
A Digitised
Planning System:
Scoping Study
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Contents

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Executive Summary

This aim of this “scoping study” was to inform the design of a Digitised Planning System (DPS); evaluating how to extend the economic, social and environmental benefits of ‘big data’ and new technology into planning and design. The ultimate goal is a tool that will revolutionise architectural and urban design processes. However, the potential benefits of a DPS will extend to the general public and creative practitioners across London and beyond.

In producing this study, we have:

- identified current datasets available and the need for new datasets
- defined common data platforms and formats to promote interoperability and access
- identified key stakeholders (public, private, professional, institutional, etc)
- defined methodologies for engaging stakeholders in defining needs/expectations
- identified potential partners for further development
- defined initial stakeholder evaluation points and develop open feedback model

In identifying the key stakeholder groups as professional grouping and publics attempts were made to get feedback from these groups. We found it incredibly difficult to get any feedback from any public groups, apart from anecdotal and word of mouth.

Feedback from the professional groups that are already engaged with the planning process was, on the other hand, forthcoming.

We reviewed the existing digital routes to access planning information and felt that the current planning portal is not

We present our conclusions, that are more observations, highlighting and caveating with the problems with getting public engagement in the design of a digital platform. We also feel that the development of such a digital platform will rely on changing perception and practice across the planning processes. This should be seen as a strong opportunity in both developing truly revolutionary change in developing the digital platform as well as getting the public more involved in the fabric of their social environments.

Stakeholder Groups & Methodologies

Stakeholders Profiles & User Experiences

Through a series of interviews, we developed a series of Stakeholder Profiles and User Experiences. These Profiles have been anonymised for the report. Details on all the profiles are published in Appendix 1.

Professionals include architects, developers, planners and designers. All have some involvement in the planning process; either in preparing material for applications or making applications.

Non-professionals are members of the general public who have had some engagement with planning. Either through a project of their own (eg. extension to private residence) or have been effected by planning and/or involved in a consultation process.

Methodologies Used in Research

The research undertaken during the course of this study has been designed to allow the project team to gather and analyse a variety of different types of information. Methodologies have included:

- **Surveys** - an online survey was offered to members of planning departments across the UK. The questions of the survey were designed to ellicit the views of professionals working within the planning process.
- **Interviews** - members of the Project Team met with professionals and non-professionals to discuss their experience of engaging with the current planning process and their awareness of planning policy and issues.
- **Desktop Research** - members of the Project Team have undertaken research to identify existing data sources and stakeholders in the planning system.

Common Themes from Stakeholders and User Experiences

Culture vs. Process

A number of the Stakeholders cite issues related to the 'human' element of planning as being one of the challenges. Where delays in the process are cited, this is often seen as being a problem of the planning deparment staff not being able to deal with the information in a timely manner. This, in turn, leads to issues around applicants' (and interested parties') ability to remain aware of the progress of applications.

Data

While some stakeholders are aware of, and familiar, with a range of different datatypes, there is no clear indication that the ability to use more data would enhance the process. However, there is some indication that planning would be more effective if the public were better able to engage, and this may be improved through the use of other types of data.

Planning Portal

For professionals, the Planning Portal poses no particular obstacles; although, several recognise that it is not user-friendly. Where PP is complex is in the relation between it and the Local Authority services. Users cite the problem of being 'bounced' from one site to another without any clarity as to why or when this will happen.

Scale

There is some evidence that the planning process runs more smoothly for larger projects, submitted by developers. Where a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) is in place, there appears to be much better flow of information between LA staff and the applicant. The developers did not have the same set of 'obstacles' that were experienced by smaller practitioners or members of the public.

In addition, where a large developer is involved, the process of public consultation

is also managed (largely) by the developer; in liaison with the LA. Often, developers are ‘front-loading’ the consultation process (eg. undertaking consultation before application is made, in order to ease the process later).

Roundtable Discussion – Professionals

As a means to gather perspectives on the potential of a digital planning system, a roundtable discussion was held (5/12/2014). In attendance were academics, architects, and planning professionals.

The attendees were presented with results from initial research; including the results of surveys with planning departments and ‘wireframes’ of an idealised new planning interface (replacing the Planning Portal).

Key issues that arose from the meeting were:

1.1. Any new system must recognise that planning is not simply a process for urban development. It was pointed out that a large amount of planning decisions are related to matters other than buildings and development. This includes land use issues, transport-related matters, change of use, etc. These are matters which are often overlooked by architects, but are of critical importance to local authorities and residents.

1.2. The engagement of the public, while challenging, must be explored and promoted. It was recognised that there are significant challenges in making the public more aware and engaged in questions of planning. The current planning system is predicated on a negative response (the ‘objection’), and therefore does not invite participation in making positive change.

1.3. Clear ‘use cases’ need to be defined in order to develop a new planning system. The diversity of different participants in the planning process requires that a new (and inclusive) system must provide for engagement and use by a broad audience. Establishing these groups, and their specific needs, must be a priority for future research.

1.4. The importance of ‘human’ decision-making must remain core to the planning process. While the use of data may provide some level of automation, in some aspects of

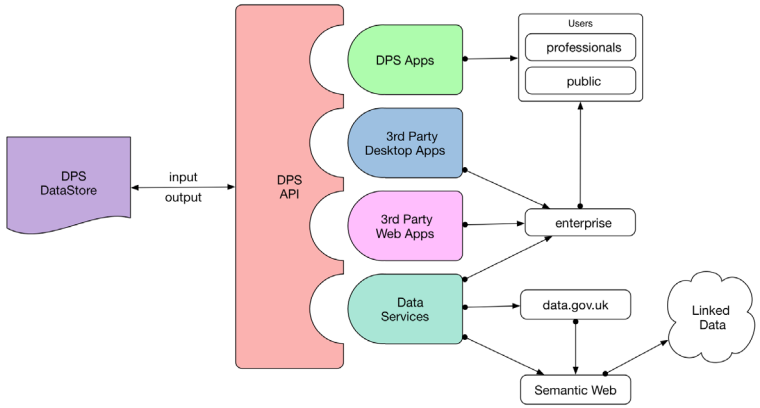


Fig 1 - Extensibility - Digital Planning System API

Fig 2 – 'Heresay' Hyper-local Conversations

the process, there should be no attempt to digitise the decision-making. It was recognised that planning decisions require an understanding of the, often complex, relationship between diverse (and sometimes conflicting) information.

1.5. The potential for a digitised planning system should be 'proactive' in supporting future planning, as well as 'reactive' in relation to applications. As planning; at local, regional and national levels, is intended to provide guidance and relevance for the future, the use of diverse data should allow planning professionals to develop and evaluate future 'scenarios.' Similarly, this may allow architects and urban designers to develop their proposals through 'scenarios' which reflect real world conditions. (Such systems are currently being piloted, see Flux Metro http://flux.io)

1.6. The importance of having alternative 'views' of the system, for public and professionals, will be critical to the acceptance of a new system. It was recognised that the existing planning system, and tools, are not suitably responsive to different users. For professionals, there is little difficulty in managing the process, but many do not make use of the Planning Portal; finding that it is not reliable or does not support the size of files necessary. For the public, however, the process is perceived as overly complex, lacking in feedback and the Planning Portal is complicated. Thus, the professional panel agreed that a new digitised system should seek to present information to users in a way that was tailored to their needs.

1.7. Extensibility will be critical to a long-term solution. The panel agreed that, due to the rapidly changing digital environment and increasing availability of new data sources, a digital planning system will need to be developed with a view to how new data sources can be integrated. Further, the value of a digital planning system will be, largely, measured in the ability of diverse users to make use of the output. Thus, the system must also allow for the potential of 'third-party' developers to offer new services based on planning data. (See Fig. 1)

1.8. A new system will require changes in practice for government and users. The current planning system will often require the submission of commercially sensitive information or information that has been specifically commissioned by applicants. In this system, such proprietary information is not available for the benefit of others. For a digital system to be successful, and open, there will need to be a concerted effort to change practice in regard to ensuring 'open access' to as broad a body of submitted data as possible.

