MHCLG Digital Planning

Reflections on launch of the Digital Planning Directory
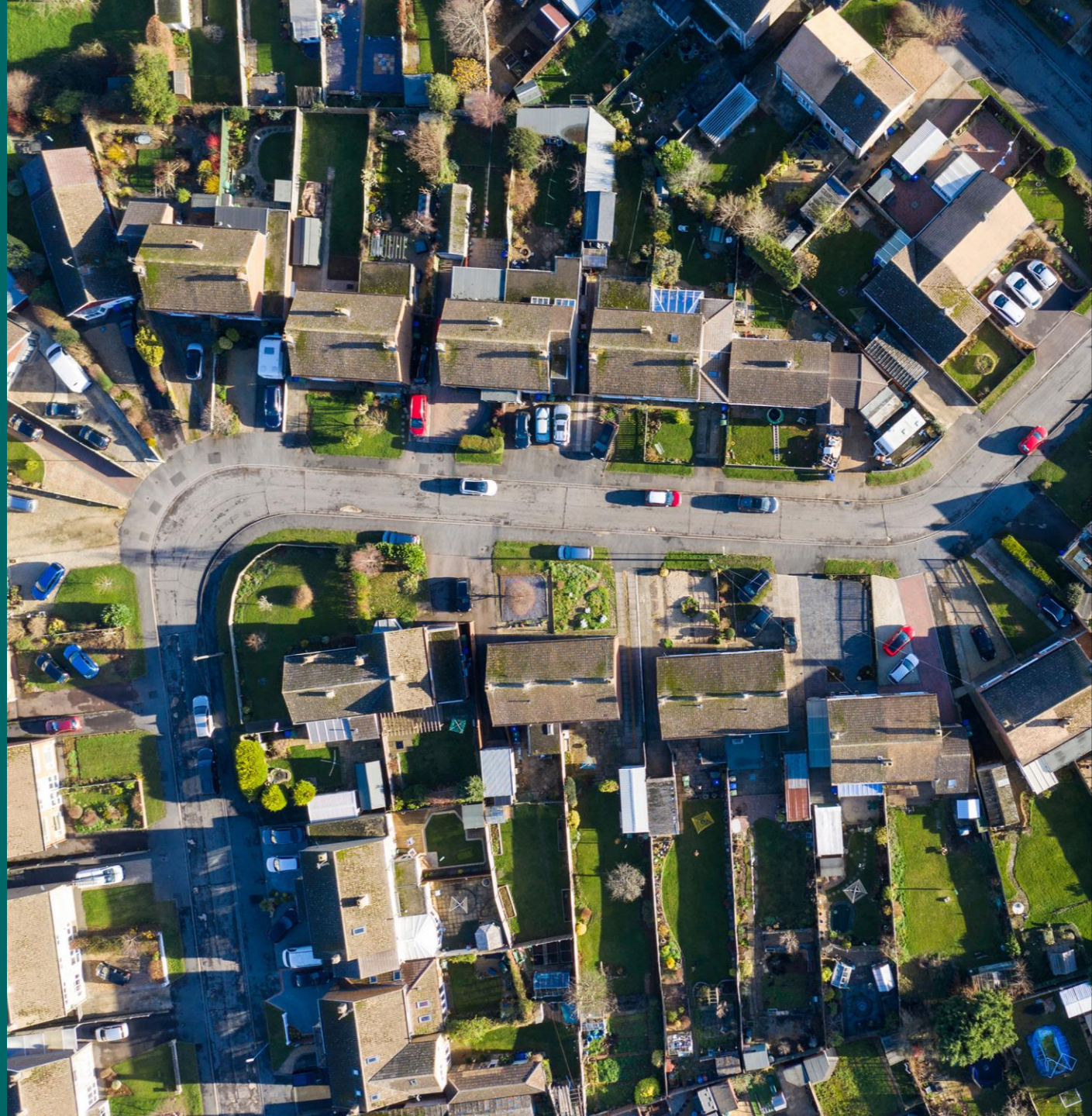
26 September 2024

DIGITAL PLANNING

Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

01

MHCLG
Digital Planning Programme

Problems with the current planning system

The current planning system is slow and inefficient due to its limited use of digital tools and the high number of paper-based processes.

