

ESG NEWS

ASTUN TECHNOLOGY'S ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL & GOVERNANCE NEWSLETTER

2023 Review



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ASTUN
TECHNOLOGY

Learn from the comfort of your own desk

We've made our public training courses more environmentally friendly. All courses are now delivered online and the entire process is paper-free... even our certificates are digital!

QGIS Essentials

Two days
8 CPD points

QGIS Advanced

One day
4 CPD points

QGIS

PostGIS Essentials

One day
4 CPD points

PostGIS

GeoServer Essentials

Two days
8 CPD points

GeoServer

Introduction to GIS

One day
4 CPD points

QGIS

Want to get more out of your open source GIS software?

Talk to us about a bespoke course or join our public course waiting list

astuntechnology.com/training

EXPERTS IN PLACE



Find out more about our ESG

Putting ESG at the heart of our business

Environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) is used to measure a business on its ethics, sustainability and impact on the community.

In this edition, we look back at our activities in 2023.

We examine how we used our resources and skills to improve sustainability. We also share insights into how we supported various communities, including our team, our clients and the wider open source GIS community.

It's always a privilege to share our news with you, and we hope this gives you and your procurement teams reassurance that we continue to take ESG seriously.

The Astun Team

Did you know?

We donated to two worthy charities in lieu of sending Christmas cards in 2023. We chose **MapAction**, the humanitarian mapping charity, and **Rewilding Britain**, a charity devoted to restoring habitats, natural processes and, where appropriate, species.



A message from our ESG Champion

We're excited to have this chance to share some of our news with you.

2023 was another busy year for us. We worked on a number of projects and were committed to improving the work we do for our customers.

We also improved our company processes and, most importantly, continued our efforts to take care of our employees' wellbeing.



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About us
The Experts in Place

We're experts at helping organisations to improve decision-making and service delivery. Our expertise enables clients to discover, catalogue, share and collaborate on place-based data.

Our solutions, consultancy services and training have helped hundreds of organisations to implement cloud technology, develop custom web maps and manage their data more effectively. If you think we can help you, please **get in touch**.



Small efforts make a big difference

Not every initiative has to be sizable to make a difference!

Part of developing an ESG mindset is looking at every event and activity with fresh eyes. When it came to our 18th birthday meet-up in early 2023, we were keen to find small ways to make a difference.

Finding the right location

One of our key factors for location was accessibility by public transport. We chose to meet in Kingston. This historic town is local to some of our team and accessible by rail for those who live further afield. **Kingston University** has a strong sustainability drive, making it the ideal location for us!

Choosing greener accommodation

We opted to stay at the **Premier Inn** in Kingston. Like us, Premier Inn is going net zero. All Premier Inn hotels are powered by 100%

renewable energy and some even have solar panels installed. Who knows, we might have next year's meet-up at the new all-electric Premier Inn at Swindon!

Premier Inn already recycles all beds, pillows and duvets. It has also committed to reducing water use by 20% per hotel guest by 2030 and to cut food waste in half by 2030.

Enjoying an eco-cake

You can't get much more 'local' than asking one of your team's spouses to make your celebration cake.

Jonathan Lake-Thomas, Senior Developer, battled the weather to deliver it safely.

To reduce plastic waste, we even decorated it with a wooden cake topper.



Six of our commitments



Paying a living wage to our team



We remain one of the 14,000 Living Wage accredited organisations in the UK.

The Living Wage is especially important to our public sector clients. Over 140 Local Authorities share our commitment to paying the Living Wage.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

Maintaining cyber security



In 2023, we were re-certified to Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus. This was our fourth year of successful certification.

We hope that our commitment to Cyber Essentials helps to reassure clients like you that their data and systems are safe in our hands.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

Cutting our greenhouse gases



We have continued with our SME Climate Change Commitment.

This encourages SMEs to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by half before 2030 and eradicate them by 2050.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

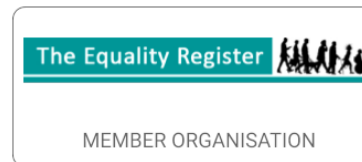
Benchmarking our ESG



We have asked sustainability assessment experts EcoVadis to re-rate our environmental, social and ethical performance. The EcoVadis Rating covers a broad range of non-financial management systems, including Environmental, Labour & Human Rights and Ethics impacts.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

Promoting equality and diversity



Our continued membership of the Equality Register demonstrates our commitment to excellent equality and diversity practices.

Membership gives us access to reviews and self-assessments, guidance and planning tools to help manage our Equality Policy and Practices.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

Bytes of kindness: recycling old tech



This year, we donated unused IT devices to Computers for Charity. The charity provides a secure data wiping and refurbishment process that gives old equipment a new lease of life.

