Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects 2014/15
Evaluation Report

Project title: ENABLING LOCAL AUTHORITY ASSETS INFORMATION

Lead organisation:	Derby City Council
Date report is submitted:	24th April 2015
Type of project:	data release, standards, data usability
Total grant:	£52,000
Internal Funding:	£59,000 Derby City Council's Corporate Asset Management Project.

Summary of the project
Situation: Public sector land and building assets is traditionally the second highest item of expenditure for councils. Derby City Council, like other authorities, face increasing budget pressures and is focusing scrutiny on its asset portfolio and their use.

The problem faced is with nature of the assets; ownership is complex and often unclear to non-professionals, making options difficult to assess when purchasing, sharing, or renting public assets. Also, there is the issue about the state of the assets and the amount of investment needed to undertake works to ensure properties are fit-for-purpose. The lack of direct information and limited access to this data makes informed effective and efficient decisions difficult.

Challenge/opportunity:
The Council realised that holding all asset data in a central solution provides various new opportunities. This was primarily about providing access to the dataset to support remote and mobile way of working, but this expanded to developing public access to information using the same methods.

The challenge was to find a simple efficient and effective method that could provide:
1) better public access;
2) existing statutory government returns (i.e. capital accounting, emissions, valuations; sales information; etc.);
3) meet the Local Government Transparency Code 2014;
4) meet the EC INSPIRE directive;
5) while supporting Government's Open Data and UK Digital Economy initiatives, covered by the revised Open Government Licence (OGL3).

Public Access
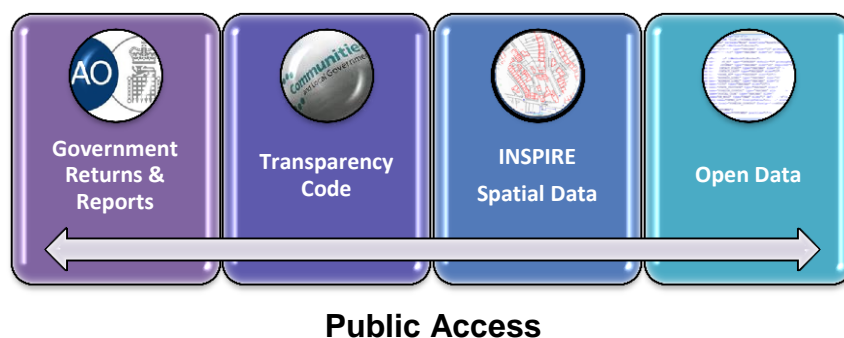
Derby City Council wants to be more transparent and provide data to the public, and existing and future tenants. Clarity of ownership and tenure is often a problem due to its complex nature. There are frequent enquiries from internal and external, 100 per week, business areas on tenure rights and ownership boundaries. Most enquiries still use high-cost channels, such as face-to-face, telephone, or email. A move to a self-service channel that is available 24/7 could help reduce enquiry costs, improve access, and prevent costly maintenance and legal errors.

The Council already produces lists of assets for statutory reporting and accountancy purposes; therefore a move to publishing data more openly should not face too many barriers. In addition, it is recognised that making better use of the data should help with the disposal of unwanted and inefficient assets,

which could make a serious impact the financial issues faced. Likewise, wider access can inform others to prevent costly mistakes.

There have been a number of national and regional initiatives to improve access to asset information. The main initiative has been electronic Property Information Management system (ePIMs) that is focused on the letting and sales of surplus central government assets and not on full ownership lists. However, there is an opportunity to link ePIMs to this new local authority asset data stream to increase its value.

Data published and uses:
Four focus groups were formed
o   Internal Strategic Property Managers
o   Suppliers Users Group (ELF Solutions, Real Asset Management, KEL, and SystemsLink)
o   Strategic Partners for linked data definitions (Land Registry, Valuation Office, Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, DCLG and Dept. Energy and Climate Change).
o   Technical Group ((the ODI, Horizons - Nottingham University, Southampton University, and LGA).

The number of land and building asset dataset users within period 02/02/2015 to 14/05/2015:

Views	Visits	Resource downloads
327	30	69

Data.gov.uk statistics

Type of users
•   Property business sector; which have shown interest in this datasets, especially on disposals and lease opportunities,
•   Community group; looking at providing voluntary / community services. (leisure and education – free schools)
•   Small Medium Enterprise businesses; looking for new premises or to expand existing premises using public sector assets

