ASTUN TECHNOLOGY

Astun Case Study

Industry: Social Housing
Country: UK

Grand Union Housing Group – Tenants' Portal

When Grand Union Housing Group was looking for an on line portal solution for use by tenants of its subsidiaries, Aragon Housing Association and South Northants Homes, it looked around to see what was on offer both in its own sector and elsewhere. Their shopping list of features was extensive:

- Capability to accept data from Capita 'OPENHousing' housing Management system
- Suitable replacement for existing customer information system
- Customer friendly and usable by staff as well as tenants
- Ability to enable tenants to self-serve to encourage greater use of the web channel
- Spatially enabled so that information could be viewed on maps
- Preference for Open Source geospatial components
- Capable of using Open Data feeds
- Responsive - capable of being accessed via a home computer, tablet or smart phone
- Capable of further development
- Competitive licensing model.

Graeme Gould, Information and Telecommunications Coordinator at Grand Union Housing Group takes up the story, "With many government services online or moving online we felt that we needed to provide both the convenience of a web based application complete with the ability for tenants to self-serve. I came across Astun Technology's iShare platform, which is used extensively in the Local Authority space and approached Astun to see if they would consider adapting iShare for use in a Social Housing context?"

Grand Union Housing Group

Security

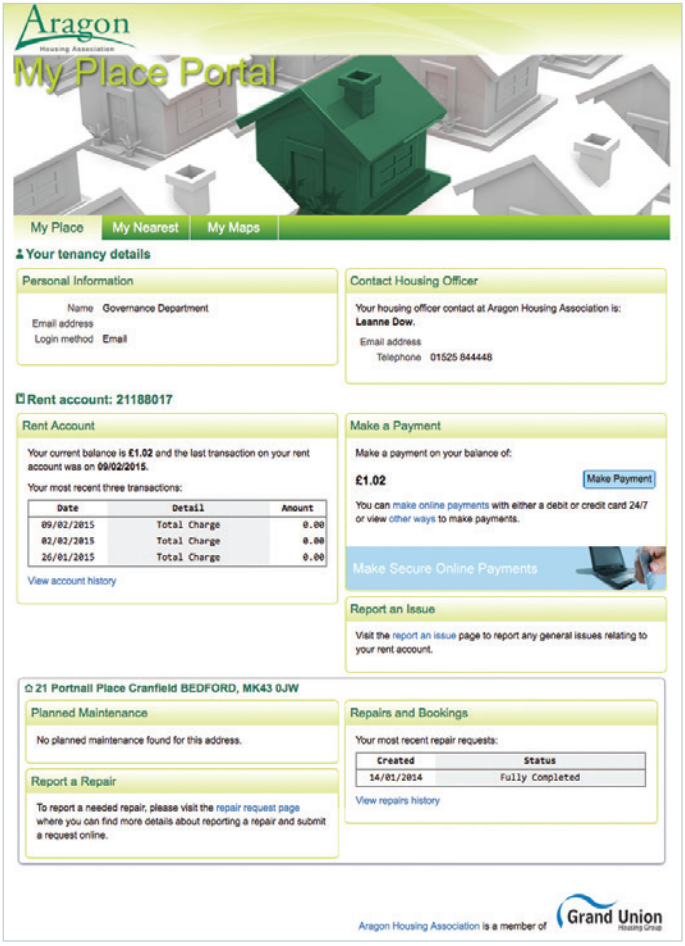
Astun took the challenge and in close collaboration with Grand Union developed 'My Place Portal' which is powered by iShare. Improving the registration process and providing a satisfactory level of security to ensure that tenants' private information was not compromised was one of the first challenges. Initial online registration requires a tenant's rent account number and either an email address, Google, Facebook or Twitter account. Once the Customer Service Centre has done the initial validation, a PIN number is generated by the system and sent out by post. When this has been received tenants can log in.

My Place Portal

Samantha O'Brien, Web Manager, explained "We wanted to enable the portal to not only allow tenants to view a history of their rent payments and repairs requests but also enrich the experience with much more individual functionality. Astun had the ability to do all these requirements and more with its experience of iShare, and so we have completely transformed the application." A completely revised user interface makes it more like a conventional website with tabbed My Nearest and My Maps facility together with the ability to make rent payments. The interface is simple and easy to understand to encourage tenants to make regular use of the web channel rather than phone the Customer Service Centre. Classic 'Channel Shift!'

