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Putting Lancashire on the map

Lancashire County Council

The Challenge

- Further enhance the well-established and much-used Mario portal

The Benefits

- Easier access to local information
- Rapid delivery of new public services
- More efficient, streamlined council processes
- Strong endorsement of Digital First Strategy

Lancashire County Council is putting Lancashire on the map in more ways than one. It is using ArcGIS Online to share information about the county on interactive web maps and, at the same time, showcasing best practice ways of using ArcGIS in local government as part of its Digital First Strategy.

The Challenge

Maps have been front and centre at Lancashire County Council for more than twenty years, ever since the launch of Mario. When it was built in 2001 using Esri ArcGIS software, Mario (Maps and Related Information Online) was a ground-breaking geographic information system (GIS) portal enabling the council to share geospatial data on interactive maps. An instant success, Mario was visited in excess of five million times in the two decades that followed, delivering 800 million views of Lancashire maps.

A consultation conducted in 2021 revealed just how much Mario was much appreciated by the many public sector employees, volunteer organisations, small businesses and individuals who referred to it regularly. Users were, however, keen to have more features, including the ability to access Mario on smartphones, download data and view real-time information. In response, Lancashire County Council decided to harness the latest capabilities of ArcGIS Online to upgrade Mario, meet users' expectations and help it become even more data driven, in line with its new Digital First Strategy.

The Solution

Mario was redeveloped in-house by the council, using out-of-the-box ArcGIS solutions and templates to minimise bespoke development work and coding. Now, Mario users can view maps on their smartphones and tablets, access live information and stream accurate data directly from Mario into their own systems.

The next-generation Mario still has the same comprehensive online map viewer as before, but also presents the content in 'themes' for the first time, making it much easier for people to find the information they need. For example, there are specific maps for finding out when roadworks are scheduled, which is the nearest school and where the mobile library will stop. "We thought about which questions people might have, what data they might need to see to answer these questions and how we might best present it," explains Maria Adamson, Senior ICT Engineer/Designer (GIS) at Lancashire County Council.

The council has taken full advantage of all the capabilities of ArcGIS Online to create new content for Mario in a variety of formats. Many of its new themed web apps were created with ArcGIS Experience Builder or Instant App templates, while others were built with ArcGIS Dashboards, including a new dashboard showing the number of collisions involving pedestrians or cyclists by year on a map, graph and pie chart. "The ArcGIS system gives us the capability to build much of what we need in one space, thus enabling us to respond more rapidly to the needs of our customers," Adamson says.

Increasingly, Lancashire County Council is now also using the full suite of ArcGIS solutions to help it build end-to-end processes. For instance, it used ArcGIS Survey123 to capture information from the public during a walking and cycling consultation and presented the results in an interactive mapping app, created with ArcGIS Web AppBuilder and shared via Mario. The development of innovative new solutions like this earned the GIS team the well-deserved accolade of 'Lancashire County Council Team of the Year 2022'.
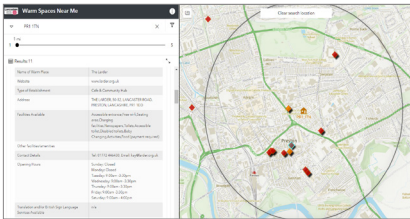
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Maria Adamson, Senior ICT Engineer (GIS), Lancashire County Council

An ArcGIS app that helps citizens to find their nearest warm spaces

The Benefits

Easier access to local information

The redevelopment of Mario has undoubtedly made it easier for members of the public and businesses to find and use local information. In addition, as Mario can now be accessed on smart phones and tablets, it is easier for council employees and public officials to find the information they need and respond to enquiries from their constituents confidently, straight away.

Rapid delivery of new public services

Using the latest capabilities of ArcGIS Online, Lancashire County Council has the capability to respond to crises and deliver new public services exceptionally quickly. For instance, it took only one week to build an ArcGIS-based workflow to process applications from organisations able to provide warm spaces for vulnerable people. Over 60 organisations successfully used an ArcGIS Survey123 app to register, and urgently-needed, up-to-date information about warm spaces was made accessible on the council website within just a few weeks.

More efficient, streamlined council processes

Through the process of enhancing Mario, the ICT has successfully raised awareness of GIS and stimulated demand for more GIS services to help streamline council processes. As a result, a range of new ArcGIS-based solutions are currently in development including a highways maintenance dashboard. "The use of GIS is growing exponentially now," Adamson says. "Using the whole ArcGIS Online toolset we have the ability to improve the accessibility of data, transform council services and ultimately better serve the people of Lancashire, which is what we are here to do."

Strong endorsement of Digital First Strategy

The success of Mario is a strong endorsement for the council's Digital First Strategy, which aims to make the council more data driven and drive the use of innovative technologies to benefit Lancashire. According to Sharon De Vall, Digital Strategy Manager at Lancashire County Council, "Mario is a great example of how the council is continually striving to offer 'digital first' solutions, putting citizens and staff at the heart of innovation and ensuring sustainable digital services fit for the future."

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