

Regeneration works: how Aspire Housing® Limited uses OS MasterMap® to support housing improvement in north Staffordshire and south Cheshire

Case study



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Challenge

Effecting change and delivering improved communities

Aspire Housing is a non-profit making Registered Social Landlord (RSL) registered with the Housing Corporation. The company was set up to take over ownership of the housing stock that was transferred from Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council in January 2000. Aspire Housing owns 8 500 properties and provides over 16 000 residents with quality affordable homes across north Staffordshire and south Cheshire. In 2006–07 Aspire Housing invested over £10 million into their properties and helped over 800 people into new homes. The company is using its expertise in large-scale regeneration programmes to forge strong working relationships with local authorities to effect change and deliver improved communities. According to Leon Storer, Aspire Housing's Strategic Asset Manager, *'To do this we need to provide people with the right information at the right time and in the right place so they can do their jobs effectively and efficiently. That is why we have invested in an ESRI® ArcGIS system and OS MasterMap intelligent digital mapping.'*

Solution

Use OS MasterMap from the outset

Rosie Reader is GIS Co-ordinator at Aspire Housing. She says, *'When I joined I set about updating our land terrier and grounds maintenance data, capturing it on top of OS MasterMap Topography Layer for use with our GIS. I set up an Access database of all our assets and imported the OS MasterMap Address Layer data. I also created a link to our Orchard Housing Management System and matched the properties accordingly.'* She continues, *'I did this in parallel with using the system to generate the plans and reports we need to run the business on a day-to-day basis, producing location plans and providing plans for our renewal work and regeneration bids.'* She confirms, *'Having the GIS has speeded up the reporting process significantly. We no longer have masses of hard-to-interpret maps marked up by hand from other plans. We are able to plot the demographics of our residents and get a complete overview of a dozen key pieces of information just by looking at one plan.'*

According to Reader, *'We used OS MasterMap right from the outset and we really couldn't have done what we have any other way. I might be capturing development-site boundaries and data or I might be capturing data for our records. All I do is click over the OS MasterMap boundary in ArcGIS. I don't have to measure it and do the calculations myself. This takes minutes rather than hours and it is accurate and up to date.'* She adds, *'I use OS MasterMap Address Layer as a locator within ArcGIS, to enable me to find properties quickly. It takes me directly to the location. I have set up a locator so that if I key in a partial address or an established business it will take me to the property.'*



Benefits

Regeneration work: a major Aspire Housing strength

Aspire Housing manages an area of major intervention (AMI) for RENEW North Staffordshire, the programme to improve the long-term future of Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and the surrounding area, and has its own clearance programme as part of this work. Reader again, *'We're providing the base master plans and the site plans for the consortium featuring neighbourhood profiling using data from our housing management system. The proposed demolition phases were marked on the master plan and from that we drilled down to the estate and highlighted the empty properties – the voids – the right-to-buy properties and so on and have plotted all that on an A0 plan for use in consortia meetings.'*

Aspire Housing is rolling out a neighbourhood approach and is developing a structure for the management of all its land holdings that require up-to-date plans and location maps within the area. Reader explains, *'We have identified area boundaries, coloured-coded depending on ownership, land use and other factors. Rather than have 20 or more different pieces of paper, there is just one map containing all the necessary information. Everybody involved in the project is working from the same data and it's saved so much time compared with driving round the estate in groups.'*

According to Reader, *'Long average tenancy duration is a good indicator of desirable estates and I produced a breakdown for the entire borough highlighting both the desirable estates and those where there is a high void turnover. This breakdown was provided to assist with the shortlisting of sites to be considered for refurbishment and regeneration of the local community and surrounding area.'* She adds, *'From start to finish, it took me less than a week, in addition to all my daily activities. If we hadn't had the GIS, I'd have tried to do it all by hand with lots of photocopied plans. To tell you the truth, I really couldn't have done it without GIS and Address Layer.'*

Reader cites another example, *'We used OS MasterMap as part of our successful grant application for the signage for the main entrances and for some environmental*

improvements to the Blurton Estate redevelopment. Following on from that, we have a lot more development partnership work in the pipeline. We have been asked to redevelop an area of shops and we are moving outside the borough to work on a suburban estate designated for regeneration under the RENEW North Staffordshire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder in the Stoke-on-Trent City Council area.'

Regeneration work is something that many RSLs are involved with but they may not have the necessary GIS expertise. Reader notes, 'We've earned a lot of respect for our work and we are getting more requests to produce mapping for the regeneration partnership. We made it easy for them to come to us. We are a one-stop shop and we add lots of value; we can do everything from organise the signs to producing all the maps and plans.'

More efficiencies, more savings

Aspire Housing is benefiting in other ways, Reader points out. 'We've helped the surveyors to become more efficient,' she says. 'We create maps containing the stock condition data they have collected, showing asbestos hot spots, non-traditional construction types, for example, visualising the data they have collected and presenting it to managers for action and reducing the number of time-consuming and costly site inspections.' Reader adds, 'OS MasterMap provides a historical context too. Things change between surveys and you can look

back at old versions of OS MasterMap to identify the changes.'

