

Inspiring citizens to engage with policies

South Ayrshire Council

The Challenge

- Find new ways to communicate with citizens and engage them in council policies & events

The Benefits

- Increased citizen engagement in local policy issues
- Greater understanding of development priorities, helping boost the local economy
- Captivating publicity for South Ayrshire, supporting the region's tourism industry
- Effective employee communications, leading to cost efficiencies



Using configurable apps from Esri, South Ayrshire Council has developed over 25 informative Story Maps to communicate information to citizens, businesses and its own employees. These highly versatile, interactive maps don't just tell a story; they engage people in local issues, support the local economy and improve the efficiency of council operations.

The Challenge

All local authorities in the UK need to engage successfully with citizens, to keep them informed about policies, events and opportunities. Likewise, councils have to communicate effectively with local and national businesses, giving them the information they need to help them expand their operations, exploit new business opportunities and contribute to the economic growth of the region. But, as most local authorities in the UK will attest, it can be difficult to attract and sustain the attention of these external audiences.

South Ayrshire Council was acutely aware of the challenges of sharing information and getting local people to engage with its policies. In particular, it wanted to increase public awareness of its Local Development Plan, a strategic policy document that sets out the council's land use priorities. It had published a copy of the plan on its website, but this pivotal document – which could potentially impact on the lives, homes and businesses of over 111,000 people in South Ayrshire – was only downloaded 1,500 times in 12 months.

The Solution

A longstanding user of Esri geographic information system (GIS) solutions, South Ayrshire Council discovered Esri's Story Map templates and recognised their potential value as a means of making information much more accessible and meaningful for citizens. "The genius of the Esri Story Map is the tying together of maps, images and text, in one place, in an interactive format," says Stewart McCall, Senior Systems Analyst at the council. "The narrative beside the interactive map makes it very clear what the map shows and why it is important, while the images draw people in and make the Story Maps compelling to view."

The council began by producing a Story Map for its [Local Development Plan](#) that combines maps of the area with high quality images and the actual policy wording. Accessed via the council website, the Story Map clearly sets out where new commercial developments, like retail units, will be permitted, advises on the best sites for wind farms and simplifies policy around residential planning restrictions. In recognition of this ground-breaking new approach to publishing the Local Development Plan, South Ayrshire Council was named the overall winner in the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2016.

Within weeks the GIS team became inundated with requests for additional Story Maps from other council departments, ranging from procurement to housing. Interestingly, these requirements weren't all for Story Maps to engage with external audiences; demand also emerged for Story Maps to help communicate information to council employees. According to McCall, there is now "at least one new Story Map request every ten days," so he has trained ten colleagues, from a cross-section of departments, to help him keep pace with demand.

Esri UK | Millennium House
65 Walton Street | Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire HP21 7QG
T 01296 745500 | F 01296 745544
E info@esriuk.com | www.esriuk.com

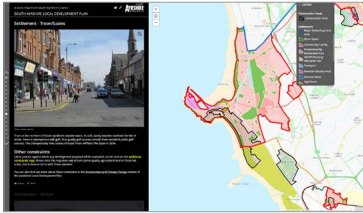
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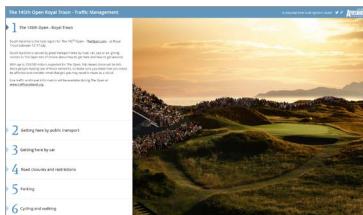
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Stewart McCall, Senior Systems Analyst, South Ayrshire Council



The award-winning Local Development Plan Story Map clarifies information about planning restrictions and council development policy



A Story Map created for the 145th Open Golf Tournament provided essential information for the 200,000 event visitors

Benefits

Increased citizen engagement in local issues

Story Maps have proven highly effective in encouraging citizens to become better informed about and more involved in local issues. The Local Development Plan Story Map, for instance, was viewed nearly 4,500 times in just six months and was accessed more times in the first five weeks than the pdf plan had been downloaded in 12 months. Another Story Map, produced to clarify proposed ward boundary changes, incorporated Esri's QuestionWhere survey app, and provided a direct means for citizens to comment on and influence council plans.

A welcome boost for the local economy

As well as the Local Development Plan, South Ayrshire Council has produced a Story Map that shows vacant land and derelict sites. The clarity of the information presented in Story Maps like these makes it far easier for home owners and commercial organisations to recognise development opportunities, understand council policies and make appropriate planning applications that are more likely to obtain planning permission. In time, the council anticipates that its Story Maps will help increase the number of commercial, industrial and residential developments in South Ayrshire and invigorate the economy of the region.

Highly attractive and captivating publicity for South Ayrshire

Enriched with quality imagery, the Story Maps help to promote South Ayrshire as a destination for visitors and support the local tourism industry. For instance, the council created a Story Map for the Open Golf Tournament, converting information from a dense 40-page Traffic Management document into a highly visual, interactive resource. The Story Map clarified how to get to the venue, where to park and how to use public transport and was viewed over 5,000 times in just two weeks.

More effective employee communications

Recent Story Maps, developed for internal use, have significantly improved employees' understanding of corporate policies and procedures, contributing in some cases towards cost savings. One example is the Story Map named 'Better Mail Management,' which shows employees how to handle mail and where to find franking machines, guiding them to the most cost effective methods of sending mail. "We now have a rapidly growing portfolio of over 25 Story Maps that play a valuable role in improving communications with citizens, businesses and colleagues," McCall says.

Esri UK | Millennium House
65 Walton Street | Aylesbury
Buckinghamshire HP21 7QG
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E info@esriuk.com | www.esriuk.com

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