Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

PropTech Engagement Fund Round 1

Final Report

April 2022

London Borough of Hounslow

Local Planning Authority	LB Hounslow
Date	31st May 2022
Theme	**Theme 2:** Plan-making Process: Regulation 19

1.0   Project Aims and Objectives

Ambition and desired outcomes

1.1   The project ambition was to create an interactive and area-based mapping consultation platform that allows communities to view and comment on plans for their local areas and understand the justification for decisions made. The platform aimed to facilitate accessible and meaningful engagement. We worked with Urban Intelligence to create the platform, which we have called 'LocalPlan Maker' (LPM).

1.2   The objectives of the project were:

1.   Design and create a platform to create an online, highly visual, area & map-based Plan Maker which displays Neighbourhoods/ Places with areas to be transformed, enhanced and conserved from Character and Design study; proposed land categorisations; infrastructure plans; place policies/strategies and masterplan proposals, and the evidence and justifications for these on a web-based map;

2.   Allow this data to be selected and viewed by place or topic to ensure the public can access the information that is important to them and target 'hard to reach' groups;

3.   Integrate easy to use consultation features within the tool, such as feedback features, interactive polls, targeted questions, videos, images & a translation feature;

4.   Allow officers to analyse responses to inform the development of the SPD.

5.   The platform should allow the import of policies diagrams/ masterplans by officers (in GIS (vector) format). The platform should allow for self-service by the Council, allowing the Council to upload policy maps and masterplans for other consultations in the future;

6.   Use the platform to run a 6-week consultation (see details below).

Focus of consultation and what you consulted on

1.3   The focus of the consultation was the Emerging Borough Character and Design Code SPD (C&D), which details the character of the borough, proposes a growth strategy & visions for each area, sets out design codes to achieve the visions at a borough, sub-area and neighbourhood level. This document has similarities with a Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation, with content covering placed based themes and design codes, already having been informed by a significant amount of engagement.

1.4   The LocalPlan Maker platform was used as the consultation platform for this document. It contains summarised information from the 700+ page pdf and is organised by sub-area (of which there are 6), in addition to a separate section for the borough wide design codes.

1.5   Each of the sub-areas has a story map to present the vision for the sub area, where the user can scroll down the page and the map jumps to the relevant location for the focus of the vision, which is summarised with photographs to accompany the map.

The user can then swap to the Growth Strategy Tab where the map displays the areas to be conserved, enhanced or transformed along with text summarising the definitions of these. Users can then select a neighbourhood, allowing the user to 'pan' around the map to explore the vision and view the character analysis for that neighbourhood & the design codes including materials and building heights. Some neighbourhoods had site specific codes, where the user can click on a site pin and a pop-up box displays an annotated design code for the site. The borough wide design code part of the tool allows users to explore the GIS mapping evidence base and view the design codes in themed tabs, where summarised text was displayed alongside explanatory diagrams or images.

1.6   Each part of the tool had an interactive question, where users could express sentiment in the form of emojis or free text, select images of materials that they liked or upload their own photos or videos.

1.7   The Consultation can be accessed at the following link:
        https://consultations.hounslow.urbanintelligence.co.uk/

2.0   Project Summary

- **Summary** (including where applicable links to project website/ image / examples)

2.1   The purpose of the project was to provide a streamlined consultation experience whereby participants can access planning consultations in an easy to digest format, delivering a more visual and interactive consultation experience when compared to reading lengthy planning documents. The project delivers a digital platform for participants where proposals can be viewed on an interactive map simultaneously with 'journeys' which can be selected by different themes of the consultation (for example, boroughwide design codes), and geographically by sub-area within the borough. Within sub-areas the journeys and digital maps are then provided for each neighbourhood, meaning every part of the borough is covered in considerable detail.

2.2   Collectively, these features of the tool seek to provide an interactive journey for participants, delivering an enhanced and streamlined consultation experience. It was also intended that this will enable a wider number of people to participate in the borough's planning consultations, reflective of Hounslow's diverse population.