The GIS has now been implemented in other departments at Aspire Housing. Reader again, 'We wanted to make sure our own house was in order before we started to roll it out to other parts of the organisation. However, we were producing around 30 plans a day for boundary dispute checks and right-to-buy applications, so it made sense to extend the GIS to the legal department and train the users to do this for themselves.' She adds, 'Our stock condition coordinator also uses the system. She exports data from the Codeman asset management software, where we have the points from Address Layer to produce reports that show the location of properties and the work planned or carried out.'

Reader can see more savings in the future. She says, 'Using OS MasterMap in-house to produce plans will in the end save on external architect and consultants fees'.

Return on investment

Senior management backing

Reader offers this advice for other housing associations looking to get a return from GIS, 'There is no one way of doing things, but you will need the sort of senior management backing that we had, from people who understand what GIS can do'. In addition, she advises, 'Having a quick-start solution as well as a long-term programme: if you lose momentum, you will lose support. People always want reports

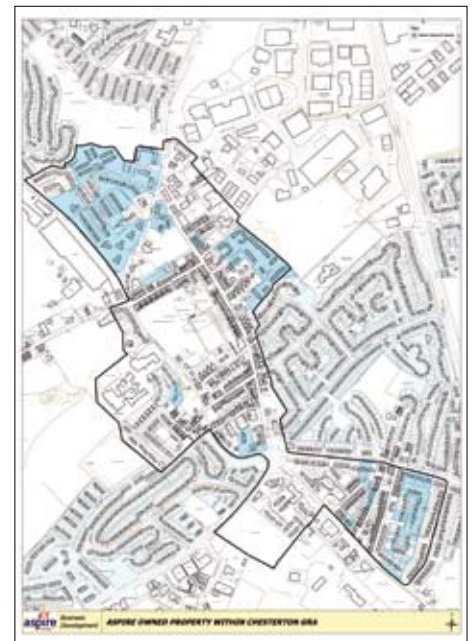
for projects and for meetings so they can make decisions, so I worked hard using the GIS to get reports out quicker.'

Very much a corporate tool

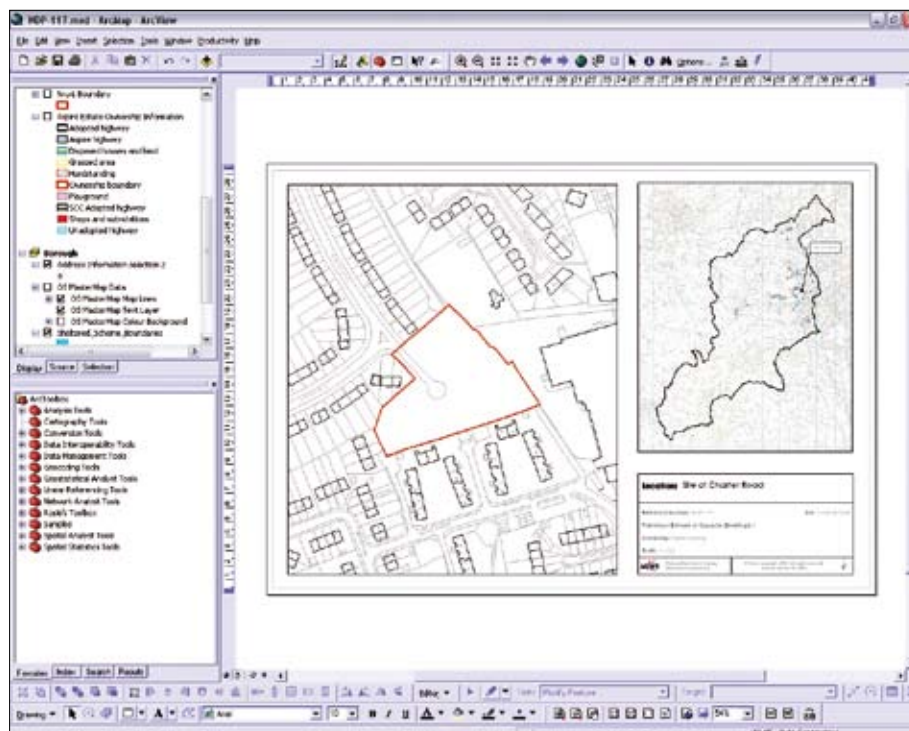
Aspire Housing view their investment in GIS as long term. According to Storer, 'The total all-in cost is around £80 000 a year, including software, maps, salaries and so on; quite small compared to our turnover. The system is picking up momentum; we are starting to push it out to other teams and we are planning to take it live through our Intranet site.' He sums up by saying, 'GIS is very much a corporate tool that feeds into our top 20 corporate priorities, and it is paying for itself progressively as more people become aware of its capabilities'.



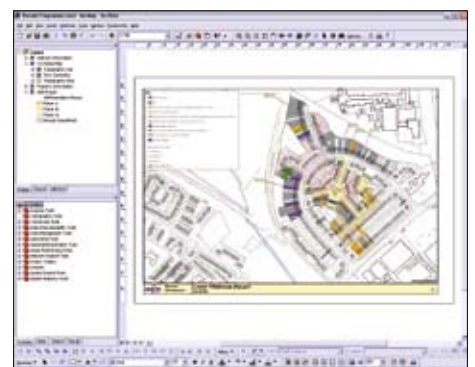
Central Area land ownership



Chesterton Renewal Area



Plan illustrating site boundary



Lower Milehouse AMI



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