

Managing a large portfolio

How the University of Sheffield is using latest mobile surveying solution to future proof its Estate

As university estates teams up and down the country are increasingly faced with an ageing property portfolio – a large part of it from the 1960's building boom - together with an ever greater squeeze on budgets, the need to obtain a clear and accurate picture of the condition of their estates has never been more important.

The estates team at The University of Sheffield is no different and last academic year the surveying team decided to make a fundamental change to the way in which it operates in order to better manage its vast 300 plus property portfolio, in excess of 5 million square feet.

It was looking for a solution which would not only help to gain an accurate, real time picture of the condition of its entire estate, but also provide detailed accessible data on which to base budgetary forecasts over a number of fiscal periods.

After creating a dedicated condition surveying team, the University of Sheffield has led the charge to bring in a mobile surveying and property asset management software application to transform the way in which the University property business operates. The team introduced

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Kykloud technology into the business and is feeling the benefits of the change.

The University Building Services Surveyor Craig Wootton explained: “Just like many of my colleagues around the country the surveyors at the University of Sheffield are tasked with supporting efficient estate management, facilitating better decision-making and ensuring that the right level of funding is in place to maintain the University's estate.

“As our physical front door to the real world, property plays a pivotal role in the University's aspirations; it is essential that we provide an environment that inspires students, staff and the wider community. But every large estate operator has constraints. As a result, individual

properties may be retained and operated as-built, or refurbished and re-purposed several times during their life cycle, which relies upon high quality decision making, supported by accurate data and substantiated advice.

“Measurable improvements to property condition and reduction of carbon dioxide emissions are key performance indicators within the University's strategic plan, and are included in annual mandatory reporting to the UK Government. Achieving these objectives where adaptability of the estate must sit alongside a strategically-planned investment programme, within a transparent and auditable process, places great demands upon information management. This prompted us to start from the



bottom up, and look again at the way in which we extracted data from our portfolio and how we were able to manage it.

“Whilst we have historically carried out condition surveys of all our property assets, some aspects of our legacy infrastructure made it pretty difficult to collect and extract meaningful data that we could use to make budgetary forecasts and decisions. Times have changed, and we want to use an application that allows us to really interrogate the data easily.

“Also, we are a small team of three

surveyors so might sometimes need to bring in external or specialist support to carry out the actual condition assessment. This pointed us towards a solution that would allow us to enlist surveyors from outside of the team but still maintain a consistent approach and consistent data set.

“Today it seems there is an app for everything and surveying is no exception. In recent years a number of mobile surveying solutions that allow surveyors to use iPads and mobile devices to carry out surveys more quickly and efficiently have

been brought to the market. We have watched on with real interest as mobile technology has increasingly found its place within the profession and recognised how it might benefit an organisation like ours. The time savings of mobile technology in the surveying process have been widely publicised but, for me, the appeal of using an app is not only how the data can be collected and the time it can save but also who can collect it.

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standardised format that can be accessed from anywhere, by any authorised individual. All the data collected is then automatically uploaded in to a central asset database which we will use to obtain a complete holistic view of the estate to enable us to make accurate budgetary forecasts.”

“We are able to carry out multiple surveys efficiently which, given the highly varied nature of our work, is invaluable. And because we are able to pre-populate the specialist survey templates to meet our exact needs, we are able to use

external surveying resources to gather data, for example our recent glazing survey, in a consistent manner. Together with supporting photography this data was then automatically fed in to a central data base to give us a clear overview and allowed our health and safety team to audit check compliance with existing legislative requirements and identify liabilities in an organised and structured manner.

He added: “Whilst it’s early days and we are still carrying out the condition assessments, Kykcloud has without a doubt helped us

to improve the way in which we operate, and we are experimenting with sharing survey data with our existing systems so that we still have access to historical data which is an invaluable benefit.

“The information we have extracted from our portfolio will form an important part of our HESA reporting, and enable us to make data driven prioritisation decisions for our lifecycle planning and future budgetary commitments.

■ For more information, please visit www.sheffield.ac.uk

