

## Local Government Open Data Breakthrough Projects Evaluation Report 2013/14

**Project title:** Natural Neighbourhoods

**Lead organisation:** Cheshire East Council

**Submission date:** 11 April 2014

**Type of project:**

Tool for defining natural neighbourhoods and ongoing publication of data.

**Total grant:**

£56,000

### **Summary of the project**

The Natural Neighbourhood tool is an internet enabled public website that allows the creation, definition of and option to publish neighbourhoods. The tool also assigns unique identifiers to these Natural Neighbourhoods to enable the onward use as linked data.

Natural Neighbourhoods are defined within the terms of this project as 'geographical areas build up from existing administrative or statistical units such as Output Area, Lower Super Output Areas or Wards'. The aggregation of these statistical units results in the creation of areas which have not been formally defined by Ordnance Survey or the Office for National Statistics.

Examples are:

- Town centres within an urban area
- Towns within a rural area
- Community or neighbourhood plan areas
- Partnership areas, etc.

Each area can be given its own permanent Uniform Resource Identifier (URi) which can be queried as linked data along with its boundary in KML format and its component output areas.

Local Government's small area reporting tools, and any public API's on these, may then be amended to allow for reporting against Natural Neighbourhoods as well as official administrative geographies. Cheshire East Council has produced some small area reports for communities and neighbourhoods and will test the neighbourhood tool by adding new communities and outputting small area reports for them.

### **Challenge/opportunity**

The proposal addresses the issue that real-life data analysis needs to be against geographical areas that often do not correspond with official administrative geographies. Many of the

requests for data and information into the Council are for geographical boundaries in which community organisations are undertaking activity or require data for funding activity. These groups often require information or data for geographical boundaries at which national data is not provided in an aggregated format. The Natural Neighbourhood tool now provides a platform which allows community groups to define their own boundaries. These areas can then be published into the LG Inform report builder, which allows access to profiles and data at the new community defined boundary. Groups are now also able to share the URI to other data providers within the community to ensure that data can be extracted for the same area.

As we are dealing with unofficial geographies there is no public body to fund this work which has implications across organisational boundaries, although discussion with local authorities has shown widespread support for the ability to monitor performance and improvement strategies across a whole range of official and unofficial geographical clusters.

### Data published and uses

Engagement has been via

- Presentation to UKGovLD – practical progress event, Manchester
- Breakthrough projects events – London
- User feedback session at LGA London
- Local eGovernment Standards Body meetings on standards that use spatial data.
- esd-toolkit programme news release
- Local Directgov mailed news letter

The above involved meeting approximately 100 people and email communication to approximately 5,000.

The following cumulative data is provided at launch and will be gathered from now to monitor take-up:

	Created	Published	Finalised
Neighbourhood types	154	15	4
Neighbourhoods	367	118	59
Page views of neighbourhood site			386
Unique visits to neighbourhoods site			91

Initial types of user are:

- Area partnerships of public sector bodies wanting to assess service need and demand in partnership areas
- Public health teams responsible for specific geographies
- Public officers wishing to break down data for large county councils into manageable geographic chunks

### Approach to publishing data

The project has delivered a tool for defining and publishing data. At launch it has been populated with natural neighbourhoods for Cheshire East and a few other councils, including:

- Cheshire East – Local Area Partnerships
- Cheshire East – Settlements

- Cheshire East – [Children’s Centre Footprints](#)
- Cheshire East – [Town and Rural Areas](#)
- Cheshire East – [Spatial Planning Settlements](#)
- Warrington – [NCA Wards](#)
- Cornwall – [Community networks](#)

Anyone registering with a valid email address can sign in and create neighbourhoods within any local authority boundary. Neighbourhoods are made up of Output Areas, Lower level Super Output Areas or wards. They can be defined by selection on a map or input of a list of Government Statistical Service (GSS) codes.

Councils and other organisations will be encouraged and supported in adding their own neighbourhoods from now with the assistance of the esd-toolkit programme Support team.

A public web page allows anyone to anonymously search for a neighbourhood or group of neighbourhoods. Matching neighbourhoods are listed and one may be selected for display. Each neighbourhood and type of neighbourhood has a URI such as <http://id.esd.org.uk/neighbourhood/NN49>, which, when input to a web browser directs to a page showing the neighbourhood(s).

Links from neighbourhoods go to related documents and web pages, e.g. the LG Inform Plus <http://about.esd.org.uk/> standard report, which is configured to read neighbourhood data. Access to this site provides users with both the Natural Neighbourhood data, but also report templates into which the Natural Neighbourhood has been embedded.

A SPARQL end point will allow querying of the data from a triple store.

### **Benefits and impact**

Significant benefits have been gained through the use of automated reporting which provides a consistent and repeatable suite of information to officers within the council. The ability to work with users to create templates which are fit-for-purpose and then can be rolled out at a variety of geographies within the council area has improved the ability of the research team to deliver data and reduced the time taken to respond to changing requirements.

The LG Inform small area reporting tool has built neighbourhoods into its reports. It also aggregates public data for each published neighbourhood level and makes this data available through its Application Programming Interface (API).

<http://reports.esd.org.uk/Reports/14> - Basic facts about Cheshire East

Access to data about Cheshire East and its various local working boundaries will improve the opportunities for local residents, businesses and other organisation to see how and what evidence is being utilised to make service design and delivery.

The implementation of the Natural Neighbourhood tool and associated reporting functionality within LG Inform plus has allowed the sub-regional partnership to cease a expensive existing contract with a data observatory supplier, this action has significantly reduced the costs to each partner, of creating and publishing profiles and supporting data for local working areas within sub-region.

The initial ambition for the sub-regional system was to promote openness in data access and decision making and to support community need for data. There is no doubt that through the Natural Neighbourhood tool and LG Inform Plus system; this will now become a reality.

Neighbourhood URi's are being adopted to describe the spatial coverage of public data, e.g. in the [inventory schema](#) for inventories of local government open datasets.

Further evidence of use, take-up and benefits will be accrued during 2014/5.

**Further information:**

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Website: <http://neighbourhoods.esd.org.uk/>