Facilities Report

Reasons for a mapping system

There is a demonstrable urgent need for the Bridgend Town Council to have available to it some form of Geographical Information System (GIS)

Benefits of GIS
There are many benefits of a GIS, depending on the version you are using which include but are not limited to the following examples:-

- Enable development of a fully integrated Asset Management System to ensure all assets are properly recorded and maintained for Risk Management Purposes, Insurance, and possible Audit purposes. For e.g. can hold info re individual benches such as how much it cost, when replaced, and include photos embedded into system available to view at the click of a button
- Enable maps to be prepared and printed for Grounds Maintenance Staff to aid in undertaking their duties and to enable problems they identify to be recorded.
- Enable maps to be prepared and printed for Councillors to identify locations of assets on one map e.g bus shelter locations
- Enable multiple maps to be printed for different wards for Councillors to undertake ward "walkabouts"
- Provide the Events Planning staff with maps to help plan events such as street markets, "Santa routes", etc
- Import data from other bodies to aid staff in undertaking duties and to provide information for Councillors e.g   Land Registry maps are available which show "Cadastral Parcels" which illustrate registered freehold boundaries (note - this does not provide land ownership information – the LR will still need to provide this)
- Enable maps to be displayed on the Town Councils website to provide important service information for the electorate e.g. where their nearest Town Council supplied defibrillator is
- Enable maps to be prepared for inclusion with planning applications or to obtain information for the planning committee to look at a particular aspect of a planning application it is considering.

Constraints of GIS
- Staff time – any system introduced will take a considerable amount of staff time to initially set up, familiarise with the system, and input all the asset management data
- A higher level of IT skills are needed depending on the system used.
- Training will need to be given to all staff and/or Councillors depending on the level of use required.
- To enable maps to be displayed on the website the website must be able to host the facility

Public Sector Geospatial Agreement
Bridgend Town Council have already signed up to the Public Sector Geospatial Agreement (PSGA) which enables it to obtain access to Ordnance Survey Maps, for free and under licence, for its use for the day to day purposes of the Council. However, in order to be able to manage, manipulate and create layers of information to gain use of it as per the above examples, some form of mapping software is needed. BCBC use a programme called MapInfo which is not included under the SLA for IT services. As a result, the Facilities Team have been undertaking investigations into some of the very many systems that are available on the market:
- QGIS
- Parish Online
- Pears

QGIS

A Free system is available to the Town Council as part of local government which is QGIS. A webinar recently hosted by the Ordnance Survey provided an overview of this system. The system enables maps with different information layers to be prepared and printed and, for example, holds aerial imagery maps. However it requires the system to be downloaded into an individual computer to be able to manipulate and print various maps. Currently under the SLA for IT services with BCBC we need to get permission for the system to be installed. Without being able to download the system the FM team have been unable to explore the capabilities of this free system, however it does seem on investigation of some of the various instruction manuals, it may need a level of IT knowledge to be able to manipulate the maps, which appeared to be the case from the webinar.

QGIS Considerations:

- No licence fee to pay
- Needs to be downloaded onto a single pc to manipulate and print
- Ease of use is unknown
- Compatibility with existing IT system is unknown

Alternatively the OS recommend two system providers - Parish Online and Pears for which there are annual fees payable which is a downside. However they do appear to be more user friendly.

Parish Online

The Temporary Facilities Officer attended a free webinar on Parish Online, hosted by the Ordnance Survey. Parish Online has been developed for use by Town and Community Councils. There is an annual fee for use of this system which is based on the population of the Town/Community Council and for Bridgend the Fee per annum at current rates would be £450 (plus VAT).

A 30 day free trial is available with no obligation to continue with the system or for immediate signup a 10% discount is available which continues every year provided the subscription is continuous. The Charge is one annual fee for as many users as you want within your organisation which would include staff and Councillors.

Alternatively subscription is offered for free if insurance is provided by BHIB insurance. This appears to be because the company believes it helps with your asset management and assists in getting information for insurance claims.

In the webinar the benefits Parish Maps provides over the free QGIS system were stated as being ready to use, data is already processed, and it requires less GIS specialist knowledge to use the system. All OS updates of maps are already installed whereas other systems you have to be aware when OS update their maps and download them into your system. All maintenance of the system is undertaken. The system includes tools to create your own maps and for e.g. it has a straight print to PDF function. This means that various maps of Bridgend Town, showing different information, or at different scales, can be printed at the press of a button. The system also saves information for future users so with changes of staff the information is not lost.