Figure 1: A Neighbourhood Story in LPM Tool with an interactive map displaying proposals and user journey the right
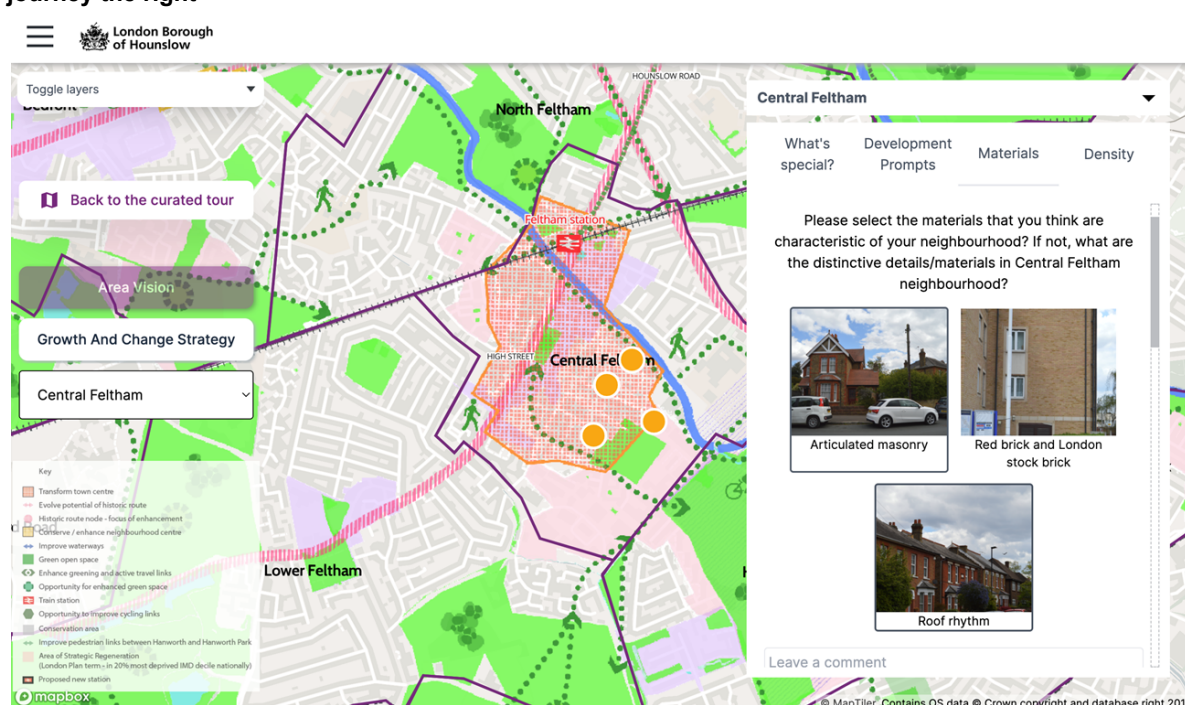
2.3   Consultation questions are integrated within the LPM Tool at relevant points of the user journeys to enable participants to respond whilst viewing the material that relates to the specific consultation question. The intention of this is to avoid participants having to locate specific points in a large document and needing to cross reference, whilst providing a response. In addition to written responses, the LPM also enables participants to add emojis that represent participants' reaction to the question, and also an optional photo drop feature to compliment the response.
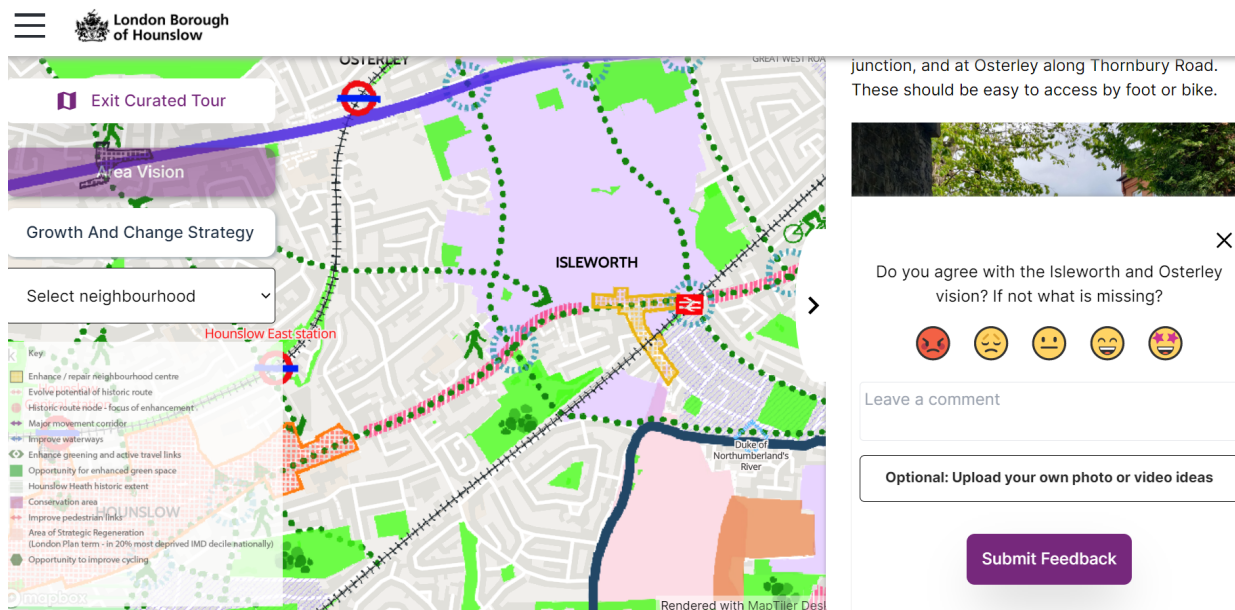
- **Opportunities** - what did the pilot allow you to do & how much was existing vs new types of engagement?