1.9. A digital planning system must also recognise the value of non-digital engagement. While the proposed system will be heavily reliant on digital tools and diverse data sources, this approach is intended to provide more flexibility in non-digital outputs. The development of a system that utilises industry standard protocols, for data acquisition and output, will allow for greater potential in varied forms of dissemination. This may include, for example:

- highly-focused (localised) printed matter; which can be relevant to individuals or communities (see Fig. 2)
- on-demand print out of localised information (see Fig. 3)

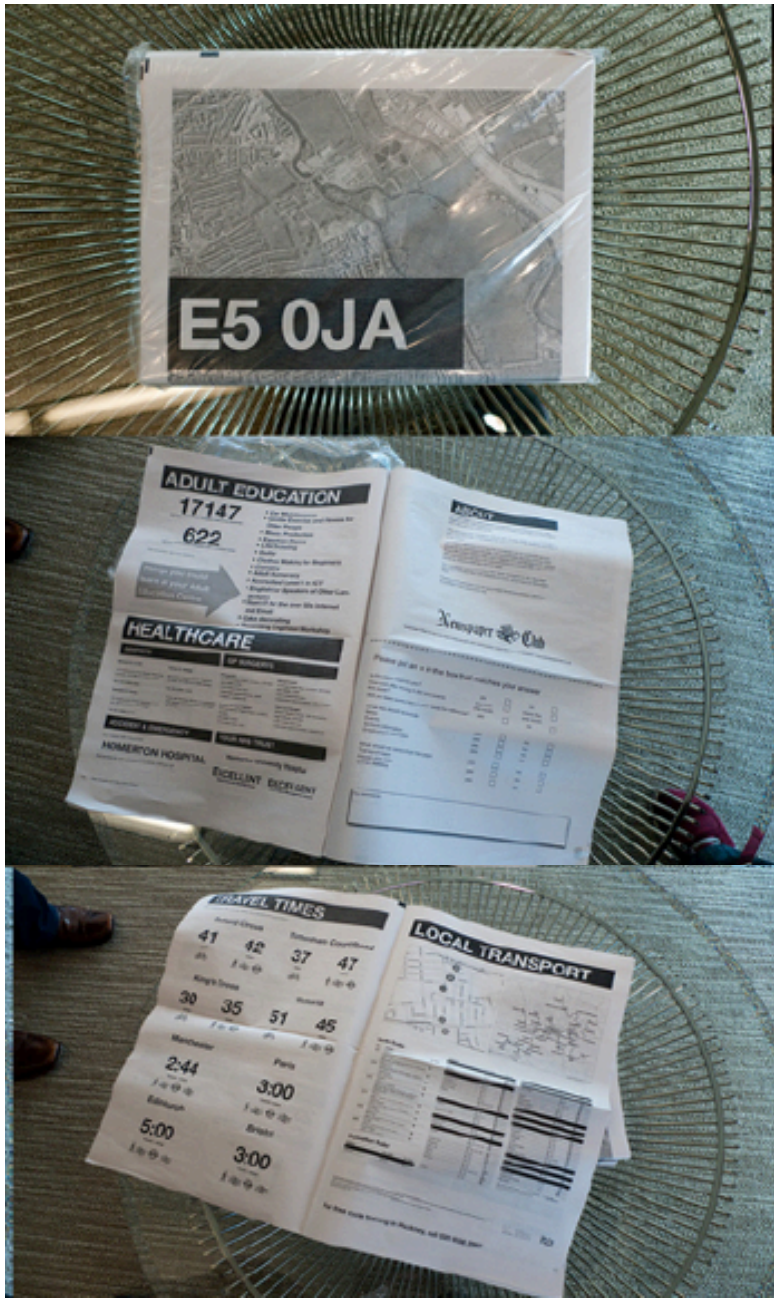


Fig 3 - Localised Information - Postcode Newspaper

Conclusions

Whilst the lack of feedback and engagement from the public in the developing of this report makes us reticent to draw too many conclusions, we do feel that we can make the following observations:

i. Developing a digital platform for the planning system would be of use to all in the professional space. In fact the main issue with this would be prioritising the development of functionality according to different professional groups.

ii. Engagement with the public will remain an issue, one that will not be addressed by the development of this digital platform. To achieve this what is required is the making use of other tools and systems and processes to engage members of the public with their local community.

    a. The considered use of social media, as a means of disseminating information and gathering feedback may be vital to reaching a broader public voice.

    b. Non-digital engagement and output must also be considered, such that the system is not seen as prioritising specific groups with ready access to technology. (See Round Table Discussion – Professionals, Fig. 16 and Fig. 17, above)

iii. The development and implementation of a digital planning system will rely as much on changing perception and practice, as it will on technology.

    a. The planning process must be re-fashioned to become positive and developmental; rather than predicated on objection and denial.

    b. A new approach to open access to submitted data will be required and this may require changes to legislation and requirements for the process.

iv. A digital planning system must be future-proofed in order to ensure that users can see the benefit of the requisite expense in development. Therefore, the system must allow for extensibility; both in terms of data input/acquisition and output. The potential for monetising planning data (therefore supporting the on-going maintenance of the infrastructure) can be achieved through allowing third-party developers access to data.

Further Action/Research

Planning for Future Research

This Scoping Study has been undertaken to provide the basis for further research and work in the development of a digital planning system. Therefore, much of this research has been undertaken to further define the parameters and approach for further action.

The following areas have been identified for further development/consideration:

Surveys

For this research, surveys were designed to be highly anonymous, in order to elicit as much openness in responses, as possible. For further research, surveys will need to have information about location of respondent, as it has been determined that there may be considerable variation in response from urban, suburban and rural areas; both from professionals and the public. Some level of anonymity will be retained, but it is necessary to gather this data in order to ensure that there is suitable balance of regional responses.

Tools for Engagement

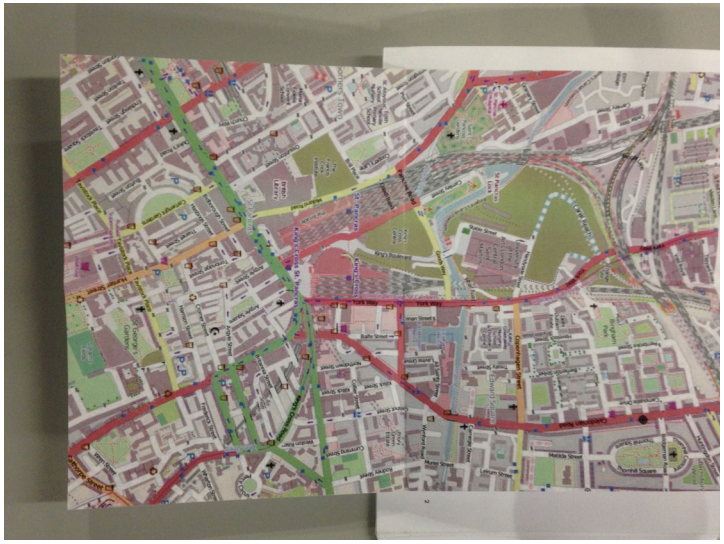
For on-going research and development, there is a need to gather more diverse responses from different groups. Therefore, the methods for engaging different stakeholder groups are suggested as:

Roundtables – these sessions should be based on the exploration of specific topics and guided by a facilitator. The aim of these sessions is to allow an open discussion around the topic in question, allowing for views and opinions to be discussed and considered.

i. Each engagement session should be held in a round table setup. Activities should be focused on a communal space around the centre of the room or around walls.

ii. Each member of the group should introduce themselves.

iii. The facilitator should make everyone feel comfortable in participating and make sure every one has the opportunity to speak and be heard, judge-



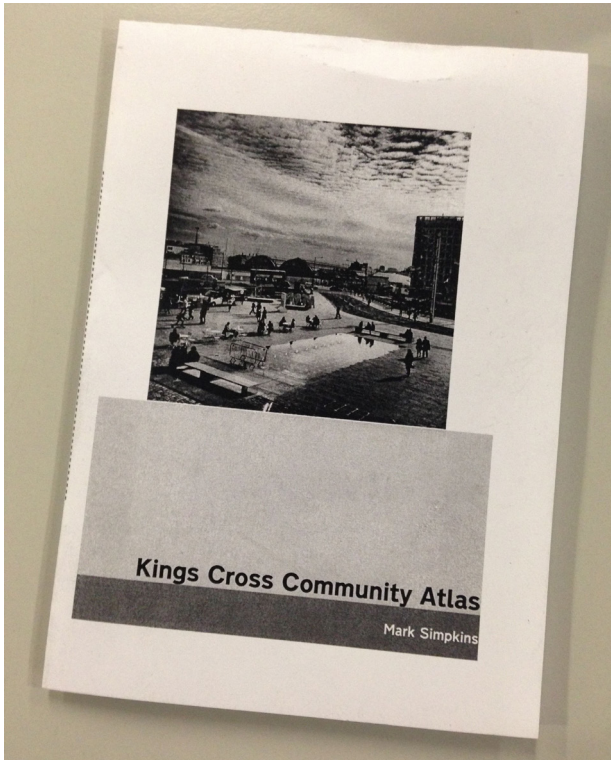


Fig. 4 - KX Cultural Probe

ment on ideas, questions should be deferred (unless it can be confirmed as incorrect)

Games – these sessions should use interactive, enjoyable, activities that have defined rules to allow participants to explore some aspect of a process. Games are a good way of teaching systems, as they can act as simulations of complex processes. The RIBA currently have a game which can be used with public groups as a way to introduce them to the planning purposes (http://bit.ly/1GqAlY0). Playful activities to introduce planning to this audience group are very useful in helping develop their thinking around their feedback on the system.

Process Reviews - Using pre-prepared flows of activity in the planning process, with groups, gathers further insight into the flows and processes involved in planning.

i. This is often done by a group review of a process, led by one of the investigators and the group invited to comment and feedback on the presentation.

ii. They should feel comfortable in critising the flow, and this should be recorded using postit notes and fed back into the process design, which can be shared with the group.

Cultural Probes - Giving members of the public workshops small diary / atlas booklets (see Fig 4) in which they can record things that they notice about their local environment. These should be given out before any workshops, and possibly again afterwards.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - User Profiles

Profile 1 - Professional - “K”

K is a design professional working in the residential and commercial project sectors. He has prepared and submitted planning applications for a variety of projects. In most cases, he is responsible for preparing the relevant information for planning applications and submitting the application.

