

Virtual Worlds are providing a new medium by which both local governments can communicate and provide services to their residents and partners, and by which local populations can make their feelings known on a wide variety of issues.

Virtual cities projects have been initiated in places like London, Birmingham, Paris and New York. Some of these are driven by the city itself, others by community groups, and yet others by partner organisations. In addition there has been a lot of “fan” worlds like Second Life, where complete chunks of cities like Dublin, Amsterdam and London have been created by users “for the fun of it”.

## Where Can Virtual Worlds Help

A recent paper that we did for Birmingham City Council's Digital Birmingham team (ask us for a copy) identified the following areas in which virtual worlds technology could be applied.

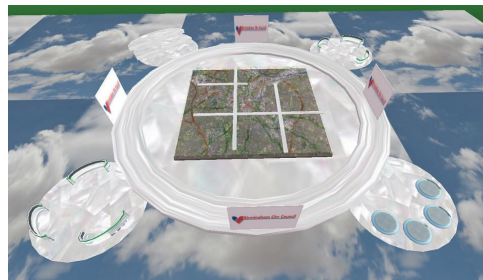
- Governance & Public Meetings
- Planning & Consultation
- Promotion & Inward Investment
- Marketing & Tourism
- Community Development
- Infrastructure Management
- Public Order
- Service Delivery
- Cultural Development
- Heritage & Historical Interpretation
- Education
- Health and Care
- Commerce
- Social Exclusion, esp Disabilities
- Employment

## Levels of Fidelity

The paper also identified 6 different levels at which a local governance might realise a virtual presence:

- 1:1 modelling of the whole city
- Models of specific buildings or districts
- A large scale “model village”
- A small scale “sand-table”
- “New” builds to exploit the virtual space

All of these could represent the city as it is, as it was, or as it could be – or all three. The structures though are only part of the story, for us the two things that bring a virtual presence alive are people and real-time data.



## Popular Access

Many cities will already have corporate GIS systems available to planners. Extending these to a “mirror world” such as Google Earth will have some benefits. But with a virtual world you free the citizen to not only wander around the space at will, but also (if permitted) to make changes, comments, or even build their own realisation. More importantly they can talk to each other and experience the environment together – this is a social experience. Most modern PCs and broadband connections will support virtual worlds – and public access can be provided from schools and libraries for others.

## Integrating Data

Most virtual worlds will support not only the import of data from the web, but its visualisation as well. For instance buses could be in their real-time locations, overlays could be deployed showing CO2 emissions or pedestrian densities. Whatever data you have can be used in novel, shared, visualisations within a virtual world.

## Moving Forward

Different uses will require different approaches, and even different worlds. A virtual world project will need to consider:

- The target use and audience
- Possible levels of fidelity and modelling
- What technologies are available
- What the benefits could be for the city

If you think that virtual worlds could help you deliver better services to your residents then we'd be more than happy to come and present to you to give you a better understanding of what this technology can offer now, and where it might be going in the future. Please give us a call.

## Daden Limited

103 Oxford Rd  
Moseley  
Birmingham  
B13 9SG  
UK

www.daden.co.uk  
info@daden.co.uk  
+44 (0)121 698 8520