Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

PropTech Engagement Fund Round 2

Final Report

September 2022

Local Planning Authority/ies	Cornwall Council
Date Report Submitted	19/12/22

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Executive Summary

Region	South West
LA Rural-Urban Classification Category	See: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-authority-rural-urban-classification R80
Project summary	To support the Newquay Futures Town Centre Revitalisation project by creating a 3D digital model of Newquay's Town Centre and offering members of the public the opportunity to experience this in an immersive and fun VR experience which gathers users' feedback on some of the revitalisation ideas which are being considered for the town centre.
Funding allocated	*£120,000*
Supplier(s) Appointed	*Arcadis & Digital Urban*
Consultation Topic	*Community Feedback on Newquay's Town Centre Regeneration proposals*
Consultation Outcomes	*The approach was effective in engaging with younger people and attracted a higher rate of engagement than our typical "online survey" based exercises.*
Consultation dates	*8-10 September 2022 – Note that the event was curtailed due to the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and the engagement event planned for 10 September did not take place. A replacement consultation day took place on 26 November 2022*

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1.0 Project Summary

- **Summary:** provide a high-level overview of the project in a few sentences or bullet points. If applicable, include links to your project website and/or images of consultation materials.

  ☐ The aim of our project was threefold:
    - o test the positive impact that immersive 3D technology could have when undertaking public engagement activities in relation to spatial planning matters.
    - o engage better with younger people who are one of the demographic groups where we often tend to struggle with rates of engagement
    - o gathering evidence regarding levels of public support for town revitalisation ideas
  ☐ We chose the coastal town of Newquay for our pilot exercise for a couple of reasons. One is because there was a locally led project called Newquay Futures already underway, supported by the High Street Task Force. The Town Team driving this project had done significant and interesting work in developing various conceptual ideas for revitalising the town centre and high street economy. The other factor that made Newquay a good location for this work is that there is a locally significant development opportunity site in the vicinity of the rail station which is allocated within the Local Plan but which has not yet progressed and it is important that work is undertaken to develop a supported future vision for this area so that delivery can be unlocked.
  ☐ Working with the support of Homes England, we decided to create a 3D digital model of the existing town centre built environment and building upon that digital landscape we created a Virtual Reality gaming style experience for people to try which incorporated some of the Newquay Futures revitalisation proposals. Our delivery Partners for the project were Arcadis and Digital Urban.
  ☐ Our VR Experience featured an avatar for the user which progressed on a journey through the town. It was in two formats:
    - o a fully immersive experience where users wore VR Headsets sitting on a fixed physical bike and virtually peddling along a route through the streets, and
    - o a game pad version on a screen where people could use an xbox style controller navigating avatars as virtual pedestrians taking the same route through the town
  ☐ As users progressed through the "game," at key locations they were asked choose options relating to their preferences or opinions. For example at one key point in the experience users where asked "If this building was removed and replaced by public open space would you come here to watch the sun set?"
  ☐ We planned to conduct the engagement exercise over a 3 day period in early September with the first two days being a stand alone installation at Newquay Orchard and the third day being part of a local "Summer Finale" family fun day which was being organised by the Town Council. Due to the passing of Queen Elizabeth and the period of national

mourning, our events could not proceed according to plan. The 3rd day of consultation was re-arranged for 26 November

- **Status quo pre-PropTech:** how did your local authority approach planning consultations before you received PropTech funding?

- In Cornwall we already use a digital public engagement platform powered by "Bang The Table" which we call "Let's Talk Cornwall." Whilst it is a digital platform, to date our approach to using it has generally been quite traditional with the platform hosting on line questionnaires about various issues for people to respond to. Our response rates are sometimes quite disappointingly low and there are some demographic groupings within our resident population where we typically achieve very limited rates of engagement.

- **Outcomes:** what did the project achieve? Summarise the main impacts in a few bullet points, a table, or other format. Note: there is a section dedicated to project outcomes further on in this report so only include a high-level summary here.

  - During the time that we were able to run the experience in September 2022, 80 people took part and provided their feedback to us which is collated in Part 1 of Appendix A of this report.
  - Results for the additional day of consultation held in November are still being analysed but initial feedback is included on Part 2 of Appendix A

- **Opportunities**: what did the funding allow you to do that you wouldn't have been able to do otherwise?

  - As a direct result of this funding we now have a valuable asset in the form of a detailed 3D digital model of Newquay town centre which we can use to test and develop spatial strategies going forward.
  - We are now working with partners to use it in developing a master plan for the Station Quarter and also we are discussing development of a Design Code for the town.

- **Funding review:** we are working to help other LPAs budget in the future and understand where you encountered surprises. Please fill out the table below and include any additional reflections about the funding in the text box underneath the table. For example: was more/less funding needed than you expected and for what elements? With the benefit of hindsight, how would you re-do your budget if you were starting this project again?