Planning Portal

K is familiar with the Planning Portal (PP), and has used it to submit and track applications. When first using the the PP it can be quite daunting, as the site is not very clear. Once you know what you are doing it can be quite efficient. However, he does find that in some cases you will be pushed from the PP to the Local Authority website, and it is then difficult to get back.

The Most Challenging Issues for Planning

K feels that the inconsistency that one finds between different local authorities, in regard to planning, is one of the major challenges. Some LA’s make more use of digital submissions than others. Some require more information than others.

K feels that there are issues with regard to how clear the system is in helping users know where and how to access information. Often the range of information available, to help you prepare a planning application or to know if planning is required, can be confusing and limited. In particular, the definition and clarity of information about ‘permissable development’ can be difficult to understand.

K recognises that, for some users, there is a level of specialist knowledge that will not be available to them. For example, K suggests that many people will not be clear about what is required in an ‘Access Statement.’ He feels that you need to already know what this is, before you start the process; but, unless you have done it before, you will not have this knowledge. K feels that this is the case for a range of things related to planning.

Data

K is familiar with some of the digital resources available in support of planning. In particular, he often accesses Ordnance Survey (OS) data in order to find the appropriate site/location plan for submitting a planning application. However, as with the PP, the OS online systems can be very difficult to negotiate on first access. In addition, there are a number of different products that may be appropriate to your planning application and it takes some level of knowledge to be clear about which is the most applicable.

Consultation vs Process

K has found that there is often a disparity between what members of planning department will suggest during meetings/consultations and what actually happens during the formal process. One of the issues that may lead to this is the fact that (in K's experience) there is a high turnover of staff in the LA. Thus, you may be dealing with members of staff who are not familiar with the process. Similarly, the turnover in staff can lead to problems of information transfer between planning officers.

Policy

K admits that he has little awarenss of the broader context of planning policy at local-level. Further, he does not have a sense of how national policy is derived and how this relates to local policy. In discussion, it was clear that he knew that national planning policy was developed in the department that replaced the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, but couldn't remember the name of that department (Communities and Local Government). In addition, K does not feel that there is any clarity of how members of the public could input into discussion/decision making about planning policy at either local or national-levels.

Digital Planning

K feels that a digitised planning system would be most effective if it was able to address the needs of different kinds of users. At present, he finds that systems like the Planning Portal and OS require a level of understanding that is more related to professionals. So, any system that would make it more possible for non-professionals to access planning information more directly would be positive.

One area that K recognises as missing, are examples of good practice. There is little information from local authorities of the types of information that will help make a good application or avoid an application being sent back for further information.

Another area that could be clarified in a digitised system would be to make clearer the relationship (or difference) between planning and building control. He has often found that issues that many people think relate to planning are actually part of the building control process. This can lead to unnecessary applications or confusion.

Profile 2 - Professional - "R"

R is a professional working in a large organisation as a developer. He is responsible for the development of multiple occupancy residential buildings; which also have commercial space for lease. In most cases, the various materials required for planning applications are prepared and submitted by other consulatant professionals, "R" is responsible for ensuring the application is submitted properly and, along with consultants, of tracking the progress of applications.

Planning Portal

R is familiar with the Planning Portal. He finds the use of the system fairly straightforward, but recognises that this has taken some time and that first use was not simple.

In addition to the PP, R regularly accesses Local Authority websites to track the progress of applications. While this is generally easy to do, there are some issues that arise regularly:

- the Planning area on LA websites is not always easy to access
- there can be delays in information being uploaded in relation to an active planning application
- where there are multiple consultations on a project, the website is not always up-to-date with the process
- the handling of commercially sensitive information, that may be required for a

planning application, is sometimes challenging for the LA (in avoiding it being made public)

Planning Committee & Public Consultation

As a developer, R is often involved called upon to attend and speak at Planning Committee meetings. Therefore, he is familiar with the requirements of these meetings and the way that presentations are made in the meeting. As the priority for his business is getting the project completed, he is less concerned about the recording of the committee process than in getting a result.

As the projects that R develops are of a large scale, there is usually a call for public consultation. In R's experience, there is often a lack of awareness about the purpose of consultation among the public.

The Most Challenging Issues for Planning

Generally speaking, R does not see too much difficulty with the planning process. For many projects there is a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) in place. This provides for greater attention from the LA, in order to meet the terms of the agreement.

Much of R's day-to-day engagement with planning is in tracking active cases and determining progress. He recognises that it is often necessary to 'chase' the case officer to get information; because the website is not updated regularly.

R feels that the Planning Committee is a problematic area of the process and describes it as a 'lottery.' He feels that there are too many potential points where decisions are based on personal or political influence.

Data

R uses standard data formats (PDF, DOC, etc) for the submission of information in planning applications. In addition, he is familiar with the use of Ordance Survey data. As much of the information required for submission is prepared by a planning consultant, R is not directly involved in generating or sourcing data for planning.

Digital Planning

R does not necessarily see that a digitised planning system would fundamentally change the way in which he engages with planning. While it may simplify processes, he feels that it is with the relationship between information and planning officials that the system becomes problematic. Thus, if a digitised system were able to assist planning officers in processing and updating information more quickly, this would be seen as a benefit.

In addition, if a digitised planning system could assist the public to more effectively engage with consultation processes, this would be beneficial to all parties.

As a developer, R is aware of local planning policy within several authorities where he has active projects. Further, as a major developer, he is often asked to consult on planning policy issues. R is less clear about the relationship between national planning policy or ways that members of the public might engage with or inform national policy.

Profile 3 - Non-professional - “M”

M is a private homeowner and design professional who has recently completed works to his home; which required planning permissions. As a design professional, “M” has experience of dealing with planning matters, but this was the first time that he has submitted an application for his own project.

Planning Portal

M had used the Planning Portal on several previous occasions. He describes himself as a very proficient user of web-based tools, but still finds the Planning Portal difficult to use. The user interface is not intuitive and the system does not provide much in the way of ‘feedback’ to allow you to understand your progress.

Once information has been submitted to the PP, he finds some confusion as to whether to track applications via PP or through the LA website. Moving from one to the other is confusing.

The Most Challenging Issues in Planning

M feels that the main issues he has found with planning, both as a professional and a homeowner, are related to the tracking of progress and access to information from the Local Authority. In many cases, he has found it difficult to be aware of what is happening with applications due to a lack of timely information available from the LA.

He has also experienced issues with the apparently high staff turnover within LA planning departments. Changes in planning officer, during the course of an application process, has meant that information is requested on multiple occasions (because the information is not passed from one staff member to the next) or files are not effectively managed.

Data

In preparing planning applications, M uses Ordnance Survey data (via the OS website) to provide site/location plans. Based on his professional experience, he has not particular difficulty in accessing appropriate mapping data, or using the OS systems.

In his professional experience, he is very familiar with the use of CAD, 3D Modelling and BIM software; and the various forms of data that can be generated through these applications. However, as the requirements for drawings submitted in planning are for PDF, he has never had cause to submit CAD/BIM files. From time to time, he will submit computer generated images (visualisations) in support of planning applications.

Digital Planning

M recognises the potential benefits of a digitised planning system; particularly in regard to making submissions more ‘intelligent’ through the use of BIM data formats. However, he is also wary of the LA ability to make use of this (and other) datasets. He feels that for a digitised planning system to truly become effective would require a considerable change in the recruitment and training of staff within the LA departments.

M also sees that a more intelligent planning system might make it possible for the public to be more engaged in planning issues.

Profile 4 - Profession ‘L’

L works in the planning section of a large development firm. She is responsible for generating and bringing together material (from consultants) in order to make planning applications for very large regeneration projects. Prior to joining her current employer, she worked in a smaller practice where she was also responsible for planning applications of smaller projects.

Planning Portal

In her current position, L has little engagement with the Planning Portal. Typically, she will fill out the application on the PP but will then print this out and submit paper copies of all the necessary materials; as well as multiple digital copies (via CD/DVD). The reason she does not use the PP for full submissions, is simply because they have found the PP unable to handle the volume and file size for large project submissions. In addition, she feels that it is easier for members of the Local Authority (LA) Planning Team to review paper submissions, rather than try to read them on-screen.

Further, in her previous employment (approximately 4 years ago) her experience of the PP was very negative. She cites instances where it took a great deal of time for applications to be moved from the PP to the LA.

The Most Challenging Issues in Planning

Due to the scale of projects that L works with, they will always have a PPA in place with the LA. This means that the LA is obligated to meet the deadlines agreed, and is much more responsive to queries. The fact that L’s firm is paying for the PPA also means that the LA is willing/able to give the projects greater attention.

In practice, the nature of the PPA on their current major project allows for bi-weekly meetings with the LA team. This process means that there are very few issues that are not addressed quickly within the process.

In previous employment, L did find that there were times when it was very difficult to communicate with LA staff. Her view was that this was almost always due to the fact that the LA staff were overwhelmed with the quantity of applications that were being managed.

Further, where a PPA was not in place the ‘quota system’ meant that when a project exceeded the statuory period for decision, it actually moved down the priority list; as project still within the statutory period for decision become more important (in order to meet quotas).

