

Award-winning Dane Housing Group uses OS MasterMap® as an integral part of providing efficient and excellent customer service

Case study



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Challenge

Accurate data is a cornerstone

Dane Housing Group is a registered social landlord that provides affordable housing to residents within Cheshire and north-west England. Mark Felton, Contracts Manager at Dane Housing, characterises the organisation thus: 'We have 4 000 properties and 6 500 residents. Some 33% of our properties are sheltered accommodation. We spend over £5 million per year on planned maintenance activities such as kitchen and bathroom renewals, reroofing and new windows.' Mark Felton explains, 'Accurate data is a cornerstone of our business. However, we didn't have all the detail we needed when the properties were transferred from the local authority, although we did have staff with over 30 years' knowledge and experience. We needed to capture all that and more, and identified GIS as the way to do it, which is why we have invested in an ESRI® ArcGIS system using OS MasterMap intelligent location-based data.'

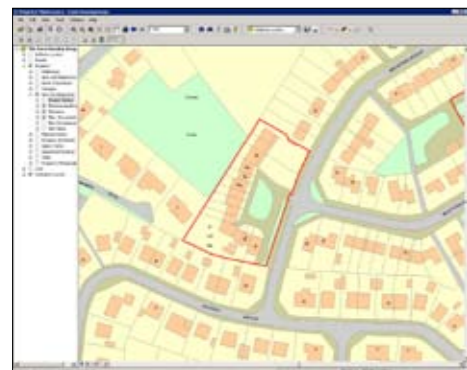
Business Excellence Award winner

Dane Housing recently swept the board at the 2007 UK Business Excellence Awards, winning the Voluntary, Charity & Not for Profit category and top spot in the North of England regional section. At the UK finals in London on 24 October 2007 the company scooped the top prize of 2007 Winner of the UK Regional Excellence Awards. The North of England Excellence assessor team commented, 'Dane managers and staff are extremely customer focused. It is how they do business. It is a focal point for its vision, mission and core values and is indicative of the results achieved.'

Solution

OS MasterMap used from the outset

Alex Hill, GIS Officer at Dane Housing, says, 'We evaluated three different solutions. We chose ArcGIS from ESRI after visiting a number of organisations in the area who were using it, and I am more than happy with the outcome.' Alex continues, 'We have one seat of ArcView with ArcReader running on a terminal server that is accessed by all our desktops. We also run ArcPad® on a PDA.' OS MasterMap provides comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date topographical and address data, validated by over 300 surveyors, to published quality standards. Alex again, 'We have used OS MasterMap from the outset to support the new grounds maintenance contact, as a basis for our land terrier, for voids analysis and action, and for a number of other purposes. Thanks to our GIS, we can go into a meeting with a contractor for a large project with accurate and up-to-date information rather than the hand-coloured maps and plans used previously.'



Integrating development information into Dane's GIS



Benefits

Ground maintenance

According to Alex Hill, 'The first task was to produce the plans for the grounds maintenance retender. I needed to know the exact boundaries of our houses and exact measurements of the grassed areas, so we had to resurvey the whole of our area.' He continues, 'We started in November 2005, with the tender due in April 2006. It was quite a task, but we achieved it.' Alex explains, 'We contracted a surveyor specifically for this task. Each week I would load up OS MasterMap Topography Layer onto the hand-held running ArcPad, indicating the areas to be surveyed. He resurveyed the whole of our area, something that wouldn't have been achievable in the timescale without OS MasterMap and ArcPad.'

Mark Felton supports this, saying, 'Indirectly, the GIS enabled us to free up some time so we could better measure the areas to be maintained. For example, we were able to identify and exclude hard standings and garage areas, some 20% or so of the total area involved, resulting a similar cost reduction in the contract.'

He continues, 'We also looked at trees close to buildings and the possible effect on foundations as well as recording any improvements that residents had made in our grassed areas – planting shrubs, for example – that we might need to maintain in the future.' Mark adds, 'We have just completed a successful first 12 months of the new contract. The number of grounds maintenance phone calls from residents has reduced from a peak of 85 in one week during the previous contract to maybe a couple of calls a week now.' However, the benefits were not all on the side of Dane Housing, as Mark points out. 'One of the bidders said that by having such accurate GIS data they were able to submit an equally accurately priced bid with confidence.'

