



PropTech Engagement Fund Round 2

Interim Report

November 2022



Local Planning Authority/ies	Southampton City Council
Date Report Submitted	Interim Report: 31 January 2023

Executive Summary

Region	South East
LA Rural-Urban Classification Category	Large Urban
Project summary	<i>The aim of the project was to present a Regulation 18 Consultation in an accessible and understandable way to help improve public engagement. This included the introduction of 3D modelling to help illustrate how proposals may look in their setting.</i>
Funding allocated	£125,000
Supplier(s) Appointed	<i>Bang the Table and VU City</i>
Consultation Topic	<i>Plan Making: Regulation 18, Draft Local Plan with options</i>
Consultation Outcomes	<i>To be completed</i>
Consultation dates	<i>31 October to 23 December 2022</i>

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1.0 Project Summary

Summary:

- Southampton is at Regulation 18 stage of the plan making process. The key challenge for the new Local Plan is identifying enough land for new homes, to meet the government target. This target equates to a 25% increase in the number of dwellings, densities need to increase which will include the need for taller buildings.
- The challenge with any Local Plan consultation is the volume and complexity of the Plan and therefore how to effectively engage local residents in the process.
- The aim was to introduce the use of a 3D model of Southampton to help people to understand what proposals may look like in situ and hopefully ease concerns about increased densities; together with a digital consultation platform to help ease navigation
- A hybrid approach was used; however, we chose a different way to include hard copy and face to face engagement, based on experience of previous consultations.
- A detailed communications plan was developed to support the consultation (see appendix 2a for materials).

Status quo pre-PropTech

- Southampton began a review of the Local Plan in 2019, firstly bringing in an engagement specialist to the team to ensure that consultation was embedded end to end in the plan making process. The Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was re-written to include broader consultation principles; take account of increased use of digital media and be less prescriptive about methods, instead outlining the range of methods that should be considered and stating that these should be applied in an appropriate and proportionate way, depending on what is being consulted on and with whom.
- The first Regulation 18 consultation took place in spring 2020, a hybrid approach was used with the consultation being hosted on the Council's SNAP survey software. Over 3,000 responses were received, of which 90% were made online.
- Southampton ran a pilot consultation in 2021 using 'Bang the Table', for Round 1 of the PropTech fund. This enabled us to test the software and take the decision to continue to use this for the Regulation 18 – draft plan with options consultation. The aim of this Round 2 project was to integrate 3D model images and videos within the consultation platform.

Outcomes:

- Bang the Table has enabled us to break down the consultation into more manageable and accessible themes. This allows people to respond to as many or as few topics as they choose and to navigate between different elements with ease.
- Some 3D model images have been embedded into the consultation platform to support some site policies and the tall buildings policy (see appendix 4a for images used).
- *Further detail will be added once the consultation has concluded to*

summarise the number of responses and the effectiveness of different communication and consultation methods.

Opportunities:

- Move to a new consultation platform, which provides a range of tools/methods, far more options than we had with SNAP.
- Following the pilot (Round 1), the Council were keen to test Bang the Table and have therefore purchased a corporate licence, enabling a range of consultations to be hosted. This helps to increase familiarity with residents and therefore people become more confident in engaging.
- The Council has been considering the use of 3D modelling for a range of planning functions, but it was cost prohibitive. This fund has enabled the main build of the 3D model for the city centre and our town and district centres, leaving a legacy for Southampton beyond this project together with an income generating opportunity for the future as we move to a more sophisticated digital approach across planning.

Funding Review:

- We took quite a frugal approach to allocating funding as we were clear that any platform needed to be financially sustainable beyond the life of the project. Our objective was to find tools that we could purchase and test with the aim of having a legacy for future consultations (or other work) but limiting costs to ongoing licence/maintenance fees.
- There are choices about how projects are implemented. The funding would allow for suppliers to 'build' the consultation and run promotional/communication campaigns. However, SCC felt it was more sustainable to embed/integrate these skills within the teams, which would enable them to carry out the work on future (un-funded) projects. SCC had also brought in an engagement specialist to the team, to lead on this area of work, again PropTech needed to be embedded into the existing work programme, not a separate add-on. Teams must be mindful of the skills they have available. Traditionally planners have run planning consultations, but to truly improve levels of engagement, particularly with the general public, requires input from consultation, communication and IT/tech professionals.
- Platforms differ – the ones we chose focus on a self-serve approach, initial training is included. Time is required for staff to get used to platforms. We feel that we still have not realised the full benefit/potential of 'Bang the Table' or 'VU City' as we are still learning how to. Over time this will become more efficient and therefore cost effective – as opposed to paying for a supplier to build and promote.
- Consultation needs to be recognised as a key piece of evidence (like any other study commissioned when developing a Local Plan) and appropriate budget allocated.