Public Consultation

With the large scale of projects that L is currently involved, their approach to public consultation is (to some degree) outside of the planning process. By this, she means that (working with the LA) they seek to begin public consultation well before applications are made. This, ‘proactive’ approach, includes supporting the development of teams of local representatives who will be involved in the consultation and planning process, throughout. This serves to iron out difficulties before the application process begins, meaning that they face less objections when the formal planning application process begins.

However, in previous employment she relied on public consultation taking place within the planning process (there was no pre-planning public consultation). In such circumstances there were challenges in actually getting members of the public to engage with the process. In part, this may have been simply because finding suitable times for public engagement is often difficult. The result was that public consultation tended to be dominated by those who had a particular issue that they wanted to address, rather than engage in a consultation process. Some level of this, ’NIMBY-ism’, L explains, is always a part of the consultation process, but where there is low public engagement it is only that voice which is recorded. This can lead to difficulties in the approval process.

Data

L is involved in both the compiling and preparing of material for application submission.

Typically, all drawings are delivered from architects and other consultants as PDF.

Written material is either in Microsoft Word or PDF format. These will be compiled, in Adobe InDesign, and then output as PDF.

She points out that they do not submit any files in native CAD or BIM formats. Further, she states that their office does not even have the capacity to work with CAD/BIM files.

Where location/site plan information is needed, L's firm will have a license for the use of the Ordnance Survey data related to the overall site of development/regeneration. L does not make use of this data, but instead provides access to the data for consultants.

While they do not necessarily use the data directly in making planning applications, L points out that her current employer, and other large developers, are constantly gathering and storing a wide range of information in digital formats.

Digital Planning

L does not, given her current experience, see that there is much need for improvement in the planning process for professionals. However, she recognises that there is scope to improve the process for the public; in terms of engagement and awareness. She thinks that some use of 'social media' may allow the public to engage with planning in ways that they do not currently.

Profile 5 - Profession "P"

P works as a planning consultant, with her own practice; which specialises in dealing with difficult planning cases. Due to the complex nature of most of the work that the practice undertakes, most will end up in appeals. Thus, she is very familiar with national, regional and local planning issues.

Submissions

At the application stage, all the information that she tends to submit is digital along with all the supporting appendices; but once she needs to support appeals in case laws, she turns to paper for confidentiality reasons and to ensure the information is physically delivered to the right person and is signed off. A lot of data is easily available but the time needed to obtain each piece is very time consuming. Often information is based on research undertaken by others, which can mean

that the reliability of the data may be questionable. Obtaining decent maps is also a problem- OS maps are very expensive, but they are also ‘flat’. Sound/acoustic information/maps are also difficult to access. The problem with this is that the sound landscape changes all the time; existing assessments are outdated therefore need to pay each time to conduct a new assessment. The same goes for contaminated land/ecology maps, and that is what makes it difficult.

Data

When preparing applications, her practice uses a very broad range of data sources; ranging from mapping, heritage, ecology, greenbelt, flooding, contamination, and any other information required to define the constraints on a specific site. Much of this is compiled by an in-house research team in support of the specific applications.

Acessing data is one of the issues that can be challenging. A lot of data is easily available but the time needed to obtain each piece is very time consuming. Often information is based on research undertaken by others, which can mean that the reliability of the data may be questionable. Obtaining decent maps is also a problem- OS maps are very expensive, but they are also ‘flat’. Sound/acoustic information/maps are also difficult to access. The problem with this is that the sound landscape changes all the time; existing assessments are outdated therefore need to pay each time to conduct a new assessment. The same goes for contaminated land/ecology maps, and that is what makes it difficult.

Application Tracking

A substantial proportion of their fees are related to tracking planning applications. The practice employs people to specifically track applications (checking them online and calling up planning authorities when things go quiet). It’s a fairly straight-forward processes but because they work on multiple cases, need someone to keep track of it all.

Public Consultation

P feels that the current planning process is set up for people to object to planning. This is why her practice always tries to reach people to be consulted before the official consultation, as she finds this type of engagement provides more posi-

tive results than after local councils announce a consultation; which immediately raises suspicions. While this is not within the normal process, it is felt necessary to achieve positive results; since consultation is a highly political phase where numbers matter.

Planning Policy

P is very confident in her understanding of how national and local planning policy is developed and how they are related. In addition, due to her past involvement in key organisations, she retains a considerable amount of influence in relation to policy.

Digital Planning System

P feels that there are pros and cons to the potential of a digitised planning system. On the one hand, it might be counter-productive for her practice, as they rely on thinking like planners, but leveraging their knowledge of policy and other site constraints, to be able to help their clients argue a case for development. If planners get access to highly sophisticated information, they would potentially be able to come up with much better development plans and to argue a more sophisticated case against hers.

However, if the digitised planning system platform had a lot of spatial data; beyond just 3D visualisations, this would help them gather information much more quickly and cost-effectively.

P feels that the most beneficial aspects of a digitised planning system would be accessible data and better decision-making. These would drive proper plan-making, and help planning departments find alternative funding streams than to rely on annual budgets which are strained, in addition to identifying cost-savings.

Profile 6 - Professional ‘B’

B is an architect in a large, internationally renowned, architectural practice; specialising in complex projects on constrained sites as well as very large sites. Much of the work of the practice is related to transport and infrastructure in major cities around the world.

Planning Process

Because of the nature of their projects, which often are very large and complex, B's practice tends to employ an external planning consultant to deal with all the planning forms and processes, so B almost never directly deals with this himself. While their planning consultant takes care of the paperwork and most of the other admin type processes, B and his team engage with planning in a public facing capacity (i.e. meet with planners and other local authority officials extensively at pre-application meetings, and to help resolve any arising issues in the lead up to granting planning permission).

The other way they engage with planning is by doing the initial research for their design, to ensure that the design fits in with local and national policy constraints and requirements. This usually tends to be a very lengthy and frustrating process as there is a distinct lack of transparency as to where everything is, and it is difficult to find anything. He often feels like there is a piece of highly significant information that he has missed because of the obscure sources of information.

Finally, often his team is employed by developers and local authorities to speak to the public, as architects are seen as 'convincing'.

However, when it comes to planning there is a multitude of other related bodies B has to speak with about their design, that has to do with planning but extends beyond the local council- such as English Heritage, other property owners, local government departments and lots of other people interested and involved in the redevelopment of an area, including 'local anoraks'; like the 'preservation' groups.

On a personal level, B would say he is relatively familiar with the process, but only because he has had to deal with it for his own home recently. However, speaking solely as a practitioner, he would say that most of the architects in his practice are not very familiar with the way planning operates. What he means by this is that while they all have a pretty good understanding of the stages and generally what happens in planning in theory and from their education at university; he thinks that it is impossible to fully understand how the planning process works until you have been personally involved in it. He feels that it is often the case that the way planning operates is highly political and varies largely according to different local authority 'cultures.'

Data

Based on a current redevelopment project, as an example, the sources of data are: Local Planning Policy, Local Authority ‘plans’, Highways Agency documents, TfL documents, planning applications in near vicinity, and the London Plan. They don’t tend to take into account future trends (such as for climate change or population change) unless this is specifically required in the design brief by the client.

Some types of data/information are challenging to access and/or use in planning. Environmental impact assessments, and acoustic and light pollution assessments. These are very tricky issues to pin down. B is unsure whether this is due to the quality of the inputs or just a difficult thing to measure. Negotiations of rights of light is also a dark area. B thinks that this could be overcome if more sophisticated datasets from previous applications were shared/readily available to compare against. A Borough/BIM based model would be great to assess the light/acoustic/environmental feasibility.

Tracking Applications

B’s practice does not tend to need to track applicaitons; as they employ planning consultants to do this for them. Generally they have not heard any complaints from their consultants that it is difficult to track the applications. This process seems to be smooth unless planners suddenly go quiet. In this case it is obvious that it is not a technical issue but more that they have a problem with the design and are taking longer to discuss it internally.

Business Implications of Planning

To obtain information about planning, that may affect their business, the practice uses manual searches for particular issues they want to find out about, trawling through the various lists. It is very difficult to find out what is going on via the news or professional networks, looking up submitted applications. B often feels like the practice is missing out on a vital piece of information, because they do not know that they needs to look for. A digitized planning platform could help identify the things the practice does not know about, but which could be significant.

Public Consultation

If the public were able to make comments, B suggests that in principle he would support this; with the caveat that the helpfulness of this will depend on the stage of project being revealed/consulted. He does not think the public should have access to comment on the design at the testing phase because this might cripple the process. He thinks that internal design panels are the best suited for this due to their experience, so for this stage it would be best to give them access to the platform view of the proposed project to test the design viability.

