Postcode Sector Boundary File Data

The Postcode Sector Boundary file is a geographic polygon file which denotes the extent of Postcode Sectors, Districts and Areas in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). This file requires the use of a Geographic Information System (GIS) such as MapInfo, Arcview or Google Maps to view the boundaries.

Postcode Sector

A Postcode Sector is everything bar the last two letters of the Postcode (e.g. UB7 0 from UB7 0EB). There are over 9,000 Postcode Sectors covering the UK - Sectors are used for more local and detailed mapping and analysis.

Postcode District

A Postcode District is the first half of the Postcode (e.g. UB7 from UB7 0EB). There are approximately 2,800 Postcode Districts covering the UK - Districts are often used for sales territory and franchise area applications.

Postcode Area

A Postcode Area is the first 1 or 2 letters of the Postcode (e.g. UB from UB7 0EB). There are 124 Postcode Areas covering the UK from AB to ZE. Postcode Areas are ideal for general national mapping and analysis.

Boundary Creation

The boundaries for the Postcode Sectors, Districts and Areas have been derived from the latest Ordnance Survey Code-Point® Open data which provides a grid reference for every Postcode in Great Britain and Postzon which provides a grid reference for all Postcodes in Northern Ireland.

In order to create the boundaries, we identify only the Postcodes with the most accurate grid reference allocated by Ordnance Survey and omit Postcodes classified as large users (including PO Boxes) which are associated with individual buildings rather than collections of addresses and therefore geographic areas.

From this set of data, boundaries are created and merged to create the higher levels of Postcode Sectors, Districts and Areas. This polygon file is therefore accurate to the latest Royal Mail Postcode information and the most accurate Postcode location information possible.

Boundary Accuracy

The boundaries have been created from the most accurate Ordnance Survey location data which have a Positional Quality Indicator indicating that the contributing grid references are "Within the building of the matched address closest to the postcode mean determined automatically by Ordnance Survey. "

The result is a set of boundaries that will fall correctly between the contributing Postcode locations but it should be noted that as these boundaries are created programmatically they will not accurately follow natural or man-made bounding features such as river, canals or road networks. An example of the accuracy of the data is shown in the images below.
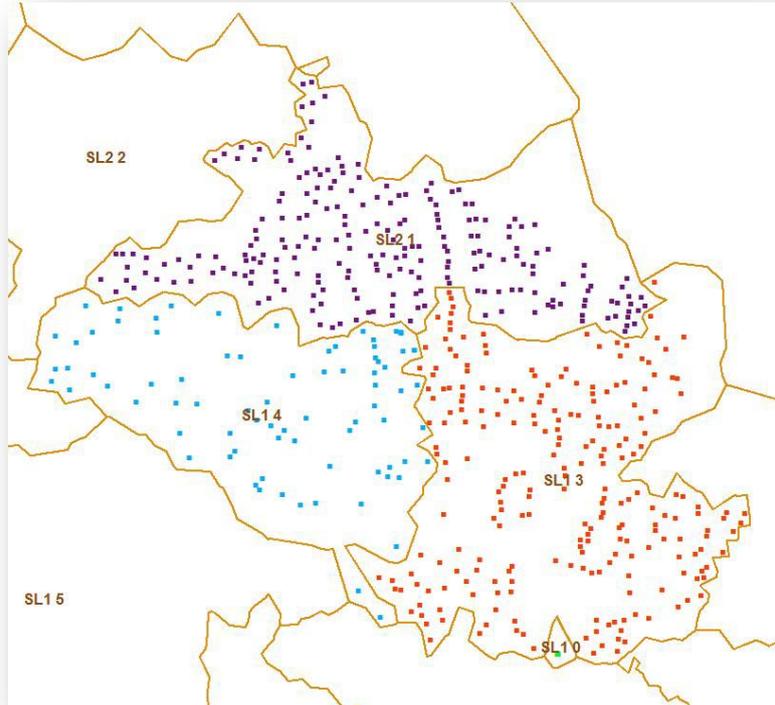
Fig 1: Code-Point® Postcode locations coloured according to their Postcode Sector and the corresponding Postcode Sector boundaries. Note that all Code-Point® Postcode locations are contained within their corresponding Postcode Sector polygon.
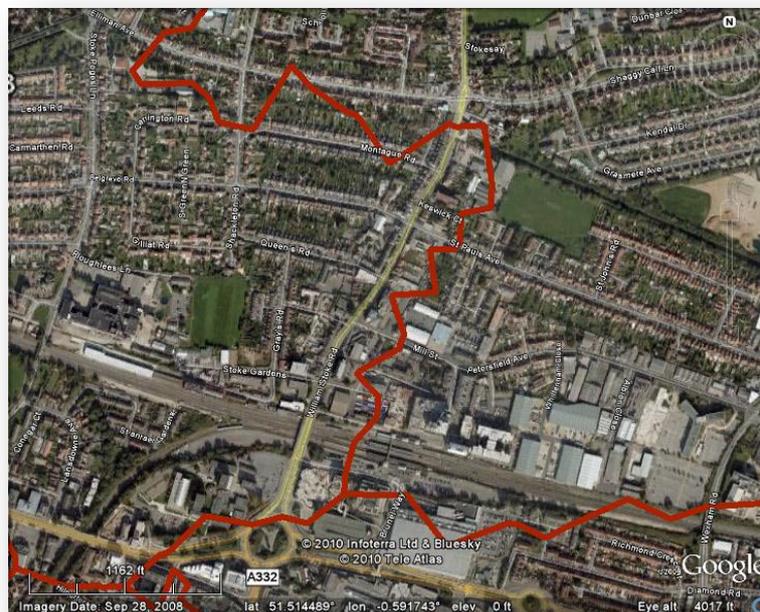
Fig 2: Postcode Sector boundary in red overlaid on aerial photography in Google Earth. Note how the boundary follows the road but does not trace it exactly. In this case the boundary is offset from the road centreline by approximately 100 metres.

