

## Crowdsourcing information to improve local planning

# Donegal County Council

### The Challenge

- Capture local knowledge to enhance the planning process

### The Benefits

- More efficient council planning process
- Time and cost savings for developers
- Greater community engagement in planning
- Enhanced public consultations



As part of the EU Northern Periphery Arctic Programme funded IMPROVE project on creating better public services, Donegal County Council commissioned Esri Ireland to help it engage with citizens more effectively on planning issues using crowdsourcing technology. Now the council can capture local knowledge and give citizens a stronger voice in the planning process.

### The Challenge

Like all local authorities, Donegal County Council needs to take into account a huge range of factors when making decisions about planning applications. Much of the information it requires – such as the locations of special areas of conservation and flood risks – is held centrally within the council's geographic information system (GIS), Esri's ArcGIS platform. As a result, planning officers use ArcGIS to analyse the locations of proposed developments and identify any potential development conflicts quickly and easily.

The council realised, however, that there was a lot of local knowledge about Donegal that was not accessible via its GIS. Communities, families and individuals had knowledge about certain buildings, fields and even hedgerows that was often very pertinent to planning decisions, but that wasn't recorded. The council consequently wanted to find a way to capture this 'micro-knowledge' within ArcGIS, so that it could be taken into account at an earlier stage in the planning process.

### The Solution

With funding from the EU Northern Periphery Arctic Programme (NPA) IMPROVE project, Donegal County Council commissioned Esri Ireland to develop a solution for capturing local information from members of the public, making it publically available and incorporating it into the council's core GIS planning systems. Esri Ireland achieved these goals by using Esri's ArcGIS Online Crowdsourcer Reporter and Crowdsourcer Manager templates to expand the capabilities of the council's existing ArcGIS platform.

"Esri Ireland brought strong expertise of working with Esri's ArcGIS Online templates, specifically the Crowdsourcer Reporter and Crowdsourcer Manager, and was able to turn the project around for us very quickly," says Daragh McDonough, Information Systems Project Leader at Donegal County Council. "We also learned a lot from working with Esri Ireland during the project, so we will be able to maintain and develop the solution ourselves in the future."

After trialling the solution with a focus group of local citizens, Donegal County Council structured its crowdsourcing portal around seven key themes, ranging from the natural environment to transportation issues, with up to 12 different sub-sections underneath each. In this way, the council is able to organise the content it collects and use it effectively within its planning systems.

Now, members of the public can access the solution, named [MyDonegalPlace](#), on the council's website, put a dot on the map and enter local information on anything from the site of a bird's nest or the birthplace of a local hero to a traffic hotspot. They can upload images and vote or comment on other people's posts, helping the council to see which issues are most important locally. Council employees use Crowdsourcer Manager to moderate the content before it is published, making sure that personal details are not revealed.

Learn more at: [esri-ireland.ie](http://esri-ireland.ie)

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Daragh McDonough, Information Systems Project Leader, Donegal County Council



Donegal County Council's new planning app MyDonegalPlace, based on Esri's ArcGIS Online crowdsourcing templates

### Benefits

#### ***Improved efficiency in the planning process***

Donegal County Council expects to be able to make more informed planning decisions, as it can now take into account concerns and knowledge that local people have, right from the outset. For example, the council anticipates that it will need to issue fewer Further Information Requests, which can delay planning applications by up to 16 weeks. “If we have more local information up-front, we can make well-informed decisions more quickly, improving the overall efficiency of our planning process,” McDonough says.

#### ***Time and cost savings for developers***

Developers and individuals who submit planning applications can potentially save money and time by using the Crowdsourcer Reporter to better understand local concerns. If they ensure that these local issues are fully addressed in their initial planning applications, they will avoid the added costs and delays that typically occur when plans are refused and amendments are required.

#### ***Greater community engagement in planning***

Ultimately, the development of the new crowdsourcing solution benefits communities throughout Donegal, as it allows anyone to engage in the planning process in a structured way. “It gives people a voice,” McDonough says. “Esri Ireland has given us a fantastic new way of capturing local information and giving citizens a role in the decision-making process for planning applications.”

#### ***Enhanced public consultations***

Looking ahead, Donegal County Council plans to use Crowdsourcer Reporter during public consultations to give members of the public a greater choice of ways in which to engage in the process. For example, it plans to use its new crowdsourcing solution as part of the upcoming Letterkenny Town Plan Review. “Crowdsourcer Reporter is a really valuable tool that we can use to engage with local people during public consultations, alongside traditional drop-in clinics and events,” McDonough says. “It will help us to get more people involved in building a shared vision for the future of Letterkenny.”

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