**Planning Software Improvement Fund Prospectus - 2022**

A new, more modular, software landscape to encourage digital innovation and provide access to underlying data.

[November 2022]

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



© Crown copyright, 2022

*Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.*

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

This document/publication is also available on our website at [link to round page on LDCU website]. If you have any enquiries regarding this document/publication, email fund@localdigital.gov.uk.

For all our latest news and updates, [subscribe to our newsletter](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1osp35QivM7PbARswwrj5AMV8GU_hiEeUXnR5-McqzzQ/) and follow us on Twitter: [@DigiPlanningGov](https://twitter.com/DigiPlanningGov)

November 2022

#

[Introduction](#_booho9jl0mcg)

[Fund overview](#_swby6pjme6q0)

[Track 1: Adopt and design new services with councils](#_x9f4p4igoaak)

[Track 2: Adopt new services and integrate with existing software](#_wlfddg8zwn3r)

[Track 3: Improve existing software products and integrations with service providers](#_8n4gld69ajdn)

[Eligibility](#_j12l7md0gsbb)

[Application](#_w8un2jgum5pq)

[Assessment](#_b0vrhm5gih2k)

[Timeline](#_abuclzptn4rd)

[Annexes](#_zde73mvb94i1)

[Open Digital Planning Services](#_wjzt9z8ujbvi)

[PlanX](#_a6voh0ijufx7)

[Technical information](#_5bijzqwo6cu0)

[Back Office Planning System (BOPS)](#_mq2kghru1jcl)

[Technical information](#_qf95ftdhd9ln)

[Expected commitments and deliverables](#_c08gtd2osbg6)

[Track 1: Adopt and design new services with councils](#_xv584xgipbzm)

[Track 2: Adopt new services and integrate with existing software](#_aku9nqn2lz0r)

[PlanX option](#_j6p27lx6u3c8)

[BOPS option](#_hv7982c2tgso)

[Track 3: Improve existing software products and integrations with service providers](#_6ipywv6pqj9n)

#

# Introduction

1. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill sets out the intentions for greater digitisation to improve the way the planning system works and is experienced; a cornerstone of this will be improved planning software, underpinned by data not documents.
2. This approach is central to the Planning Software Improvement Fund, along with the Open Digital Planning [Adoption Commitments](https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/ripa-bops-adoption-commitments/) and the five principles of the [Local Digital Declaration](https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/what-is-the-declaration/).
3. Since 2019, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) has funded a group of local planning authority (LPA) partners to co-design and deliver [Back Office Planning System (BOPS) and Plan X product services (previously known as RIPA).](https://dluhcdigital.blog.gov.uk/2022/08/01/new-user-centred-services-for-planning-applications-are-now-live-on-council-websites/) Together these are the [Open Digital Planning Services](http://opendigitalplanning.org).
4. It has also previously funded 8 LPAs to deliver [pathfinder projects that explored ways to enhance their planning services by working closely with existing software providers](https://dluhcdigital.blog.gov.uk/2022/01/21/modernising-planning-software-in-collaboration-with-councils-and-suppliers/).
5. Now, we are launching Round 1 of the Planning Software Improvement Fund, amounting to £5 million, to enable 25 LPAs to adopt improved planning software services. Funding is awarded via Section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 grant and shipped to LPAs

# Fund overview

## Track 1: Adopt and design new services with councils

1. Join the Open Digital Planning project to adopt and work with other LPAs to design the PlanX and BOPS services for submitting and processing planning applications.

## Track 2: Adopt new services and integrate with existing software

1. Adopt one of the Open Digital Planning software products [PlanX or BOPS], and work with an existing service provider on targeted service improvements and technical integrations.

## Track 3: Improve existing software products and integrations with service providers

1. Work with existing service providers on targeted service improvements and technical integrations in line with DLUHC’s vision for digital planning.

