

Transforming lives, homes and communities through process innovation

Bracknell Forest Homes

The Challenge

- Deliver professional and cost efficient housing services

The Benefits

- Estimated savings of over £50k in tree management
- Improved insight to support development planning
- More sensitive and professional services for customers
- Employee productivity vastly improved
- Reduced exposure to the risk of litigation



Driven by a clear vision to transform the lives of its tenants, Bracknell Forest Homes is using Esri's ArcGIS Platform to innovate and enhance core business processes. Through the combined use of mobile, cloud and web-based GIS apps, the organisation has significantly improved the cost effectiveness, efficiency and quality of its housing services.

The Challenge

Like all housing associations, Bracknell Forest Homes has a duty to its board, stakeholders, investors and the industry regulator to offer value for money, demonstrate shrewd business management and deliver a high quality of service for tenants. It owns and manages around 6,000 rented homes in Bracknell Forest and surrounding areas, as well as 1,075 leaseholder properties.

The organisation's aspirational vision is to "transform lives, homes and communities" and, to achieve this, it encourages innovation in all aspects of the business. Indeed, innovation is one of the "magnificent seven" values that Bracknell Forest Homes has identified as being critical for its success. It defines innovation as "creativity with a job to do" and, in more ways than one, the organisation is making creative use of geographic information system (GIS) technology to drive the adoption of best practice approaches in the housing sector.

The Solution

Since 2010, Bracknell Forest Homes has used a range of solutions from Esri's ArcGIS platform to support the delivery of its services. The association has been able to easily integrate web, mobile and cloud-based apps, to create seamless, GIS-driven processes, and thereby implement innovative new approaches to service delivery.

In brief, it uses:

- ArcGIS Online to store all spatial data securely in the cloud and potentially make GIS services and analysis capabilities accessible to all of the company's 240 employees
- ArcGIS Pro to provide advanced GIS functionality, when required for specialist tasks
- Collector for ArcGIS to allow the company's mobile teams to collect data in the field
- Survey123 for ArcGIS to conduct surveys with tenants and then subsequently analyse their feedback
- ArcGIS Story Maps to present information clearly to business teams in an interactive format.

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“The mobile GIS solution for our Tree Team allows us to manage our portfolio of 10,000 trees with just two full time members of staff. We estimate that without this solution, costs would increase by at least £50,000 a year, and we would be unable to carry out necessary tasks in a proactive, cost effective manner”

Andrew Keljarrett, Business Improvement Manager, Bracknell Forest Homes



An example of some damage that happened to a tree on Bracknell Forest Homes land in 2013. An example of how important managed, appropriate surveys are to minimise the risk of tree damage.



Screen shot of Collector app showing location of trees

Benefits

Tangible cost savings from reduced administration

The creation of mobile GIS solutions has enabled Bracknell Forest Homes to make significant, sustained cost savings. For instance, the Tree Team uses Collector for ArcGIS to carry out surveys on trees the association is responsible for. The surveyors are able to check locations of trees, carry out surveys, deal with customer queries and provide information to contractors on tree maintenance work needed – all while in the field. “The mobile GIS solution for our Tree Team allows us to manage our portfolio of 10,000 trees with just two full time members of staff,” says Andrew Keljarrett, Business Improvement Manager at Bracknell Forest Homes.

Greater financial returns on estate assets

Increasingly, Bracknell Forest Homes is using ArcGIS to help it make strategic decisions that will impact the future profitability of the business. It is, as an illustration, currently collecting data in the field about the condition of garage blocks and then analysing possible development opportunities for these sites with ArcGIS Online. By replacing under-used, old and deteriorating garages with brightly lit parking spaces, amenity areas or new properties, the organisation can simultaneously reduce its maintenance costs, improve facilities for tenants and create new revenue opportunities.

A sensitive and professional approach to under-occupancy

Bracknell Forest Homes is currently using the ArcGIS platform to help it minimise under-occupancy in its properties and incentivise tenants to downsize. It uses Survey123 to assess the needs of householders at properties that may be under-occupied, alongside ArcGIS Online to quickly ascertain if there are other properties available within its housing portfolio that may be more suitable, such as bungalows already fitted with showers or wet-rooms for elderly people. The organisation can, therefore, reduce under occupancy rates and make its larger properties available to families on council waiting lists, while delivering a professional and understanding service for its existing tenants.

Improved employee productivity throughout the business

The use of ArcGIS has had a significant impact on productivity, across a wide range of business departments. In Finance, for example, employees recently used ArcGIS Pro to reduce the time needed to define title extents for a refinancing initiative from over a month to less than one week. Equally, employees in the Estates Team have reduced their need to return to the office to collect or return information on jobs, while the Tree Team is able to carry out more surveys in less time. “We have at least doubled the number of tree inspections that surveyors can perform in a day and given managers faster access to better information about where surveys have been undertaken,” Keljarrett says.

Reduced exposure to the risk of litigation

Using ArcGIS Online and the tree data captured via mobile GIS, Bracknell Forest Homes can now categorise each individual tree as either ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’ risk, based on a wide range of factors including tree health, adjacent services and public access. The clarity of the information presented by ArcGIS allows the Tree Team to provide assurances to the board and regulators that risks associated with damaged or falling trees are being managed and mitigated responsibly. Most significantly, this GIS-driven process reduces the risk of litigation for poor tree management. At its worst, mismanagement can lead to charges of corporate manslaughter, potentially resulting in unlimited fines for an organisation and prison sentences for involved parties.

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