Derby City Council data downloads: data.gov.uk

■ Views ■ Visits ■ Resource downloads
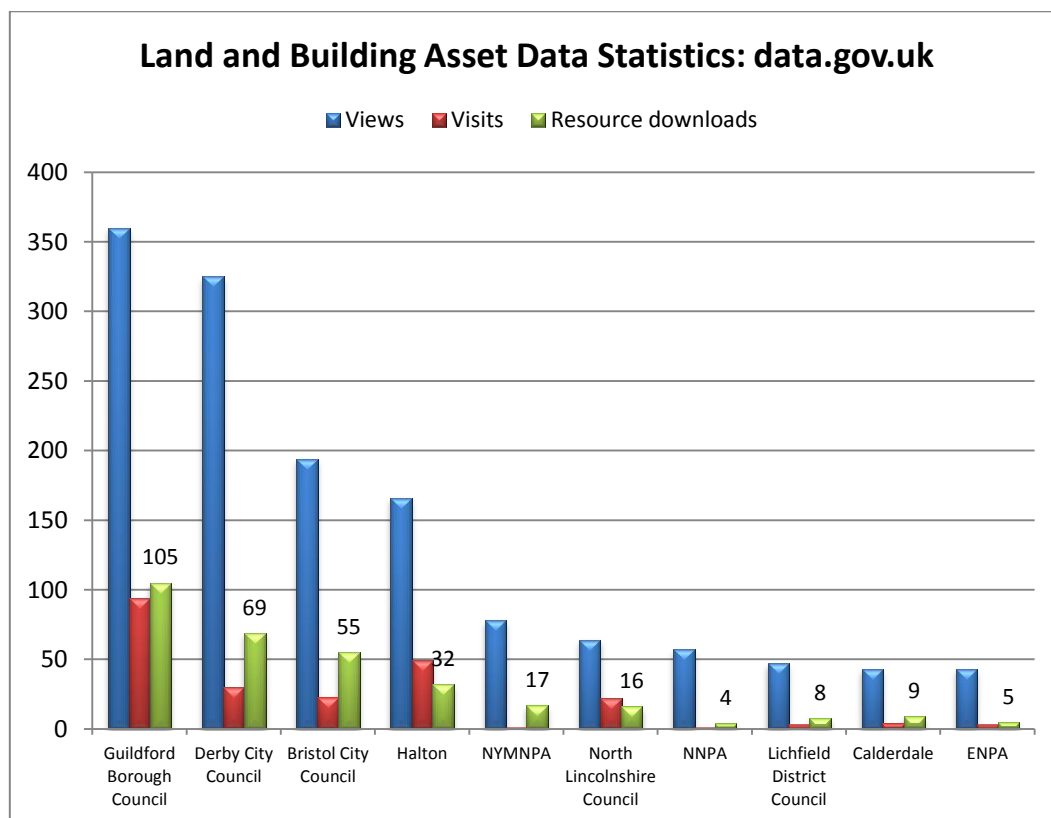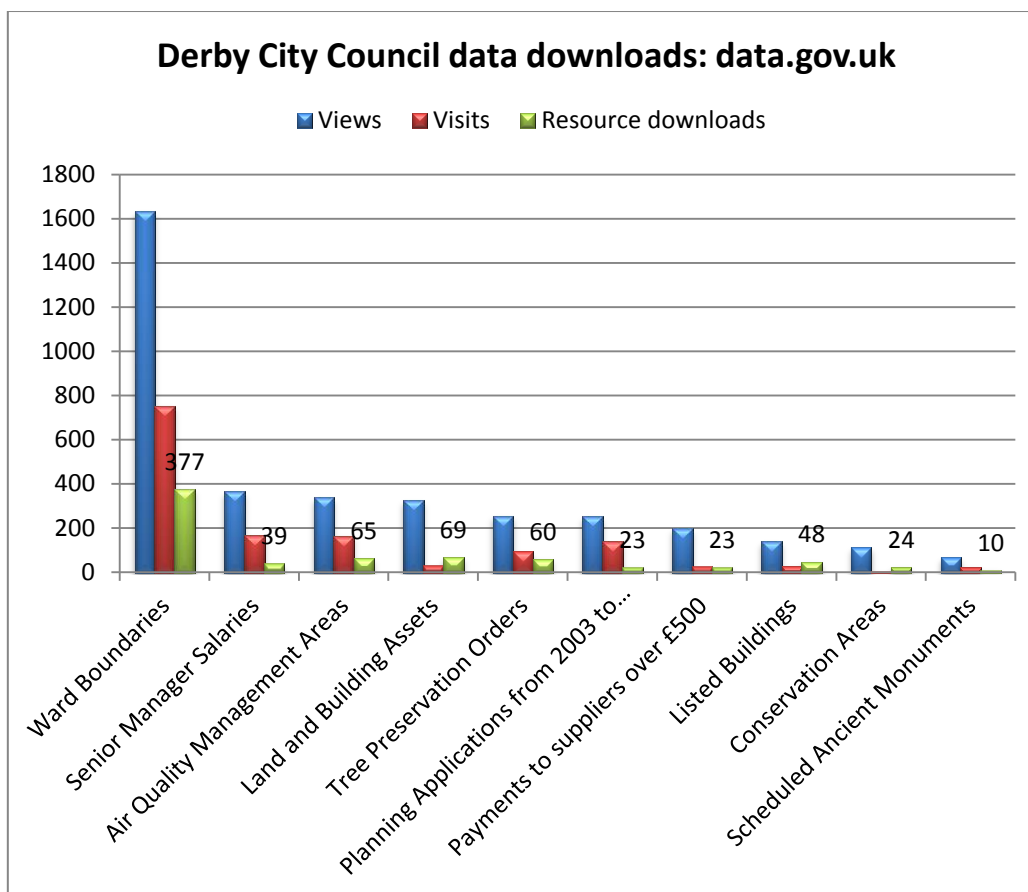
Approach to publishing data

- Derby City Council did not have a core solution to hold the source data as one. Therefore, two routes to publication were originally used: 1) attribute data as a Comma Separated Variable (CSV) file that meets the Transparency Code and Open Data standards; 2) spatial data as a Web Map Service (WMS) to meet INSPIRE and PSMA requirements.

