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Smarter real time asset management

KarbonTech and Solihull Council have been providing a live public facing 'Report It' facility for gully blockage and maintenance via the local authority's website. This article explores the impact of the live service

Latest figures from Ofcom show that almost seven in 10 people in the UK now own a smartphone. As well as being responsible for the invention of the 'selfie' the smartphone revolution is changing the way we expect to engage and receive information from our local councils.

Over the past five years or so we have become familiar with the ability for the public to report issues with potholes, flooded gullies, damaged pavements and overgrown vegetation using email via council websites. Whilst being a definite step forward from the traditional reliance on a phone call or letter it still remained a long way from being a real time exchange of information which officers and contractors could access.

One council keen to lead the way in real time engagement with the public is Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The council has worked with asset management software specialists KarbonTech to provide the public with the ability to report gully blockages and see action taken via the council's website.

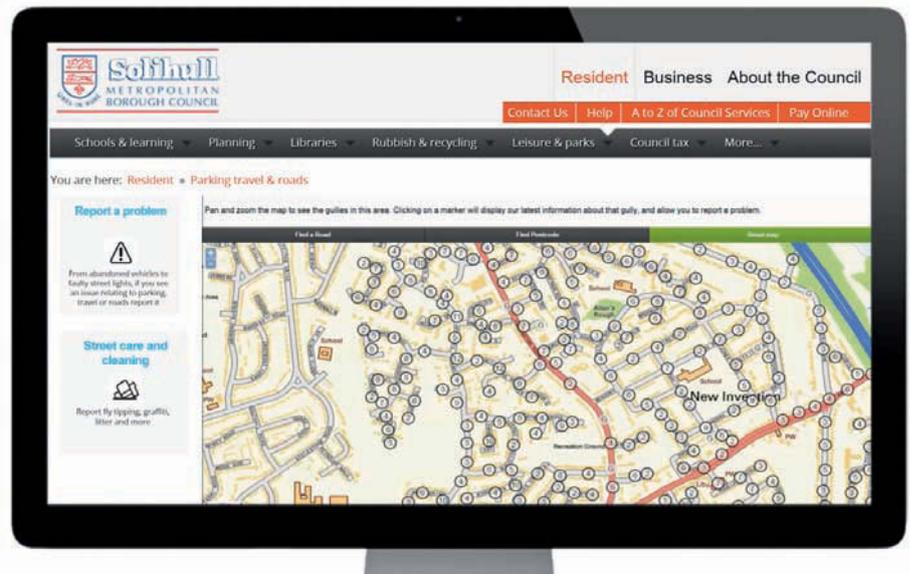
KarbonTech specialises in asset management software and has built a strong reputation for innovation in the highways sector. The company was a finalist in the *Highways Magazine* Excellence Awards 2015 for the best use of new technology in the industry.

Embedded within the Solihull Council website is a 'Report-it' facility which is viewable on any internet ready PC, tablet or phone.

A powerful set of search tools make the 'Report it' option easy to use and allows members of the public to locate a gully using a map view, street name or postcode. The precision of the location data is essential to ensuring that accurate data is recorded.

Users can zoom in and out on the map to see the gullies in this area. Individual markers indicate the location of each gully and clicking on the marker will display the latest information about that gully, and allow a problem to be reported.

Clicking on the marker for an individual gully also displays the historical



maintenance which allows the public to know the last time an asset/gully was cleaned, repaired or maintained. Photographs of the gully can be uploaded which helps the highways professional assess the importance of the fault.

The accuracy of the recording of the geographical location avoids miscommunication and means work allocated out to maintenance teams is clear and no time is lost identifying the correct gully. The system provides the ability to share reported defects with contractors much more easily, therefore, enhancing communication. Assets requiring work can be allocated to field teams wirelessly. This leads to improved management of complaints and builds a better historical record of each asset.

The key features of 'Report-it' are:

- ➔ Easy to use public interface
- ➔ Embed into existing council website
- ➔ Smartphone and tablet ready
- ➔ Public can upload photos
- ➔ Inform public electronically of last inspection.

Ed Bradford, senior engineer, highways services at Solihull said: ***"It is a real step forward to be able to offer a live public facing 'Report It' facility. It means we can manage gully issues quickly, prioritise work and deliver better value for money."***

Traditionally highways asset management has been the remit of contractors and highway officers. The general public has had no insight into the sheer number of assets being managed. Whilst elected members have expended time reporting blocked gullies and drainage issues to officers on behalf of their local residents. The volume of calls to council call centres about gully issues has reduced and response times are improved because information is seen straight away by the highways teams.

The experience in Solihull demonstrates that a simple effective public interface for reporting defects has benefits not only for the general public but for officers and councillors.

Mark Entwistle, managing director of KarbonTech, said: ***"A real time 'Report-It' application usable by the public seemed a logical extension of our Gully Smart asset management product. The results from Solihull are demonstrating that 'Report-it' is working to the benefit of the both the public and highways professionals."***

With seven in 10 of us now having smartphones the way the public engage with councils is changing and we in highways will have no option but to adapt to meet these higher expectations. ☹