

Worcestershire County Council – One version of the truth



This case study outlines how Worcestershire County Council has worked closely with the district councils in its local area to achieve complete synchronicity between the Local Street Gazetteer (LSG) and the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG). The case study includes hints and tips on how they have achieved this to help other councils who are working through the same issues.

Background to the project and organisations and who was involved

Worcestershire County Council is a diverse authority in the West Midlands containing both urban and rural areas. It has a population of 557,400 residents (2010 mid-year population estimates). Bromsgrove, Malvern Hills, Redditch, Worcester, Wychavon and Wyre District Councils all fall within the county boundary.

As is common with other areas, the county is responsible for the statutory function associated with the LSG. The district councils are responsible for the LLPG. Both gazetteers contain street information.

The problems

The problems are mainly due to the fact that the county council is not the street naming authority, yet many of the county council's functions rely on very up to date information, so details on new streets are of great importance. The responsibility for Street Naming and Numbering remains with the six district councils within the county area. Although information was being passed to the county, from time to time this was a bit erratic, meaning that the district councils (that had created the new street names) and the county council would not have the same information.

There was an arrangement whereby the district councils were allotted a selection of Unique Street Reference Numbers (USRNs) which were used to provide a unique key for each street name. The information flows were based on a defined time schedule but new street names and

amendments would only be emailed through on from some of the district councils to the county council.

When information was not being passed between the authorities, in some cases the roads were being created twice with two different unique identifiers. This was always recognised as a potential problem especially with two tier authorities, and although it is a much harder task to fully synchronise between two differing authorities, the importance of not having two different 'unique' identifiers was recognised.

Further issues related to coordinates which were inconsistent between the LLPG and the LSG. There was also another issue regarding motorways and trunk roads, where there was less of a driver to include them in the LLPG. Type 3 records should also be in the LLPG but are often considered to offer little benefit to the district councils.

GeoPlace began to highlight the differences between the LLPG's and the LSG's through monthly reporting of figures which showed the level of synchronization between the two local gazetteers. Worcestershire had significant synchronicity issues that they we're fully aware of and which required attention.

The aim was that both gazetteers should be in complete synchronicity with one another, ensuring there was one version of the truth at a local level showing one consistent set of records for all streets held by the different organisations. This would ensure that partners who used the data also used a consistent record of all streets.

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The solution

The driver for change, as outlined above, came from the monthly reports which detailed the level of synchronicity between the LLPG and LSG data was. This prompted the LSG Custodian to proactively develop a more interactive relationship between the county council and the district councils.

Meetings were set up to discuss outstanding issues. The opportunity was also taken to discuss issues if a regional meeting was organised. Often these were joint meetings for LSG and LLPG Custodians and so it provided an excellent opportunity to share and discuss problems associated with street synchronicity.

Each month when the new reports are issued by GeoPlace, the LSG Custodian uses these as a prompt to call or email the relevant LLPG Custodian to discuss any outstanding issues. This approach was also used to iron out historic issues between the records. The key has been ensuring there is a two way dialogue.

There hasn't been any particular method to resolve the issues between the LLPG and LSG street records. It has simply been about ensuring regular communication and working through each record as it crops up. A large part has been down to the hard work and dedication of those involved and also instigating the two way communication process which is necessary to reach a consensus.

There has been a variety of openness to closer working from all those involved. Some are less keen than others to get involved and work together to resolve the street synchronicity issue. One approach which has helped with this is to use the enthusiasm of those who are on board to filter through to those who are less keen. These Champions have proved really valuable to the improvement in the data.

It was also identified at an early stage that this was not a one way process, but needed the cooperation and flexibility of both LLPG and LSG, making changes where it was both easiest and most appropriate to do so.

There are still a few synchronicity issues between the county and the district council's street records but these will be fixed with a few more days work. From then a monthly audit of the data will continue, prompted by the reports from GeoPlace.

To address the issues of missing trunk roads and motorway, the LSG Custodian has created all the relevant records in the dataset and is speaking to the district councils to ensure that they are added to the LLPG so as to prevent any possible duplication on the future.

Outcomes and impact

There are many benefits from ensuring that there is full synchronicity between the LSG records and the LLPG records. These include:

- ensuring partners, whether they use the national address data or the National Street Gazetteer data, can be assured that the street records data that they are using is consistent
- that there is one version of the truth with one unique reference number
- all new streets are added to both the LSG and LLPG
- the datasets can be used together using street attributes directly with addressing information.

At a local level, benefits include:

- reduced duplication
- more accurate records which aid better service delivery, for example in tackling pot holes and scheduling and co-ordinating road works

- queries or complaints will be related to the same database information for each street by both authorities
- better communications and relationships between districts and the county
- better understanding of the support infrastructure to help in solving issues
- clearer view of who is the most appropriate person to solve issues.

Key lessons from the project (for other councils)

- face to face meetings often offer the best way to resolve big issues. Get the relevant people round the table – and enlist an independent Chair if required
- explain the issues from your perspective but also listen to the others point of view
- flexibility – look at the easiest way to solve the problem rather than saying these are all the problem of the other side
- make use of Champions for Change! Use the enthusiasm from the keener ones to energise those who are less keen
- once you have established two way dialogue, maintain it through a variety of mechanisms
- hard work and perseverance pay off.

For more information:

Bob Lloyd

Streetworks Manager

Tel: 01905 766832

Email: bjlloyd@worcestershire.gov.uk

Zoë Britt

Research and Communications Manager, GeoPlace

Tel: 020 4447 3500

Email: zoe.britt@geoplace.co.uk

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