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

FOSS4G:UK Local 2023

Using our expertise to help bring open source geospatial technologies to a wider audience

FOSS4G:UK 2023 was held on the 7th of September at eight venues across the UK.

Financial support

As national sponsors, we contributed towards the event costings and to enabling OSGeo:UK to continue to provide financial support to open source projects.

Volunteering to talk

We may be biased, but we think we have more than our fair share of the UK's best open source experts.

It's important to us that our team have the chance to share their knowledge, so we encouraged Astuners to respond to the Call for Papers.

Mike Saunt (MD), Elena Robu (Metadata Consultant) and Matt Walker (Principal Development Architect) joined over 50 other speakers.

Supporting the community

We believe that FOSS4G:UK is a great day out for anyone interested in GIS. This year, 200 other people agreed with us.

At Astun, we had no shortage of volunteers who wanted to attend.

Familiar faces such as Mike Smith (Renewals Manager) and Andy Bailey (GIS Consultant) were joined by more recent additions to the team, including Andrew Smart who is now part of our Sales Team.



Catch up online

There are over 20 hours worth of recordings available on the **FOSS4G:UK YouTube channel**. You can find a list of our favourite talks on our **blog**.

Highlights from FOSS4G:UK



History of GIS

Presentation



Our MD, Mike Saunt, delivered his talk in London.

"Back to 2003: A Brief History of Open Source Mapping Adoption in the UK (a non-technical viewpoint)" reflected on changes in attitudes towards open source GIS.



Machine Learning/AI

Presentation



Elena Robu gave her first-ever FOSS4G:UK talk at Bristol.

"Unleashing the Potential: How Automated Metadata Creation Can Improve Your Data Quality and Accessibility" gave attendees practical insights into how to make the most of large language models used to automate metadata creation.



Paths to Wellbeing

Joint presentation

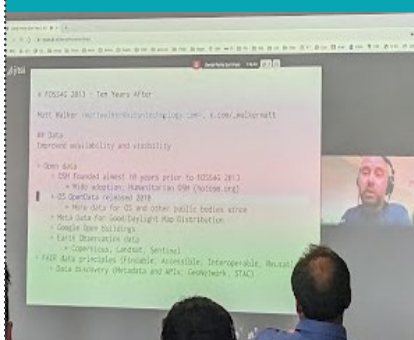


In Swansea, Matt Walker was joined by Rhys Wynne-Jones of Ramblers Cymru to talk about Paths to Wellbeing, a project to promote 145 walking routes across Wales. Matt provided a demo and technical overview, including information about data capture, ETL, web technologies and hosting.



Ten Years On

Round table



A lot has happened in the ten years since the UK hosted the FOSS4G global conference in Nottingham.

As one of the event team, Matt Walker joined the panel discussion remotely.



Attendee's View

Andrew Smart, Basingstoke



Andrew Smart, Sales Account Manager, enjoyed his first GIS event.

He particularly valued a workshop by Hannah Wright from Ordnance Survey. She discussed different methods of representing geospatial data for non-technical audiences. Unfortunately, this talk was not recorded.

ESG Points

David Renn, Lancaster



Many clients know David from his attendance at our user groups whilst working for a Local Authority and from his more recent training and consultancy role with us.

He receives ESG brownie points for travelling to Lancaster in his electric car.



Astun User Group 2023

We invited our clients to a day devoted to open source GIS

Not everyone can make it to our annual User Group, so here are the highlights for those who couldn't attend. If you'd like more information about any of the topics covered, please [contact us](#).

Before we get into the details, we'd like to thank all the delegates who have completed our feedback survey. We've had brilliant scores this year, once again, and great comments from attendees.

Astun news straight from the horse's mouth
Our user group always offers delegates the chance to learn about our development roadmap and see some of the latest geospatial innovations in action. This year was no exception with presentations from our MD and several of our technical experts.

Talks included an overview of **Astun Data Services (ADS)**, including plans, such as the transition to Ordnance Survey APIs, from Matt Walker and Domna Kanari. Jo Cook and Elena Robu gave an overview of potential syndicated services for ADS, including national datasets of Electric Vehicle Charging Points, Energy Performance Certificates and a national Food Hygiene Ratings dataset.

Their talks were followed by an introduction to **iShare Insights** with Power BI, featuring ex-local authority GIS Manager David Renn and Elena. iShare Insights is an ideal way to enable users to access powerful data visualisations. Mike Saunt, our MD, introduced the concept of a My Councillor dashboard that could provide councillors with critical insights whilst raising their awareness of GIS. After all, local authority GIS teams can never have too many 'champions' within the management structure!