Costs:

Element	Description	Estimate	Actual Costs	Additional Information
Project Manager	Additional resource required to run project, enhancing the regulation 18 Consultation. Attending meetings with DLUHC, suppliers and responsible for reporting to DLUHC.	£10,000	£19,950	More days required on project than anticipated due to number of meetings required and complexity of consultation structure planning plus full consultation build, monitoring and results processing.
Strategic Planning Manager	Advising on consultation content; planning requirement and ensuring projects meets wider needs of planning department.	£5,000	£12,618	More days required on project than anticipated due to consultation structure planning, creation of 3D model examples to embed into Bang the Table due to lack of internal support from design colleagues.
Planning Officer(s)	Support with preparing consultation content, web-content, stakeholder mapping, consultation plans, events, communications etc.	£5,000	£6,014	Slightly increased requirements due to additional web content and events than originally planned.
Procurement & Communications	Procurement support / Communications Plan support	£5,000	£10,000	Increased comms support required for consultation material planning, creation, management and monitoring, reporting etc. - overall campaign management
Campaign	Communications campaign, incl. social media, design and production of materials.	£10,000	£3,761	Reduced cost due to bulk order and decision to utilise more digital options for campaign than previously used (e.g. digital display boards, more social media, key group mail outs etc.)
Bang the Table	Consultancy support from Bang the Table, focussed on the integration of 3D model images and video (or alternative approach to be explored if appropriate)	£10,000	£0	No costs as consultation build was done entirely by project manager and integration of 3D model was not possible - only screenshots could be embedded which was done solely by the Strategic Planning Manager

3D Model, license & support	Purchasing of 3D model to cover key parts of the city, licensing costs, training and any ongoing support	£80,000	£72,275	Slight reduction to estimated cost due to 'bulk order' discount (more tiles mapped = cheaper cost)
TOTAL		£125,000	£124,618	

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
<p>Getting started: Developing the business case/gaining organisational buy-in to apply for Round 2 funding.</p>	<p>Project manager produced a briefing note on the bid, that was discussed by the directorate management team. Several suggestions were made under the different themes of the fund. The director was keen to ensure there was a wider benefit/legacy from any successful bid. Proposals were investigated further and narrowed down as to what would best fit the brief and the legacy aspiration of SCC. This work was carried out by the project manager and approved by Service Head and Director.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needed to be very clear about the key purpose of the fund – digital citizen engagement. Several proposals were focussed on delivery under the themes (e.g. estates regeneration), with little understanding of consultation/ engagement. This is sometimes seen as either nice to have or a hurdle in the statutory process. • Culture change is still required, organisationally, so that public opinion is welcomed and seen as a positive way of gaining acceptance of proposals and improving trust. • Buy-in is easy as everyone wants funding, but without necessarily understanding the deliverables!
<p>Procurement: developing supplier brief and project budget</p>	<p>We had an existing contract with Bang the Table and wanted to continue working with them. Had brief discussions prior to submitting the bid. Had initial conversations with the two key 3D Model suppliers, to understand basic overview of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bang the Table, very positive in pre-bid discussions, indicating that integration with 3D model content was doable. • 3D Model providers limited, but this did make it easier. Timing was a key concern, but both stated

	<p>the model, broad costs and if they can deliver within the required timescales.</p>	<p>they could deliver and were up for looking at how integration might be achieved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful to have informal discussions with potential suppliers, as this helps to shape the brief for the formal process.
<p>Procurement: finding and appointing a supplier(S)</p>	<p>3D Model Specification and Method Statement Questionnaire attached. Worked with procurement colleagues to establish the simplest route. With only two potential suppliers, both were invited to an 'interview', they were sent questions beforehand (method statement), we went through these and scored. Procurement checked scoring and made formal appointment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrations/interviews with suppliers varies dramatically. Some smaller companies have no marketing/sales so you get a very techy demo, that can struggle to engage (at worse). At the other end, larger companies have sales/account managers. You get a slick demo, but maybe not able to answer detailed technical questions. • If you have specific technical questions, provide them ahead of meeting, so they can get answers.
<p>Onboarding: PropTech suppliers, additional consultants, and internal teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kick-off with VU City to set out key milestones and weekly check-in meetings through the 3D model build. • Joint meeting with VU and BtT to explore integration options. • Communications team – agree joint project plan • Corporate Consultation Team – agree standards for BtT (sign-up form etc) • Finance Team – notified prior to bid, request to confirm when funds received and set up of analysis codes so that use of funding can be monitored during project and reported at project end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to ensure clear milestones are set out for delivery, regular meetings/updates scheduled to monitor progress. • Early engagement with the Comms. team allowed detailed plan to be delivered and options to be explored – learning from other projects.