Land terrier

Having completed the ground maintenance work, Alex was able to concentrate on updating the land terrier. He explains, 'Understanding what land we own and what properties we own is key to our operation. To resolve land ownership and property boundary disputes, potentially an area of contention, it is essential that we have accurate information at our fingertips. That is why I needed to ensure that our terrier was 100% accurate, adding the boundaries that I had obtained from our right-to-buy files. It took just four months to put 20 000 "T" marks onto the system, and now we are confident that we know precisely which land is ours.' Alex adds, 'Thanks to OS MasterMap, we are confident that we – and our residents – are not paying for repairs that are the responsibility of others.'

Voids

Empty or void properties mean lost rental income and there are costs incurred each time a tenancy changes. That is why Dane Housing is keen to reduce the number and duration of such voids. Mark Felton explains, 'In 2004 we were running at 9.3 weeks per void, now reduced to 3.3 weeks, with a modest reduction in void numbers from 325 to 310. This is not all because of GIS, though it has enabled me to map voids and repeat voids. That way we can investigate to see if there is an underlying issue that we can resolve. We have also mapped vulnerabilities so that we can consider providing adaptations that may support residents in staying longer in a property.'

Informing prospective tenants

Alex points out that Dane Housing also uses OS MasterMap Address Layer 2. He says, 'We do have prospective tenants who don't know the area. We use Address Layer 2 data to build a picture of all local amenities for an area. We provide a map and description of the area, a map showing the property together with a photo of the property. With all that information up front, they can more quickly see if the area is suitable for them. In this way we are expecting to reduce void periods by a further two or three days.'

Return on investment

GIS investment more than covered

Mark Felton considers that with a solution that benefits 90% or more of the staff within the organisation, Dane Housing has obtained a real return-on-investment (ROI) at both the financial and performance levels. He says, 'We put customer service at the centre of the business. High levels of customer satisfaction leads to high levels of staff morale. There is some evidence, too, that customer satisfaction may be linked to lowering levels of rent arrears.' In terms of financial returns, Felton comments that, 'The initial cost of the solution, including the Ordnance Survey mapping, was less than £35 000, with ongoing annual costs of £9 000 for support and Ordnance Survey licence fees'. He continues, 'This has been more than covered by the efficiencies we have generated. We will have saved £100 000 over three years on the grounds maintenance contract and will have saved many thousands of pounds through a reduction of ground maintenance calls from residents, faster resolution of disputes and identification of chargeable work.'

Valuing assets and planned works

According to Mark, 'Everyone thinks of GIS in terms of grounds maintenance, but we also use it for asset management, planning strategies and linking in streets. Asset values are dependent on proper maintenance. It is vital, therefore, that we have accurate information on which to plan such maintenance. We've used the GIS to help us value our assets and to help us to value planned works as well. This links in: into the asset strategy, into the amount of property and the amount we invest in maintenance.'

With widespread use comes widespread confidence

For success with GIS in an organisation such as Dane Housing, Alex believes 'it is important to involve as many people and departments as possible. As staff start to use it, the confidence grows and they want to use it more and more.' He continues, 'I am about to roll out a cut-down version of the GIS based on ESRI ArcReader for our Contact Centre. Through this, operators will have access to the grounds maintenance information and will have land terrier details and property photographs so they can answer some of the simpler queries at the first phone call. This is expected to generate further time savings and improvements in customer service.'

Championed at the highest level

Mike Doran, Director of Community and Supported Housing at Dane Housing, sums up: 'Prior to implementing the GIS system much of our information regarding property, customers and general neighbourhood data was collated separately and could not be easily shared. By using GIS to overlay and present data which required "deciphering", both strategic managers and front-line staff have an easy-to-use overview of property type and condition as well as specific customer information such as needs for aids and adaptations.' He adds, 'The continuing development of our GIS system is central to the company's asset management strategy and the delivery of SMART and effective neighbourhood services. GIS is giving us at Dane Housing a tool with which we are able to integrate previously separate sets of information in a comprehensive and easily understood format and is an integral part of providing our award-winning efficient and excellent customer service.'

