Case Study
Open data: North Somerset customer information portal and historic tourism data

Introduction
North Somerset is situated within a picturesque part of the South West of England. Tourism is an increasingly important contributor to the local economy and this case study highlights how open data is enhancing the visitor experience to the area. In addition it will briefly outline how wider open data publishing has enabled the tourist website (http://discovernorthsomerset.co.uk/) to be developed.

Specifically the case study explains how North Somerset uses data to:

- Encourage visitors to the area, boosting the local economy and tourism profile
- Engage with groups to promote/encourage community self-sufficiency
- Centralise corporate information about events, history, heritage and leisure
- Interact with local developers to promote open data and support creation of innovative products

Further detail about the key aims of the open data projects can be found in the North Somerset evaluation reports:
Customer information portal and dashboards
Providing open access to multi-media and historic tourism data

In the beginning
The council wanted to improve public availability and access to relevant and timely data and there was widespread enthusiasm and buy-in for this project amongst senior members and officers.

Staff from the Business Intelligence team already had experience of managing corporate datasets and were tasked to develop the use of open data. A data architecture was designed and implemented, with automated tasks moving the data from back office systems to publication as open data wherever possible.

The council are using the Datashare platform (http://data.n-somerset.gov.uk/) which allows information to be published in an “open format” making it reusable and therefore fully accessible.

Local developers can now use the data in their applications and web site designs for community benefit. Additionally looking at benefits for the council itself, releasing and publishing data presented an opportunity to increase self-service to residents and reduce the volume of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests received.
Access to multi-media and tourism data

At the same time the council was reviewing their tourism offer more broadly. There was widespread support at a senior (officer and member) level within the council for developing innovative and sustainable ways of attracting interest in the area and increasing visitor numbers.

The local area was already a popular tourist destination, with seaside towns such as Weston-super-Mare and Clevedon. The council recognised that they could make a wealth of data available via the Datashare platform which could in turn be utilised and published without copyright restrictions to create a website that would promote tourist areas of interest. This would expand the tourist offer and hopefully drive up visitor numbers and length of visits, provide a more varied offering for visitors and potentially help to support local business and generate income to the area.

Description

In order to make the tourism data as ‘alive’ and user friendly as possible a website and data structure was developed by Ergo Digital. Council staff including members of the economic development, environment and business intelligence teams established where relevant data was held, listed this and (putting themselves in the position of tourists to the area), agreed the most relevant and interesting data to feature on the site.

Staff also engaged with local libraries and the community to capture more detail about the local information and historic images they held. Adding further content to the metadata and using standard schemas made the data more usable for a wide range of purposes. For example developers used geographic location information and data about nearby public transport links in itinerary planning apps.
Benefits

Opening up tourist information on a website has allowed engagement with local developers and external groups and challenged them to expand and improve upon the information the website offers.

The website was launched at the same time as the Banksy Dismaland exhibition which was already generating additional interest in the area. The site experienced a high level of traffic and many other attractions were viewed on the site as well as Dismaland, suggesting that users extended their visits and explored the area more widely using information from the site, ultimately supporting the local economy.

A council officer explains “we know that the Banksy exhibition generated up to £20 million for the local economy. Much of this additional income was generated from spend outside the Dismaland exhibition and by creating a new visitor website that increased awareness of the other attractions and points of interest in the area, we encouraged people to explore more of what the area has to offer and extend their stay.”

The tourism website also features local events which allows users from the local community to see in one central location where things local to them are taking place.

Challenges/issues

Although the project attracted senior level buy in, there was limited capacity for officers to take on the project meaning that priorities had to be adjusted and at times resources were very limited. However, staff remained keen and engaged throughout which helped move the project forward to a successful conclusion.

The council is currently monitoring usage of the open data portal and the Discover North Somerset website and are keen to gather further information on other less tangible benefits. This includes ongoing engagement with local developers, the wider community and tourist groups.

Creating insight and engagement

Providing open access to multi-media historic and tourism data has led to positive and wide ranging benefits for both tourists and local citizens in relation to community engagement.

Libraries have been heavily involved with the tourism and heritage project and have been keen to help promote the local offer. An existing resource of varied local historical images (which were used in a recent project creating reminiscence e books for local people with dementia) were made available. These were geotagged and displayed as an image library on the Discover North Somerset website for others to find and easily map to a location.
Individuals in the community have also contributed to the project with their own photos and in return have been shown how to scan, access and view them developing their knowledge of digital technology. Local groups have been encouraging people to capture their own images as part of the project. In this way there has been innovative interaction with groups of residents who may otherwise have been overlooked in terms of digital engagement and many images have been added to the site by the community which were previously not publicly available.

The council promoted the site at their annual tourism conference which local businesses attend so that they were involved and informed. They also have a business development website and forum which was used to alert companies about progress with the tourism offer. Officers have engaged with a group of local developers to help publicise and assist with their digital strategy and ran a hack day for the North Somerset developer community. Some participants have been working to help support local groups and the council are publicising and promoting this work.

Since the hack day the Council have developed linkages with attendees and local educational establishments in order to promote and develop the open data community.

One local developer is currently looking to create a treasure hunt app using the historic images from the site. This challenges users to visit various places of interest unlocking clues as they do so, leading users all around the local area.

Engagement has also been made with the local college. Local developers and council representatives have talked to the students about the role of the council and put this in the context of using open data. The students have been encouraged to develop apps or other innovative ideas using open data, and two are currently developing solutions as part of their end of year projects.

**Useful advice**

When considering the development of a similar approach to that used in North Somerset, it is worth remembering that:

- creating buy-in from across the authority and CEO is of key importance and this project was particularly successful due to high level senior buy in at the start
- publishing data that are relevant and important to your authority and are answering a need or filling a gap are most useful

**For more information, visit:**

1. Discover North Somerset website: [http://discovernorthyorkshire.co.uk/](http://discovernorthyorkshire.co.uk/)

For more information about the North Somerset open data project contact: [david.burdge@n-somerset.gov.uk](mailto:david.burdge@n-somerset.gov.uk)