Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

PropTech Engagement Fund Round 1

Final Report

April 2022

Bolsover District Council

Local Planning Authority	Bolsover District Council
Date	6th May 2022
Theme	Theme 1: Plan-making Process: Regulation 18

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1.0 Project Aims and Objectives
- Ambition and desired outcomes
- Focus of consultation and what you consulted on

Ambition and desired outcomes

Bolsover District Council sought funding from the PropTech Engagement Fund in order to explore the potential for streamlining the plan-making process and gamifying plan making consultation to drive collaboration and engagement.

Desired objectives were:

1. to simplify and speed up plan making through the creation of an interactive web-based GIS interface that produces policies and sites outcomes based on data rather than documents;

2. to provide access to this interface and the same datasets used by officers to allow citizens to do more than simply comment on the plans. In this project, digital tools will hopefully allow citizens to create and submit alternative proposals by deleting and / or adding sites to the map.

The key discoveries from this project were intended to be:

1. What is the potential for streamlining the plan-making process?
2. Can we capture land value more effectively through data?
3. Can we make plan-making more transparent, accountable and democratic?
4. Can we remove barriers to active participation?
5. Can we engage young people who are most affected by forward plans but in this authority's experience are the least likely to respond to consultation?

Focus of the consultation

The focus of the consultation was the [Shirebrook Growth Plan](#). This non-statutory planning document is intended to sit above the recently adopted Local Plan for Bolsover District and direct where additional growth would be acceptable to the Council. The Council will adopt prepared Growth Plans as material considerations in the planning process, such as decisions on relevant planning applications or future reviews of the Local Plan.

Work on the Shirebrook Growth commenced in March 2022 and Round 1 has focussed on the Initial Consultation Exercise. This has sought to gain an evidence base on the current threats and opportunities in Shirebrook and to open a conversation around how planned growth can help address or respond to these.

> **2.0 Project Summary**
> ● **Summary** (including where applicable links to project website/ image /
> examples)
> ● **Opportunities** - what did the pilot allow you to do & how much was existing vs
> new types of engagement?
> ● **Funding review** - comparison of amount bid vs actual cost i.e. was more
>   funding needed than you expected and for what elements?

Project summary

To trial new technologies to encourage greater public engagement in the plan
making work of the Council, particularly amongst younger members of a local
community.

Opportunities

By being part of the Government's PropTech Engagement Fund, the Council was
able to employ the PropTech firm, The Future Fox, and their social media partners,
The Quick Fox, to trial a more mobile first, younger person orientated, consultation
on the Shirebrook Growth Plan.

This ran alongside the Council's more traditional consultation methods of:

- Emails & Letters
- Press Release
- Posters & Exhibitions
- Public Meetings
- Online web portal for making representations
- Paper consultation forms

This more mobile first approach saw The Future Fox create a new consultation
website for the consultation on the Shirebrook Growth Plan, which can be viewed
at: https://placebuilder.io/shirebrookgrowthplan

The questions departed from the traditional consultation on draft policies and
potential site allocation and brought in question styles using the Likert scale
(represented by emojis) and ranking answers. These styles were used to make
answering the questions more simple and easy to use for people not previously
engaged in planning matters.

Alongside this, the more mobile first approach involved a social media campaign that
involved purchasing advert time on Facebook and Instagram for the geographic area
of Shirebrook and its hinterland. The adverts prepared purposely reflected the
younger people target audience demographic.

Images of the consultation materials are included below.

