



## 20 YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG

Co-ordinating the diverse activities and working practices within a County Council, with its Area offices and Agency Agreements, has always been challenging.

Back in 1985, Buckinghamshire County Council, already appreciating the benefits of standardisation and packaged solutions, embarked on a project to install Symology's PUSWA package throughout the County. The success of this project started the beginning of a close, mutually beneficial relationship, which continues to thrive to this day.

Symology's packages have changed and developed beyond recognition over the years since then, culminating in the 2004 launch of the Insight range. Throughout this time, Buckinghamshire County Council have been major contributors in helping to shape the comprehensive facilities provided by Symology's range of software products, so that they continue to meet the ever changing requirements of Local Authority maintenance operations.

Buckinghamshire County Council's use of the system has expanded considerably from the initial starting point of the PUSWA module. Today the system provides the Transportation Services Department with a fully integrated Asset Management system covering areas such as Inspections, Works Ordering, Financial Control, Gazetteer Maintenance, Street Works and UKPMS. The system is used to manage over 3150 km of highway.

The flexibility and portability of Symology's software has enabled BCC to easily take full advantage of new technologies and facilities as they have evolved over time. In the early years, standalone PCs were used in the three remote area offices. Operations were later centralised with the system running on a UNIX server. Today the system is operated on a Windows 2000 server, with remote offices utilising Windows Terminal Server and microwave communication technologies to gain access to the system. This latest deployment method enables facilities such as embedded Microsoft Word and Excel, Crystal Reports and mapping options to be utilised with excellent performance.

As part of the County's policy of continually striving to provide better and more informative services to its customers, in 2003, Transportation Services appointed Trish Richards as Customer Services, Group Manager. The responsibilities of this role were to oversee the implementation, by April 2004, of a departmental call centre operation, to be known as HIGHWAYS ON CALL. The prime objective of this new service was to improve the Authorities communication with members of the public.

As part of the project, Trish, with many years experience of Customer Service in the private sector, embarked on a detailed review of available software, including attending training courses to obtain an in-depth view. By September Symology's Customer Services module,

which had been fully operational in the Beaconsfield Area office since 1999, was identified as being the best software available to meet the requirements.

Trish was helped in the implementation by Bob Glover, Symology's Account Manager, and Kathy Farrer, Buckinghamshire's Insight System Administrator. They were quickly able to use the flexibility of the Customer Services module to set up a number of different deployment scenarios, in order to identify the most suitable methods of operation for all the different types of requests which occur. A specialised training course was then developed for the new Customer Services personnel. At the same time, Symology were commissioned to merge the individual Area office customer service databases into one centralised, corporate database. All of these tasks were successfully completed within 2 months, and initial on-site training was given in December 2003.

The success of the training programme enabled the commencement of a pilot scheme from early January 2004. Inevitably this scheme raised a number of questions, both procedurally and with the software. However, due to Kathy's understanding of the system and the in-built flexibility provided by the software, the issues raised were quickly resolved.

The next stage of the project was to provide a means of enabling the citizens of the County to raise customer service requests online via the HIGHWAYS ON CALL section of the Buckinghamshire website -

[http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/highways\\_maintenance/highways\\_on\\_call/](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/highways_maintenance/highways_on_call/).

**Note**

A demonstration version of Symology's Customer Service based web pages can be found at <http://www.symology.co.uk/syminternet> - please feel free to enter records on this system if you wish to evaluate the facilities. Please do not enter records on the Buckinghamshire system unless you wish to make a genuine request.

Symology's Customer Service Electronic Interface allows requests raised in other systems to be imported into a holding tank within the Customer Service module. Requests imported using this mechanism can then be validated for accuracy before a full commitment to the database is made.

Symology were commissioned to develop a bespoke web front end that could be used by website visitors to not only record service requests, but track and monitor their progress.

The requests made via the website are automatically imported into the Customer Service module using the electronic interface. Latest status information is extracted from the Insight database and fed back to the SQL Server database used by the web pages so that the citizen can monitor the progress of requests.

The consultation, development and implementation of this element of the project were achieved within a two-week period. The overall success of the pilot ensured that the whole HIGHWAYS ON CALL project went live as planned in April 2004.

At a post implementation meeting Trish Richards commented:

"I'm very pleased with the way the project implementation has gone and I'm indebted to Symology and to Kathy for her hard work in setting up and configuring the system. Because of the size and complexity of the project we decided to use a phased implementation throughout the department. Our Wycombe Area went fully operational at the beginning of

April and the other areas were brought on gradually, with the whole County fully operational from October. Operationally, we have found the software meets all the requirements and is very easy to use."

Apart from the Departmental Call Centre project, Symology have also been working with Buckinghamshire on a number of other major projects:

### **Local Delivery Plans (LDP)**

Gary Bartlett, Group Manager - Policy and Performance, asked Symology for help in improving the availability of LDP information throughout the Department. Symology successfully demonstrated to Senior Management how this could be achieved and within a month a fully working system was implemented.

### **National Street Gazetteer**

The introduction of the Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) with all its rules and regulations resulted in Buckinghamshire needing to make a significant number of changes to their National Street Gazetteer. Due to timing and resource constraints, Symology were asked to help. A Symology consultant was assigned to the project and using our SymView GIS product, the Gazetteer was updated to enable Buckinghamshire to submit a comprehensive Level III Gazetteer on time.

### **SAP Accounts Payable interface**

Having changed to a new Accounts Payable system, an electronic interface between Symology's INSIGHT system and SAP was needed.

Whilst the statement of requirements posed some problems of information availability, once the detailed specification was approved, Symology developed the interface within 3 weeks and enabled Buckinghamshire to meet their implementation timescale of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2004.

### **Embedded Mapping & OS MasterMap Layers**

More recently Buckinghamshire have implemented Symology's embedded mapping facilities together with the use of OS MasterMap layers.

The embedded mapping options provide high performance, secure and intuitive facilities for day-to-day functions such as determining the precise location or work requirements, area based searching, entity plotting and map printing.

OS MasterMap is an intelligent digital map designed by Ordnance Survey for use with geographical information systems (GIS) and databases. Based on the National Grid, it includes topographic information on every landscape feature – buildings, roads, phone boxes, post boxes, and landmarks – and represents a significant evolution from traditional cartography. OS MasterMap depicts the real-world digitally and presents this comprehensive, advanced information as themes in a series of layers, each layer carrying millions of features. At Buckinghamshire the OS MasterMap layers were loaded into an Oracle database by Symology and Insight was configured to access and update the maps using ArcSDE.

The mapping facilities are now in use by the Customer Service Team and the staff are all very happy with the system. Shortly these facilities will also be made available to all highway technical staff.

### Mobile Devices

As this article goes to press, the next phase of Buckinghamshire's implementation plans are in progress. With the order of 30 Mobile Devices just arriving (see picture below) and Symology's latest start-of-the-art mobile device software, Buckinghamshire's inspectors will soon be able to communicate with the main database whilst out in the field!



Kathy Farrer commented:

"As ever, Symology have again come up with the goods. We were set some very tough objectives, but with their help, professionalism and understanding of our operation we have been able to meet our objectives. As a result of close co-operation with Symology over a number of years, we have reached the stage where Symology's INSIGHT is accepted as **the** solution for Asset Management throughout the Department."