You can find videos introducing iShare Insights on our **YouTube channel**. We offer versions for GIS Managers and non-GIS users.



“Our 2023 User Group was a great success thanks to the hard work of our team and the enthusiasm of our clients. We've already started planning our 2024 User Group. Look out for your invitation in late Spring.”

“We made some great contacts on the day, with whom we have been actively collaborating with since the event. Without it, we would never have met these people in the GIS community. Overall, the Astun user group not only gave us a lot of information but inspired us that we can do so much more with the iShare platform.”



ASTUN TECHNOLOGY USER GROUP AGENDA

Thank you for joining us at our User Group. Here's our plan for the day.

TIME	TOPIC	SPEAKER
10.00 - 10.30	Welcome coffee/informal networking	
Welcome	Introduction to the 'data' session	
Talk One	The blind people and the elephant	
Talk Two	Astun Data Services - overview and future plans	Mike Saunt, MD
11.30 - 11.50	Break for refreshments	
Talk Three	DataVia: unlocking hidden benefits of street data in Monmouthshire	Matt Walker and Domna Kanari
Talk Four	Astun Data Services - syndicated services	Amy Pritchard, Monmouthshire County Council, with guests from GeoPlace
Talk Five	iShare Insights with Power BI - simplifying data analytics for non-GIS users	Jo Cook and Elena Robu
13:10 - 14:10	Break for lunch in the restaurant	
Welcome	Introduction to the 'collaboration' session	Elena Robu, David Renn and Mike Saunt
Talk One	What's the Point?	
Discussion	Round table discussions	Amy Jackson, Elmbridge Borough Council
15:10 to 15:30	Break for refreshments	
Discussion	Round table discussions	David Renn and Moira Livesey
Q&A	Q&A, prizes and close (c. 16:30)	David Renn and Moira Livesey

COMPETITION
How well do you know the Astun Team?

This year's competition gives you the best chance to get to know as many of us as possible. See overleaf for details.

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Peer presentations (the Year of the Amy)

We invite clients to each User Group to share their insights with fellow delegates. This year, Amy Pritchard from Monmouthshire County Council joined representatives from GeoPlace to talk about pulling the latest National Street Gazetteer (NSG) data directly from GeoPlace's DataVia into iShare. We've since heard from delegates that they have already been in touch with GeoPlace to discuss their options further. You can find more information about the DataVia API on our blog.

Later in the day, Amy Jackson talked about Elmbridge Borough Council's successful GIS Day event which marked the launch of its new geospatial strategy. It appears that bacon sandwiches and maps are a winning combination that Amy wholeheartedly recommends to other GIS teams. If you fancy raising awareness of GIS on GIS Day (November 20th) or PostGIS Day (November 21st) please keep an eye on our newsletters as we'll give you a heads-up a few months in advance. You can also have a look at this [blog](#) that's packed full of ideas from 2023.

Amy also kindly brought along some leftover map origami challenges for delegates to attempt with varying degrees of success. Perhaps we'll switch to making paper planes out of maps next year.



"Our key takeaway is that there are still software developers who care about their products."

Catch-ups over curry

Lunch gave delegates a chance to network and refuel in readiness for...

An afternoon of round table discussions

David was joined as co-host by Moira Livesey. Together, they have over 60 years of local authority GIS experience. With most of the Astun team on hand, delegates embraced the opportunity to voice their opinions on a variety of topics. We'll use this information to help us channel our resources during 2024.

David and Moira comment, "It was great to see (and hear) such enthusiastic engagement from all of the delegates. Lots of good networking took place and it was useful to hear about local successes and challenges. Sometimes it is good to know that there are others in a similar situation, especially if it leads to a solution that can be taken up by others. This view reflects the opinions of delegates, one of whom said that they learned that 'everyone else has the same issues that we do.'"

A little User Group fun

This year's competitions let delegates demonstrate their geographic general knowledge and discover little-known facts about members of the Astun team. Don't worry if you missed out, as we're re-introducing our 'Meet the Team' blogs. Discover how Andrew Smart is working with his colleagues in sales and marketing to enhance customer satisfaction and engagement in the first [blog](#) in the series.

Never miss a GIS event again!

To receive event notifications, including an invite to our 2024 user group, please [subscribe](#) to our events mailer.

If you're enjoying reading this ESG newsletter, don't forget to also subscribe to the ESG mailer so we can send you future editions.



Do you need a speaker?

Shine a spotlight on open source GIS

In the past we've presented at various online and in-person events, including FOSS4G, GeoBusiness and conferences and webinars hosted by the Association for Geographic Information (AGI).

