

Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects 2014/15 Final Evaluation Report

Project title: Local Sites for Local People

Lead organisation: Greater Manchester Ecology



Unit

Date report is submitted: 24/04/2015

Type of project: Data release

Total grant: £17,295

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Summary

The Local Sites for Local People project facilitated the release of polygon (map) data and metadata in relation to designated Local Wildlife Sites in Greater Manchester (GM). Local sites in GM are generally known as Sites of Biological Importance (SBI).

Polygon (map) data and metadata for SBIs is held and maintained by the shared service, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU). The data was only shared with local councils and was not publicly available. The breakthrough fund grant enabled GMEU to source Geographical Information System (GIS) ownership layers and database information for ownership of all SBIs within Greater Manchester, allowing GMEU to publish open source maps and site information for all 533 local wildlife sites within GM.

GMEU also aimed to source Rights of Way GIS data from 10 district councils to improve the access information to SBIs.

1.2 Opportunities

The aim of the project was to bring the existing SBI data to a wider audience (Planners, the public, land owners/managers and academics), while at the same time, reinterpreting the data into a format that was easier to digest and manipulate. By making the existence of SBI's more widely known and by providing more information in relation to SBI's, it was hoped that the sites in question would be more appreciated and maintained in a more sustainable manner.

2.0 Data published and uses

- Number of bodies consulted – 20 (10 district councils plus United Utilities, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, National Trust, Greater Manchester Waste Authority, Canal and Rivers Trust, Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust, Peel Holdings and the RSPB).
- Number of datasets published – 11 (Public polygon and metadata for each of the 10 district councils in Greater Manchester, plus 10 private land owner datasets given to each of the 10 district planning departments).
- Number of local sites data released - 533
- Volume of data downloads within period – NA

- Datasets downloaded most often – NA
- Number of users within period - NA
- (Broad) type of users (if known) – NA

3.0 Approach to publishing data

3.1 What approach is used to publish data?

3.1.1 Data.gov interface

GMEU's aim was to publish data to data.gov via a Web Mapping (WMS) and Web Features Service (WFS) in compliance with both INSPIRE regulations and GEMINI guidance. WMS & WFS provides a HTTP interface for requesting and downloading georeferenced map images from a server. Tameside Council, who host GMEU, do not currently have a WMS/WFS server and so it was not initially possible to provide a WMS/WFS solution.

The cost of paying a private company to host the data or the time and expertise to set up a WMS/WFS Geoserver was not factored into GMEU's initial funding bid and may not have been possible. However, a complementary infrastructure and data mapping project running at the same time as the GMEU project agreed to host the data. Using Salford Councils WMS/WFS Geoserver, [New Economy Manchester's](#) Infrastructure Mapping project hosted the data.

It was wrongly assumed that www.data.gov.uk would provide the data storage capacity for data sets rather than acting as a service that points users to the data providers own url.

If it is the government's intention to encourage more open data releases in the future, they may have to consider providing more data storage support and facilities, especially for smaller local government departments and non-governmental organisations that will not have the funds or expertise to run WMS/WFS servers.

3.1.2 Alternative publishing outlets

As well as publishing the data via www.data.gov.uk, GMEU have also made the data available via [New Economy Manchester's](#) Infrastructure Mapping project and GMEU's own [Interactive data map and search tool](#). In the first instance, national and local government planners can now compare SBI data with other "Green Infrastructure" data and data sets such as public utilities.

GMEU's interactive data map and search tool allows SBI's to be layered over ecological and biological data and records.

3.2 How data users assess the availability and use of data:

3.2.1 How have users found out about the service?

Because of the current [Pre-election period regulations](#), the release and availability of the data has not been advertised and therefore no data has been accessed in its new format.

3.2.2 How has the authority promoted the publication of the data?

Post-election, site owners and managers will be the main groups to be informed of the data

availability. Promotion will be carried out via direct email/mail contacts, GMEU's website and word of mouth.

3.2.3 Have users found it easy to download datasets and use the datasets?

Again, because of the current [Pre-election period regulations](#), the release and availability of the data has not been advertised and therefore no data has been accessed in its new format.

3.3 Is the contextual information such as metadata provided with the data of use?

Data has been provided with metadata conforming to both INSPIRE regulations and Gemini standards.

3.4 Future monitoring, development and system improvement.

The data is an annual time-series dataset, reviewed and updated through ground truthing site visits. Potential amendments to the access of the dataset will be governed by feedback from end users such as local government planning departments and site managers.

4.0 Benefits and impacts

4.1 What is the impact of publishing the data or providing a service to your organisation and to the data users?

4.1.1 Local and national planning

Local councils currently spend time and resources identifying owners of SBIs in relation to specific land-use planning and other matters. Ownership data collated and released back to local councils will reduce council time and costs spent establishing land ownership in relation to issues such as strategic planning, planning applications, building control infringements and antisocial behaviour (e.g. tipping).

Online, open access to SBI site locations would allow more tailored and efficient requests for biological data in relation to planning applications, better informing applications for development and speeding up the application process.

At a national level, SBI data made available early in the planning stages of large landscape scale strategic projects, such as the HS2 rail link, may result in time and costs savings in relation to considerations made about potentially sensitive sites.

4.1.2 Amenity access

At a social level, the public have been given access to maps and details of over 500 of the best wildlife sites in Greater Manchester. Increased knowledge of local wildlife sites will increase provision for amenity access (walking, cycling, running).

Greater knowledge of and access to "new" local wildlife sites will decrease the pressures placed on current "honey pot" sites and make nature more accessible to a large urban population.

[Recent studies](#)(1) have shown that access to green or recreational space had a link to narrower inequalities in well-being and reduced socioeconomic inequalities.

Better mapping of official public rights of way in relation to local wildlife sites will decrease unauthorised access to sites and reduce land owner conflict with site stakeholders.

4.1.3 Land management

Data released to central government agencies such as Natural England will allow fast, efficient targeted communication on issues such plant bio-security (e.g. ash dieback), native and non-native species monitoring (e.g. Japanese knotweed) and environmental funding opportunities (e.g. Stewardship and English Woodland Grant Scheme). Open access to information on local wildlife sites will aid landscape planning and the creation of coherent ecological networks.

4.1.4 Research

Access to SBI data by universities will allow the overlapping of layers with a whole host of other GIS data. A geographical spread of wildlife site polygon data with associated habitat metadata, across Greater Manchester, could assist with projects such as monitoring climate change indicators or woodland cover in association with flood control.

5.0 References

Richard J. Mitchell, PhD, Elizabeth A. Richardson, PhD, Niamh K. Shortt, PhD, Jamie R. Pearce, PhD. (2015). Neighbourhood Environments and Socioeconomic Inequalities in Mental Well-Being. American Journal of Preventive Medicine. Online

Contact:

The Greater Manchester Ecology Unit
Tameside MBC
Room 5.22 Council Offices, Wellington Road
Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside, OL6 6DL

0161 342 4007

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Author Samuel Bolton, Associate Ecologist,
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For further information about the Local Sites for Local People Project, please contact Samuel Bolton - Greater Manchester Ecology Unit.

Email: samuel.bolton@tameside.gov.uk

Telephone: 0161 342 4007

Website: www.gmwildlife.org.uk