<p>Campaign Development: developing marketing and engagement strategies. This might also include developing survey questions, platform content, or user research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and Engagement Strategy: focus on digital approach, supported with in person events. In person events will focus on an offer to attend existing meetings (not the traditional ‘exhibitions’), these may be with community/residents’ groups, business groups, youth/school groups. In addition, we have a presence in each of the council’s libraries for a ‘drop-in’ session, to enable people to come and ask questions. Range of digital media used to promote (see communications plan). • Survey Questions: Developed in-house, but very constrained by the plan content and the options being proposed. • Platform Content: Mirrored the key themes of the plan, with policies all listed under the topic headings. Each question was asked using the survey tool. It was agreed that this should be done consistently across all sections which meant we did not use the range of tools available on the platform. • User Research – attended Tenants conference, Southampton Voluntary Service and Engagement leads mtg. Asked people to let us know how they wanted to engage with them (in person, paper, email etc). This was used to inform strategy. 	<p>Wanted to target local communities and tap into existing networks. Whilst some people are on our mailing lists and follow the Council’s social media, many do not. We therefore asked elected members, local residents’ groups etc to share on their local social media groups.</p> <p>Consultation content has been determined by the plan and planning regulations, therefore there are only limited opportunities to vary and get creative.</p> <p>The challenge was to break down the large volume of content into manageable sections and make navigation as easy as possible.</p>
<p>Campaign launch and management:</p>	<p>Campaign launch all managed in-house between the planning and communications team. A couple</p>	<p>We haven’t achieved a true hybrid approach to events. Our initial idea was that we would be able to</p>

<p>working with suppliers to 'go live', attending in person / hybrid events, troubleshooting tech issues</p>	<p>of minor tech issues were quickly resolved, either in house or via the support desk at Bang the Table. In person events were hosted by the planning team.</p>	<p>share 3D views of different parts of the city or show more interactive ways for people to respond to the consultation. However, in person events have focussed on raising awareness and answering detailed questions</p>
<p>Campaign wrap-up: Closing campaigns, running analysis, agreeing next steps</p>	<p>We took the decision to extend the deadline after a few requests, particularly from local community groups. Analysis was divided with engagement specialist doing summary/quantitative analysis, organising reps. from Bang the Table. Planning officers divided reps (based on policies they worked on), each responsible for reading, categorising and responded to comments from all sources). This process is ongoing. Using 'clockify' to record officer time – baseline for continuous fund project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bang the Table can produce reports but still a need to reformat for the next steps of processing. Explore further with continuous fund, to include all Reg. 19 requirements. • Large number of reps. made via email (58 documents received), these are LPAs biggest problem as they are hugely time consuming and if policy references are not provided there is a level of interpretation /subjectivity applied. Need to do more work to understand barrier/why people don't use the platform.
<p>Feedback loops: e.g. developing opportunities for ongoing feedback from the community, following up with people who responded to the consultation, sharing consultation insights with key stakeholders</p>	<p>Feedback will be divided into three steps: 1. You said: headline results, number or responses – quick survey, policy options etc 2. You said – more details – summary of comments made. This may be divided by theme so as not to be 'information overload' 3. We did – examples of what changes are being made to the plan or further work being carried out With each 'next steps' will be included. More specific topic/policy-based discussions will take place, as required, depending on feedback.</p>	<p>Want to ensure we drip feed information back and keep the Local Plan on people's radar. It is likely to be a year until the next statutory consultation takes place, so can be easily forgotten.</p> <p>Will also aim to ensure linkages are made with other communications – continuing to work with Communications team ensuring opportunities are taken to refer to Local Plan when communicating about similar/related projects.</p>

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?

Existing contacts – such as neighbourhood/resident groups. Contacted in the weeks before the consultation launch, to inform and offer to meet with groups in person. Launch mail outs included all social media assets, enabling networks to share on our behalf, with consistent messaging.

Attended Tenants Conference, Engagement Leads forum (organisations across the City), Voluntary Sector Forum, all to raise awareness before and gain support to help share message/information during consultation.

See appendix 3b for list of face-to-face meetings and events held during the consultation and appendix 3c for schools sessions feedback.