# Eligibility

1. Only LPAs in England are eligible to make applications to the fund, noting the funding track requirements, deliverables, and assessment criteria outlined below.
2. Central government departments, third sector organisations, other public sector organisations and LPAs from elsewhere in the UK are not eligible to apply. Private and third sector organisations are not invited to submit applications.
3. Applicants must be [Local Digital Declaration](https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/) signatories. LPAs can sign up to the declaration during the application window, [guidance is available on the Local Digital website](https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/declaration/guidance-on-making-a-commitment/).
4. Each LPA is eligible to submit one application only.

# Application

1. Application forms will be made available to LPAs from 16th November, via the [Digital Planning website.](https://www.localdigital.gov.uk/digital-planning/digital-planning-software/funding/)
2. All applications must be submitted by 23rd December 2022.
3. Applications are expected to demonstrate the LPA's readiness to meet the fund eligibility criteria outlined in this document.
4. A sift and shortlisting exercise will take place at the beginning of January 2023.
5. Interviews for shortlisted applicants will take place mid January 2023.
6. Funding is expected to be shipped in mid-February, subject to ministerial timelines.

# Assessment

1. Successful applications will demonstrate:
2. *A commitment to digital planning.* Applicants will provide evidence of their organisation’s commitment to transforming their planning services and give a clear explanation of how they see digital technologies and practices supporting this change. The responses will include work already underway, initiatives that have taken place, strategies that have been defined and budgets that have been allocated.
3. *A commitment to the principles of the Local Digital Declaration.* Applicants will demonstrate how the LPA has applied the Local Digital Declaration principles in previous or current work. The proposed team has some experience working in an agile delivery environment and applying user-centred approaches to design and is committed to working as part of an agile delivery team.
4. *The right team.* The proposed team will comprise of the capabilities, experience, and capacity relevant to digital planning software and the funding track. Responses will demonstrate how the time commitments and responsibilities of each team member corresponds to the proposed funding. The application will consider how the team will ensure engagement from senior stakeholders and subject matter experts.
5. *The delivery approach.* There is a plan for the team for the duration of the funding, including consideration of how the LPA will manage staffing, recruitment and capacity challenges. The plans will provide a clear breakdown of how the funding from DLUHC will be spent.
6. *Sharing knowledge/stakeholder engagement*. The proposed team will share progress, learnings and products with stakeholders in their organisation to help build wider engagement and understanding that supports the adoption of the products. They will champion their work in their LPA and - with the support of the project teams - provide training and guidance to colleagues on using the products and services.

# Timeline

| **Fund announced** | 9 November 2022 |
| --- | --- |
| **Fund launched and applications open**  | 16 November 2022 |
| **Weekly applicant Q&A session** | 23 November 202230 November 20227 November 202214 November 2022 |
| **Applications close**  | 23 December 2022 |
| **Panel interviews**  | 9 - 20 January 2023 |
| **Successful applicants notified** | February 2023 |

# Annexes

## Open Digital Planning Services

### PlanX

1. A user friendly browser based Application Service allowing residents to apply for a Lawful Development Certificate
2. By only asking questions relevant to their project, our Application Service makes it simpler for residents and planning agents to request a Lawful Development Certificate. The service can be integrated with back office systems.
3. Our aim is to help residents and planning agents to submit high quality planning applications that are right first time. [Our first live service is for Lawful Development Certificate submissions](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-applications/apply-for-a-lawful-development-certificate).
4. Our application service simplifies the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) legislation, and only requests information relevant to the project.
5. When answering questions about their project, residents and planning agents are shown rules related to permitted development rights.
6. Notable key features:
	1. Everything the Guidance Service does
	2. Document upload requests come with clear guidance to reduce invalid applications.
	3. Accepts payments and allows applicants to save and return to a live application
	4. Planning teams can manage their own services, allowing quick updates when legislation changes.

