Advanced Software Engineering Team 3 Report

In this Advanced Software Engineering coursework assignment, our team was assigned a series of tasks that completed in sequence gradually progressed towards an android app that displays the Land Registry Price Paid data for nearby properties on a Google Map fragment. This report chronicles, in our own words, the work that each individual contributed toward the completion of the project in its final state.

On the following pages you will find approximately five hundred words from each team member describing the challenges, triumphs and lessons that each one of us encountered during the course of completing our sections of the work. First off, Grant will describe the development of the Front End in Android Studio. Following this, Dan will describe the development of the Back End in Java Netbeans, before Mehmet describes the Database Systems initially in Java Derby and finally in Heroku and PostGre SQL. To finish everything off, Alex will describe her efforts to test the system.

Front End (Grant):

The project’s front end is an Android application running at API level 24. The application employs Google locations services to fetch and display location coordinates (latitude and longitude) for the user; as well as plot both the user’s location and nearby properties (within the user’s current postcode) on a Google map.

Android programming has proved to be a challenge above and beyond that of basic java programming. Whilst sharing all of the same underlying tools, Android introduces several new concepts to the aspiring programmer, such as the activity lifecycle of applications, requiring the developer to understand what Android is doing behind-the-scenes at any given time. The developer must also be mindful of how the application’s computations interact with the visual XML layout, designed for the user, mapping each element of the display to its background code appropriately.

The following figure is an approximation of the application’s functionality, intended to illustrate the core sequence of events involved in its lifecycle.

**MainActivity**

**Client – Asynchronous task**

App fetches user location (lat/lng) from Google location services.

User’s current location is displayed on a Google map below their lat/lng coordinates.

The Asynchronous Client class is instantiated and executed. User location is passed to Client via constructor.

Application plots properties received from back end on Google map, displaying the postcode and sale price on-click.

Markers are colour coded according to price bracket.

Has the back end responded?

**NO**

**YES**

Opens a network socket and connects to the application’s back end.

Sends user’s postcode location to back end in order to be queried against land registry database.

Receives multiple nearby property sale details from back end.

Price, postcode, address, transaction date.

Stores nearby house sale details in ArrayList that can be used by MainActivity class.

The greatest challenges in developing the front end of this application were thread management, communication between classes and attempting to implement various 3rd party APIs. The application’s main thread (UI thread) performs a great deal of work each time it receives a Google location update. This computational requirement occasionally caused the application to crash unexpectedly and frequently made the interactive map unresponsive whilst it was ‘thinking’. Calling methods between classes also posed its own issues. Due to the inherent nature of Android programming it is impossible (or at least poor practice) to create an instance of the MainActivity class, making it became very difficult to implement MainActivity methods in the package’s other classes.

It was our hope to reduce the computation requirements of the application by moving all geocoding and reverse geocoding to our back end virtual machine. Unfortunately, time and group experience prohibited us from achieving this in time for the task 5 deadline. This improvement should have removed a significant amount of workload from the phone’s processor, allowing for other upgrades such as additional map marker placement and more frequent location updates, boosting the application’s performance. Given more time, this would be worth re-attempting.

Back End (Dan):

When it came to building the backend for our app, the primary matter of concern was to have an initial file system in place to receive and store data from the phone. Even before setting up the connection protocol to transmit and receive the data, there needed to be somewhere for it to go, as well as a framework in place to dictate what information the phone actually needed to send to the backend.

To begin with, when the backend was connected to by a phone it would look for a folder in its directory named according to the MAC address of the device that initiated the connection, and create a new one if one did not exist. In this folder it would create a .txt file named according to the System.currentTimeMillis() at which the connection was opened. The Latitude and Longitude provided by the phone’s GPS was then saved into this file.

Once the file system was in place, it was time to build the port and socket network interface so that users’ devices could actually interact with the back end. Sadly, what should have been a simple affair turned into a nightmare. Our socket implementation simply could not be coaxed into functioning properly. Ultimately it took the entire team working together took two weeks longer than planned for to get through all of the firewall, network security and virtual machine routing issues until we got consistent connectivity. The end result of this was a catastrophic delay that we were ultimately unable to make up for as the project progressed, leading to a chronic struggle to keep up with advancing deadlines.

Once the Socket implementation problem had finally been fixed, it was time to build a file reader that would input the Land Registry Price Paid data into the program’s file system so that it could be distributed to users when their devices connected to the back end. To begin with a file reader converts each line of the Land Registry Price Paid .txt file into an Array List of tokens. The tokens that correspond to the information relevant to the app are then stored in another Array List, while those tokens that are of no use to us are discarded. The tokens that have been stored in the second Array List are then stored in the program’s database using SQL, and the process begins anew and is repeated until every transaction record in the file has been saved.

Now that the data was in place thanks to the File Reader it was time to build the Data Querying method that would allow the data to be accessed by and sent to user’s devices. When the phone connects to the server it geocodes its GPS coordinates into a UK Postcode, which it sends across the socket to the backend. The Back End then plugs the first half of that postcode into an SQL statement that selects all transaction records whose postcodes share that first half. The server then transmits those records across the socket where the Front End takes over processing that output.

Originally the database was built and queried by the same program, when it was run it would do a check to see if the database was populated or not. If it was not, the program would run the read file method and populate it, otherwise it would proceed straight on to listening for connections. In order to improve efficiency, the program was split into two towards the end of development. There is now a database building program and a database querying program, so that administrators have finer control over which function they wish to invoke.

Databases (Mehmet):

Testing (Alex):