Elected members were briefed and provided with an information pack, we had hope that they would be local advocates and raise awareness within their communities, however we did not receive and requests for meetings of supporting materials. This will be followed up through our cross-party working group, to better establish the role of members.

- 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?

The DLUHC team have been on hand to support throughout the process, which is achievable when working with a limited number of LPAs. Scaling up across all LPAs with key guidance will be key, understanding the potential need for a cultural shift – appreciating that those on the pilot are there because they are up for change, many will resist and require clear guidance, supported by robust regulations.

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

Bang the Table – offered a range of digital tools within the platform (polls, surveys, maps, ideas boards etc). This means the platform is financially sustainable beyond the Proptech fund.

This platform is also self-serve – unlike some where they produce/build the consultation/campaign, not only does this add costs, it does not upskill staff – which again adds to financial sustainability. Through using this approach we have built a case for SCC to use BtT corporately – long term this will join up consultation, make it easier to share responses across projects resulting in wider learning from consultation feedback – this should help shape forward plan for consultation across an organisation.

VU City – VU were confident in delivering within the timescales we needed and had increased functionality (e.g. being able to add building blocks directly in the model without having to create on CAD software and import) which added value to the product in terms of our current project but also the legacy impact to the Council as a whole.

3.0 Pilot Outcomes

- **Proposed Outcomes:** The key outcome for the project was to conduct a successful Regulation 18 consultation on our Local Plan, using the new digital tools. Aiming to increase the proportion of statutory consultees who responded via the digital platform, increase responses from the general public but using the digital tools to make the consultation more accessible and through an improved communication programme working with local community networks.
- **Baseline data:** The first Regulation 18 (Issues and Priorities) took place in 2020, demographic data and postcodes were collected which provided a detailed baseline. In addition, the pilot consultation, run for round 1 of the PropTech fund, also provides some baseline. The key difference is the content. As you progress through a Local Plan the content that we need to consult on grows in quantity and complexity. It is therefore unrealistic to expect the same number of responses as you receive in early stages. However, for context, in 2015 prior to the employment of an engagement specialist for the Local Plan, or any PropTech interventions, an Issues and Options consultation was run and only received 250 responses, with another 500 respondents abandoning their response. This is a good comparable given it was also a Reg 18 consultation.
- **Measurement challenges:** Due to the fact we had a range of baseline data we have been able to clearly measure a number of outcomes and have introduced new measures to better understand processing time, that will be used as base data for future consultations. There is some challenge in measuring the quality of responses, this is focussed on the more detailed comments made on-line
- **Demographics:** We had a 'sign-up' form on Bang the Table in which we collected, age, gender and ethnic group. This was only required for those responding on policies and did not include the quick survey. We have felt that the gathering of personal details can be a barrier, hence the decision was taken only to ask those making detailed responses, ensuring that the quick survey was kept quick. Overall, of those who provided demographic information, respondents to this consultation were (on average) older than those who responded to the first regulation 18 consultation. However, the content was very different it is therefore difficult to make accurate comparisons. This does demonstrate that digital is not excluding older people.
- **Cost effectiveness:** Yes, there is some time saving for the processing of those responses that have been provided on the digital platform. Reports are automatically generated, group all comments by policy etc and summarise survey questions. There is still further processing to be carried out in spreadsheets, reading, tagging and summarising responses. We aim to use the continuous fund to develop a solution to fill these processing gaps within the digital platform. However, we also received 58 documents via email. These were mainly from statutory and general consultation bodies who produce detailed responses which require significant processing time, along with the added risk that (if not clearly stated) comments are not correctly assigned to the policy they were made about – this is sometimes not clear. The team are now using clockify to get a clear understanding of processing time. The continuous fund will be used to explore the barriers with statutory consultees and aim to find a solution where we reduce the number of email responses and the associated burden on officers.

4.0 Community Feedback (to be completed when consultation has concluded)

- **Summary of community consultation:** The consultation was under Regulation 18, for us this was a draft plan with options. We therefore needed to publish all policies and the options and invite comment. In order to make this more navigable the consultation was divided into themes (in line with plan chapters). Within each theme the relevant policies were listed including– options, policy text and overall approach; comments could be made separately on each element (to help with processing).
- **Summary of community responses:** High level analysis has been carried out to understand who responded and to what themes and to assess the impact of the communications plan. The detailed comments are still being processed and more detailed analysis and summaries of key feedback will be published in Spring 2023. See appendix 3a 'Summary of Results'.
- **Delivering on feedback:** The feedback is currently being processed and all comments will be categorised. The levels of agreement/disagreement with each of the policy options will be assessed alongside the detailed comments and preferred options will then be selected and appropriate amendments made to the policy text.
- **Community testimonials:** see quotes below in green box.

