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Case study

Mapping out a better future for London

Greater London Authority

The Challenge

- Standardise, consolidate and share planning information for the whole of Greater London

The Benefits

- Improved access to open data
- Faster delivery of new homes in London
- More successful planning applications for developers
- Greater collaboration between boroughs
- mproved decision making within the GLA

The Greater London Authority has embedded Esri's ArcGIS technology at the heart of a new end-to-end digital planning process for London. The use of ArcGIS web mapping services is improving access to planning information from 35 planning authorities and helping to accelerate the delivery of new homes throughout the capital.

The Challenge

One of the Mayor of London's top priorities is to build thousands of genuinely affordable homes to buy and rent. To support this goal and help developers build more homes more quickly, the Greater London Authority (GLA) wanted to make information about planning opportunities and constraints more easily accessible. It realised that a lot of useful planning information was locked away in documents, spreadsheets and disparate systems, not just within the GLA but also within thirty three London boroughs and two additional planning authorities. It therefore set out to bring together thousands of separate datasets, covering the whole of London, and make them readily available to search, view and download.

The Solution

In what was a highly collaborative project, GLA started by liaising with London's 35 planning authorities to consolidate all available planning datasets and documents. It then used Esri's ArcGIS Pro solution to standardise geometry, attributes and coordinates across the many different datasets assembled. "It was an enormous task," recalls Paul Hodgson, Senior Manager, City Data, Greater London Authority. "Even the way that lines were drawn was different across different boroughs, but using ArcGIS Pro we were able to bring everything together in a common format."

After amassing nearly 3,500 data layers, GLA used ArcGIS Enterprise to create a centralised data repository, with some of the data held on premise and the remainder held in ArcGIS Online, in a private cloud. GLA then created a series of ArcGIS web map services with ArcGIS Enterprise enabling it to serve up the datasets in a variety of ways and make them discoverable to different audiences. "A key part of the project is sharing the data with the wider world," Hodgson says. "ArcGIS Enterprise gave us a route to doing this."

One ArcGIS web map service powers a new web app, called the Planning DataMap, that makes it easy for developers to view information about planning constraints and opportunities on an interactive map. Users can search for information in the categories 'Protection', 'Good Growth' and 'Context', or look at local policy layers from each London planning authority under 'Borough Layers'.

In addition to the Planning DataMap, there are around 100 internal and external web maps that stream data from ArcGIS Enterprise on everything from listed buildings and designated greenbelt zones to brownfield sites. External organisations can also go to the GLA website to stream the data that they are interested in directly from ArcGIS Enterprise into their own data systems, planning solutions or housing apps.

ArcGIS Enterprise is now an integral part of GLA's digital planning strategy. It integrates with other third-party systems and is helping GLA to create a complete end-to-end digital process, from evaluating sites and managing planning permissions to monitoring the progress of strategic plans. According to Hodgson, "ArcGIS interacts very well with other systems, using recognised standards."

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> “ArcGIS has really helped us unlock the planning data, which shapes the future of London.”
>
> Peter Kemp, Head of Change and Delivery, Planning, Greater London Authority

GLA’s Planning DataMap, powered by an ArcGIS web service

The Benefits

Improved access to open data for everyone

Developers, landowners and local authorities can now see all available information about planning opportunities and constraints, in any London borough, all in one place, for the first time. In the first four months of 2024 alone, ArcGIS served up data over 8 million times, demonstrating just how vital a role ArcGIS is fulfilling in the planning process for the capital. Peter Kemp, Head of Change and Delivery, Planning, at GLA, says, “ArcGIS has really helped us unlock the planning data, which shapes the future of London.”

Faster delivery of new homes in London

The GLA anticipates that the improved availability of London planning data will help to accelerate the house building process, as it will contribute to time savings in the planning process. Established developers can identify opportunities and put together schemes more quickly. Equally, it will be easier now for new entrants to the market and proptech innovators to find the information they need to start their first development projects.

More successful planning applications for developers

With the wealth of data served up by ArcGIS Enterprise, developers have a clearer understanding of planning constraints that cross boroughs. They can, therefore, now put together well-informed planning applications that are less likely to be turned down, as constraints have been taken into account properly. For instance, it is now far easier to understand protected views, such as the vista of St. Paul’s Cathedral, and see where height restrictions on new buildings apply across a wide area.

Greater collaboration between boroughs

The use of ArcGIS helps to improve transparency and supports greater collaboration between London boroughs. In particular, planning teams within London boroughs can more easily take into account the plans of other neighbouring boroughs. They can avoid duplication (such as planning similar health facilities in close proximity) and identify development opportunities that cut across borough boundaries.

Improved decision making within the GLA

Within the GLA itself, it is now possible for teams across all departments to consider planning information when making decisions. For example, a team responsible for improving highstreets has recently used data from ArcGIS to understand how planned new homes might increase footfall in shopping areas. “The great thing about having ArcGIS web services is that you can easily draw planning data into other projects,” Hodgson says. “It makes other projects a lot more doable.”

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