

Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects 2014/15 Evaluation Report



PROJECT TITLE:	Providing open access to multi-media historic and tourism data
LEAD ORGANISATION:	North Somerset Council
SUBMISSION DATE:	22/06/2015
TYPE OF PROJECT:	Data capture/publishing/release/standardisation, usability community development
TOTAL GRANT:	£31,900

PROJECT SUMMARY

To release information about local heritage, tourism and events as open data to encourage residents and visitors alike to explore the area of North Somerset.

The primary strategic objectives of the project were:

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

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Whilst North Somerset Council officers had a wealth of information about tourism and heritage, much of this information was dispersed across corporate systems in paper or other non-digital formats. There was also the ever present challenge of limited budget with which to collate and digitise the necessary information.

With these challenges in mind, it was agreed to adopt an open data management approach and release as much information as open data as possible. Open data would give unrestricted access to software developers and members of the public alike, enabling websites and apps to be created with minimal capital investment cost from the council, whilst helping to grow connections with the local technical community.

The project sought to deliver the following elements:

1. Identify the key datasets that should (and could) be published with standardised schemas that could be adopted by other data publishers
2. Collect and publish local history, tourist and landmark information as open data, implementing a sustainable process and platform to ensure ongoing success
3. Run a hackathon event to encourage local developers to collaborate and establish a local network of specialists

The project has involved officers from GIS, archaeology, conservation, libraries, seafront and events, marketing and communications, development management and ICT. External agencies include local history groups, tourist attractions, event holders and local transport groups.

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APPROACH

1) Data management and schema design

Initial meetings established who owned what data, formats, structures, etc. Research was also undertaken to identify any existing data schemas and datasets already being published as open. During this process, many versions of similar datasets were found across the council. It was decided to create the following datasets as corporate assets:

- attractions and sites (including key tourist attractions and heritage sites)
- events
- event venues (part of the attractions and sites dataset)
- historic images

The review of existing published data schemas returned limited results, but schemas from Bath:Hacked and Leeds Data Mill were partially adopted, with additional advice from the Open Data Institute (ODI). All final published schemas follow the Dublin Core metadata principles where possible to ensure national consistency.



Published schemas can be seen on the North Somerset Council **DataShare** site (<http://data.n-somerset.gov.uk>), <http://data.gov.uk> and at <http://opendata.esd.org.uk>. Data schemas have been developed to be as flexible as possible to accommodate a wide variety of future uses. Additional fields were added following feedback from the hack day to make the data more flexible.

2) Data collection and collation

Once schemas had been developed, data was collected and cleansed into a single, definitive corporate dataset. Datasets have all been linked to a Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN) from the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) wherever possible, meaning all records are accurately geolocated.

The *images* dataset required the most effort to create due to the variety of data sources and formats. A Flickr site (https://flickr.com/photos/discover_north_somerset/) was created to present historic images. Many images have been viewed over 100 times, and this will increase following promotion via the Discover North Somerset website (details below).

A textual inventory for images on the Flickr site was created and published on the North Somerset Council DataShare site (<http://data.n-somerset.gov.uk/View/culture-leisure-and-heritage/images>).

The library service and their volunteer network led the historic image capture from hard copy records. Specialist ICT equipment was procured, and training/support for volunteers provided. By May 2015, over 1000 images (mostly postcards and



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local scenes) had been collected and scanned. Work is continuing, with the intention of capturing and publishing the remaining 15,000 or so local postcards and local images in the future.

Images chosen for publication have been selected to represent a rarely seen 'slice of daily life in history' rather than the often seen iconic images of North Somerset. This has stimulated significant interest from local history groups and societies who have also been submitting their own content to the project.

Library services have engaged with local groups and have been able to provide training and support for over 50 users on mobile devices as a direct result of this project, supporting the national and corporate digital vision.

Some images have been identified as being potentially subject to copyright. These are currently being investigated in partnership with the Somerset Records office. Once resolved, images will be published with any necessary copyright notification. Where copyright issues cannot be resolved, then images will be available in the Local Studies room in Weston-super-Mare library.

3) Hack day to engage with local developers



A hack day (branded as Code North Somerset) encouraged participation from the local developer community to use the open data provided in this project to create original web and app products. The event was a whole day long and was moved from the original planned date to accommodate the general election/student exams.

The day was very successful with a number of benefits including creation of an online meeting forum and initiated a monthly meet up to discuss open data and project progress. A plan to engage with Weston College is also in place that will give monthly, practical hands on lessons of how to work with open data and to build projects through the year, with the intention of finishing with an end of year hack day.

Two of the outstanding ideas proposed on the day - a 'photo treasure hunt' and 'bike share' website - that showed innovative use of the open data each received a share of the prize money. North Somerset Council officers and the developers will be keeping in touch via the discussion group to track development and support through to completion.

The Code North Somerset day was attended by senior managers, including the chief executive officer. The interest in open data and the wider projects continues to grow with the increasing portfolio of information available.

4) Benefits and impact

- Key corporate datasets (events, tourism sites, etc) are now centrally managed. Information is now kept up to date with minimal manual intervention, saving over 30 days of resource annually and reducing potential duplication

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- The events dataset will be used in the forthcoming refresh of the North Somerset Council website, replacing 4 previously published PDF lists of events
- Improved engagement with the developer community including the creation of forum and meeting group.
- Since initial publication of datasets in May, there have been over 300 hits on the DataShare site for this information. This excludes hits via the DataShare API which is being used for Discover North Somerset
- This project has become aligned closely and used within other projects, particularly library led initiatives including the 'reminiscence' project for Alzheimer sufferers and wider digital engagement programme. The reminiscence project had already been initiated before this project, creating a number of 'e-books' containing historic images of a particular area to spark conversation and awareness in dementia sufferers.

Whilst the original e-books were very effective at stimulating conversation, each had to be manually created and compiled based upon a limited set of images. E-books would also have to manually be downloaded onto a tablet device. The publication of the 1000+ images as part of this project means that e-books can now become more dynamic and customisable such as the ability to filter by a chosen location and date.

Work is currently being undertaken to see if a new website/app can be created to realise this vision and it is believed one of the developers engaged in the hack day is looking to turn this into a reality.

- Information has supported a library local history week in May 2015 that encouraged library visitors to view and explore local images and data using the DataShare and Flickr sites. Library services we are able to support and train members of the public how to use and access information on mobile devices, supporting digital engagement
- Another key development as a result of this project is the creation of a new tourism and heritage website. 'Discover North Somerset' website (due for launch in late June) is built almost entirely based on the open data created by this project.



Events, sites, attractions are all read in real time using an API from the DataShare website, and almost all images are accessed from the Flickr website.

The website is built using WordPress. It has been agreed with developers that special widgets to use the DataShare API and schemas developed as part of the site will be made freely available for others to use via GitHub

FURTHER INFORMATION

Open data is available at <http://data.n-somerset.gov.uk> and <http://data.gov.uk>.

Further information can be obtained by contacting Dave Burdge, Corporate Information Manager at North Somerset Council (david.burdge@n-somerset.gov.uk)