk
- September 2009: Beta version goes online
- December 2009: *Putting the Frontline First*
  - "A more informed citizen is a more empowered citizen"
- January 2010: Website launched
- April 2010: Release of OS data



Post-Bureaucratic Age/Big Society

- The theme also appealed to Coalition
- Empowering communities
  - Burke's 'little platoons' go online
  - Entrepreneurial use of information
- Increasing accountability
- Increasing value for money
  - Radicalisation by devolving power
  - Handy in the current economic climate

Aims and Ambitions

- Make government more accountable and approachable
- Create better value for money
- Stimulate growth
- Reform public services
  - Providing choice
  - Opening up public sector contracts
- Ambition: to make the UK the most transparent and accountable government in the world

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The Prime Minister's Commitments (29th May)

- COINS spending data online in June 2010
- New central government ICT contracts online in July, all contracts by Jan 2011
- New items of gov't spending over £25,000 online from Nov 2010
  - Local gov't spending over £500 online from Jan 2011
- Crime data at 'street level' from Jan 2011
- Top civil servants' jobs and pay rates in Jun/Sept 2010
- All done or on course

Public Sector Transparency Board (Jun 2010)

- Francis Maude (chair)
  - Sir Tim Berners-Lee
  - Rufus Pollock
  - Nigel Shadbolt
  - Tom Steinberg
- Support and challenge public bodies in their implementation of the transparency agenda
- Extend the agenda to local gov't and public services
- Establish public data principles

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Public Data Principles (Draft)

- Reusable, machine-readable
- Free reuse, including commercial reuse
- Available through single access point (data.gov.uk)
- Open W3C standards
- Timely and fine-grained
- Quick release
- Encourage reuse, publish inventories

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Work in Progress

- Increases in depth of coverage and breadth of scope
- Promotion of culture change
  - Government
  - Public
- Evaluation
- Change presumptions of access
  - “Why not?”

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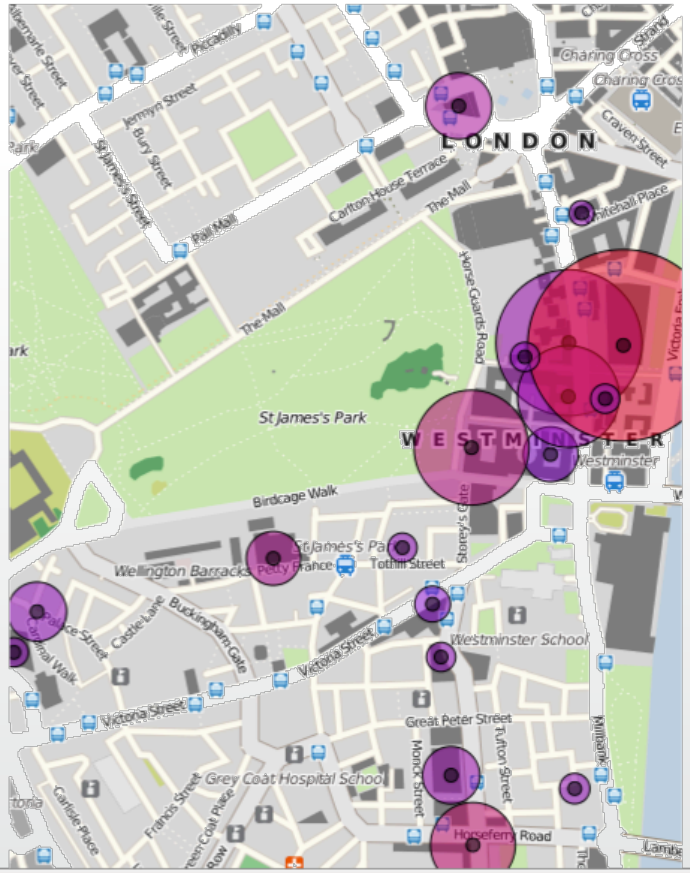
Examples: ASBOrometer

- iPhone app giving stats about anti-social behaviour
- #1 free app in iTunes app store

Examples: Govspark

Map

The map below contains coloured circles representing the energy consumption of each building. The radius of the circle is proportional to the energy consumed per full time equivalent employee. The colour of the circle relates to the energy consumed per square foot of gross floor area. The redder the circle, the more energy consumed.