5.0 Conclusions and Policy Reflections

- If we could re-start the project it would not fundamentally change as we felt that we presented the detail of a draft plan with options in an accessible and structured format that enabled users to navigate to the themes and policies they were most interested in. However, there is a need to better understand statutory consultees, developer/agents and neighbouring authorities who did not use the digital platform and what they see as the barriers. If we are to improve digital processes and make things more efficient, we must move away from the acceptance of lengthy emailed documents. This is a key element of our Continuous Fund project.
- The content remains a key barrier to engagement amongst the general public. Local Plans become more lengthy and complex as they develop and therefore engagement level decreases. Is there a need to consider the role of the general public in shaping local plan, at what stage is this most valuable and relevant?
- The 3D model was not used as extensively as we had initially planned, however in hindsight this may not have changed much. If we had introduced

more images there could have been a risk of misleading people that images represented proposals as against indications of height for example. We now feel that 3D modelling would be better used when looking at specific locations with more developed proposals. This will be taken forward as a number of masterplans are being developed across the city. There is still a need to have a more accessible/less detailed version for general publication

on-line as the full version of the 3D model is not able to be embedded to a webpage and requires the viewing device to have the necessary processing power (e.g. a phone or basic laptop cannot be used to view it effectively).

- In the longer-term we continue to work with the Digital Planning Team at DLUHC to look in more detail at some of the specific challenges we faced with consultee responses (not in the format we would like) and lack of responses (improving the experience for the public, what is their role? When and how can we most benefit from their insights?). We are also using this experience to help develop consultation and communication plans for Regulation 19 and masterplanning projects at the Council.
- We need to work with a wide range of stakeholders to help make the process more effective and less onerous for all. This includes a range of statutory and general consultation bodies such as national organisations, LPAs (with their duty to co-operate hat on), agents/developers, businesses and residents.
- Policy reflections:
 - The planning regulations state that we should consult all stakeholders at specific times when developing a Local Plan. However, all stakeholders represent a huge range of people with different levels of interest and understanding as well as being impacted differently. This makes consulting with them all about everything in the plan very challenging. Due to the regulations, LPAs have traditionally ensured these are met by providing all details, perhaps with a series of exhibitions, but this doesn't mean much to the general public.
 - Is there now a need to consider that different stakeholders have different roles at different times through the development of a local plan? Digital solutions don't solve this problem, they provide an alternative means of consulting, but as we have experienced, the professionals did not use the digital platform and the public mainly engaged with a quick survey which will have more limited influence on policy going forward.
 - Likewise, whilst our projects to date have been centred around the Local Plan development we need to be ensuring solutions are able to be used across the full range of strategic planning functions to avoid the need to procure multiple digital solutions for each different task. This is why we are keen to use our two solutions in the masterplanning work as well as our Reg 19 Local Plan consult next year which will test the appropriateness of these solutions further.
 - The PropTech sector is still quite new to the Planning world and many focus on the look and feel of a consultation, making it more interesting/interactive and increasing the number of responses. However, with a Local Plan, this approach would not meet the regulations, without running it alongside something more traditional.

Useful from DLUHC:

- Table illustrating the types of digital solution for each type of planning function.
- Limitations of digital solutions
 - Skills required if you do not opt. for the supplier to build/run/promote your consultation

Please use this space to include any quotes from your team about your project. Don't forget to attribute the quote so it is clear whose perspective you are sharing (e.g. 'project team member or 'supplier' etc).

- Community Group representative “**there is just some much information and it's complicated, we couldn't possibly respond to everything in the time available**”
- Statutory Consultee (neighbouring LPA) “**we'll send a response by email, that's how we've always done it**”
- Housing tenant (at Tenant's Conference) “**no-one has ever asked us how we would like to be communicated with, we just get sent emails**”

6.0 Additional reflections and feedback for DLUHC (optional) *This is a space for you to provide any additional reflections or feedback for the DLUHC team that you prefer not to be published publicly.*

7.0 Appendices

- Appendix 1a: Method Statement for Prospective Suppliers (3D Model)

- Appendix 1b: Specification Template
- Appendix 2a: Consultation and Communications Plan
- Appendix 2b: Communications Materials
- Appendix 3a: Summary of Results Report
- Appendix 3b: Table of Face to Face Events
- Appendix 3c: Schools Feedback
- Appendix 4a: 3D model images