Boundary Coastline

A generalised Ordnance Survey 1:250,000 Strategi coastline has been used as the bounding area for these polygons as this is deemed to be most appropriate for the dataset and helps ensure files are kept to a manageable size. A royalty-free coastline has been used to define the extent of Ireland (including Northern Ireland and EIRE).

Islands and Split Polygons

The Postcode boundary file does contain islands and split polygons which are created as a result of the generation processes used. Whilst these may not be ideal visually, the islands are geographically correct in ensuring that each Postcode location is within its corresponding Postcode Sector polygon.

Also as all Postcodes used are of the highest Ordnance Survey positional quality we have left the island polygons intact.
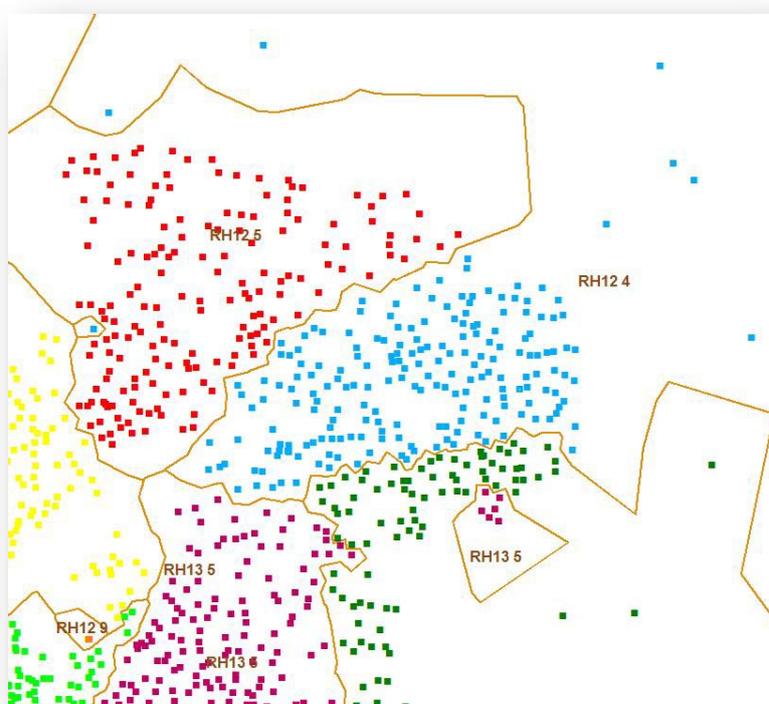

Fig 3: Code-Point® Postcode Locations colours by Postcode Sector and the corresponding Postcode Sector boundaries. Note the blue isolated Postcode to the left which is part of RH12 4 – this Postcode causes a Sector island to be created in the Postcode polygon set. Similarly An island is created in the purple set of Postcodes for RH13 5.

Data Formats

The polygon files are available in MapInfo Interchange, ESRI Shapefile, DXF and kmz formats for use in most GIS systems.