

# Visualising land rights and usage for property transactions: Buccleuch and groundMapper

## The Challenge

As one of the UK's largest landowners, Buccleuch lives by its mission to be a responsible land steward, work collaboratively within the community, and utilise land to its best potential. Its legal team must advise on legal aspects of any sale or other transaction that the business proposes and this can be more complicated where overlapping rights are held by third parties (such as farm and sporting tenancies) across the landholding.

A Geographic Information System (GIS) can accelerate discussions by providing access to digitised maps, but Buccleuch's original GIS was challenging to use which meant that it was used less frequently by Estate team members. Buccleuch wanted a new way to bring digital maps and location data where it needed to be: at the heart of its business and all its land discussions, whether that be a legal, financial, agricultural or environmental conversation.

## Partnering with thinkWhere

"I was so impressed when I joined Buccleuch and got my first experience of GIS in legal work -- I saw how much time GIS could save, but I was also taken aback at how complicated the system was," said Lyndsay McGregor, Head of Legal Services, Buccleuch. She added that it was also nearly impossible to share their GIS with external solicitors, who could only access it via a standalone laptop. "When I first saw that it was possible to access groundMapper by thinkWhere through a web portal, I thought, 'This is what we're needing.'"

For Buccleuch, updating its GIS to include groundMapper immediately provided simpler access to mapping information right across the business. Now, people aren't intimidated: the web-based portal makes it more familiar, they're logging on more regularly, and they're feeling more confident. "groundMapper is now one of the first points of reference, and everyone's referring to the data much more, which means we can hopefully make better decisions," Lyndsay says.

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*"We're looking forward to using groundMapper with external solicitors more. It can speed up discussion about points that arise because both sides can see the information easily from a browser. Verbally describing mapping matters is hard -- saying 'the fence line to the northeast of the property' leaves room for doubt -- but with groundMapper we can pinpoint an area for discussion, visualise both title and lease information on one screen and it's not a technical exercise. The faster we identify issues, the quicker we can resolve them."*

### The Results: up-to-date mapping data improves discussions about land use

groundMapper is now widely used across the organisation, enabling visualisation of property information in hundreds of categories, from title boundaries, leases, and rights of access to areas of special historical or ecological interest. Buccleuch can create and share 'projects' in groundMapper with trusted external users, to accelerate legal discussions around transactions such as land sales.

When it comes to land use changes, groundMapper is especially helpful. As new data sets become available at greater resolution, Buccleuch can see land features with greater precision and make more informed decisions about its use.

"We can sit down and see that, for example, rather than a whole area being uniform, perhaps 25% of the area could be used for peatland restoration," Lyndsay says. "We're using groundMapper regularly to help make land-use decisions, and it's a very powerful way of discussing things. These conversations involve different enterprises within the business, and we can all look at one plan: we can see which areas may be suitable for an energy project, for environmental purposes, or for potential development. Having the maps so easily accessible through groundMapper really aids decision-making to see how everything fits together."

### Benefits at a glance: groundMapper and Buccleuch Legal

- Greater user adoption: user-friendly web portal replaces a GIS that was less frequently used by staff due to its complexity
- Faster resolution: particularly for legal issues due to ease of identifying land features and boundaries
- Sharing of information: ability to set up projects to share internally and with trusted external parties
- Trusted decision making: up-to-date land information provides the latest insights to inform land-use decisions
- More clarity: adds precision to legal, financial, environmental and agricultural discussions
- Better accuracy: staff now access up-to-date location data as a first point of reference, reducing mistakes

[Scottish Land & Estates members can find out more about groundMapper on the SLE website.](#)