#### Technical information

1. Our Guidance and Application services are built on PlanX so Officers can use a content management editor to collaboratively write and maintain services.
2. PlanX services are browser-based and users access them via your Council Website. [Read full technical specifications](https://www.notion.so/Service-specification-a076f18cba104925b2fdeb143d0dcb91).
3. Automated planning constraints checks are made by querying the [National Planning Data Platform](https://www.planning.data.gov.uk/). The platform pulls through standardised data from council Geographic Information Systems (GIS), so that users know they are seeing reliable and assured data relevant to their property.
4. Using APIs, applications come through to our own Assessment Service, and to other existing back office planning systems.
5. [Southwark Council: Apply for a Lawful Development Certificate](https://www.southwark.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-applications/apply-for-a-lawful-development-certificate)

### Back Office Planning System (BOPS)

1. With everything in one place, Planning Officers can make better, faster decisions.
2. This tool allows Planning Officers to see their workflow, status of applications, plans and constraints. Within the tool they can process and reassign applications and request more information from the applicant.
3. Our aim is to build a service that is a joy to use. Planners will spend less time searching for information, and have more time to use their planning expertise on higher value work
4. Our Assessment Service is a case management system that has been designed with extensive inputs from planning teams, and makes planning data more accessible. Planners spend less time searching for, and requesting information.
5. Notable features include:
	1. Clearly shows the officer’s workflow and status of applications
	2. All documents and data are shown side-by-side, in one place
	3. Shows any constraints picked up when the applicant draws a digital red line boundary
	4. Allows officers to amend this red line boundary, and to send a request for approval to applicants
	5. All officer-to-applicant communications take place in the service, generating a consistent audit trail
	6. Notifications are sent directly to applicants to request new or updated documents

#### Technical information

1. The Assessment Service is built on the Back Office Planning System (BOPS), an open source case management system that allows planning teams to validate and assess planning applications.
2. BOPS services are browser-based and officers access them via your council website. The BOPS applicant module is a browser-based interface that applicants can use when interacting with council staff about their application. [Read full technical specifications](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JC1gOPoTBF3jCqpcadfHk7-UiqvPc-Q_K9iDlbun9EI/edit?usp=sharing).
3. The Assessment Service receives application data from Application services built using PlanX.
4. Integrations with [GOV.UK Notify](https://www.notifications.service.gov.uk/) and [GOV.UK Pay](https://www.payments.service.gov.uk/) allow officers to check and amend fees and application details, sending email notifications straight from the system, with a clear audit log of communications.
5. Team members get individual login accounts, and the developer, Unboxed, can provide training support for digital transformation at your planning authority.

##

## Expected commitments and deliverables

#### **Track 1: Adopt and design new services with councils**

Join the Open Digital Planning project to adopt and work with other LPAs to design the PlanX and BOPS services for submitting and processing planning applications.

In August, the [Open Digital Planning](http://opendigitalplanning.org) project launched [three live services](https://dluhcdigital.blog.gov.uk/2022/08/01/new-user-centred-services-for-planning-applications-are-now-live-on-council-websites/), which aim to make it simpler for applicants to make and council officers to process a planning application:

* A Guidance service, built on PlanX as part of the RIPA project
* An Application service, also built on PlanX as part of the RIPA project
* An Assessment service, built as part of the Back Office Planning System (BOPS) project

These services are currently in use for [Lawful Development Certificate applications](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/building-or-improving-your-property/apply-for-a-lawful-development-certificate/), and the team is now developing services for householder planning permission.

LPAs with Track 1 funding will work with other councils and project partners to continue the development of the services, and should choose a level of involvement - high, medium, or low - based on the level of staff time they are willing to commit to project work.

The level of funding available varies depending on how much time a partner council can commit to co-creation activities - see [How to Join](https://opendigitalplanning.org/join/) on the On Digital Planning website for more detail. The maximum amounts available to councils are:

1. High Involvement: up to £300,000 staffing costs [2-4 FTEs], £100,000 non-staffing costs
2. Medium Involvement: up to £200,000 staffing costs [1-2 FTEs], £100,000 non-staffing costs
3. Low Involvement: up to £100,000 staffing costs [1 FTE], £100,000 non-staffing costs

Local Planning Authorities adopting Open Digital Planning services should be able to work towards the project’s [Adoption Commitments](https://opendigitalplanning.org/adoption-commitments/), and must read and commit to these before applying.