We're always happy to share our expertise. If you're looking for a speaker on GIS, please [get in touch](#).



"Thank you for a wonderful day. It was very useful and informative."

Call for Sites: going paperless

How interactive mapping and online applications save time, money and paper!

Introducing Call for Sites

Local authorities have a duty to maintain an adequate and up-to-date supply of sites which are suitable for housing, employment and other types of development. A Call for Sites exercise provides a valuable early opportunity for interested parties to promote sites for consideration and helps to ensure that optimal development sites are considered and selected.

The need for paperless applications

The traditional Call for Sites process involves proposers submitting a paper application including a printed, annotated map (of various degrees of accuracy).

Submissions are often inconsistent and valuable time is taken up by scanning in applications and redrawing complex polygons onto an internal GIS.

The future of Call for Sites applications

Switching to an interactive map that's integrated with a GIS eliminates the need to manually plot user-supplied maps. Instead, proposers can capture a precise polygon extent against OS mapping which is loaded automatically into the system.

Keeping fingers on the pulse

As data is added to a GIS, planners and GIS officers can access a real-time view of submissions. Accurate site area measurements are calculated by the system, making it possible to easily determine when potential quotas are reached.

Benefits of a purely online application process

Making the switch to 'online-only' applications offers many benefits:

- A paperless solution is better for the environment
- Consistency: all proposals are accurately captured against the latest detailed Ordnance Survey mapping
- Users can view existing constraints on development
- Save time: no scanning is required
- Users are notified that their submission has been received
- Relevant information, such as green belts is easy to access

Read Dudley MBC's [Call for Sites case study](#).

Did you know?

In an Astun-conducted survey of ten councils, six still offer to accept submissions by post. If you're one of these, give us a call! Within a few days, you could have a brand-new, paperless process to promote.

“

"This solution helps to improve quality, save time and enhance the user experience.

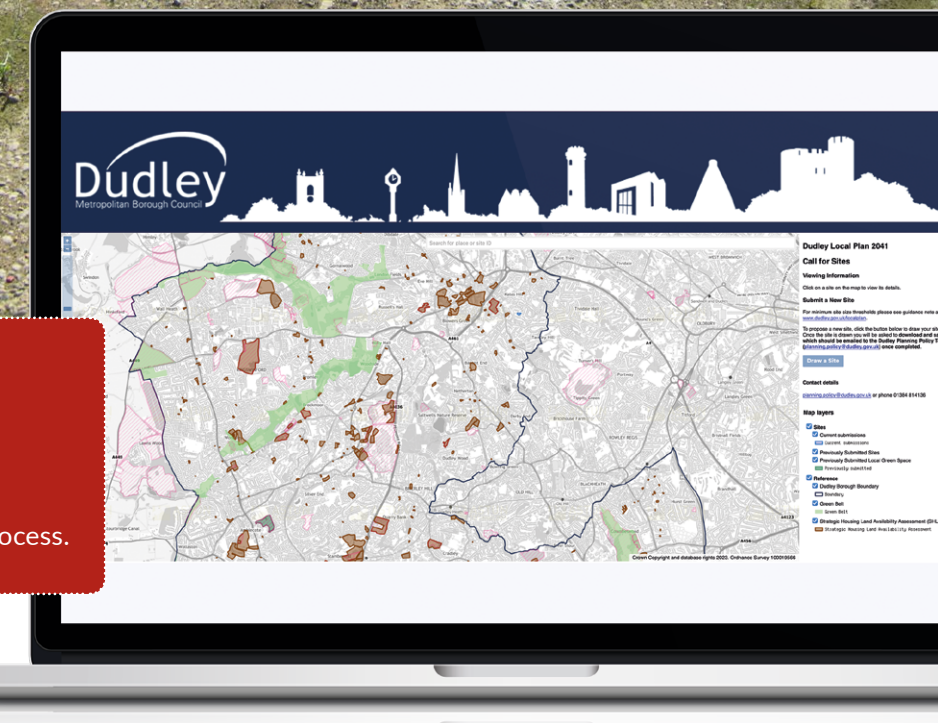
Without this solution, we would have to plot the sites manually based on paper or electronic submissions. Instead, we now receive ready-to-use accurate maps based on the latest OS data."

Kaliegh Lowe
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council



Check out this case study

Read about Dudley MBC's revamped Call for Sites process.



Well-being at work

As responsible employers, we want to look after our team.

For a relatively small company, we've taken big steps to help our employees feel in control of their physical and mental health.

Smart Health, an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) delivered by AIG, underpins our efforts.