	Amount Bid	Amount Spent
Extension of Bang the Table licence and services	15,000	0
3D Model Development and software licencing	30,000 15,000 30,000 £75,000	£99,750
Project Management		
Specialist System Integration Support		
LA Officer time backfill – data gathering, events planning & coordination	£22,000	Internal Officer Time charges – £6,288 * Equipment, marketing & Venue Hire – £505 Other Sundry Expenses – £219 £7,012 Note officer time for the 26 Nov event not included.
Contingency	£13,000	£0
TOTAL	£120,000	£106,762

Further notes:

Due to the event having to be curtailed our providers have confirmed that there is scope to run a further event within the existing budget. This additional engagement event took place on 26 November 2022 in Newquay and the costs of this event will be available when accounts have been produced in Jan.

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2.0 Lessons Learned

As part of developing guidance for best practice, we want to understand the lessons learned at each stage of your project. We know that these project stages might look different for different projects so feel free to edit the table to reflect your particular experience. Please provide as much detail as possible as these insights will be integral to developing national best practice guidance. Where applicable, please share links or attachments to supplementary evidence such as a copy of your business case, supplier briefs etc. These can be included in the appendices at the end of the report.

Project stage or milestone	Approach - what process was undertaken?	Lessons Learned
Getting started: Developing the business case/gaining organisational buy–in to apply for Round 2 funding.	*Submission of the bid for funding was promoted and authorised by the Service Director and a senior manager in the service collated the bid submission. Due to time constraints there was little time available to liaise across all departments prior to the bid submission.*	*Following the bid submission we had to undertake a significant amount of internal communications about the project in order to secure the resources and support that we needed and this created pressure on delivery of the project within the time frames set.*
Procurement: developing supplier brief and project budget	We lacked in depth technical expertise to develop a comprehensive supplier brief so we had to adopt more of a partnering approach with our providers (Arcadis and Digital Urban) using their experience alongside our own local knowledge to arrive at a workable brief	We have learned from this that greater levels of client expertise and capacity within the LPA would be beneficial, especially if we are to upscale this type of work. Subject to funding we are therefore keen to incorporate the role of a Digital Planner within our LPA
Procurement: finding and appointing a supplier(S)	We were already working with Digital Urban on another project in partnership with Homes England so were keen to build on that relationship for this project. As Digital Urban had	The approach we took was a pragmatic one in the circumstances, and obviated the need to undertake time and resource hungry procurement and tendering procedures. Use

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	not been set up as a direct approved supplier for Cornwall Council, we used an existing procured framework with Arcadis as our route to market and Arcadis entered into a contract with Digital Urban.	of the Framework did, inevitably, add an overhead cost to the project though and so with the benefit of our experience from this project and additional time to plan ahead we would look to undertake a more traditional tendering process if we were to proceed with further PropTech work with the LPA contracting directly with the provider rather than through a Framework intermediary.
Project Development	Our development of the consultation experience did not take place quickly enough. The subject matter that we were proposing to consult on within our VR experience was being developed alongside the VR experience itself so a lot happened quickly in the final few weeks.	The learning we take from this is that we need to be clearer at an early stage. For future exercises we will insist on a dry run exercise being held at least 2 weeks before live consultation activity takes place.
Marketing and Engagement	We deliberately adopted a low key approach due to uncertainty in the project development and in our ability to safely and effectively manage a large number of people. In the run up to the events taking place we used Cornwall Council's social media and communications channels, in conjunction with other local influencer channels and local media (press and radio)	Our general feeling was that this was appropriate in the circumstances, especially as the client project team had not had the opportunity to undertake a dry run of the experience before go live on this project.
Customer experience	In our September consultation exercise we were not set up to match the "in game" feedback with the post experience evaluation forms and this limited the scope for analysis of our data	This was corrected in the November event so that users were assigned a unique number which could be matched to the post experience evaluation form.
Customer Experience	A number of customers who tried the VR	For a future event we would look to offer

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	headsets on the fixed bikes reported that they experienced feelings of disorientation and nausea	alternative VR modes
Event Safety and Security	On the November event there was unfortunately a violent incident which took place. This was dealt with effectively at the time and nobody got hurt however staff there were shaken and the outcome could have been worse.	Our learning from this is that we will take extra precautions and consider whether it may be appropriate to employ on site security.

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Final Reflections: Where applicable, please also respond to the following questions:

- How did you conduct community outreach (digital and/or in person)? What approach, including timelines, budget, and tools were adopted?

Our engagement event was conducted "in person". To do this work we created an installation with the specialist VR technology and invited passers by to try it. As a pilot exercise we did not put large amounts of resources into publicising the event so we were pleased to get c.90 people engaging over the 2 days that it was live. Now that we can be confident that our VR experience offer is of good quality and was overwhelmingly reviewed positively by those people that did try it, we can justify a bigger publicity effort for future events.