2.4   With regard to types of engagement used to promote the consultation and use of the LPM as a consultation tool, all usual channels of engagement for planning consultations were utilised including:

- notification emails sent to all individuals and organisations on the Spatial Planning consultation database;
- announcements broadcasted on all of the Council's social media pages;
- consultation notifications added on the Council's Citizen Space portal;
- leaflets delivered to residences on council owned estates containing details of the consultation;
- links to the LPM provided on television screens in Council-owned buildings;
- consultation documents including the SPD PDF and consultation response form provided on the Council's website;
- consultation workshops held including workshops targeted for specific (underrepresented) user groups, and for the general public;
- hard copy consultation documents made available at all libraries within Hounslow.

2.5   In addition to the above traditional consultation engagement channels, new opportunities also arose from the funding that the Council secured from the PropTech Engagement Fund. Through enabling a new consultation tool to be developed, the Council was able to provide enhanced and more diversified engagement through the summarisation of consultation information via interactive user journeys and the ability to display consultation material on a map based platform. Furthermore through the ability to display information by different geographical locations within the borough and at different scales, the LPM enabled participants to create their own unique user journey, based on the information that was important to them. This in turn helped enable the delivery of a bespoke consultation experience for each participant dependent upon the areas and themes they chose to select.

- **Funding review** - comparison of amount bid vs actual cost i.e. was more funding needed than you expected and for what elements?

2.6   With regard to funding, the LPM was delivered within budget. All of the funding was ultimately used to pay the consultants for their work on building the back-end of the tool and implementing the front-end design of the tool (which as designed by LB Hounslow officers), within the web based platform. This was the main difference from the estimated costings included in the LB Hounslow Prop Tech application form, which had set aside 10% of the overall budget for internal resource and officer time. It is also worth noting that a 3D element of the tool was not developed as part of the project. This was in part due to timescales, and also because all funding was needed to deliver the key foundation elements of the tool including the interactive map based proposals and user journey features, as the tool was effectively built from start to finish, as opposed to extending an existing platform. The Council is seeking to deliver further enhancements to the tool including improved and updated graphics for the base map on which the tool is built.

3.0 Community Engagement Summary

Outreach Methods (how you conducted outreach, timeframes and tools used)

3.1   Consultation ran for 6 weeks from 4th April – 16th May 2022. It was originally due to end on 13th May, however the decision was made to extend the deadline to the Monday evening following feedback that residents wanted to use the weekend to put together their responses.

3.2   The consultation was advertised via social media (Facebook & Twitter), the Council's website, local newspapers, electronic screens in all Council owned buildings, via a CitizenSpace event page, a leaflet drop at all Council owned estate buildings, the Council's email newsletter, email to the Local Plan contact list & to all equalities groups, notification to all those who had filled in a previous engagement survey through the Commonplace platform & via email to those who had previously attended an engagement workshop.

3.3   A number of workshops were held (via Microsoft Teams as Council policy was unclear at the time around in-person workshops due to Covid 19), including: separate resident workshops for the East and West of the Borough, a workshop with the Youth Parliament & a workshop with disabled residents. The workshops were designed to explain key elements of the study & seek feedback from residents. 5 minutes at the end of each session were dedicated to demoing the Local Plan Maker tool and showing people how to sign up. Residents also gave some feedback on this point in the session.

Lessons Learned
   - Challenges you had to overcome
   - Additional guidance and support that would have helped
   - Anything else? (including surprises)

3.4   Engaging hard-to-reach groups was a particular challenge. We found the best way to get feedback from these groups is via workshops that an engaged member of a particular community helps to set up & get people interested. Members of the group then gave valuable verbal feedback on key themes related to the specific characteristics & interests of that group. Our Equalities Team was key in providing the contacts for the hard-to-reach groups. Guidance on the best methods for reaching out to different groups would be helpful in future.

3.5   One of the aims of the project was to include a translation function to automatically translate the text into any language to allow equalities groups to participate in consultation more easily. The consultants who we were working with on the project were nervous about providing this feature, stating worries that the automatic translations may not provide an accurate representation of the information and would reflect badly on the Council or the consultants. Professional translation services are provided on request by the council (discretionally); however this service is very expensive and potentially unachievable for a 700+ page document. An automatic translation solution would therefore represent a cheaper solution that would help the Council reach more groups, despite the possibility of incorrect translations (n.b. the accuracy of automatic translations is much improved). Guidance on the acceptability of automatic translation tools would be helpful to resolve this problem.

3.6   There were several points during the project where the Council would have benefited from independent advice from an expert in software development. This sort of a person would have helped to provide mediation between the Council and the

Consultants to advise on what is technically possible within given timeframes and for a particular budget to aid with the decision-making process.

3.7   The project was delayed as some of the software development was sub-contracted to a company in Ukraine. Due to the breakout of war between Ukraine and Russia, work on the project was stalled to allow the developers to move to safety. A wider programme to grow the software development capabilities within the UK would help with this project and future projects.