GP consultations

Free with Smart Health



Getting through to a NHS GP can be stressful in itself. Fortunately, our team have access to 24/7 telephone-based or online GP appointments, often available almost immediately. GPs can support our team with medical concerns, prescriptions or specialist referrals.

Mental health

Free with Smart Health



Waiting times for NHS mental health support can be lengthy. Our team can access mental health specialists more quickly and have up to four free therapy sessions. Help and support is also available for partners and children.

Other benefits

Free with Smart Health



Our EAP also includes a personalised 4- or 8-week programme devised by sport coaches and nutrition experts, health checks and second opinions on medical conditions.

Checking in with the team

Well-being reviews are an easy way to check in with our team without making employees feel awkward

In 2023, Leigh, our Business Operations Executive and ESG Champion, conducted anonymous well-being reviews to check that our team felt supported at work.

In the spirit of transparency, we delivered a summary of the reports at a company meeting.

Achieving balance

Most employees already feel that they can switch off at the end of each day and are able to achieve a good work-life balance.

Our Employee Assistance Programme

We also took the opportunity to remind staff that they can find support through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) or from Leigh, a Mental Health First Aider.

Taking care of our employee wellbeing is essential for a happy and productive workforce. By offering programs and resources that support employee wellbeing, we can help them stay healthy, engaged, and motivated.

This year saw a new addition to our EAP offering. The Smart Health/ myStrength App provides health and wellbeing support under one roof. It also offers legal and financial support to assist our employees in navigating life's ups and downs.

Leading by example

During our meeting, Mike, our MD, shared how he uses flexible working to break up his day with exercise and reset his stress levels. As all team members can flex their working hours, this is an option available to both part- and full-time employees.

70% of the team feel stress levels are low and relatively manageable.

53% of the team feel happy with their physical well-being.



FIND OUT MORE

Discover more in our [blog](#).

Paid fun in the sun...

Our sabbatical scheme gives loyal Astuners the chance to spend quality time with their families

Astuners accumulate one week of fully paid sabbatical leave for every five years of service completed.

This year's sabbaticals

Andy Bailey, one of our consultants, and his family travelled across Europe.



Moira Livesey, our Local Government Ambassador, embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime tour of Australia.



...and rain!

Jo Cook, a keen mountain climber, spent some of her not-so-sunny sabbatical at the top of Creag Bhan. This is the highest summit on Gigha, a small island owned wholly by its community.

Hosting in a greener cloud

The impact of cloud hosted services on sustainability

Switching to cloud hosting systems offers a raft of benefits for GIS and IT teams, including increased security and ease of management. However, the environmental benefits are equally important.

As Astun's Cloud Hosting services continue to grow in popularity, it's vital that our cloud hosting provider shares our commitment to sustainability.

Why we choose AWS
According to Amazon's 2022 Sustainability Report, "AWS can lower customers' workload carbon footprints by nearly 80% versus on-premises computing workload." Once AWS is fully powered by renewable energy, that number is expected to increase.

Astun's cloud footprint
Amazon's Custom Carbon Footprint Tool shows that over 12 months to October 2023, we saved 4.406 MTCO₂e by using AWS hosting in place of on-site hosting.

Five of Amazon's sustainability commitments

Making the most of renewable energy



In 2022, Amazon was the World's largest corporate purchaser of renewable energy for the third year in a row. AWS is committed to power its operations with 100% renewable energy by 2025. It is also asking suppliers to switch to renewable energy.

Working towards net zero carbon



Amazon co-founded **The Climate Pledge**, a goal to be net zero carbon by 2040 - ten years ahead of the Paris Agreement.

The Pledge has now been signed by more than 400 companies, including IBM, Uber and Mercedes-Benz.

A focus on water positivity



AWS has committed to being water positive by 2030. That means returning more water to communities and the environment than it uses in direct operations, despite unprecedented droughts.

In 2022, AWS data centres improved their water use efficiency to 0.19 litres of water per kilowatt-hour (L/kWh). This was a 24% improvement from 2021.

Amazon as a whole made a \$10M planned contribution to help launch the Water.org Water & Climate Fund to directly empower one million people with water access by 2025, providing three billion litres of water per year in areas facing water scarcity.

Making employees part of your ESG



Twenty thousand Amazon Web Services (AWS) employees signed up for the AWS Inclusion Pledge in its inaugural year.

Internal AWS affinity groups include Women in Amazon and the Black Employee Network.

Sharing profits to help society



The AWS Innovation Fund, worth \$750,000 in 2022, awards grants to employees seeking to make a positive impact on society. The Fund supports causes that reach 25,000 people from under-represented groups around the world.

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