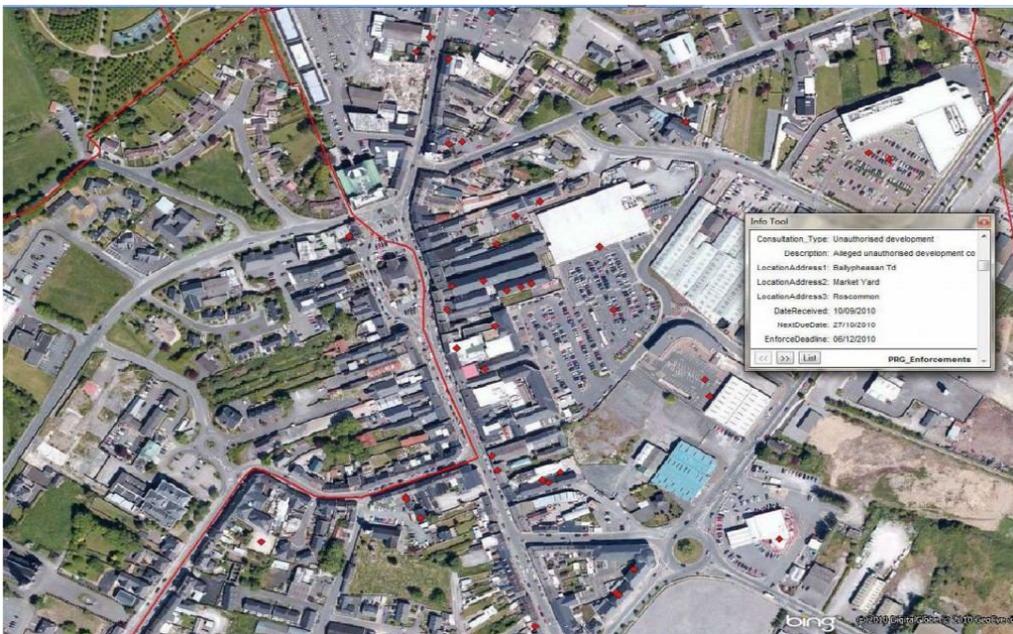


Case Study: Roscommon County Council



1. Project Name: Spatial Planning Reports



2. Contact Details

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3. The Customer

Roscommon County Council is the primary unit of Local Government in the County of Roscommon, an inland county in the province of Connaught covering an area of 2,549 sq. Kilometres and with a population of approximately 64,000.

The Council is responsible for providing a large variety of services which impact the daily lives of those living in and visiting the county. These vary from essential services such as the provision of water and sewerage facilities, the building and maintenance of public roads, development control, and those of a community and recreational nature such as libraries and the arts.

The main function of the Planning Office of the Council is in facilitating the sustainable development of housing, industry and services in County. It does this through the production of a 5 year development plan and the processing of planning applications in accordance with this.

4. Industry Category

Local Government

5. Executive Summary

The Planning office is responsible for evaluating individual planning applications submitted in relation to developments within the County boundary. The location of an application is a critical factor in determining whether an application should be granted or not.

With each new application already being captured into a GIS the Planning office looked to utilise the spatial analysis capabilities of the GIS to replace existing manual paper based procedures and to assist in streamlining and standardising the planning application evaluation process.

Working closely with the GIS section of the Council programs to create 'Spatial Planning Reports' were defined and developed to analyse the location of each new application against a set list of spatial criteria, returning and presenting the results through a standard report template on the Council Intranet. Time savings of a half a day on average per application have been estimated when compared against previous methodology. With the report process defined variations on the standard report have also been looked for and implemented, providing further time savings to the Planning office.

6. Purpose of Project / Business Challenge

Under legislation Planning applications relating to developments within the County of Roscommon must be made to the Planning Office of the Roscommon County Council. It is then the role of the Planning Office to evaluate these applications in accordance with its current County Development Plan with the end result being a granted, with or without conditions, or refused decision.

This evaluation process involves analysing the content of the lodged application against a number of criteria defined within the Plan. Along with factors such as the size, type and

aesthetics of any development the Planner must also take into account the location of the proposed development in relation to surrounding natural and man made features. The Planner may also be required to refer the application to a 3rd party for comment depending of where it is located in relation to features of interest such as Designated Areas etc.

With the support of the Councils GIS section the Planning Office of the Council has been capturing the extents of each new planning application into a GIS for a number of years with the main aim of creating a digital dataset for secure storage and sharing. This dataset is then shared internally through the Councils Corporate GIS allowing the Planners to view the location of any captured application in relation to a large number of other datasets, both internally and externally sourced. The Planning Office recognised that GIS though its ability to access, integrate, and analyse spatial datasets, could provide further benefits. Having the application data already within a GIS dataset presented them with the opportunity to further utilise the spatial analytical capabilities of the GIS to assist in streamlining and standardising the evaluation process. The two main aims of the Planning Office were to implement standardised procedures that would be applied in a consistent manner to any new application, and to generate efficiencies in the evaluation process where possible through the automation of the procedures.

7. Solution

MapInfo Professional is the standard desktop GIS software used within Roscommon County Council with over 30 licences in use between the various sections including Planning, Environment, Roads, and Water Services. Within the Planning Office specifically planning and technical staff already used MapInfo and a number of associated custom applications on a daily basis for various tasks including the digitising of planning applications, the production of development and local area plans, for visual analysis, and for map production.

After engaging with the GIS section of the Council to review their requirements it was decided to develop and implement a MapBasic program which would analyse each new application captured against a set list of feature layers and output the results in the format of a readable report to be made available for viewing through the Council Intranet.

As a first step the Planning Office defined the report requirements in terms of the feature types to be queried against and the individual query type (E.g. Distance, Within, Intersects). In total each planning application needed to be analysed against over 30 different feature datasets including the likes of other planning applications, designated areas, development plan zonings, national monuments, radon values, aquifer vulnerability, and flood areas. A program was then developed in accordance with these criteria.

The program when run identifies any new planning applications not previously processed and executes each defined query against the location and extents of those applications. It outputs an XML based report per application that is then made available for viewing on the Council Intranet for viewing by any relevant Planning staff, with each report consisting of a combination of text based information and a number of associated saved map images providing visual context, styled for display. The program is scheduled to run nightly ensuring a report is available for viewing no more than 24 hours after the application is captured in the GIS.

When at a later date when the Planning Office, under a requirement from the Department of the Environment, was tasked with carrying out detailed analysis on over 100 known quarry locations within the County to determine if they required detailed Environmental Impact Assessments they immediately identified the benefits of applying the same methodology. After defining the quarry report criteria automated reports were generated and again made available to the relevant Planning staff with savings of up to 2 days in effort per quarry in carrying out the same process manually.

8. Benefits / Business Case

- Automates and standardises the process of analysing planning applications, delivering a more consistent experience.
- Streamlines the process of evaluating planning applications by making key information available, saving an estimated three to four hours per application.
- In the case of Section 261a quarries saved approximately 200 man days effort in evaluating quarry locations.
- Replaces manual paper-based analysis methods with a digital record viewed via the Corporate Intranet, and provides a shared single version of reports.
- Ensures all necessary referrals are made.
- Customisable enabling different report criteria to be applied with minimum effort.