3.8   Building on the above two points, as digital planning establishes a prominent role within the planning industry it should be an essential requirement that planners are educated in GIS software in addition to understanding software development/digital planning. This should be taught at universities as part of planning courses, in addition to a CPD digital planning programme for planning professionals.

3.9   Clarity could be provided around how digital tools can be used as part of the local plan examination process as evidence. For example, LB Hounslow have previously developed a digital SHLAA that would provide evidence for housing and employment numbers. It would be helpful to have guidance whether this would be an acceptable format & how to present this in a digital tool as evidence. It would also be helpful to have clarity on how inspectors would like to view consultation submissions at examination, to allow development of a back-end analytics display that shows the consultation responses in an acceptable format. We suggest that it would be helpful to have a workshop session discussing how digital local plans could used by the Inspector & the formats that they would consider to be acceptable so that we can start forward planning for this.

4.0   Pilot Outcomes

Engagement - how many people were engaged and who? eg demographic analysis and how did this compare to traditional methods / expectations?
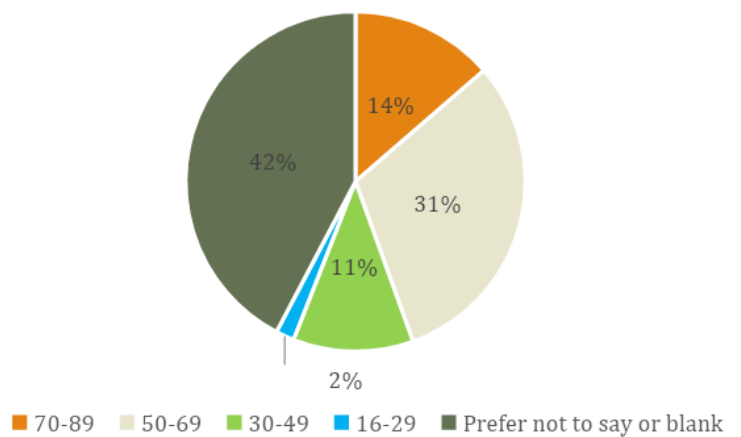**Comparison of Baseline data** - What baseline data did you compare the outcomes with and what does it show?

4.1   In total we received representations from a total of 52 representors. Comments were received through the Local Plan Maker Platform and via email.

Age Distribution of Local Plan Maker Responses

- 70-89
- 50-69
- 30-49
- Prefer not to say & Blank
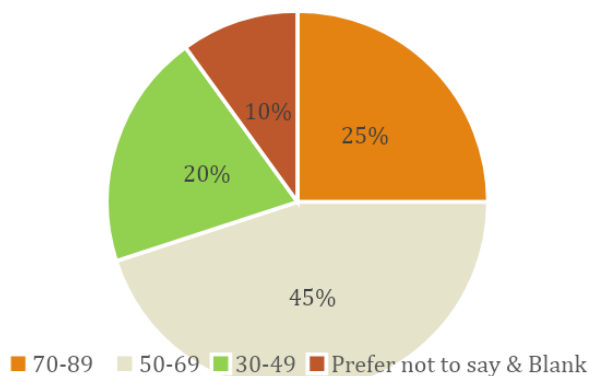
Age Distribution of Previous Engagement Survey Responses

- 70-89
- 50-69
- 30-49
- 16-29
- Prefer not to say or blank

4.2   The responses data demonstrate that the largest age group who responded using the Local Plan Maker was age group 50-69 (45% of total respondents), followed by age group 70-89 (25%) and then age group 30-49 (20%). Of the total responses, 10% preferred not to give their age or did not provide it. There were no responses received from people in age groups younger than 30. This tells us that the majority of respondents were in middle to older age groups, however, it is noted that 20% of responses were provided by people in the age group 30-49.

4.3   This is compared with previous data from the engagement survey undertaken in January 2021, to which 228 responses were given. The largest age groups who responded were also the 50-69 age group (31% of total respondents) and the 70-80 age group (14%). It is notable that the 30-49 (11%) made up a smaller percentage of the overall respondents in comparison with the 2022 consultation survey, however the survey did reach out to a small number of respondents from the 16-29 age group (2%). A much greater proportion of responses (42%) preferred not to say their age category. Despite using the same methods to publicise the survey, we speculate that a reason for having a larger number of responses overall is that the survey was undertaken during a time where measures to control the Covid 19 pandemic were more restrictive of people's activity, potentially meaning people had more time to fill out surveys. Another reason may be that the questions in this engagement survey were targeted at understanding what people liked about their areas and what the biggest issues were to shape the visions and codes in the document. As such, the questions were more open ended in comparison to the Local Plan Maker questions that asked people to review the visions, information & codes and respond.