PropTech Engagement Fund - Round 1

Tell us your thoughts on living in Shirebrook

1. How do you feel about living in Shirebrook?

😟 😕 😐 🙂 😍
very bad   bad   neutral   good   very good

4. What would you change to make living in Shirebrook better? (drag & drop below options)

⠿ [ ] better choice and availability of new housing

⠿ [ ] more job opportunities

⠿ [ ] more frequent public transport

⠿ [ ] better shops and services in the Town Centre

⠿ [ ] more green spaces

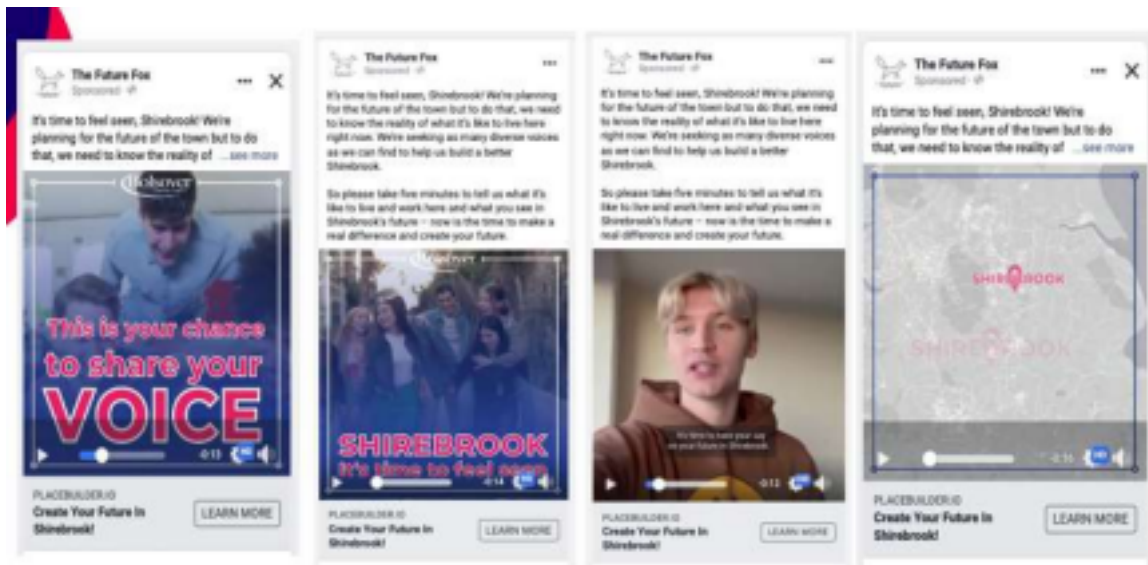### 1. Drag the pink circle on the map
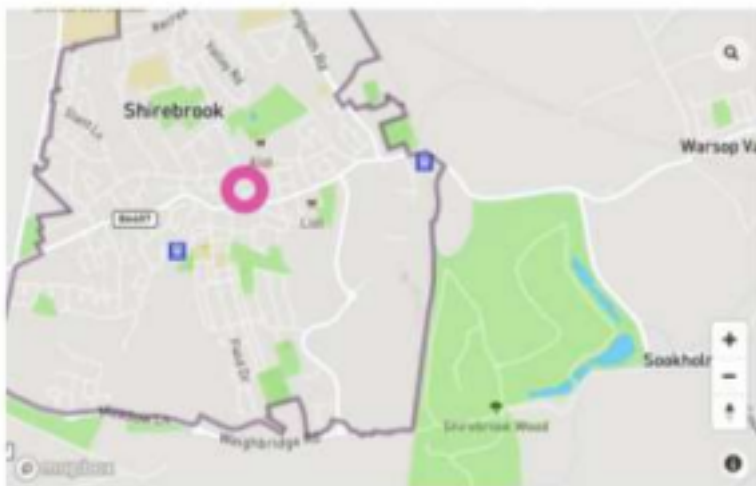
2. Enter your comment

Enter your comment here, you can write up to 250 characters

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Funding review

The financing of our round 1 project was as follows:

	Bid	Committed	Spent
Consultancy (software licence and development)	£70,000	£56,215	£43,209
Bespoke social media package	£15,000	£15,800	£8,770
Backfill / project support officer	£15,000	£15,000	£15,000
TOTAL	£100,000	£87,015	£66,979

The sums committed and spent reflect the reshaping of the project and moving the development of the land use values gamification element into a later consultation stage. This decision reflected both the selected Initial Consultation Exercise stage of the preparation of the Shirebrook Growth Plan, i.e. to begin at the beginning, and the timescales for development given the end of March financial deadline.

However, with the opportunity to bid for round 2 this funding position enabled the development costs of obtaining the land use value information being covered by round 1 with the round 2 money enabling the development of the gamification module and virtual reality / augmented reality technology. This will see the remaining committed consultancy funding being used to help deliver parts of the next stage of consultation and be pooled with round 2 funding.

The staff budget has been used to provide back fill cover on the Council's Bolsover Community Woodlands project through the funding of a project officer. This role has enabled the Planning Policy team to transfer work to enable sufficient amounts of officer time to be dedicated to make the PropTech pilot a success

Outreach methods

As described above, we used the Future Fox's PlaceBuilder platform to provide a public consultation website that had a mobile first approach.

The Initial Consultation Exercise ran from 1st to 31st March 2022 and involved the Council reaching out to the Shirebrook community via:

- Emails & Letters – these had links to the PlaceBuilder platform via weblinks & dedicated QR code;
- Press Release – this was issued by the Council on its usual communication channels, e.g. website, Twitter and Instagram social media accounts; • Posters – these were put on lampposts around Shirebrook and had links to the PlaceBuilder platform via a dedicated QR code;
- Exhibitions – this was displayed in the Shirebrook Town Council office and at a staff exhibition drop in session;
- Paper consultation form – this mirrored the PlaceBuilder platform's format and also had links to the PlaceBuilder platform via a dedicated QR code; • Social media campaign – this used dedicated adverts to promote the consultation and link to the PlaceBuilder platform.