- Looking back at this project, was there additional guidance or support from DLUHC or other stakeholders that would have been helpful to work through these and other stages of delivery?

Our biggest challenge was delivery within the required time frames including having to procure providers. Given the time constraints it would have been helpful if DLUHC could have created an up front procured supplier catalogue for Local Authorities to select from as this would have accelerated the timeframes for procurement and allowed greater focus on the engagement activity itself.

- What was the primary reason you chose your particular PropTech supplier?

In partnership with Homes England we had already worked with Digital Urban to develop a map of the Station Quarter area so they were a natural choice to extend that work to encompass the entirety of the Town Centre area of Newquay.

- Were there any wider surprises which surfaced through undertaking the project?

The responses we got were overwhelmingly positive across all demographic groups who participated in the VR experience

3.0 Pilot Outcomes

- **Proposed Outcomes:** What outcomes were you aiming to achieve? To what extent were these achieved? What were the main outcomes (quantitative and qualitative) of your project? **(Please use the attached spreadsheet to detail this further).**

We were interested to see how effective use of VR technology could be in improving our engagement with residents and particularly younger people.

- **Baseline data:** what existing data did you use to compare your project's outcomes to? Did you review or change this approach at any point? How does your baseline data compare with the outcomes achieved in your Round 2 PropTech project?

As a baseline we compared our engagement exercise with a six week consultation exercise which had taken place in Newquay about 8 months earlier using our traditional engagement approach

- **Measurement challenges:** how did you measure the impact of your outcomes? Did you have any challenges assessing the impact of your project? If so, in what ways?

We used our Bang the Table system to record data from both exercises and used outputs from this to compare the datasets

- **Demographics:** (if applicable) how did you collect demographic data as part of your consultation? If so, please share any demographic breakdown of consultation respondents (e.g. age, gender etc). How does the demographic of your PropTech funded consultation compare with previous consultation responses?

After residents had used the VR experience, we asked them to complete a post experience evaluation form which captured data about their demography. This data was then entered onto a spreadsheet and from there uploaded to our Let's Talk/Bang the Table platform.

- **Cost effectiveness**: did a digital engagement approach save time or resources compared with traditional engagement approaches? If so, how was this measured?

We cannot say that it was cost effective as the project costs included building the 3D model and VR Experience. Now that we have that digital landscape we will be able to re-use it and build upon it so we would expect future projects to be more cost effective than this pilot has been. However the key factor about this approach is that it relies on "in person" engagement to get the full benefit of the experience and so future events will continue to be relatively high cost to run compared with a

remote approach.

4.0 Community Feedback
- **Summary of community consultation:** what was the focus for engagement and what questions were asked? How were these questions decided? Were there any surprises (either in responses and/or who responded)?
- **Summary of community responses:** what were the key themes and learnings from the consultation?
- **Delivering on feedback:** how has the community feedback shaped the project delivery plans? How has this validated, challenged, evolved key assumptions and potential project outcomes?
- **Community testimonials**: If available, we would love to see any direct testimonials from community members about their experiences on the project in their own words. We would appreciate it if any testimonials could be attributed to specific individuals or local groups, but quotes can be kept anonymous if preferred (please state if this is the case).

5.0 Conclusions and Policy Reflections

- If you could re-start this project what, if anything, would you do differently?

The main reflection is that if able to we would have allowed ourselves more time to develop our VR Experience and to complete the engagement event.

- What longer-term changes, if any, do you expect to make as a result of this pilot?
  - If not, why - what barriers are preventing long term adoption?

This project has given us a small but important insight into the potential that use of 3D modelling and VR has for engagement. We would definitely seek to use our model again to support further engagement and master planning work within the areas that we have digitally mapped through this pilot. We also want to use this work to kick start an internal conversation about how these tools could have a wider application beyond Newquay.

- What (if any) other stakeholders (outside of those who responded to consultations) do you think should be involved alongside LPAs to support long term adoption of digital planning?

Other stakeholders we would look to involve include Planning Agents, Architects, Urban Designers, Property Developers, House Builders and Local Councils (e.g. Districts, Towns and Parishes)

- Policy reflections:

- ○ Did any existing planning policies limit your ability to achieve your goals for this project?
- ○ Are there any policies (national and local) you'd like to see changed in the future? If so, how?
- ○ Where do you think further guidance is required, either for local authorities and the wider PropTech sector?
- ○ How could DLUHC better support LPAs in the future with the further adoption of digital citizen engagement tools, best practice guidance, or other support?
- ○ If additional funding was available - what do you think future Proptech Fund rounds should focus on delivering / achieving?

We think that there are significant public benefits to be realised from widening the use of 3D modelling and embedding this practice within the mainstream Planning Process. Doing so would enable scheme promoters to bring their planning proposals to life in a way that is hard to achieve with traditional planning documentation and would enable officers in the LPA and statutory consultees to gain a rapid understanding of the implications of development proposals. It will also help scheme promoters to get communities on board.