- Measures gov't departments' carbon footprints
- Created by Isabell Long, age 16

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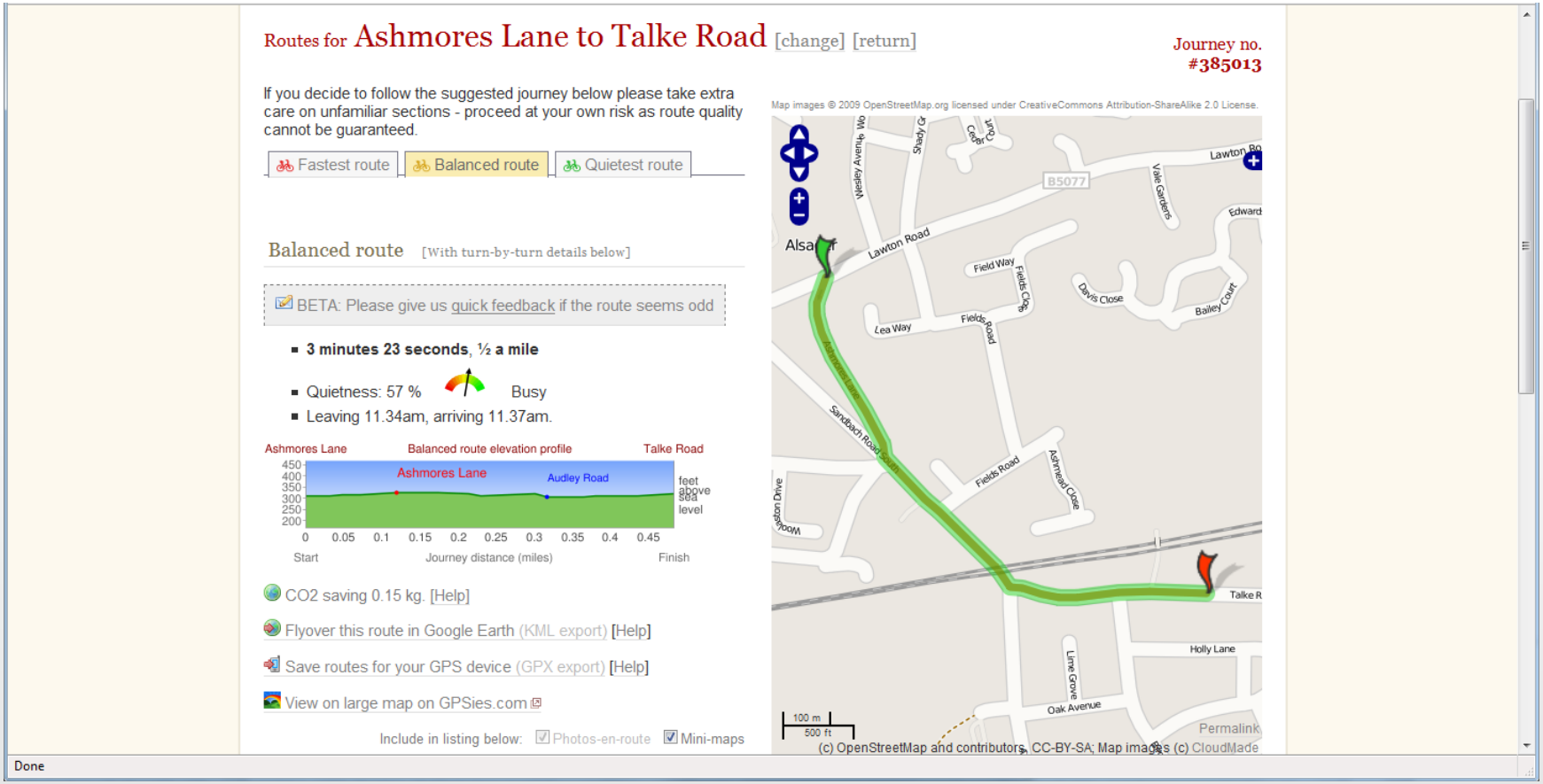
Examples: CycleStreets