Lessons learned

It is considered that this expansion of the use of technology to augment our traditional consultation methods worked well and increased the reach of our public engagement. The use of dedicated QR codes on the different channels of communication was a particularly good development that enabled us to understand which channel people were reaching our consultation by. Data was also collected on what type of device they were using to access our consultation.

It is considered that the DLUHC organised PropTech show and tells provided a good incubation space for ideas to be shared by the group of pilot authorities, enabling us to hear the good ideas of others and adopt and adapt them to improve our approach.

Engagement and comparison of baseline data

Our outreach targets for round 1 were:

> 600 'minimum' engagement hits on Placebuilder portal
> 1200 'stretch' engagement hits on Placebuilder portal
> 900 engagement hits on Placebuilder portal from social media ads · 200 registrations for future plan-making engagement, i.e. people providing their email address
> 100 submissions / responses through poll & map facilities

Alongside this, we want to see if we can get a demographic spread of submissions that better reflects the population of Shirebrook, albeit noting that the age question is optional.

Against these outreach targets, we achieved:

> 870 engagement hits on Placebuilder portal
> 258 engagement hits on Placebuilder portal from social media ads
> 75 registrations for future plan-making engagement, i.e. people providing their email address
> 163 submissions / responses through poll & map facilities

In addition, the use of dedicated QR codes highlighted that people were reaching the PlaceBuilder platform as follows:

> 402 – Direct (via web links on Council emails and press release) ·
> 258 – Facebook (via social media adverts or sharing of adverts) ·
> 174 – Organic (via QR code on letters)
> 33 – Poster (via QR code on posters on lampposts or exhibition)

Key engagement information:

shirebrookpoll ▾

Sessions by Full referrer

URL	Count
(direct)	402
facebook	258
organic	174
poster	33
business.facebook.com/	1
google	1
m.facebook.com/	1

Sessions by Device Category

Category	Count
mobile	632
desktop	205
tablet	33

shirebrookpoll ▾

Submissions per day

User locations

Postcodes of users who submitted a comment
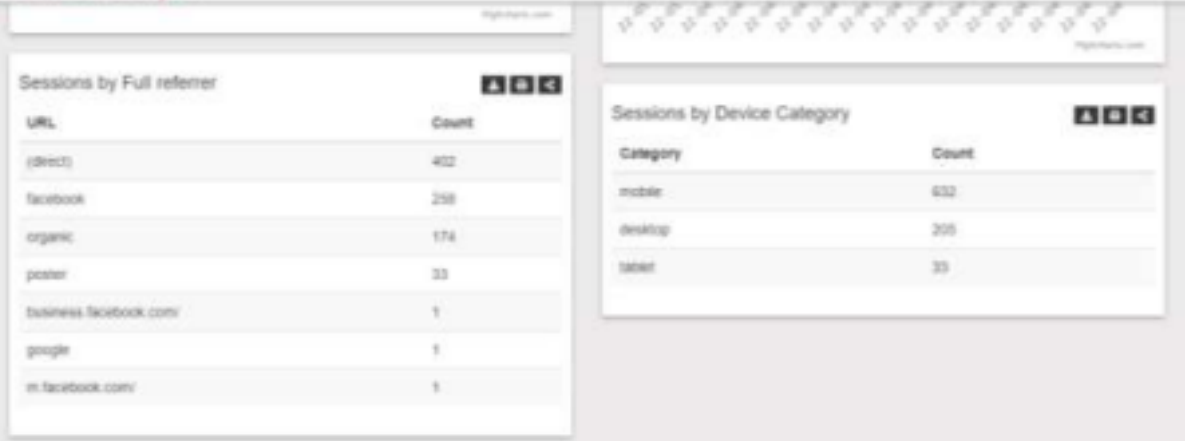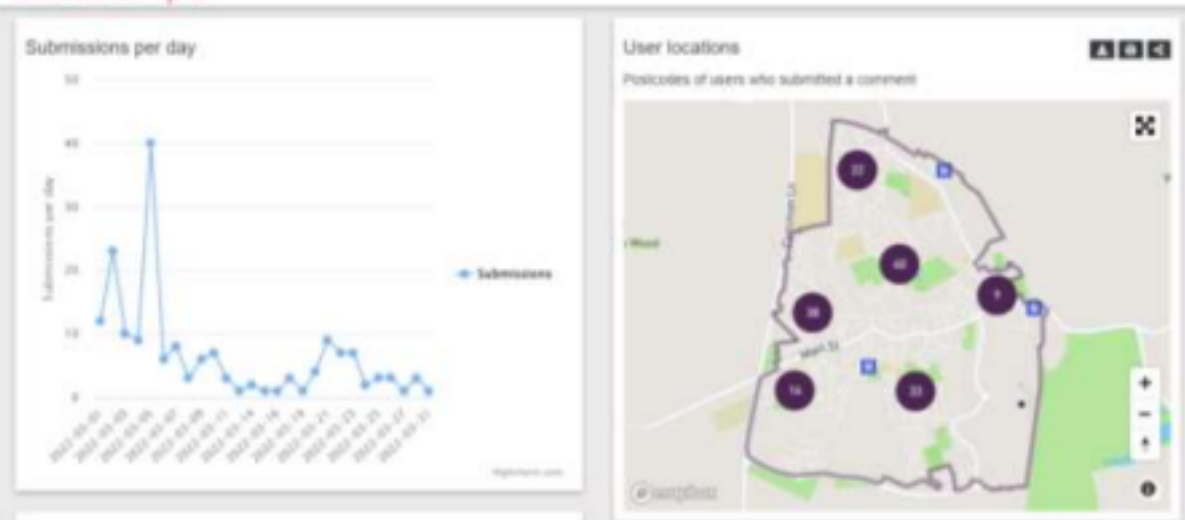
Key demographic information:

Demographic Survey

Age

Demographic Survey

Connection

Comparison of Baseline data

Demographics

The Council has no real demographic data for engagement in plan making work on the Local Plan for Bolsover District. This is largely due to the Council following the principle that an individual's age, ethnic origin, gender or disability does not increase or detract from the value of the planning points being made.

However, anecdotally officers involved in the plan making work have recalled that people attending public drop-in sessions or making representations have tended to not be younger people.

Beyond this, the Council has utilised ONS data sets to obtain an age profile for Shirebrook to act as a baseline for representations by age (where provided).

Against this population profile, as shown above (and repeated below) the responses by age grouping were as follows:

- 18 to 24 year olds – 6% of responses;
- 25 to 34 year olds – 15% of responses;
- 35 to 44 year olds – 23% of responses;
- 45 to 54 year olds – 20% of responses;
- 55 and over – 21% of responses;

• Other / Prefer not to say – 16% of responses.

What this shows is that there is a general correlation between the age profile in Shirebrook and the age profile of people making representations, with the largest groups in both profiles being the 35 to 44 and 45 to 54 year olds.

This information also shows that 18 to 24 year olds are still under-represented per population, but potentially are much better represented than in previous public consultations.

Levels of engagement

The Council has seen relatively good levels of engagement for engagement in plan making work on the Local Plan for Bolsover District and these influenced our outreach targets (repeated below) for the more geographically limited Shirebrook Growth Plan:

• 600 'minimum' engagement hits on Placebuilder portal
• 1200 'stretch' engagement hits on Placebuilder portal
• 900 engagement hits on Placebuilder portal from social media ads • 200 registrations for future plan-making engagement, i.e. people providing their email address
• 100 submissions / responses through poll & map facilities

Against these outreach targets, we achieved:

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• 163 submissions / responses through poll & map facilities

These levels of submissions are relatively positive and would indicate that the additional role of the social media campaign has played a positive contribution.

Summary of community feedback

Our Initial Consultation Exercise for the Shirebrook Growth Plan focussed on four subject areas, namely:

1. Living in Shirebrook
2. Working in Shirebrook
3. Shirebrook Town Centre and its central Market Place
4. The Environmental of Shirebrook

As described above, our questions were targeted on understanding the current sentiments of people living and working in Shirebrook. This was purposely done to both gain a useful baseline on the current feelings about Shirebrook to inform the forthcoming plan making work but also allow conversations and discussions to start from a 'safer' and 'more comfortable' space for non-planners.

Access to countryside and green spaces had the strongest positive sentiments and the town centre had the strongest negative sentiment. Living and working in Shirebrook received a more ambivalent response.

Potential changes to Council practice and cost effectiveness assessment

The Council recognises the importance of good public engagement and approaches consultation as both a way of getting people involved in planning and aiding their education and understanding of the UK (English) planning system. As such, we have enjoyed trialing the use of PropTech to support these aims.

For information, the exploration of PropTech opportunities through this pilot has informed our review of our Statement of Community Involvement. As such, we will launch on Friday 6th May 2022 a consultation draft of a new Statement of Community Involvement which will ask, amongst other things, if greater use of social media and video platforms would encourage greater levels of engagement on planning matters.