4.4   The responses data demonstrates that of the participants who responded using the Local Plan Maker 50% stated that they did not have a disability, 10% stated they had a disability that limited them a little and 5% said they had a disability that limited them a lot. Of the total responses, 35% either preferred not to state whether they had a disability or left the field blank. This tells us that at least 15% of respondents had a disability that either limits them a little or a lot. There is no baseline data to compare this to, it will instead form a point of comparison for future consultations.

Disability Categories of Local Plan Maker Responses

50%
35%
5%
10%

■ No   ■ Yes- a little   ■ Yes- lot   ■ Prefer not to say & Blank
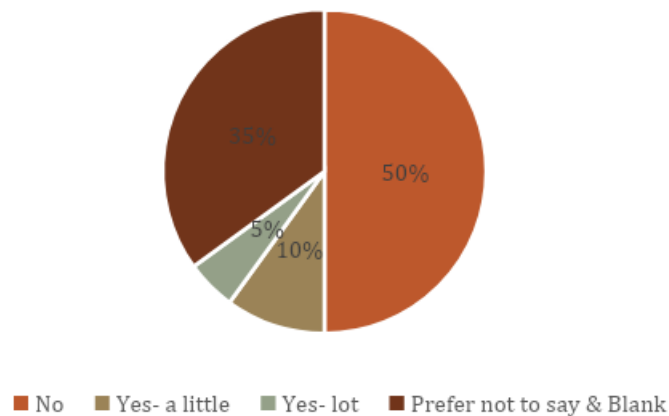
4.5   The responses data demonstrates that of those who responded using the Local Plan Maker, the largest ethnicity category with 55% of respondents was White-English/Welsh/ Scottish/Northern Irish/ British. The following largest categories were prefer not to say & blank (25%), any other ethnic group (10%), followed by White-Other and White- Irish (both 5%). There is no baseline data to compare this to, it will instead form a point of comparison for future consultations.
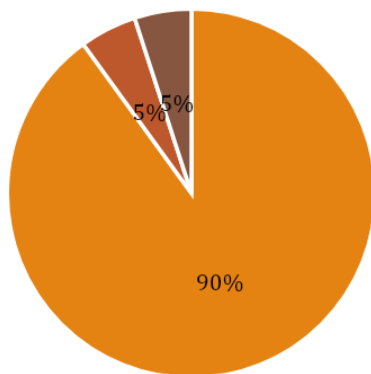
4.6   ### Ethnicity Distribution of Local Plan Maker Responses

25%
55%
10%
5%
5%

■ White - English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
■ White- Other
■ White - Irish
■ Any other ethnic group
■ Prefer not to say & blank
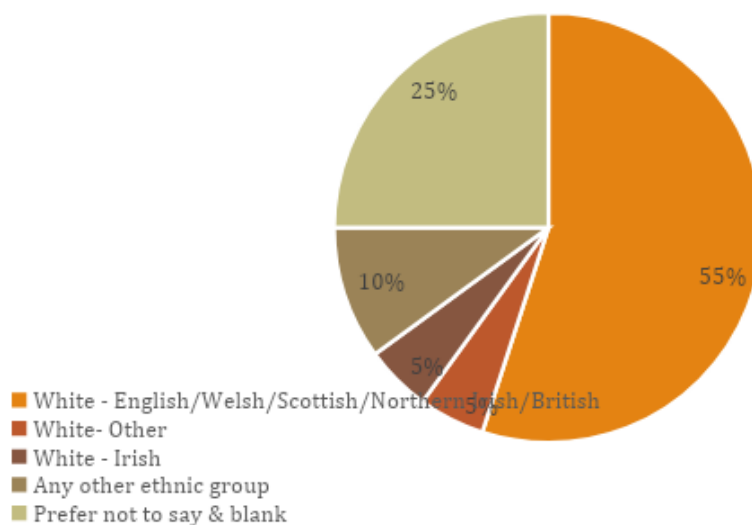
20 people in total used the Local Plan Maker to give their responses. A further 33 sent comments by email, 3 of which also submitted comments using the LPM. 90% of people who used the LPM were classified as individuals (ie. they were not developers, companies, statutory or other bodies or community groups).
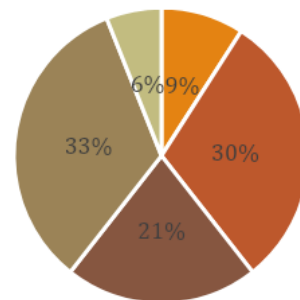
4.7   Only 9% of those who submitted comments via email were individuals. Statutory bodies & other bodies made up the largest category of those who submitted responses via email (34% and 6% respectively), followed by developers/companies (30%) and community groups (21%).

Local Plan Maker Respondent Categories

Email Respondent Categories

4.8   Understanding that the vast majority who submit responses using the LPM platform are individuals will in future help us to target the information to the right people. When originally deciding how to summarise information for the platform we were conscious that if we left out technical detail we might not have been presenting the full picture and if we left technical information in then the summary would become too technical and unengaging. Therefore, understanding that those who use the platform are individuals will help us to target information at what people will be most interested in in their area, signposting where they can read more information if interested.

