



# Conwy & Denbighshire

The UK's First Cross-County  
Highways and Infrastructure  
Collaboration Solution



Early in 2008, both Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) and Denbighshire County Council (DCC) had a vacancy for Head of Service for their Highways and Infrastructure Departments.

The two councils decided on an innovative, collaborative approach that led to the appointment of a joint Head of Highways and Infrastructure in February 2009, the establishment of a joint cross county team, and the extension of the Symology Insight System, already in place in Conwy, to incorporate both counties requirements.

### History

Conwy implemented Symology's Insight System for Street Works in 1998, in order to adhere to the then new Legislative and Code of Practice requirements. In 2006 they added the modules required for managing UKPMS operations.

Later that year the solution was extended to manage Gazetteer Maintenance, Customer Services and Highways Maintenance, which facilitated a highways safety inspection regime with handheld devices, Street Works notification for internal works, and electronic works ordering. Bridges & Structures was also implemented, allowing the Atkins standard for inspections to be introduced – again using handhelds. This also allowed for the Bridge Condition Indicator to be produced.

### Be smarter and deliver better services

CCBC and DCC set up a project group to drive the collaboration process with Members and staff representatives focusing on the need to deliver better, more citizen-centric services even at the expense of traditional council structures.

According to **Mike Graham, Programme Manager Highways & Infrastructure**, *"Since February 2009 the focus has evolved from delivering better services with the same resources to providing better services with fewer resources as well as realising efficiency savings."* Merged structures are being developed across the service, beginning with street lighting, street works, and passenger & school transport. Since the General Election, and in anticipation of significant budget challenges as a consequence of reductions in Central Government resourcing, this has had even more emphasis. According to Mike, *"We are maximising our combined assets to minimise costs wherever possible. We must also be smarter and transform our services to be customer-oriented and customer-driven. This will mean providing enhanced access and more channels of contact for citizens' convenience and making difficult choices about which services we offer whilst continuing to meet our statutory obligations."*

### Integrating DCC's data

**Alison Tomlinson, Highways Asset Manager** at Conwy says *"Importing the DCC Gazetteer into the CCBC system was fairly easy. There were a few issues to be addressed in terms of permissions, as we now share the Gazetteer module but want to restrict access so that we cannot edit each others datasets. The solution was a change by Symology to the configuration file. We're still developing the control and editing of the map layers with Symology but it already allows us to meet the required standard while retaining control of two separate datasets in the one system. However, we would like to see further improvements to the use of Welsh street names and Welsh characters."*

*"Migrating DCC's StreetWorks data into Insight was a little more challenging, especially as we ran into a problem with DCC's old street works system that forced us to bring the date for live data forward. However, we undertook a trial data load that identified the issues and just worked our way through them."*

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*Managers have empowered their staff to identify waste, duplication and inconsistency in the delivery of similar functions via open workshops.*

*Everyone has a clear mandate to challenge the need for every process and reduce each procedure to its essential elements and develop common policies and consistent ways of working across Conwy and Denbighshire.*

## Solving integration issues

Alison believes that the really positive aspect of sharing the licence agreement between the two counties is not just the cost savings it has generated but the detailed way they have been required to examine their work processes as well as the knowledge and skill sharing that can be utilised across the two authorities.

*“We are the first Symology customer to use the system in this way and have had to compromise. After all, when you’re adapting one system to two Authorities there will be operational issues and the level of system integration differs depending on the modules. We have one joint database for Street Works and for the Street Gazetteer, which will enable further future integration of other modules that, for the moment, remain separate. But, users retain the sense of ‘two systems’ via the use of the View and Update permissions, which allow us to present different users with different ‘views’. For instance, the two Street Works managers can view works across both authorities while administrative staff only see what is relevant to their individual Authority.”*

“Symology is a very good technology partner to work with. Their development team have a good understanding of our needs and respond positively to enhancement and functionality requests. Support is very good and the helpdesk team is responsive and helpful when we have queries. Last, but certainly not least, Symology is excellent at meeting legislative changes and providing fixes when issues are identified.”

## Empowered staff

According to Mike Graham, *“Managers have empowered their staff to identify waste, duplication and inconsistency in the delivery of similar functions via open workshops. Everyone has a clear mandate to challenge the need for every process and reduce each procedure to its essential elements and develop common policies and consistent ways of working across Conwy and Denbighshire. We continuously monitor efficiency gains and have joint service performance reviews to identify differences and address them quickly.”*

*“The collaboration emphasises the value of staff and the benefits arising from improved opportunities for development, progression and access to training. Every policy approach and procedure will be reviewed as part of the integration agenda and choices presented to the members for decisions on the appropriate balance between service levels and cost.”*

## The collaboration’s mission

- A reduction in the duplication of service wide support and administrative functions across the two counties.
- Improved training & development opportunities, efficiency and flexibility in workforce planning including the sharing of resources resulting in improved productivity. This also delivers a better work environment to attract and retain good staff; also enable for succession planning. The workforce generates a high cost element of any service being offered and it is an asset that must be as productive as possible.
- A saving in staffing costs by reducing the number of Heads of Service posts from two to one. This includes establishing single structures where this is appropriate.
- Economies of scale through better use of resources; for example, to assist in the implementation of a joint highways asset management plan for the authorities with the consequent benefits of more efficient and effective use of highways maintenance resources.
- Reduced duplication when preparing policies, practices and contracts for the Highways and Infrastructure Service.
- Opportunities to maximise efficiency by delivering services across a wider geographical area through removing some of the inherent duplication and inefficiency that exists in relatively small Unitary Authorities.

Mike Graham concludes, *“We intend to merge completely the two Highways and Infrastructure functions over the next couple of years and, in part, enable this by utilising a single Highways Asset Management system at the core of service delivery.”*

## Key Features

- Conwy has grown from using Symology Insight for Street Works purposes only to having a fully integrated Highways Asset Management System.
- Shared licence allows for shared systems costs and shared knowledge and skills.
- The “One Team, Two Counties” approach is delivering improved customer services and increased efficiencies whilst also managing with fewer resources.
- Efficiency improvements and costs savings are measured against the ‘baseline’ in place prior to the collaboration.
- The CCBC/DCC collaboration project is delivering Best Practice and valuable lessons to other collaborative models.
- Economies of scale through better use of resources.
- Implementation of a joint highways asset management plan for the authorities with consequent benefits of more efficient and effective use of highways maintenance resources.
- Symology offers very good support, has a good understanding of needs and responds to enhancement and functionality requests.
- Helpdesk team is responsive and helpful.
- Symology is excellent at meeting any legislative changes and providing fixes when issues are identified.
- Quarterly account meetings with Symology to identify possible issues and discuss future improvements.
- Regular User Group meetings and sub-user groups are also very useful.