- Helps plan a cycle journey



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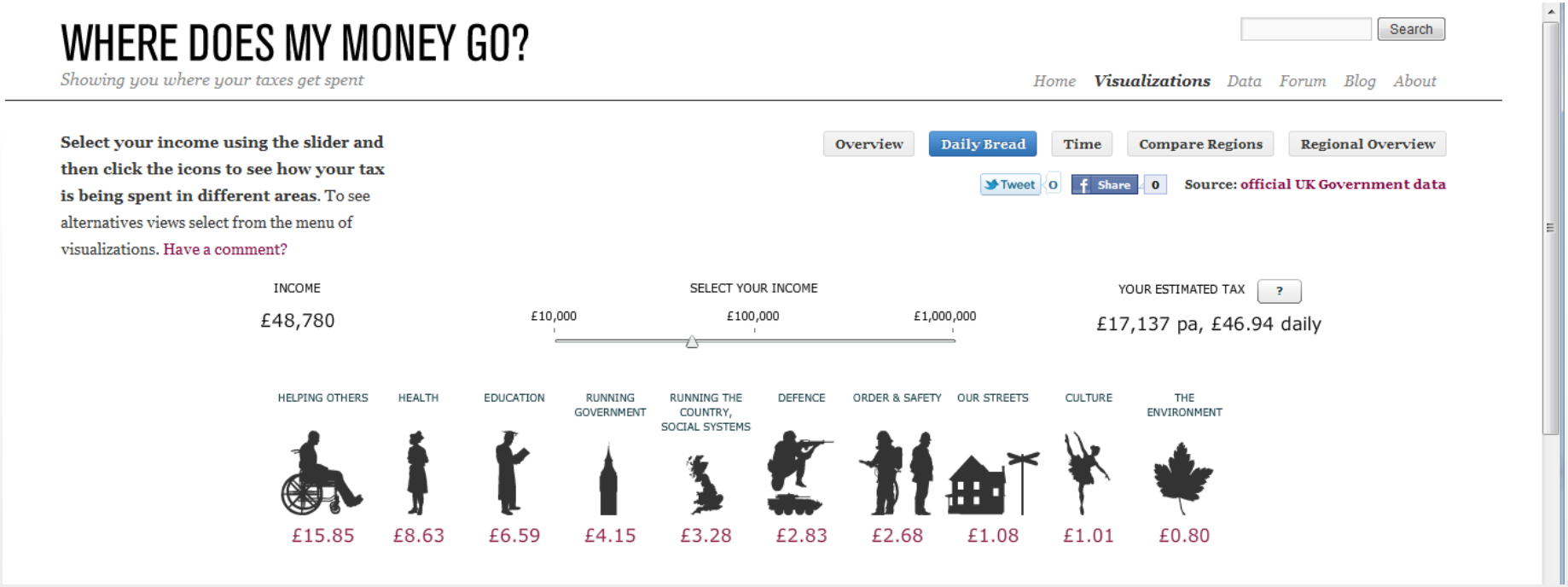
Examples: Where Does My Money Go?



- Visualises information about public spending

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Transparency

- Yet there is an apparent contradiction

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Transparency v Privacy

- If the gov't is transparent then it must release data
- What about data relating to me?
- If the data is released on the WWW, then where is my privacy?
- What is privacy here?
  - Data is held by gov't
  - No individual control
  - Trust in gov't to prevent access
- From practical obscurity to anonymity

From This …

To This …

Personal Data (1998 Data Protection Act) Not Included

1. Can a living individual be identified from the data?
2. Does the data relate to the individual? (*)
3. Is it obviously about that individual? (*)
4. Is it linked to that individual? (*)
5. Is it to be used to inform actions affecting that individual? (*)
6. Does it have biographical significance in relation to that individual? (*)
7. Does it focus on the individual as its central theme? (*)
8. Does it have the potential to impact on that individual? (*)

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Issues: Triangulation

- Cf. Mosaic (Experian)

Issues: Information Without Identification

Issues: Consent

- Is this something we have tacitly agreed to?
  - Did we consent to practical obscurity?
- How far can one balance the public good against private preference?
- Is it feasible to allow withdrawal?
  - Cost
  - Crippling transparency programme
- Evaluation
  - Quality
  - Coverage

Summary

- Transparency
  - A good
  - An opportunity
- Privacy
  - Too much or too little could equally wreck the programme
- What are the limits of legitimacy?
- What weapons are there?
  - Redaction
  - Aggregation
  - Consent

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