4.9   Those who commented on the LPM exclusively used it to comment on their sub-area or neighbourhood (ie. they did not use the platform to comment on the Borough Wide Design Codes). There may be a plethora of reasons for this: people found it more relevant to comment on their neighbourhoods rather than more technical design focussed codes, it may not have been obvious that the borough wide codes were there to comment on given that the icon was much smaller, or that the information was not presented in an accessible format. The reasons for the lack of comments on this is something to explore with user focus groups in future.

Summary of community feedback - key themes / learnings?

Local Plan Maker Tool Feedback

4.10   We created a survey for participants to complete where they could provide feedback about their experience of using the LPM Tool. Three responses to the survey were received, out of the overall 20 people who used the Tool. It is considered that the low response rate to the survey may be reflective of the larger proportion of participants who responded via email.

4.11   The survey asked participants about the features of the LPM they liked and disliked. Of the responses received, feedback suggested that participants liked the interactive map feature of the LPM, but did not like the story mapping (user journeys), although feedback did not explain why this was. In answer to the question posed which asked if making a user account deters users form participating in consultations, opinion was divided with one respondent answering 'yes', one answering 'no' and one leaving the response field blank. The same categories of responses were received to the question asking if information is easily digestible and/ or understandable.

4.12   The three responding participants advised that the LPM was not easy to use, with a variety of reasons given including:
● difficulty in submitting comments
● the interface was not simple enough
● technical issues/bugs.

4.13   It is worth noting, however, that the LPM was still in prototype form at the time the C&D Codes SPD consultation was undertaken and therefore it will continue to be developed and refined, having regard to feedback that has been received from users who have interacted with the Tool. The majority of the issues raised about the tool were technical points that can be addressed through technical back-end alterations. With regard to the point about the interface not being simple enough, as the LPM is developed and refined, we will seek to look at amendments which simplify the interface and overall user experience.

What changes (if any) have come about as a result of this project and opportunities to deliver further/ongoing digital engagement?

4.15   The project has enabled the Council to test and utilise a new digital consultation system which will be refined and further developed to build in the flexibility for it to be used for a broad range of planning consultations. There is also scope for it to be utilised by other Council departments for their consultations as well. In addition, we intend to adapt the tool so it can be utilised for consultations on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and all stages of consultation on the Local Plan. The tool will therefore change how the Council delivers its planning consultations to provide a more digital and interactive experience, with the possibility of this being extended to other Council consultations.

4.16   With regard to changes to the LPM itself, the Council intends to improve and enhance the graphics of the tool, principally focussing on the base map's graphics, but also the overall style of the LPM, including the user journeys. It is intended that other adaptions and enhancements will be made to the tool to ensure it has the built-in flexibility to use for a range of planning consultations. These include:

● The ability to add tabs to user journeys to display a wider range of information within the journeys;

● Increasing interactivity within the digital map including further touchpoints represented by a range of icon types which can be selected, as well providing as a spatial representation of planning policies & proposals;

● The ability to display site allocations and HELAA sites on the base map within the LPM, whereby sites can be selected to provide further information;

- A homepage which provides a log of all consultations, including live and historic consultations, which can be selected.

Cost effectiveness - are there ways that conducting digital engagement allowed you to save time or resource compared to traditional methods of engagement?

4.17   The building of the software was costly and time consuming, however now that the software has been created in prototype form, we can make amendments to use the platform for all our future plans, within an existing maintenance and support contract with the supplier.

4.18   The operation of the content management system for LPM will be transferred to officers at LB Hounslow which will enable us to upload, add and amend our own material, and create reports for response analysis, without the need to liaise with the consultant to do so. This will result in improved efficiency and associated cost savings.

4.19   Ultimately, as the number of consultations that the LPM can be used for increases, this will in turn contribute to further cost and efficiency savings, particularly in relation to analysis of responses. Also, as the tool is further developed with additional features, it will become quicker for officers to add or amend consultation material. Whilst these adaptions and additions are in the implementation phase it will still be possible to use the tool for as a consultation portal.

4.20   The mechanism for exporting consultation response information from the LPM is more time-efficient in comparison to processing consultation comments submitted through email, with the latter involving summarisation of lengthy responses and their categorisation into particular areas/themes. Encouragement for participants to use the platform will in future save a significant amount of officer time.

5.0   Development/Implementation

- **How you developed/ implemented/ mobilised the product with your suppliers**

5.1   The Council set out the project background, scope and requirements for the LPM in our request for quotations tender document. Following appointment of the successful supplier, the Council worked closely with the consultants to develop the front end of the LPM. LB Hounslow provided the template design and layout of the tool, and developed screen-by-screen user journeys which included where the consultation content would be presented, how it could be accessed and where consultation questions were to be imbedded. The Council also provided the GIS layers to be used for the interactive map, and the images that featured as part of the user journeys. The consultants delivered the public facing element of the LPM in accordance with the Council's design requirements and provided the technical expertise for delivering the back end, including a system for storing and extracting consultation responses.

