



Image: GeoConnexion

# Location, location, location

James Nolan shows how careful use of GIS in the commercial property sector can bring to life data sets that would otherwise remain buried in ledgers and spreadsheets

With so much business data now geographically related, its collection, collation and analysis is essential to decision-making, not least for commercial property investment and retail expansion purposes. The effective combination and display of disparate data sets, which are both highly sensitive and commercially valuable in a geographical context, is more important than ever.

The variety of tasks involved in location planning requires an agile GIS resource. Measuring change over time at a given location can determine what will happen in the future. Demographic differences, changes in residential and workplace populations and traffic activity can all vary at any given location. Supermarkets, coffee shops and mobile phone operators already apply GIS to support new developments and to safeguard future business profitability.

## It's about time

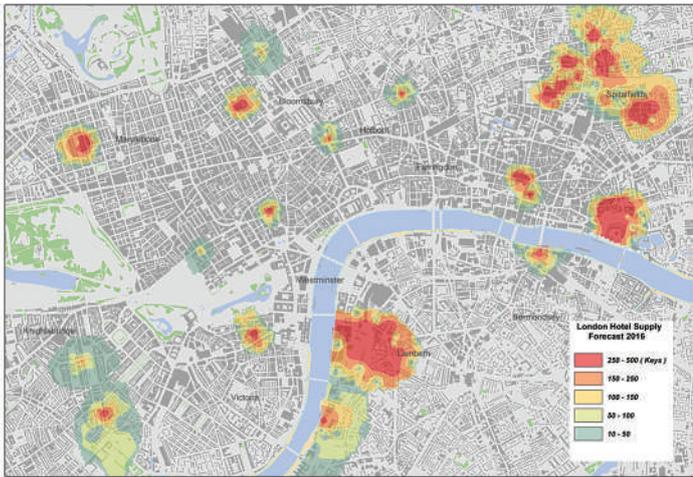
Desktop GIS software is used with travel time software and a wide variety of spatial data to get a complete picture of small bespoke geographical catchment areas. The development of on-line subscription software makes it possible to create drive times and walk

times in countries across the globe. The results are used in property valuation reports and in marketing brochures.

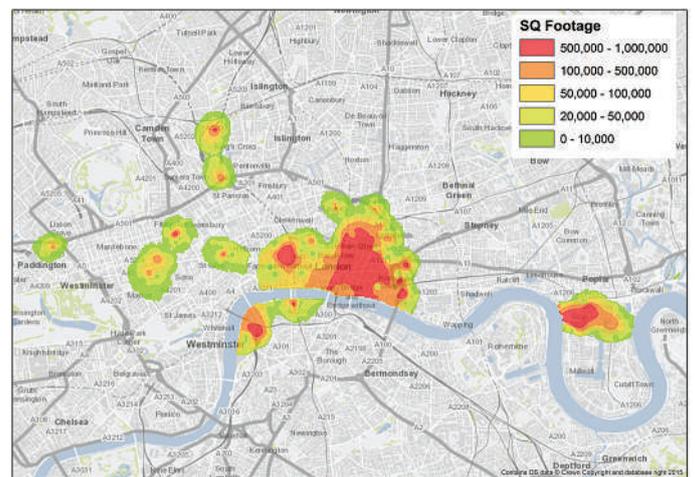
Mapping the results from a travel matrix and straight line distances allows the interaction of people and places to be explained. These methods have been applied to the office occupier markets in the City of London and in new mixed-use developments across the metropolitan area. Regional out-of-town retail developments and shopping centres in the UK and in continental Europe are major beneficiaries of the location planning process; all their reports contain some GIS-derived data and mapping outputs.

## Hot Property

Unlocking the value of sensitive location data is a commercial speciality of GIS as it is able to convert lists into surfaces – commonly known as heat mapping. This shows the data in its geographical context. The examples shown overleaf depict hotel rooms and office space opening in the future in central London. Without revealing specific occupier or attribute information, the maps illustrate structural change in the local markets. The rewards for this knowledge can be gained by investors



Map showing pipeline information for hotel development in central London



Floor space expansion across prime office markets in London

in the hotel and office property sectors and operators of restaurants and coffee shops - which naturally co-exist - before demand and costs rise.

A simpler approach is to plot, say, a current retail store estate as the start point for location planning. A staged approach to expanding that estate, based on specific rules - drawn from operator knowledge, business-explicit data and market data stored in a GIS - produces a targeted location list. The approach allows unstructured lists to be ordered by magnitude and de-risked sites to be found at the desktop. Available retail

units can also be identified before a site visit - saving time and money - and ensuring that the most profitable locations are found.

A list of locations will be part of a final output of the GIS location planning process; it will be targeted, ranked, and measurable and, when plotted, placed in its true environment - on a map.

**James Nolan is Senior Geospatial Analyst with central London-based Knight Frank ([www.knightfrank.co.uk](http://www.knightfrank.co.uk)), one of the world's leading residential and commercial real estate agents**



Using GIS, available retail units can be identified before a site visit - saving time and money - and ensuring that the most profitable locations are found.  
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