Awareness and Influence

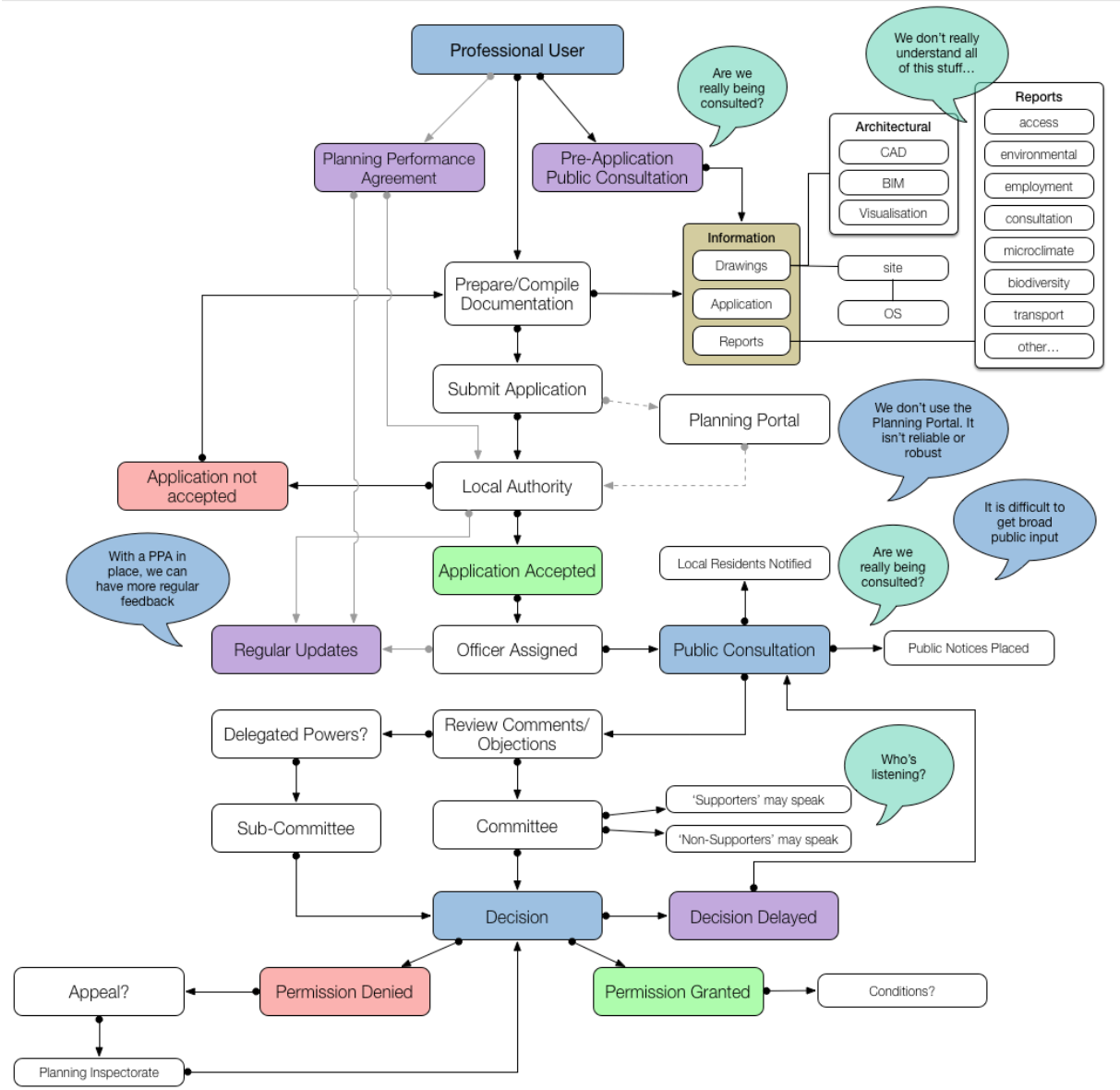
B does not feel that he is really aware of how planning policy is developed; nor does he think that this is necessarily information that is required to operate within the process. Further, B sees no strategic remit in trying to influence policy; rather, he and his colleagues usually aim to work within the defined constraints.

Digitised Planning System

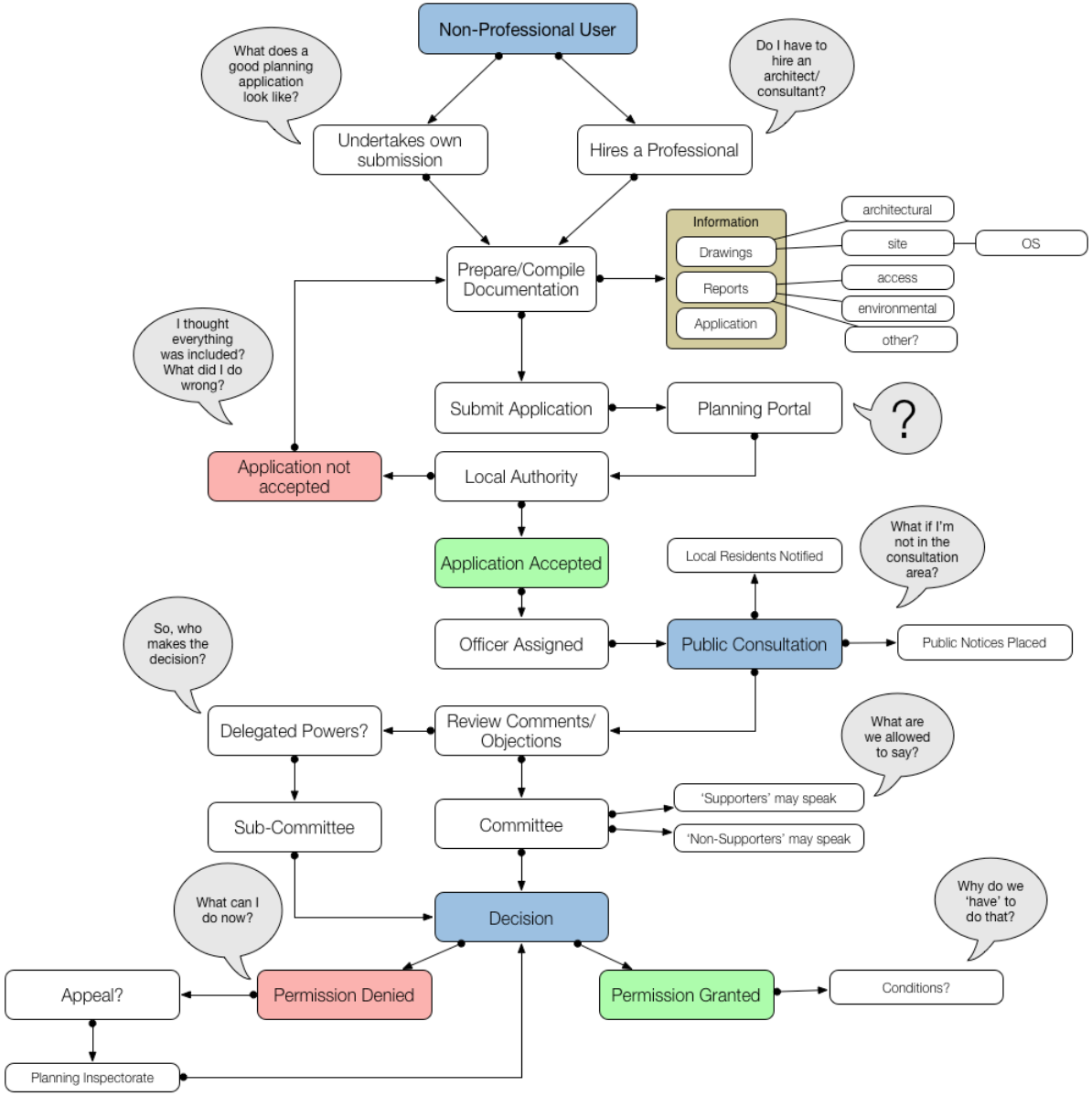
B is very positive in the view that a digitised planning system would be beneficial to his professional role. He would love a virtual map showing what is going on in and around a plot he is designing for. He usually uses the planning portal for this, but finds it has many of mistakes (e.g. where heritage curtilage is outlined, this is mismatched with no listed buildings). In particular he thinks an interface between buildings is very important because most of his practice's projects are transport/ infrastructure based. Changes within the vicinity of buildings they design for have important impact on the overall quality of the design.

B sees the potential benefits of a digitised planning system as the immediacy of the information and being able to see what and who else is out there. For now, his practice relies mostly on finding this out from the press and the professional network which tends to be quite patchy. A digitized planning platform would also help LA's identify, retrospectively, what else needs doing by future projects. E.g. when building the shard, turned out there were few areas in the vicinity that needed work, that planners did not know about until they physically stumbled upon that area.