The My Place tab provides a snap shot view of the tenant's rent account, the current balance and the three most recent transactions. It also shows the situation regarding repairs, planned maintenance, the ability to request a repair and the current status or recent repair requests.

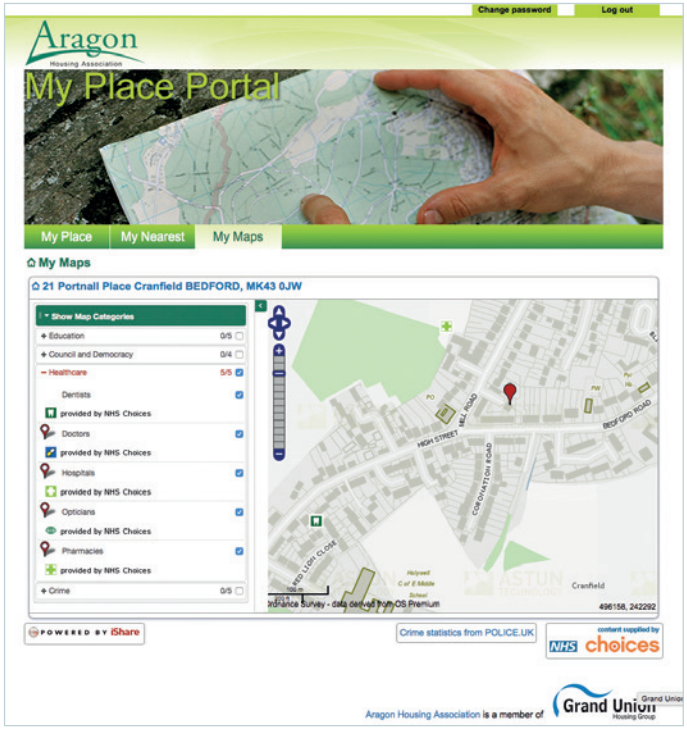
To make a rent payment on a property, garage or Community Alarm Service it's simply a matter of clicking on the 'Make Payment' button which takes the user to another page inside the application. The tenant then types in the amount that they want to pay and the payment process continues. This process is handled by Capita's Online Payments system but users are unaware as the process of payment and final confirmation are seamless between the two systems. There is also a facility which enables tenants to report an issue on their account.



By clicking on the My Nearest tab tenants can browse, information on local schools and pre-schools, local health facilities, including pharmacies, dentists, doctors and hospitals. There are also links to the Local Authority and Police authority websites.

The My Maps tab reveals a map with the tenant's property highlighted by a drop pin. The map itself is based on the OS Premium package which is MasterMap, styled and hosted by Astun in the Cloud using Astun Data Services[1]. Astun handles all map updates. The maps interface, which has full pan and zoom controls is capable of displaying four categories of information, education, council and democracy, healthcare and crime. The data is pulled from various open data sources including EduBase, NHS Choices and Police.UK.

My Place Portal polls the Capita OPENHousing system on a daily basis but all the security and tenant's authentication data is held in the Postgres database that underpins iShare.



My Place Portal is 'responsive' so that it can be accessed on a computer, tablet or smart phone. Over 1000 tenants now use the system and that number is growing daily.

Open Source – OpenData

"My Place Portal is powered by iShare which is built on an Open Source stack with which we were already familiar," said Graeme Gould. "I also knew that Astun was capable of integrating with many systems and was heavily involved with Open Data syndication. My Place Portal already takes advantage of many of these data sources and we will add more as they become available."

Further development

iShare is under constant development but the main changes to My Place Portal have been to the admin user interface, which has been fully styled to enhance usability.

Future planned enhancements include:

- Ability to view up to date details of tenants and the people that live in the property.
- Add property boundary view including fence responsibility
- Tree view – to show trees which are the responsibility of the association
- Grass view to show areas of grass for which the association is responsible.

[1]Astun Data Services offers a simple low cost alternative for PSMA members or those with an alternative Ordnance Survey licence to access national cover (or a licensed subset) of MasterMap and other data sets as a WMS or WMTS and a vector download service with two attractive cartographic styles. Astun also hosts OS OpenData