

South Ayrshire Council uses story maps to boost engagement

South Ayrshire Council is using interactive maps to make information about local issues more accessible, meaningful and engaging.

Challenge

Local government needs to effectively communicate with its stakeholders to keeping them informed about politics, upcoming events and new opportunities. With so many sources of information competing for attention, South Ayrshire Council needed to find a way to attract and sustain the interest of its citizens, businesses and colleagues

Solution

ESRI Story Map templates were used to tie together maps, images and text, and published online in interactive format (see image). The accompanying description makes it very clear what the map shows and why it is important, while the images draw people in and make the Story Maps compelling to view.



[The first Story Map](#) was used to increase public awareness of South Ayrshire's Local Development Plan which sets out the Council's land use priorities. By combining maps of the area with high quality images and the actual policy wording, it clearly set out where new commercial developments, like retail units, will be permitted; advises on the best sites developments like wind farms; and simplifies policy around residential planning restrictions.

A further Story Map was produced to clarify proposed ward boundary changes and incorporated Esri's QuestionWhere survey app to provide a direct means for citizens to comment on and influence council plans. In recognition of their new and engaging approach to publishing the Local Development Plan, South Ayrshire Council was named the overall winner in the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning 2016.

Benefits

Increases citizen engagement on local issues by making information more accessible and meaningful

With nearly 4,500 views in just six months, the Local Development Plan Story Map was accessed more times in its first five weeks of publication than the previous Local Development Plans had been in an entire year. The Council has found that people are better informed and are more involved in local issues.

Contributes to initiatives designed to boost the local economy

South Ayrshire Council also produced a Story Map which shows vacant land and derelict sites. The clarity of the information makes it easier for home owners and commercial organisations to recognise development opportunities, understand council policies and make appropriate planning applications that are more likely to obtain planning permission. Interactive Story Maps enriched with quality imagery, including one for visitors to the Open Golf Tournament which converted a dense 40-page traffic management document into a highly visual, user-friendly resource.

Improves efficiency and realises cost-savings when widened to the internal audience

Extending the Story Map initiative to its internal communications has enabled the Council to improve employees' understanding of corporate policies and procedures. For example, the 'Better Mail Management' Story Map shows how to handle mail and where to find franking machines to cost effective methods of sending mail. The Council says that there is 'at least one new Story Map request every ten days.' This has resulted in ten staff from various departments being trained to help keep up with demand.