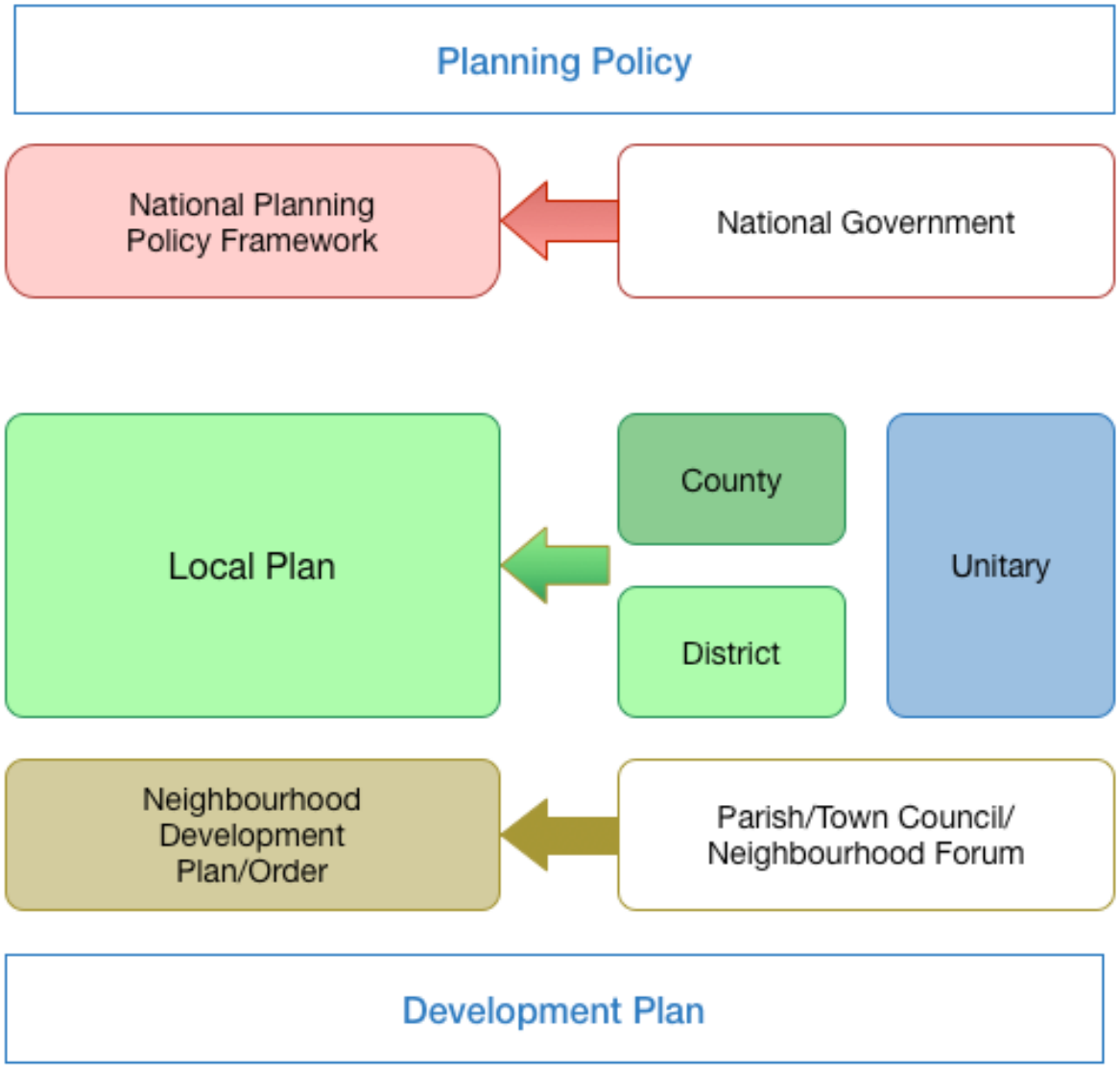
Appendix 2 - Planning Process Diagrams



Planning Process with Professionals' Comments/Issues



Planning Process with non-Professionals' Comments/Issues

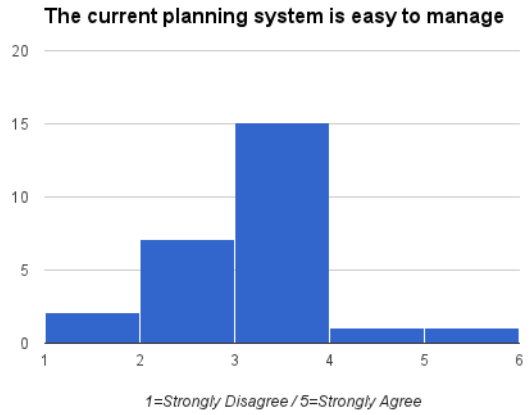


Planning Policy Diagramme

A survey was sent out to 60 Local Authority planning departments across the UK. Staff were asked to respond to 12 questions via a 5 point scale for responses. A free text area was provided for response to the 13th question, which was open-ended.

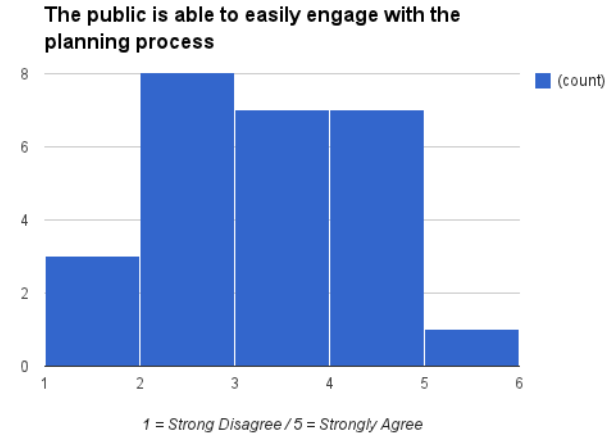
Survey respondents were not required to indicate their local authority and all information is anonymous.

Within the 5 point scale, 1 meant the respondent ‘strongly disagreed’ while 5 meant the resondent ‘strongly agreed.’



Q1 - The current planning system is easy to manage

While the majority of respondents marked this question within the middle of the response range, there is a clear indication that the vast majority of the respondents to not agree.

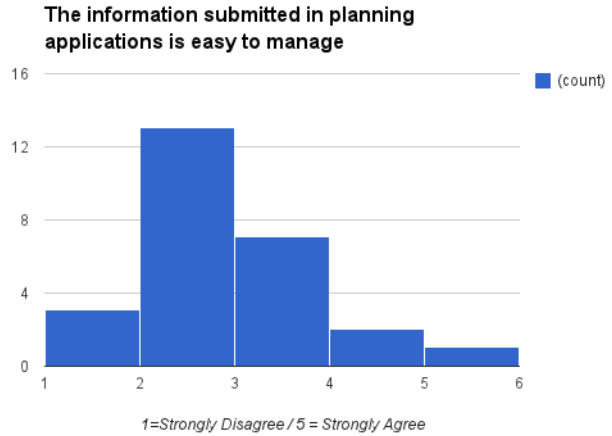


Q2 - The public is easily able to engage with the planning process

The spread of responses to this quesitons are fairly even across the 2-4 point bands. The fact that only one respondent strongly agreed with the statement, while 3 strongly disagreed, suggests that the overall feeling in response to this question errs on the negative.

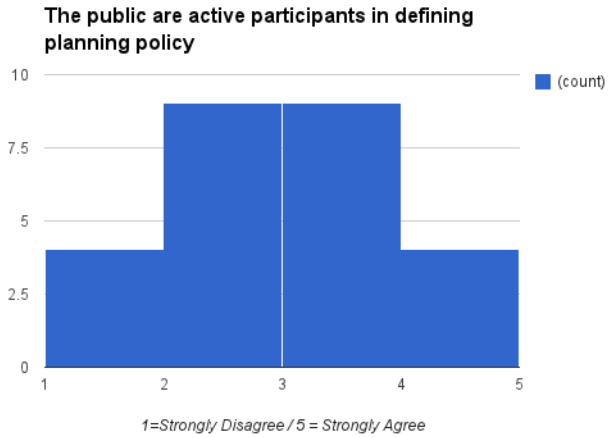
Q3 - The information submitted in planning applications is easy to manage

The majority of respondents marked this at 2. This suggests that they disagree and that it is difficult to manage the information they are required to work with.



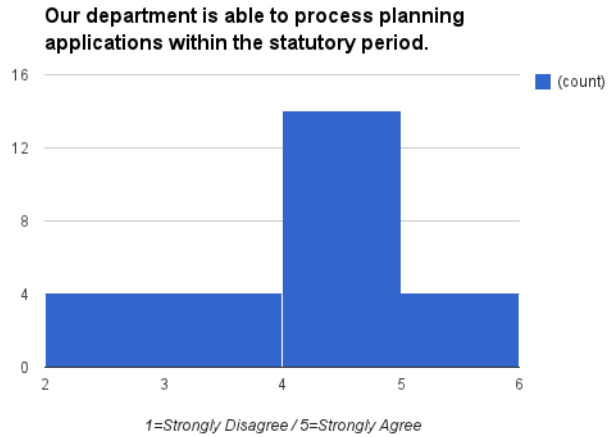
Q4 - The public are active participants in the planning process

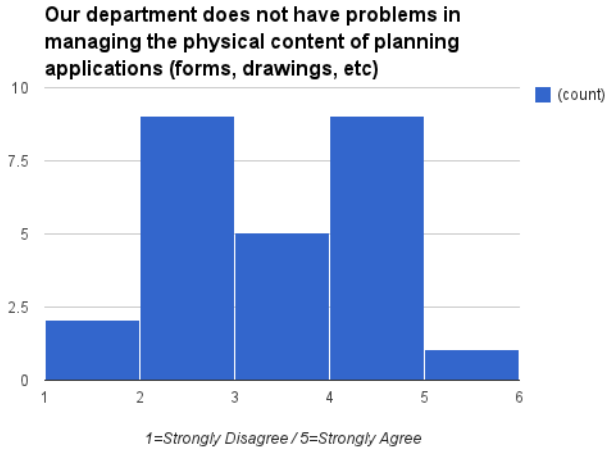
Responses follow a traditional bell-curve (although there were no 'strongly agree' responses). This suggests that there may be a variation in responses based on different local authorities or by staff engaged at different levels of the planning process.