- However, the project discovered, with feedback from industry professionals, that a single option could be provided for both routes and this was already used in the USA public sector (Massachusetts) using Web Feature Service (WFS). This streamed the geographic objects and attribute data in to the web. Also, it was discovered that a WFS stream could provide various output formats, including the CSV and PDF formats required for Transparency and Open Data.

- A review of datasets published on data.gov.uk for the Transparency Code revealed most local authorities did already produce a WMS for asset data. Other feedback revealed most GIS suppliers that provided a WMS did offer WFS too.

- Therefore a single approach began to be developed using WFS as the main streaming service.

Access to data

- Access to the data is through in two web services, although linked back to data.gov.uk as the single reference point.
  - Maps.data.gov.uk for the direct mapping services.
  - Info4derby.derby.gov.uk for the data and visualisation services.
- Other open data portals were tested for interoperability and functionality e.g. cartodb and Socrata.
- However, the web services could provide all the functionality required, or hold data and Metadata required to meet all standards.

Data Discovery

- Use of Metadata and registration of ODI certificates has placed links to the data at the top on most search engines using 'derby land and building assets'.
- A focus group was held with property and asset professional about the use and need for this dataset. However, it was clear that few understood open data and how to find it or use it. Nevertheless they

did see its potential if the data included information critical to their business needs e.g. 'for sale', 'to let'

- The contextual information such as metadata provided with the dataset is critical to the project. It was realised early on that estates terminology was complex and had many legal connotations. For example, defining what Gross Internal Area (GIA) or Leasehold is. These are essential for end users to understand the data and to opening it up for non-professionals.
- The Council undertook a soft launch approach. The quality of the data, the links to spatial data, and understanding of open data were of concern, so limited the exposure to publicity.
- Data links are to be made available through the existing Council website, following its own transformation.
- The Council is still learning about the open data and its potential audience, and are still planning to engage with users directly on data.

Business as usual
- The approach taken was to ensure long-term commitment and sustainability of the dataset. Using existing core solutions to stream the dataset to data.gov.uk ensures robust and sustainable service.
- Monitoring of use is done at national (data.gov.uk) and local levels. Also, both offer feedback loops and support.
- The dataset will now support FOI requests and strategic property discussions.

Benefits and impact

The Council has:
- o been able to publish the dataset with only generating a small increase in use of resources to manage and monitor this service;
- o the opportunity to shift high-cost enquires to a self-service model;
- o doubled up skills and knowledge with existing roles;
- o provided a robust platform, with no additional software or overheads;
- o published its asset data from the same source and provided various output formats;
- o included a number of visualisation service to help users understand and explorer the dataset;
- o published a direct stream of data from source, providing a real-time and up-to-date information.

The Citizens / Users will get:
- o better transparency on public sector asset information;
- o access to data anytime they want, 24/7 access to up-to-date data;
- o robust and comprehensive data that is compliant to standards with reference links and metadata;
- o data that helps them answer their queries, enriched data with feedback loops for future development;
- o access to the data the way they want, with options on output for spatial and attribute data supported by visualisation tools.

Results are too early for robust evidence, but 325 views and 69 downloads within 3 months is encouraging.

Feedback from the business sector did reveal a genuine interest for public sector asset management data, especially with national coverage. The approach, tools, and licensing is in place. A collective data stream from all authorities could enable the development of a national application programming interface (API) service linked or merged with ePIMs. Companies already using this approach to public sector open data are making considerable impacts and income (e.g. Transport API). Furthermore, they have enabled wider opportunities for others to develop interfaces to specific customer needs and supporting the UK Digital Economy.

Furthermore, the public sector should look forwards to develop a future model that builds on current learning and exemplars for open data. For example, the publication of asset data at Southampton University that has transferred its dataset in to the web, the Internet of Things (IoT), making it highly interoperable and enabling many digital opportunities. This has made their assets a core definite public

catalogue, which has created value by providing the backbone to other datasets. A similar approach would enable high quality open data at source and could create efficiencies; removing the need for databases, complicated routes and processes to publication. Furthermore, this would support wider innovations, such as building information modelling (BIM), energy management solutions, and the opportunity to modernise services.

In conclusion; Derby City Council was able to develop a sustainable method to publish its asset data with minimal additional effort and provide additional visualisation tools. The data produced met open data and government standards. The approach, with the national hubs (data.gov.uk) and LGA's schema and validator, can be easily replicated. Therefore, other authorities have the opportunity to enable wider benefits for businesses and citizen.

Further information:

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