This makes information hard to access for both government and citizens wishing to get a full and accurate picture of housing and planning needs, and for the private sector to build useful and innovative services.
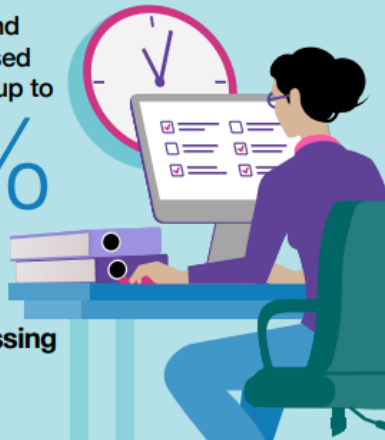
For some applicants it can take **Over 70 hours** to prepare and submit a planning application.

Up to 50% of planning applications are invalid on submission.

Each invalid application causes on average **34 days of delay...** ...straining planning authority resources.

THE SLOW AND FRUSTRATING APPLICATIONS PROCESS IS HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE INDUSTRY

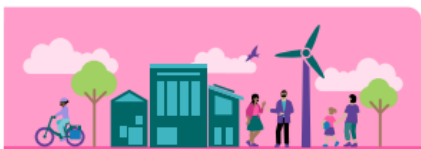In 2008, over **70%** of planners worked in the public sector

By 2018, only **56%** of planners worked in the public sector

The majority of planning applications are 'straightforward' homeowner applications for things like extensions and changes of use.

But outdated and often paper-based methods mean up to **50%** of planning officer time is spent on manual processing and dealing with errors.

This takes capacity away from the development of larger (minor, major and strategic) schemes.

THE IMPACT ALSO EXTENDS TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Only around a third of local authorities have adopted a Local Plan within the last five years.

The Royal Town Planning Institute believes that less than 1% of the population of a district engage in the development of their Local Plan in the current system.

ACCORDING TO A GROVESNOR REPORT

Only 7% of citizens trust local planning authorities to make decisions in the best interest of the local community.

This lack of trust can result in citizens missing opportunities to engage with councils consulting on plans for development, that could be beneficial to the area.

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The vision

"Make the planning system in England fit for the 21st Century"

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How Digital Planning is transforming the planning system

The programme's four key outcomes will shift the current documents-based system to one that is powered by data and modern user-centered products and services.

Better access to planning data

Faster and more efficient planning decisions

Improved local community engagement

Simpler, faster, more accessible plan making

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02

PropTech learnings & opportunities

Where we started

The Goal:

Support the sector to adopt digital approaches to consultations that streamline the planning process and help enable faster housing and infrastructure development

How:

- Work with LPAs to trial new digital engagement tools to improve the consultation process (through PropTech innovation funding)

- Support the LPAs to adopt digital engagement tools and support PropTech market to make solutions more sustainable, effective and accessible

- Establish new best practice to inform policy development and overcome barriers to adoption
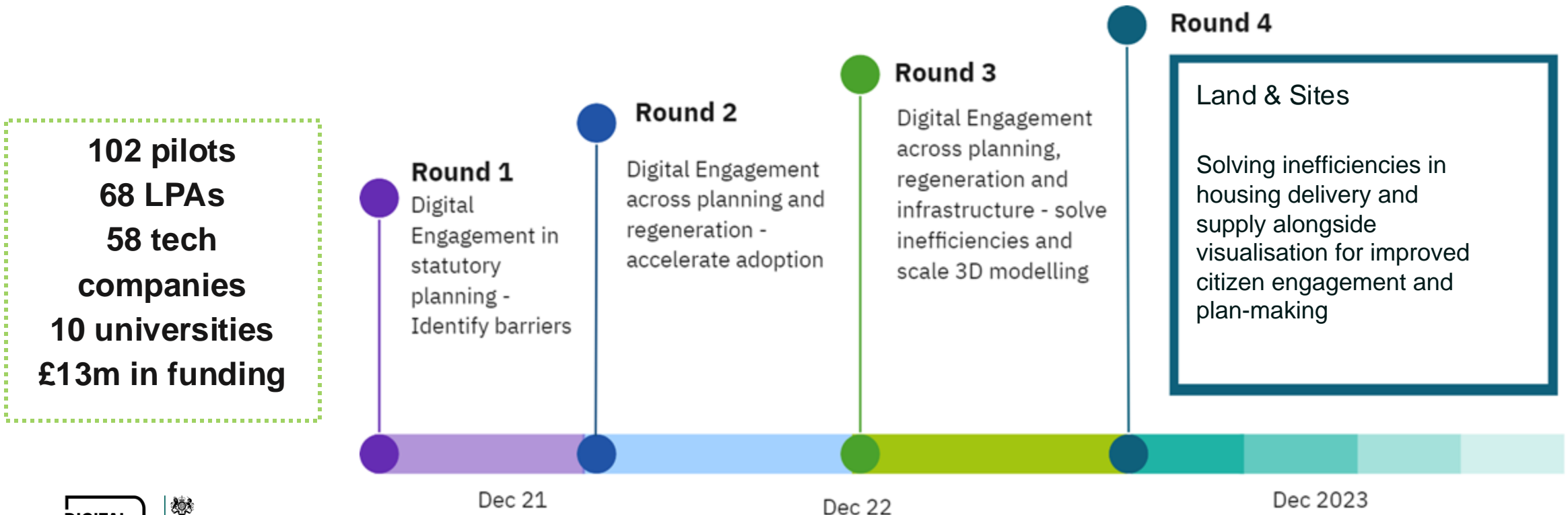
PropTech means Property Technology. It's an umbrella term for innovative technology that drives efficiencies within built environment processes and industries