Q5 - Our department is able to process planning applications within the statutory period

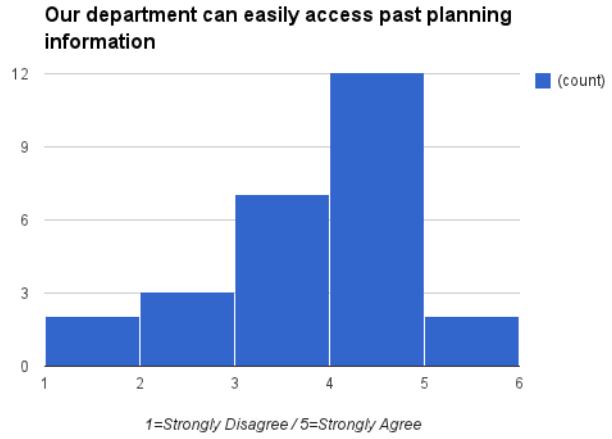
The majority of the responeses fall into the point 4 band. This would suggest that most local authorities feel that they are doing well in responding to 'most' applications within the statutory period.





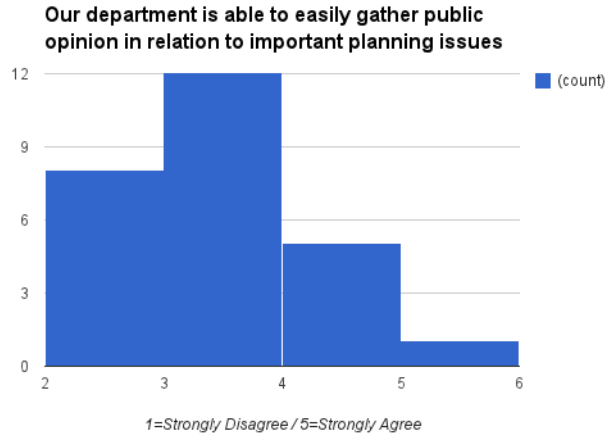
Q6 - Our department does not have a problems in managing the physical content of planning applications (forms, drawing, etc)

Responses to this question are split across 2, 3 and 4; with the majority in the 2 and 4 bandings. This would suggest that the majority of local authorities face 'some' challenges in managing the physical content of applications.



Q7 - Our department can easily access past planning information

The majority of responses fall into the 3-4 bands, with the majority in the 4 band. This suggests that most respondents feel that they are relatively able to access past information without difficulty. Again, given the spread of responses, there may be differences between local authorities and between staff at different levels within departments.

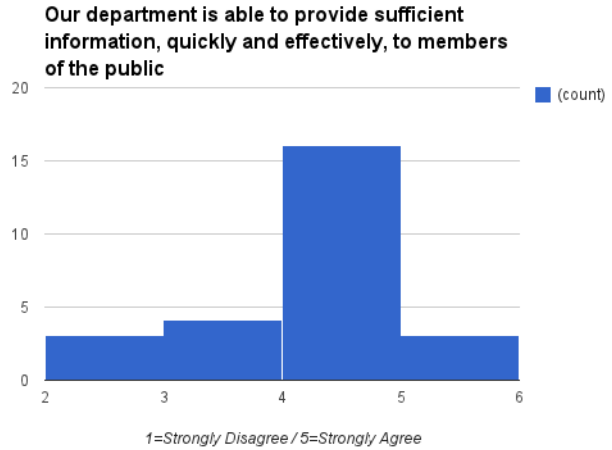


Q8 - Our department is able to easily gather public opinion in relation to important planning issues

There is a clear trending toward the negative in the responses to this question, suggesting that planning departments find it difficult to gather public opinion. There is some correlation in this response to comments from interviews (both public and professional).

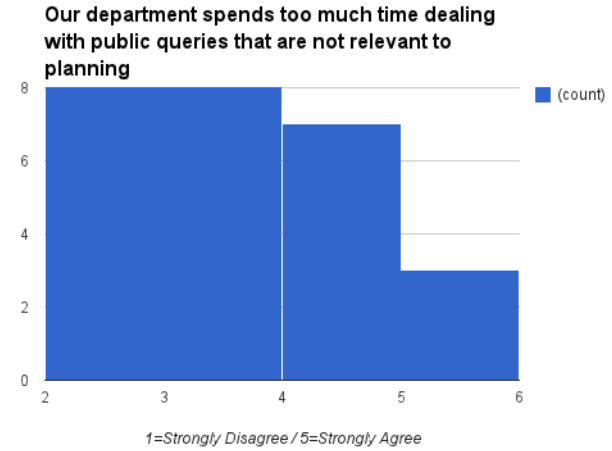
Q9 - Our department is able to provide sufficient information, quickly and effectively, to members of the public

Response to this question is predominated in the 4 band. Thus, many of the respondents feel that they are able to provide sufficient information, quickly and effectively to members of the public. This is, to some extent, at odds with the responses from members of the public and small practitioners; who suggest that they have challenges in obtaining information from planning departments.



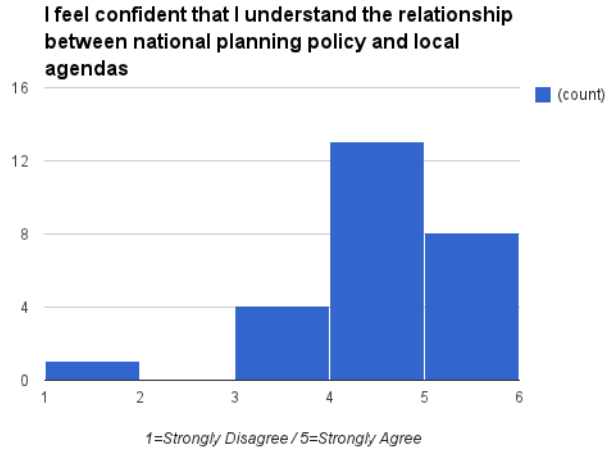
Q10 - Our department spends too much time dealing with public queries that are not relevant to planning

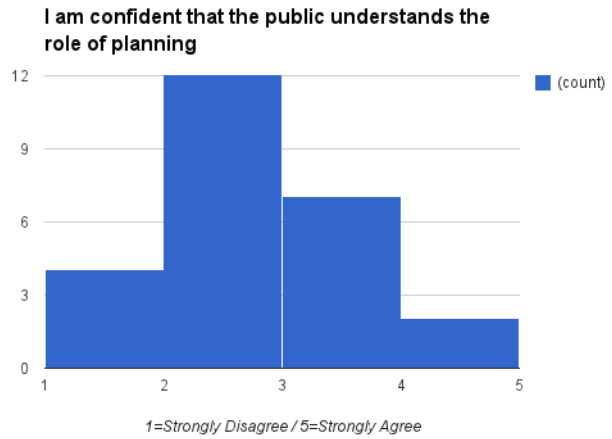
Responses to this question run the gamut from those who disagree to those who agree. There are no respondents who strongly disagree with the question. These responses suggest that there may be considerable differences in experience between different local authorities and different levels within departments. This question should be considered in relation to Q12, in regard to the public's awareness of the role of planning.



Q11 - I feel confident that I understand the relationship between national planning policy and local agendas

There is clear indication that the majority of respondents working in planning departments are confident of their knowledge of national and local planning agendas.





Q12 - I am confident that the public understands the role of planning

Based on the majority of responses in the 1-2 range, it is clear that planning professionals do not feel that members of the public understand the role of planning. This response should be read in relation to both Q10 (Our department spends too much time dealing with public queries that are not relevant to planning) and Q8 (Our department is able to easily gather public opinion in relation to important planning issues); as triangulation of these responses suggests that there may be a corellation between public awareness, engagement and the information the public seeks.

Planning Department - Survey - Free Text Comments

What do you feel is the most difficult aspect of managing the planning system?

- the tension between the pro growth agenda of the government and the local agenda which is about protection and restraint.
- Perceptions of the service as a blocker and the root of all the problems in the recession. Planning is actually part of the solution but where it sits in the timeline of developments means Planning is often accused of being the problem.
- ministerial statements not being in line with current policy - failure to address the plan making arrangements to make them more streamlined - too much tinkering with the detail and not enough high level reform . The PD changes being a case in point .
- Additional complications created by prior approval and notification regime for ‘permitted development’ proposals. Public expectations.
- Availability of suitably experienced staff at an affordable rate
- Managing customers’ expectations
- Ensuring one get the fullest amount of information early on in the process. Without this delays may occur. Also additional conditions may be added to planning consents. possibly introducing other delays in the development management process. In London one also has an additional layer of control from the GLA which does not always appear to be strategic.
- Clunky IT facilities. Staff changes and shortage. Changes of central planning rules and guidance.