- **Lessons learned:**
  - **Challenges you had to overcome eg 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**

5.2   A key challenge that presented itself was the need to rely upon consultants for the software development of the LPM, including their technical expertise for delivering the back end mechanisms of the LPM, which was required to successfully build the Tool. Due to the Council not having in-house technical expertise in software design or programming, it was not possible for this to be completed in house. As such it is considered that this would be an area where it would be useful for additional guidance to be provided from DLUHC to participating local authorities.

5.3   A high level overview of the processes and mechanisms required to deliver software for digital systems from industry experts would be extremely valuable as it would provide PropTech authorities with a basic understanding of the level of work that is required to deliver digital planning tools. It is considered this would be useful for the procurement and management of consultants for similar future projects. Another area where further guidance would be useful would be for an overview to be provided for how planning data may be structured within digital tools. For example, this could include an overview for how site allocation, HELAA and policy datasets could be stored digitally to be utilised within digital tools, as opposed to being maintained in an Access database or Excel spreadsheet.

5.4   Whilst further input in relation to the digital element of tools would be useful, it is considered on reflection that as LB Hounslow has a supportive, proactive and engaged in-house procurement team, we did not require external assistance or support from DLUHC with regard to procurement processes. We also had good support from the in-house ICT team discussing technical aspects of the project, such as how to integrate with Azure AD logins, establishing an API with the Council's email system, and advice on user experience and user journey.

5.5   The Council has significant further ambitions for the development and implementation of digital tools in planning, which include the LPM as well as other digital tools that have either already been developed, or are in the process of being developed. We now have a portfolio of digital planning tools including the LPM, an automated site assessment database on a digital map-based platform (Hounslow Assessment

Database), and a 3D capacity assessment modelling tool (Hounslow Intensification Tool). It is also our intention to develop a digital interactive Infrastructure Delivery Plan which maps infrastructure projects in the borough, their phasing and the source and amount of funding attributed to them.

5.6   In respect of the LMP, the Council's next phase for the project seeks to further develop the adaptability of the tool so it can be rolled out for all types of planning consultation, including the Regulation 18 Issues and Options stage. Finally, the Spatial Planning Team are exploring with other departments whether the digital tools that we have developed including the LPM could be rolled out to other service areas, as there is crossover with a number of other Council workstreams. For example, mapping and digitally storing information regarding the Council's assets and landholdings.

5.7   The Spatial Planning team hope to use future funding to focus our efforts on developing a digital toolkit to aid us in undertaking our statutory duties, such as digitising the site allocation & HELAA processes, infrastructure planning & section 106 & CIL collection and allocation, and heritage planning. Digitising our statutory processes will make them more efficient and easier for officers to undertake.

6.0   Procurement

Procurement approach and outcomes

6.1   We procured the consultants utilising our in-house procurement team via an invite only Request for Proposals (RfP) through the London Tenders Portal. The RfP described the project & its goals and outlined the assessment criteria. We chose the RfP as we wanted to procure a supplier as quickly as possible; the RfP format allows for a 2 week submission period & allows the bidder to submit a shorter project proposal and timeline. Invites were sent to the Council's existing suppliers and other suppliers that had previously indicated that they could meet project requirements. The marking criteria was split 70:30 quality to price to ensure that the quality of submission was the key driver in the appointment of a supplier.

6.2   We wrote within the RfP that we may require the procured solution to be made open source. Having an open source platform ensures that we are not tied to a supplier in future, meaning we can chose another supplier to integrate the solution into another platform and further innovate it.

6.3   We had a supplier in mind for the project, as we wanted to have compatibility with our existing digital tools. In line with our procurement rules, we engaged with the supplier to understand whether they could deliver the sort of project we were looking for. This helped to shape the RfP brief.

6.4   Two proposals were submitted in response to the RfP. Three members of staff were appointed as evaluators. After independently marking each bid on its quality, an evaluation meeting was held where the marks were moderated. The procurement team then factored in the cost submissions and a winner emerged, Urban Intelligence.

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**

6.5   The lessons learned include ensuring that the Digital and IT team is involved from project inception to ensure that an ICT perspective is included within the procurement brief to feed into wider council priorities.

6.6   Another lesson learned is ensuring that a range of suppliers are engaged with to ensure a full understanding of what is on offer in the market.

Working with suppliers - any reflections what went well or what you would handle differently next time with your suppliers?

6.8   At the beginning of the project, meetings & workshops were held to scope out what we wanted from the project within the given timescales. The supplier set up effective Miro templates to tease out what the key ambitions for the project were, what they key features we wanted to include were and who we wanted to engage. This session was useful in pulling together ideas from a wide range of internal stakeholders. The next step from here was to scope out how we wanted the tool to look and function which we began to scope out with the supplier in another workshop.