#### **Track 2: Adopt new services and integrate with existing software**

Adopt one of the Open Digital Planning software products [PlanX or BOPS], and work with an existing service provider on targeted service improvements and technical integrations.

LPAs with Track 2 funding have two options:

1. **PlanX option:** Adopt the Open Digital Planning Application service (built on PlanX) and work with your council’s existing back office system provider to develop integrations and make specific service improvements that will be scaled to other LPAs using the same product. Applications should include one or more of the following:
	* An open API integration that passes planning application data between PlanX and an existing back office system [[this example has been developed by the Open Digital Planning project](https://southwark.bops-staging.services/api-docs/index.html)].
	* An outbound API for historical planning data [[this example has been developed by the Open Digital Planning project](https://staging.paapi.services/api-docs/index.html)], so that it can be used by other data consumers.
2. **BOPS option:** Adopt the Open Digital Planning Assessment service (built on BOPS) and work with an existing submission service provider to develop integrations and make specific service improvements that will be scaled to other LPAs using the same service. Applications should include one or more of the following:
	* An open API integration that passes planning application data between an existing submission service and BOPS [[this example has been developed by the Open Digital Planning project](https://southwark.bops-staging.services/api-docs/index.html)].
	* An automated planning constraints check via the National Planning Data Platform, so that applicants can see what constraints apply to their property.
	* A digital red-line boundary tool so that applicants can draw and submit site location plan polygons as GeoJson data to BOPS.

Successful applicants with Track 2 funding will be expected to take part in ‘Low involvement’ commitments to the Open Digital Planning project. Equivalent to a 0.5 FTE contribution, this will involve participation in an integrations working group and regular user group and metrics activities.

Local Planning Authorities should therefore be able to work towards the Open Digital Planning [Adoption Commitments](https://opendigitalplanning.org/adoption-commitments/), and must read and commit to these before applying.

Successful applications are likely to have consulted and developed an approach with the existing service provider.

The funds are intended to backfill and bolster council delivery and technical resources, and technical work with the service provider.

* Up to £300,000 is available for councils taking the PlanX option.
* Up to £250,000 is available for councils taking the BOPS option.

Where LPAs share the same service provider and have the same project idea, we expect you to apply individually and we will ‘match-make’ successful applicants. In such cases, it may make sense for one council to manage the contract and grant for the technical work on behalf of other LPAs. We will discuss this with successful applicants before the award is confirmed.

All APIs developed using this funding will be tested, fully documented, and published to a library of open APIs for digital planning services.

#### **Track 3: Improve existing software products and integrations with service providers**

Work with existing service providers on targeted service improvements and technical integrations in line with DLUHC’s vision for digital planning.

LPAs will work with an existing submission service provider and their existing back office system provider to develop an open API integration that passes planning application data between the two systems.

LPAs will work with an existing submission service provider and their existing back office system provider to develop integrations and make specific service improvements that will be scaled to other LPAs using the same software and services. Applications should consider:

* An open API integration that passes planning application data between an existing submission service and an existing back-office system [[this example has been developed by the Open Digital Planning project](https://southwark.bops-staging.services/api-docs/index.html)].
* An automated planning constraints check via the National Planning Data Platform, so that applicants can see what constraints apply to their property.
* A digital red-line boundary tool so that applicants can draw and submit site location plan polygons as GeoJson data to BOPS.
* An outbound API for historical planning data, so that it can be used by other data consumers [[this example has been developed by the Open Digital Planning project](https://staging.paapi.services/api-docs/index.html)].

Successful applications are likely to have consulted and developed an approach with the existing service provider.

The funds are intended to backfill and bolster council delivery and technical resources, and technical work with the service provider.

Up to £250,000 is available for councils on Track 3.

Where LPAs share the same service provider and have the same project idea, we expect you to apply individually and we will ‘match-make’ successful applicants. In such cases, it may make sense for one council to manage the contract and grant for the technical work on behalf of other LPAs. We will discuss this with successful applicants before the award is confirmed.

All APIs developed using this funding will be tested, fully documented, and published to a library of open APIs for digital planning services.