



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

PropTech Engagement Fund Round 1

Final Report

April 2022

**North
Lincolnshire
Council**

Local Planning Authority	North Lincolnshire Council
Date	April 2022
Theme	Theme 3: Development Management: Planning Publicity

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We would love to capture your outcomes, learnings and reflections in a way that is manageable. We have suggested 3-5 pages to respect your time, but there are no formal word limits where you would like to share more.

If you would like to provide further information please feel free to send additional attachments / appendices when you return the report.

1.0 Project Aims and Objectives

- Ambition and desired outcomes
- Focus of consultation and what you consulted on

The key project objective was to provide relevant localised planning publicity be that at a county wide scale or localised to the village or specific area of town. Along with reusable data that could be analytically tracked to enable the success of publicity to be monitored to help decision making in the future and enable change.

We focused on discussion with users and desktop survey of existing methods.

We spoke to the wider parish councils and internal stakeholders to find the interest and benefits that they thought a more focused method of publicity would provide.

This included Parish and Ward members and the Communication and Marketing team, with more public consultation being used at later stages to monitor if the digital approach has made a difference to people engaging with planning applications. This stage is ongoing.

2.0 Project Summary

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

Creating a fully digital offer that can be reused across outlets to provide the same information in multiple ways.

<https://apps.northlincs.gov.uk> provides the backbone to this and allows us flexibility in delivering tailored data to locations, groups, and individuals in multiple formats.

Provide access in multiple ways to the same data and allow a links to data to be monitored to allow analytical analysis of how publicity is engaged

- **Opportunities** - what did the pilot allow you to do & how much was existing vs new types of engagement?

The pilot enabled us to think outside the normal and look at ways that we could test differing ways to engage and publicise planning applications and start to build up a wider base of evidence as to what engages different groups and different application types.

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

The project funding was allocated and utilised as per the project application, apart from the staffing funding which due to the nature of the project and the ability to try new ideas time was used outside of the funding. If we were revisiting again, we may look to allocate a greater funding allocation to internal staff and move them from their existing roll to spend a greater amount of dedicated time to the project.

The team easily used the time allocated and more alongside the day job, this was due to the enhancements being seen as beneficial to the service alongside the project so additional time was spent to ensure the work was able to continue following the project.

3.0 Community Engagement Summary

- **Lessons Learned**

The public in general are a very good test bed, working to deliver the perfect product is not achievable and using the public to test and work in an iterative process to deliver something to the public helps them provide constructive feedback as long as communication is kept open.

Engaging as early as possible helps.

4.0 Pilot Outcomes

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

The ongoing pilot has enabled us to recognise where savings could be made in getting information to a wider audience.

We have found that traditional methods such as site notices and public notices are still used but sometimes only referred to when the customer has already found out on Facebook and sometimes queries the position of a notice or the advertisement period. The cost effectiveness of the publicity could be tested to show where the social media could save the expense of other methods, Depending on the targeting of social media this may or may not be more cost effective if there is an expense to targeted location advert on social media.

5.0 Development/Implementation

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

A large part of the development was done in house extending existing licensing to provide functionality to enable the PropTech Project. This involved web app development internally for the QR code generation and monitoring along with Google Analytics and Microsoft Clarity investigations around API access to existing data.

We worked with suppliers to extend the existing planning solution to hold additional data and also integrate our reporting from there with other data where this was not possible. Having a fully open API to Salesforce enabled this work with many tools we already have skills in.

- Lessons learned:

Internally development capacity is limited, and it has given a realisation to what we can achieve if we apply internal skills to a project and increase our capability in this area. If we want to flex in the future, we need to invest in people to drive the technology and not always rely on funding a supplier.

This also lends itself to sharing and collaborating across the public sector to enable development on platforms that are traditional supplier agnostic as it is the process we as local government create and then can apply our own technology to this if we break it into smaller well integrated pieces rather than one large system that does not do it all in the best way.

An example here would be us integrating well with the Safe FME product to a MySQL

database, Salesforce platform and Microsoft 365/Power Automate to end up with a PowerBI report where the user sees all as one and not the discreet part as they are all integrated well and the user see them as a single planning process not skipping about.

6.0 Procurement

- Procurement approach and outcomes
- Lessons learned:

Working on a project of this size and speed it soon became apparent that we have local rules in place that are not always easy to adapt to the pace at which we need to move to fulfil projects such as this in a controlled manner meeting all local contract procedure rules.

Using the G-Cloud framework on the surface makes things easy to procure fairly at pace but attaching to that local rules delayed and added questions to the process where frameworks had not previously been used. This delayed the start of the project
And procurement framework review has resulted in a change to our internal rules to support the use of such frameworks in the future.

Using frameworks such as G-Cloud has caused issues with engaging existing suppliers as rather than new work there are some rules in place meaning we are amending an existing contract and therefore not buying new but buying additional services making an exception to existing contracts, therefore not fairly procuring the work. This delayed the project and made it difficult to use a framework for this but would not have been viable in the timescales without the support and use of our existing supplier.

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

Suppliers were very good and enabled the use of frameworks to speed up the work. We found that suppliers supported the PlanTech projects and wanted to see real progression in the sector and supporting local authorities was the way to do that. The issue again been procuring an existing supplier been difficult

7.0 Conclusions & Policy Reflections

- Potential policy and/or process improvements

We would like to see a digital only approach for certain application types to enable a constant and known method of communication for applications, rather than adding digital to the traditional methods we could test the policy by applying a digital only approach to household applications.

Open and transparent data exchange is key to be able to integrate all of the data collection and join it back to location and planning reference, if a schema for planning applications was accepted and made available or a requirement from all suppliers we would be in a position to truly open up planning across boundaries and become a single aggregated uk planning application portal that could stand agnostic to any supplier and feed any other website or social media in an automated way leading to AI around

planning across the uk to allow users to be pushed relevant information at the right time.

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

We will continue to monitor and test methods of publicity for all planning applications adding a touch of digital to the traditional methods to enable tracking and tracing of engagement and turning some of the tradition into the digital with the aim to provide a Google Analytics style report that spans the traditional and the digital to see where investment works and where physical/traditional is a requirement.