6.9   Following this scoping session, we designed wireframes that showed how we wanted

the software to function and presented it back to the suppliers. However, as we were working in isolation from the suppliers, we were not sure what was technologically possible within the timeframes. We then presented our wireframes to the suppliers, and they communicated that what we wanted could not be delivered in the timescales. Following this conversation, we worked on coming up with achievable wireframes along with the supplier which helped to bring focus back to the project and provide a template for the software developers to start working on.

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?**

7.1   In respect of limitations to digital outcomes arising from existing policies, it is considered that the T&C Planning Regulations do not currently cover digital planning solutions, and it may be beneficial to explore an amendment to the Regulations to provide a greater focus on the role digital solutions can play in planning. This could also be reflected in national planning policy and guidance. Another area that may benefit from revised requirements broadened to include digital solutions is the submission of Local Plans and accompanying evidence to the Secretary of State for examination. The submission of site allocations and accompanying evidence such as the HELAA and housing trajectory through the use of digital tools could be explored as an area which would provide improved use of resources and efficiency savings for Councils, also assisting with the government's objective to speed up the plan making process. In addition, a national requirement setting out the structuring of data that local authorities must adhere to upon submission of Local Plans would be beneficial as this would ensure consistency of the format of data submitted across all local authorities and also help serve as a checklist for authorities, to ensure nothing is missed at submission stage. This could include policies and accompanying evidence as part of the structured data.

- **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?**

7.2   Following conclusion of the C&D Codes SPD consultation, use of the LPM has highlighted that it has remained challenging to engage with young people, as no age groups below the age of 30 responded to the consultation through the tool. Furthermore, our analysis of responses demonstrated that the significant majority of respondents using the LPM were white British, which is not at all reflective of the ethnic diversity of the borough. As such, it is considered that a key area where it would be beneficial to receive further guidance from DLUHC in relation to engagement would be provision of a toolkit of strategies to help us engage hard to reach groups such as young people and people from non-white British ethnic backgrounds, through strategies utilised as part of future planning consultations. This could include practical solutions that help capture the interest of such groups. It should also be noted that, in hindsight, the consultation was held during a period where low turnout may be expected, as it was during purdah and although out of our control, there was unseasonably good weather during the consultation workshops.

7.5   This demonstrates that timing of consultations and events is important, and can play a role in attracting participants, including hard to reach groups. In addition, the focus of the consultation was a SPD, and Local Plans are likely to encourage more participation in consultations. An area of development for us is to understand and consolidate how we capture opinions hard to reach groups such as through youth parliament. This could involve holding workshops where the LPM is used and to participate, attendees are required to sign up at the workshop, in order to get them

log ins, so they are more likely to use the system.

7.6 It may be useful for a guidance note or videos to be issued focussing on accessibility standards and approaches to language translation in digital tools, as part of future digital engagement programmes.

7.7 A learning outcome from the PropTech Engagement Project for the Council has been that digital tools can be costly, and as a consequence the project budget was exhausted on consultancy fees with none left over for internal time and resource, as had originally been planned. In addition, due to funding limitations, it was not possible to deliver all aspects of the project included in the initial application and specification. For example, the tool does not currently include a 3D element, which had originally been planned. Accordingly, an increased level of funding for future projects would help facilitate improvements to the delivery of digital tools for planning. Another constraint to the project which has been raised by the consultants is the project timescales. It has been fed back to us that a longer project timeframe would enable delivery of a more comprehensive product. Finally, the provision of technical support from DLUHC for the back end of digital tools would help provide mediation between local authorities and their appointed consultants, and would enable an improved understanding for Councils regarding the possibilities, limitations and overall management of expectations for digital tools.

- **What longer-term changes (if any) do you expect to make as a result of the outcomes of this pilot?**

7.8 Following the PropTech Engagement pilot, LB Hounslow intends to initiate a number of longer-term changes to how we consult on planning documents and how plans are prepared. To summarise, these include:

- adapting the LPM digital platform so that a range of plans and programmes can be consulted on, including planning documents and ultimately other plans and programmes across a number of council departments;

- utilising the system to digitise the Local Plan, not only for consultations but also to digitally store policies, evidence and other information, and visually display this through maps, touch points and links to more detailed information;

- integration with other digital tools which the Council uses including the sites database and Call for Sites platforms, and a digital Infrastructure Delivery Plan system;

- building on areas where outreach to communities and other participants has improved, and continuing to utilise the tool to engage hard to reach groups through development of additional features such as a translation tool and potentially video fly-throughs;

- Continuing to hold dedicated workshops for hard to reach groups such as youth parliament, also offering interactive trials where attendees are required to sign up at the time, in order to encourage participation; and

- subject to updates being made to the Planning Regulations and national policy, implementing requirements for consultation comments to be provided digitally through online systems unless participants opt out due to specific circumstances (such as for example disability, difficulty accessing internet etc).