Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

# PropTech Engagement Fund Round 1

# Final Report

# April 2022



| **Local Planning Authority** | Wandsworth Council |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | 13/04/2022 |
| **Theme** | **Theme 2:** Plan-making Process: Regulation 19 |

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 aim of this project was to create a range of graphics and illustrations that can be used to support our communication about the role of Local Plan. This includes banner images, a visual timeline and icons that could sit on our webpages and be displayed with the digital consultation.

The scope of the project was intentionally small, and less focused on delivering a large digital solution, but looking at the other supporting material that is required to make planning consultation more accessible.

My goals for the project were to:
- Make the consultation and webpages more visually appealing and easy to read.
- Build a case for greater focus on planning focused digital engagement in the future.
- Understand the procurement process for commissioning designers.
- Share learning with other London boroughs who may not have a strong digital precedent for Local Plan consultations.

A project like this has not been commissioned in Wandsworth before, was a good opportunity to bring Wandsworth inline with other boroughs in terms of supporting graphics for the plan. This would help make the case that design like this is an important communicative tool, and not just an expensive unnecessary extra.

The project timeline aligned well with the Regulation 19 consultation, which is the third stage of the Local Plan development process. Typically, consultees at this stage are more likely to be statutory bodies or developers rather than members of the public, due to the technical nature of the terminology and reduced opportunity for visioning.

Whilst the commission was not likely to increase engagement with these groups, who are already aware of the Local Plan process and likely to make a formal comment already, it would support a more general push in awareness raising. Before the project was delivered, the Local Plan webpage was plain text which is off-putting and hard to engage with for many people.

**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?

Summary

The appointed supplier was Maddison Graphic. We worked together to itemise a list of unique illustrations.

The project produced a visual identity and timeline for the Local Plan, which can be found here: https://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local plan/draft-local-plan-full-review/

Other icons include infographics that can be used in other areas, infographics to help demystify some key policies and chapter covers and icons that can be used throughout the printed document for continuity.

Housing typologies and general icons L-R clockwise: busy high street (Northcote Road), mid-rise housing, semi detached housing, terrace housing, shops, industrial land.

Local icons L-R clockwise: The Clapham Grand, the pagoda in Battersea Park, St Mary's Church in Putney (Grade I listed), Battersea Power Station (Grade I listed), Putney Bridge.

People icons:



Tree icons:



Example place icons L-R: Balham tube station & flower market, Ram Brewery development in Wandsworth Town

**Balham**

**Wandsworth Town**

Example infographic (housing):

**Housing**

There are

**148,950** properties in Wandsworth as of 2021

A target of 19,500 new homes is needed between 2019-2029 as set out by the London plan

**70%** of properties in Wandsworth are flats or maisonettes

**24%** are terraced houses

Other illustrations include chapter icons (e.g. for place-based policies), public space icons, different types of land uses and a full set of infographics across seven themes.

Opportunities

The funding allowed for a whole new workstream to test a more visual approach to planning communications. This has previously not been a priority and money has not been available for this type of project, so whilst the outcomes themselves are not a new form of engagement, they are new for Wandsworth.

Through expansion of the expression of interest, it became apparent that some elements I had hoped to deliver or that the suppliers had suggested in their bids during procurement,

such as integrated audio or moving banners, were beyond the scope of our council webpages. Due to these limitations, and the more limited nature of regulation 19 consultations, some items were moved out of scope. This allowed for more budget to be put towards working with the supplier.


Funding review

The total amount requested was £30,000. The table below indicates the items that were mentioned on our expression of interest compared with those taken forward during the project.

| Item | Amount requested | Amount delivered |
|---|---|---|
| Backfilling roles | £5,000 | £5,000 |
| Software | £2,500 | Not deliverable – clashed with corporate approach / was out of scope |
| Mailout system | £500 | Not deliverable – clashed with corporate approach / was out of scope |
| Translations | £2,000 | Moved to out of scope due to limitations for the Regulation 19 consultation and will be addressed as part of the ongoing improvements |


**3.0 Community Engagement Summary**
- **Outreach Methods** (how you conducted outreach, timeframes and tools used) ● **Lessons Learned**
  - ○ Challenges you had to overcome
  - ○ Additional guidance and support that would have helped
  - ○ Anything else? (including surprises)


The outreach for the Regulation 19 Consultation was statutory, so there were limited opportunities for outreach methods. They included emails and letters to the Local Plan database and a link to the digital consultation portal, that was also displayed on Citizenspace.

The visual identity was added to the website near the start of the consultation process and was also used as a header image on Citizenspace.

The timeframe initially aligned well, with the consultation period, but had ended before the bulk of the elements were delivered due to the time to produce the customer illustrations. The suppliers were a team of two people, so they had more limited capacity than a larger organisation. Due to the multi-purpose nature of the illustrations, this was not a problem as they will be used in other ways in other planning contexts.