More information can be viewed on the consultation draft Statement of Community Involvement on the Council's website.

At this stage at the end of round 1, the results of the pilot would appear to indicate that the techniques used through the Initial Consultation Exercise on the Shirebrook Growth Plan have led to greater levels of public engagement. The costs associated with developing the Placebuilder platform are significant and consideration would need to be given to how this would be sustained after the PropTech Engagement Fund pilots. Despite this, the costs associated with the social media campaign are much lower, albeit they could prove significant if used over multiple consultation exercises. That said, the techniques involved and lessons learned could potentially be incorporated into existing Council operations.

However, it is considered that the real innovative work will emerge through round 2.

5.0 Development / Implementation
- How you developed / implemented / mobilised the product with your suppliers
- Lessons learned:
    - Challenges you had to overcome e.g. people / skill shortages / knowledge gaps
    - Additional guidance and support that would have helped
    - Any surprises you faced, or other reflections?
    - Ongoing engagement requirements / ambitions for this project

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We have utilised a relatively 'off the shelf' product and so it would appear from the Council's end that there has not needed to be much software development. The existing PlaceBuilder product has been tailored to ask the questions we wished to have asked and has coped with this customisation well.

The social media campaign responded to a client-contractor discussion and relatively quickly developed an interesting and exciting set of adverts, particularly the advert involving a former member of the 'Building Lives Around Shirebrook Town' youth group (see https://placebuilder.io/shirebrookgrowthplan).

This former member was selected to voice the advert as an authentic and relatable younger person from Shirebrook. Their time was reimbursed via the youth group to help support their community role and it is hoped we can use their expertise again.

Overall, the main lesson learned was that the collaborative approach, facilitated by DLUHC, has helped share ideas and lessons. This form of collective endeavour has been welcomed by the Council and it is recommended that this type of approach is continued and applied elsewhere.

6.0 Procurement
- Procurement approach and outcomes
- Lessons learned:
    - Challenges you had to overcome
    - Additional guidance and support that would have helped
    - Any suggestions to improve procurement in the future, surprises you faced, or other reflections
- Working with suppliers - any reflections what went well or what you would handle differently next time with your suppliers?

Our approach to procurement had two stages.

Firstly, we tried to engage through the national frameworks but this led to only one company to contact us with an expression of interest. Alongside this, we were approached by three companies, Commonplace, Future Fox and Urban Intelligence, that were not on the national frameworks but had heard about the Council's successful award of a PropTech grant. This situation led to a rethink and the decision to follow a new approach.

As a result, we then ran an open competition and alerted the three 'non-framework' companies and the one that had initially expressed an interest. This exercise led to submissions from Commonplace, Future Fox and Urban Intelligence, which were assessed. As part of the assessment, the three companies were required to provide a virtual demonstration of their product. From this exercise, the Future Fox were selected as the Council's preferred partner.

The main lesson we have drawn from the procurement part of the pilot is that open market competitions are probably the best way to identify a preferred partner. In addition, the organisation of expos to enable companies to showcase their products would be a helpful annual CPD type event. This would be best organised at a regional or national level.

> **7.0 Conclusions & Policy Reflections**
> - Potential policy and / or process improvements
>   - Were there any existing policies that limited your ability to maximise digital engagement outcomes?
>   - Are there policies you would like to see changed in the future?
>   - Where do you think further engagement guidance is required (this could include guidance for both local authorities and the wider proptech / consultancy sector)
>   - Where and how do you think DLUHC could support LPAs in further adoption of digital citizen engagement tools, best practices and / or wider digital transformation?
> - What longer-term changes (if any) do you expect to make as a result of the outcomes of this pilot?

Our main policy reflection is that it is welcome that DLUHC are approaching the exploration of PropTech in such a considered manner.

The references to PropTech within the Planning White Paper hinted at a potentially rushed and uninformed roll out of the requirement to digitise the plan making process. This had raised concerns from a LPA perspective about potential turmoil in the planning system, particularly from our Council which had fought long and hard to get an adopted Local Plan in place and bring a plan-led planning system to bear.

As such, the regular show and tells, together with the accompanying research sessions, have helped the Council to gain a better understanding of the Government's evolving thinking about planning reforms and the exploration of the role of PropTech in facilitating this.

From these, it became clear that the purpose of the PropTech Engagement Fund was to both stress test the existing market and to help create a local authority orientated PropTech market to introduce greater competition to software suppliers. Again, this considered approach is welcomed and to demonstrate good governance and care of the UK (England) planning system