- Managing local expectations
- the most difficult aspect of managing the planning system is the amount of paperwork it produces. This could be streamlined by attempting to go paperless with planning applications.
- inconsistency
- Overcoming all of the planning issues to reach and issue a decision within the statutory period, this is often not possible with complex issues.
- Political intervention and public expectation
- Providing Statutory Consultees with easily accessible material on our website.
- The current Government's endless tinkering and changes
- The greatest difficulty comes with applications that are more exceptional, e.g. majors with special characteristics where relatively bespoke technical information/ solutions provided by conditions or S.106 is needed. In addition, the move to CIL and limit on pooling S.106 issues, together with viability considerations when specific needs for infrastructure and affordable housing are real concerns for local communities and makes the decision making process a lot more difficult - local politicians reflect the concerns of their neighbourhoods, so without plausible answers to these issues it is difficult in the short term to see how major objections to development can be overcome.
- Continuous change and complex regulations which professionals find hard to keep up with - what chance do other users of the system have ?

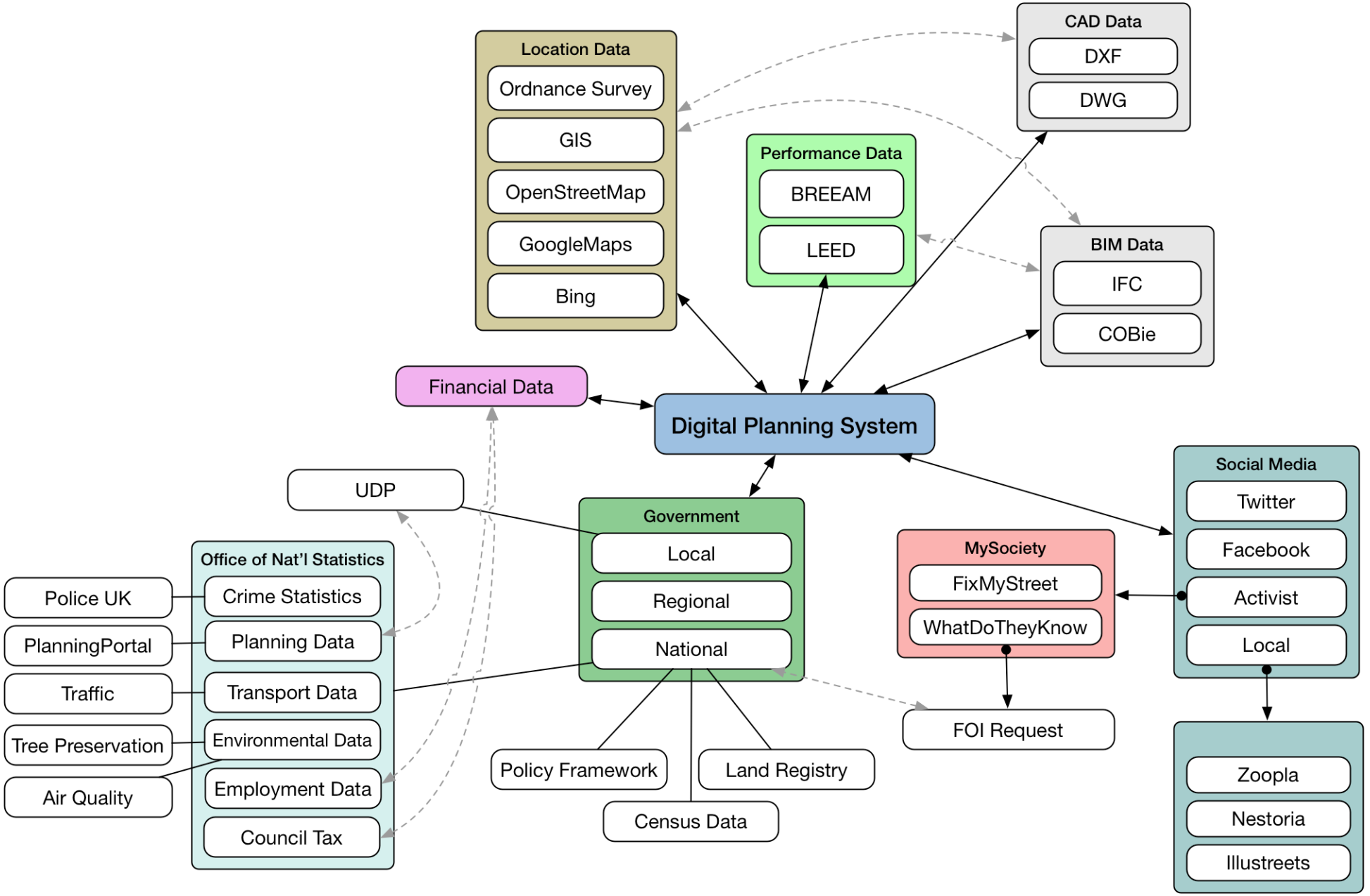
Appendix 3 - Datasets

The identification of appropriate datasets for inclusion in a Digital Planning System must take into account existing sources of data, sources that will further enable the planning process, and those that may enhance the ability of the public to engage with the planning process. However, it is also necessary to consider that a 'future-proof' system must have the ability to integrate data sources that are not yet developed.

Existing Data Sources Used in Planning

Data sources currently used in planning are relatively limited. In most cases, as is seen from the interviews conducted with professionals, data is restricted to drawing formats (DWG, DXF, PDF) and some digital mapping (OS). This limited use of data belies the fact that there are diverse sources of data that may be relevant to planning.

From interviews, there is little evidence of a clear awareness of the range of data sources available. In part, this may be due to the fact that it currently requires some technical expertise to understand how "non-traditional" data sources might be integrated into a planning process. For example, while there are numerous sources of data related to a variety of national and local government matters (transport, crime, environment, employment, etc.) there are few simple ways of visualising this information in ways that make it immediately accessible and usable for planning purposes. Similarly, the potential of social media; as a means to gather public opinion or disseminate information, has not yet been explored in relation to planning.



Existing Data Set Mapping

Existing Datasets and Digital Services

These are some of the other online and digital services that we have reviewed or acknowledged during the development of this report. These may not be directly relevant to a digital planning system but they are important in thinking about public engagement with their local environment.

Dataset Name	Type	Source	Format	Open/ Closed Source	Free	API?	API Access	Availability
Facebook	Social	http://facebook.com	various	closed	Y	Y	open with limits	International
Twitter	Social	http://twitter.com	various	closed	Y	Y	open with limits	International
OpenStreetmap	Geo	http://wiki.openstreetmap.org/wiki/Develop	various	open	Y	Y	open	International
OS OpenData	Geo	http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/business-and-government/products/opendata-products.html	various	open	Y	Y	open	National
ONS Census	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/index.html	various	open	Y	N	n/a	National
Crime Data	Gov	http://data.police.uk	JSON	open	Y	Y	open	National
ONS Crime Dataset	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Crime	MS Excel	open	Y	N	n/a	National
Planning Portal	Gov/Commercial	http://www.planningportal.gov.uk	Various	closed	Y	N	n/a	Local/National
Google Maps	Geo	http://maps.google.co.uk	Various	closed	Y with limits	Y	open with limits	International
Land Registry Data	Gov	https://www.gov.uk/land-registration/data	CSV	closed	N	N	n/a	National
Tree Preservation	Gov	http://data.gov.uk/dataset/tree-preservation-orders5						Local
Live tables on planning application statistics	Gov	https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-planning-application-statistics	MS Excel	open	Y	N	n/a	National
Nestoria	Aggregation	http://www.nestoria.co.uk/help/api	JSON	Open	Y	Y	open	National
Whereaboutslondon	Aggregation	http://www.whereaboutslondon.org	see LDS	Open	Y	Y	see LDS	Local
London Data Store (LDS)	Gov	http://data.london.gov.uk/	CKAN API	Open	Y	Y	open	National
ONS Labour Market Datasets	Gov	https://www.nomisweb.co.uk	Various	Open	Y	Y	open	National

Dataset Name	Type	Source	Format	Open/ Closed Source	Free	API?	API Access	Availability
ONS Environment Datasets	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Environment#tab-data-tables	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Education Datasets	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Children%2C+Education+and+Skills	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Health of Population	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Health+of+the+Population	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Labour Market Datasets	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Labour+Market	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS People and Communities	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Communities	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Housing and Households	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Housing+and+Households	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Planning	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Planning	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS People	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=People	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Travel and Transport	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Travel+and+Transport	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Population	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Population	MS Exce/ Zip?	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Gov't Expenditure & Receipts	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Government+Receipts+and+Expenditure	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
ONS Health & Social Care	Gov	http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Health+and+Social+Care	MS Excel	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
Heresay.org.uk	Aggregation	http://www.heresay.org.uk	n/a	Open	Y	N	n/a	National
Commonplace	Social/Aggregation	http://commonplace.is	n/a	Closed	Y	N	n/a	National
FixMyStreet (MySociety)	Aggregation/Gov	http://fixmystreet.com	Various	Open	Y	Y	open	National
TheyWorkforYou (MySociety)	Aggregation/Gov	http://theyworkforyou.com	Various	Open	Y	Y	open	National

Dataset Name	Type	Source	Format	Open/ Closed Source	Free	API?	API Access	Availability
WhatDoTheyKnow (MySociety)	Aggregation/Gov	http://whatdotheyknow.com	Various	Open	Y	Y	open	National