The main challenges were to do with a differing corporate approach that did not suit

planning's needs – for example, blocks on the number of emails that can be sent via outlook were enacted without consulting planning, or realising planning might have statutory responsibilities. The replacement mail service was in the set up process, so was not ready for use. Similarly, our corporate digital consultation platform has been renewed for several years, so there are now better alternatives on the market.

An aim of this project was that we would raise awareness of the needs of planning and shift towards a more innovative approach.

## 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?
- **Summary of community feedback** - key themes / learnings?
- **What changes (if any)** have come about as a result of this project and opportunities to deliver further/ongoing digital engagement?
- **Cost effectiveness** - are there ways that conducting digital engagement allowed you to save time or resource compared to traditional methods of engagement?

The consultation itself was narrower in scope than at Regulation 18 stage, in that it was not accompanied by digital events or workshops and consultation was statutory in nature. In some ways the opportunity at this stage in the process was more limited.

However, the project has had the following outcomes:

- Improvements to the webpages: the Local Plan pages are now much less dense and more visually appealing. There was a significant increase in the amount of time people spent on the Local Plan webpage after the identity was added at the end of January and the timeline in early March (see below graph)
- This has sparked internal conversations about how we can make more lasting changes such as widening the column width and creating more image friendly webpage layouts, which are in progress
- Internal feedback has been positive: 'looks really good, much easier to read and has a fresh feel to it'
- Progress internally with moving the wider digital engagement conversation process forward and a successful round 2 application for a more ambitious brief to support the Night Time Strategy

Average visit duration in period
## 00:04:21
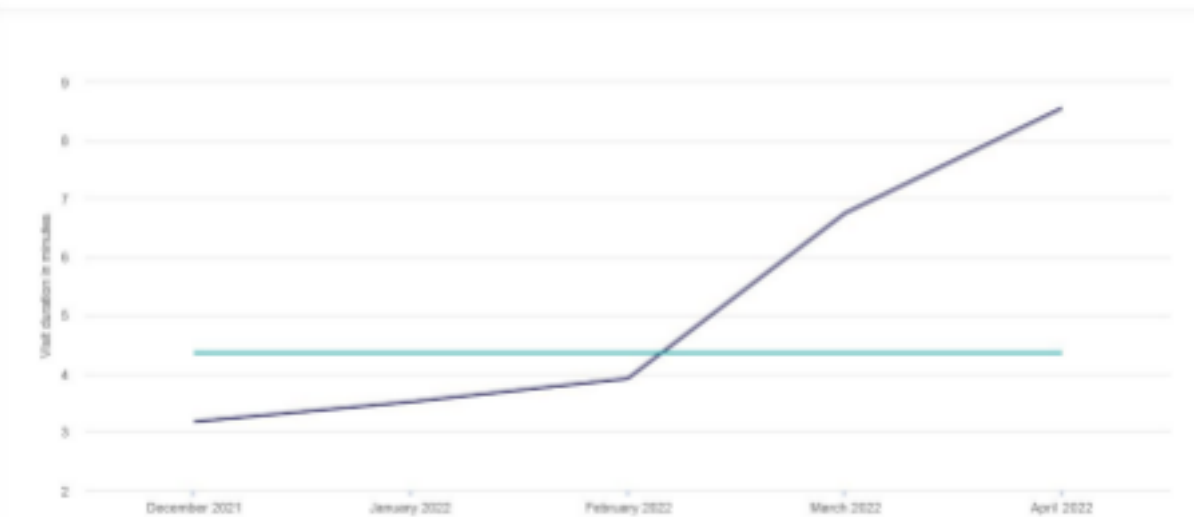


*Graph: data from the web team showing increase in time spent (purple line) on the Draft Local Plan webpage from the period December 2021 – April 2022.*

In terms of cost effectiveness, custom illustrations are skilled and do take time, but with a long term view about how they can be used in mind, are a worthwhile investment.

## 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

Once the supplier was appointed, we had several development conversations to establish the number of unique illustrations that would be required, and I went to the team for feedback. We kept track of comments and deliverables on a Miro board which was the easiest way to combine multiple sources of information.

There was some discussion and initial concerns that illustrations may need to be run past councillors for approval due to the choice of buildings in the banner (for example, showing the listed Alton Estate that was built as social housing). Given the timeframe with the consultation and timing after Christmas, there was not sufficient time for this to take place. However, once the first illustrations were added to the website, these concerns never materialised.