Evolving to support the sector to test & scale PropTech across the planning ecosystem

The PropTech Innovation Fund was established in 2021 as a delivery vehicle to support widespread adoption of digital tools in planning, to mature the UK PropTech market and to validate the role of digital as a crucial lever for improved, faster plan-making and development outcomes.

102 pilots
68 LPAs
58 tech companies
10 universities
£13m in funding

Round 1
Digital Engagement in statutory planning - Identify barriers

Round 2
Digital Engagement across planning and regeneration - accelerate adoption

Round 3
Digital Engagement across planning, regeneration and infrastructure - solve inefficiencies and scale 3D modelling

Round 4

Land & Sites

Solving inefficiencies in housing delivery and supply alongside visualisation for improved citizen engagement and plan-making

Dec 21   Dec 22   Dec 2023

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Establishing evidence for streamlining planning and housing

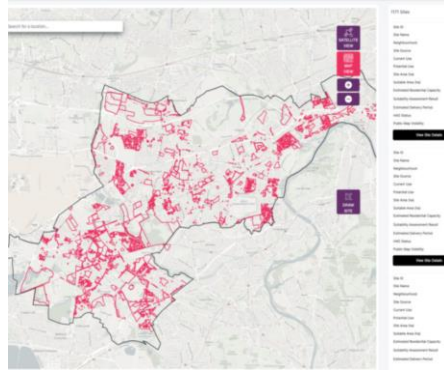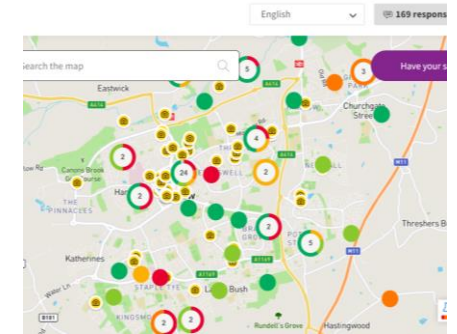| Planning process	Plan-making	Site Identification & Assembly	Viability & Feasibility Assessment	Public Consultations	Monitoring
Example PropTech Solutions					
PropTech impact	**4-6 month reduction in Local Plan** timeline including over 200 weeks of planning officer time savings	**95% reduction in time** to identify and assess new sites **£11k license** for tech to assess all sites **vs. £120k consultant fee** paid by LPA for 6 months work	**2-3 x increase in number of homes built on small sites** within the Plan Period Able to identify and analyse **191x as many plots of land** using PropTech	**300% increase in community responses** to consultation **37% increase in positive sentiment** for new development proposed	**Reduced time and cost burden** for ongoing compliance with regulatory requirements like biodiversity net gain

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Identifying and overcoming barriers to scale

Barrier: Lack of evidence to demonstrate a return on investment – most LPAs do not hold, or have access to, the right evidence to get senior buy-in for adopting digital platforms.

Barrier: LPAs in the PropTech Innovation Fund acknowledged the often lengthy and complex internal processes and approval mechanisms that are required to procure a new supplier.

Barrier: Lack of market interoperability – LPAs struggle to access, integrate and publish planning systems and data when required due to the lack of integrations between suppliers.

Barrier: Lack of market awareness and of product capabilities – most LPAs in the Fund were not previously aware of the market offering or which products would fit their needs.