Parish Online obtains information map layers from various organisations such as Ordnance Survey, NRW, CADW, RCAHMW, Sustrans, HM Land Registry, The Coal Authority, National Grid, and British Geological Society. In some areas they work with the Local Authority and hold data from them such as for example Tree Preservation Orders. However they do not currently have any BCBC information layers but this is a possibility for the future.

For the Facilities Maintenance Team the system would be important for Asset Management. For example apart from being able to catalogue all of the outdoor assets in a map format, the Parish Online can, for example, not only record the location of a grit bin but record the size and volume of it, how much it cost to purchase and also record when it was last filled up. Another example which would serve useful for the proposed CAT of Ruhamah Burial ground is it can record the inscriptions from individual gravestones with accompanying photographs.

Parish Online is available for use via Chrome/Microsoft Edge/Safari and is a web based system and therefore does not require any programme to be downloaded into individual computers. Different permission levels are available as follows (the administrator can amend the access levels at any time):-

Administrator. There is only one Administrator for your Parish Online account. This should be held by the Parish Clerk or whoever has overall management of Parish Online
Data Manager. This level of user has all the privileges as the Administrator, except for accessing Billing. So they can create, edit and delete Map Layers and create, edit and delete Map Objects within layers.
Editor. This level of user has full editing rights for Map Layers (adding, modifying and deleting Map Objects) but they cannot create new Map Layers or modify the structure of Map Layers. They can modify any object, even if they haven't created it themselves.
Reader. This level of user can view all Map Layers, but they cannot create, edit or delete any Map Layers or Map Objects.

When logging into the system it will automatically centre on the area applicable to the account (Bridgend). Although you can view maps for the whole country the licence only permits you to "use" it for your parish purposes. If for example a project is being undertaken in conjunction with a neighbouring community council (who would also need the system), cross boundary working is available. If so and there is a need to share maps with the other CC you would simply need to let the Company know and they can amend the system to link parts of your maps.

The system will automatically tell you what shared info layers are available for your area (e.g. if BCBC had info layer available it would come up) rather than having to hunt down information layers yourself.

The Town Council can sign up for the Parish Online newsletter and there is a knowledge base with step by step guides and videos on "how to". Their system enables you to import information provided by other GIS companies for example if you employed Pear Technology (at a cost) to survey an area e.g. cemetery to provide a detailed map this can then be uploaded into your Parish Online account.

There is a Public map facility where you can pick certain layers and create interactive maps for display on your website, for example which streets the Santa ride will follow.

Parish Online Considerations:
- OS recommended
- Cost - £450 plus VAT per annum
- 30 day free trial or 10% discount
- Ease of use – does not require specialist IT / GIS knowledge to manipulate
- Accessibility – different users can access at the same time
- Information Map Layers created by staff can be viewed by all users

Pear Technology

The Ordnance Survey also recommends a system provided by Pear Technology and there are two versions available.

PT-Mapper Standard is aimed at users with smaller farms and simple requirements, which is £575. This enables things such as: - Draw lines and shapes, Measure objects – both linear distances and area, Open multiple map windows concurrently, Integrate with Google Earth, Group individual layers, add map titles and legends, and Import files from various sources

PT-Mapper Pro has additional functionality to support larger estates, councils and arboriculturists and costs £895 and has all the features of PTMapper Standard, plus: Create separate maps from your main map, Export maps to PocketGIS, Use tree tab to speed up tree management, Produce a complete property schedule for viewing and export to Excel, Search and navigate map via street gazetteer

Pear Technology Considerations:

- OS recommended
- Limited functionality
- Cost- £895
- Ease of use is unknown

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Town Council sign up to an account with Parish Online. Although Parish Online comes at a cost rather than the QGIS system it would provide all the functionality that would be required in Asset management in an online format. It would be cheaper than Pears based on the population of Bridgend.   It would enable all users to access a map for viewing at any time including Councillors being able to access information layers prepared by staff and it would assist staff other than the facilities team to create information for presentation to the public.   It would not need the consent of BCBC to use as it does not need to be downloaded into an individual PC/laptop.