We also had many discussions to ensure the illustrations were diverse, and showed the many different sides of Wandsworth, for example by showing a mix of groups of people, visible religion, age and ability types.
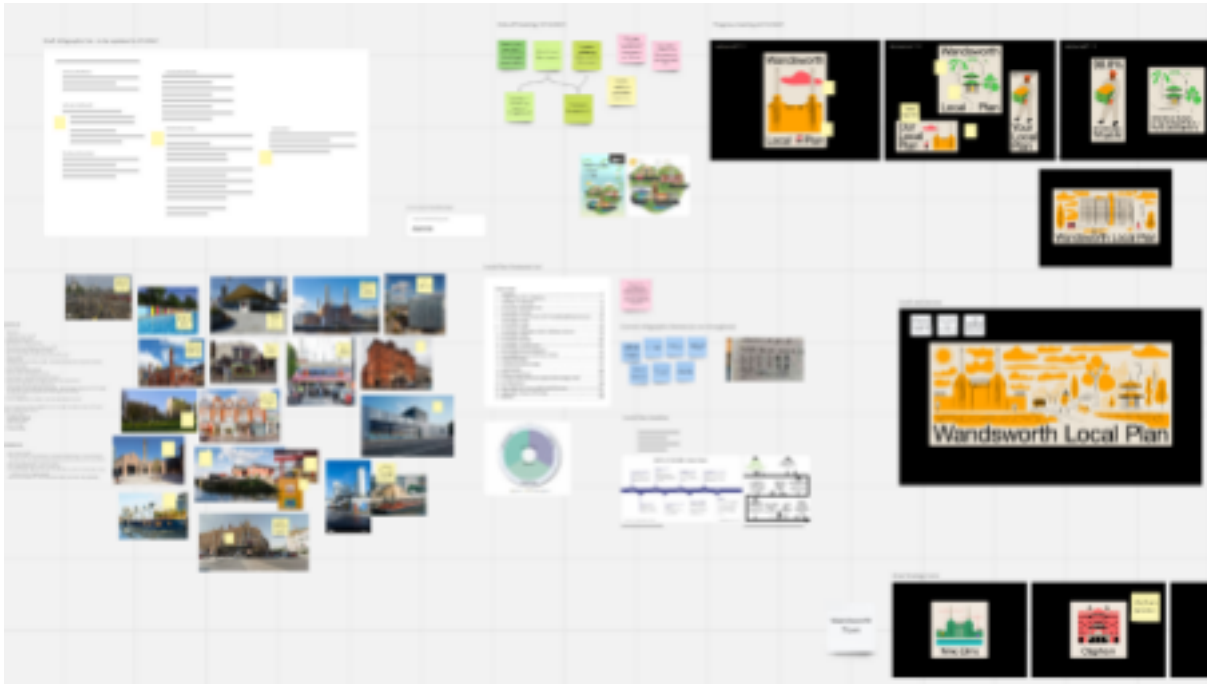
*Project planning board shared with designers showing development of the project.*

## 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 on what went well or what you would handle differently next time with your suppliers?

The main challenge with the project was working within the timeline. The process of submitting an expression of interest without having approached suppliers beforehand in this case meant the allocation of funds had to be amended after the project was awarded and a chunk of development work was required before the procurement process could begin. As one person working on the project, it was a large time investment to develop a detailed brief if we had not been successful.

The timing of the deadline also meant many colleagues were away during August and early September, so it was harder to get wider input. I would suggest that time frames would benefit from being less tight, and for some projects, there might be an opportunity to submit an expression of interest for the project without fully committing to a budget.

The brief was written with an understanding of the design process and previous experience of receiving design briefs from Local Authorities in a personal capacity. Feedback from applications was that the requirements were clear and concise, and we did not need to spend a lot of time developing the brief to understand what was achievable or reasonable in the time frame.

Had I not had the experience or design knowledge it would have been a more complex process and required more back and forth to define the scope of the project.

I was also able to use my networks, both personal and through the Public Practice, to create

a list of suitable suppliers who could deliver what I wanted at a high level. This also meant they had experience working with local authorities.

## 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?

In terms of sharing knowledge or areas where DLUHC could support, guidance on how to write a clear and concise design brief and knowing how to interview suppliers might be beneficial. Through separate conversations, I did find that some suppliers reached out on LinkedIn, or some emailed the council directly because they were aware we had been awarded funding. Others seemed to imply a lack of knowledge to do with digital and tech skills, or that we might be a 'soft target' as they knew how much money we had been awarded.

Progress improvements have been covered in other sections of the report, but I hope that in the longer term, there will be more of an emphasis on the ability of design to help with communication and that it is regarded as a worthwhile investment.

The next steps will be used to produce a matrix or tracker to ensure that the icons are properly documented and are able to be picked up and used throughout the team.

This project also led directly to a successful PropTech Round 2 application, which will also go on to have a significant impact on our internal approach and external offer to the community.