

Launching a world-leading public information system

Heritage Services

The Challenge

- Consolidate data from three business units
- Improve departmental efficiency

The Benefits

- Higher quality of customer service and improved operational efficiency
- Better access to information for all

The Customer

The National Monuments Service, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Service form part of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG). Collectively known as Heritage Services, they play a leading role in identifying, categorising and conserving important natural, historical and architectural sites across the country.

The Challenge

One of the most important roles of all three business units within Heritage Services is to make information accessible to anyone who needs it. However, Heritage Services was finding it increasingly difficult to respond quickly to all of the requests for information that it received each year – largely because of the vast amounts of data it held.

“Heritage Services manages data covering 30,000 national monuments, approximately 30,000 buildings and vast areas of countryside, coastline and offshore water,” says Rob Ovington, GIS coordinator for the National Parks and Wildlife Service. *“Our challenge is to manage information about all these sites and make it accessible to different groups of people, whenever they want it, in a format that they can understand and use.”*

The three business units had been using Esri GIS solutions for many years to support their work – but their data was held in disparate systems. They recognised that if they consolidated all their data in a single centralised environment, this would help them to make information more accessible, both to external organisations and to other business units within the DEHLG. Heritage Services also had the foresight to realise that GIS could help them streamline many of their core processes, if it was more tightly integrated with other business systems and workflows.

The Solution

Esri Ireland started by helping the three business units to cleanse and consolidate their disparate data sets and to establish a centralised geospatial database. This “Geodatabase” made it easier and more efficient for the department to maintain and manage its vast spatial data resources.

Next, Esri Ireland worked with Heritage Services to create a new and innovative web mapping application to help make information from the Geodatabase readily accessible to employees. Named the “GeoBrowser”, this solution enables users to search for, view, query and analyse map-based information over the organisation’s intranet. *“For the first time, all departmental employees can easily access information from other business units, from one place,”* says Ovington.



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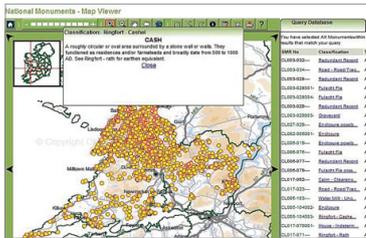
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Rob Ovington, GIS Coordinator, National Parks and Wildlife Service, DEHLG



National Monuments Viewer – Ringfort at Cashel in the Townland of Aillwee, Clare

To help improve public access to information, Esri Ireland then helped Heritage Services to develop three new publicly facing websites – one for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.ie), one for the National Monuments Service (www.archaeology.ie) and one for the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Service (www.buildingsforireland.ie). Powered by Esri technology, these sites allow users to view data online, download data to their own internal GIS systems or stream Heritage Services’ data direct into their own online applications.

In addition to these GIS developments, Esri Ireland worked with the different business units on a range of concurrent projects to embed GIS more tightly into core business processes. *“The flexibility of Esri’s ArcGIS suite means that we can use it to support many areas of our work,”* says Ovington. *“Esri Ireland is extremely professional and experienced. We have benefited from dealing with the people who know the software best.”*



National Parks and Wildlife Viewer –showing Natural Heritage Areas and Special Areas of Conservation in Carlow/Kilkenny

Benefits

The creation of a centralised approach to GIS has transformed the way that Heritage Services works and delivered a plethora of benefits for the DEHLG, as well as the citizens and external organisations that it serves.

When people contact the department with queries, members of staff can easily use the Geo Browser to call up the building or area of land in question, access supplementary information and answer questions instantly, without needing to phone back later. This intranet-based solution therefore significantly reduces the amount of time and effort required to answer queries from stakeholders and the public. The department can deliver a higher quality of service, while working more cost efficiently.

The three new public web sites extend these benefits even further. Most members of the public and external organisations elect to use the web sites to access the information that they need on a ‘self service’ basis. This is more convenient for them, but also more cost effective for the DEHLG, as it frees up staff to work on other projects.

Throughout Heritage Services, GIS has been deeply embedded into core business processes, and this is contributing significantly to more streamlined workflows and operational efficiencies. Skilled surveyors and archaeologists no longer have to spend as much time working with paper-based systems and checking that their reports have been entered correctly into the system. Instead, they can concentrate their time where it adds most value to the organisation. Ovington says: *“GIS puts our experts where they need to be.”*

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