

# How the adoption of digital tools supported more positive conversations around planning



**DIGITAL  
PLANNING**

 Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities



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## THE CHALLENGE

Planning consultations often attract responses from a similar audience, with a larger number of negative responses received compared to those in support of planning proposals. For example, in 2022, over two million planning objections were made by the public across the UK. Additionally, it is reported that just [7% of communities trust their local authority](#) due to communities being unable to see how their feedback is being taken into consideration quickly and easily.

To address this, projects in Round 2 of DLUHC's PropTech Innovation Fund set out to test how the adoption of digital tools like augmented reality, 3D visualisations and gamification models could foster more meaningful community engagement. The following case study explores the approaches taken by [Birmingham City Council](#), [Leicester City Council](#), [Lambeth Council](#) and [Bolsover District Council](#), to create a more inclusive, transparent, and positive dialogue around planning decisions.





# Birmingham City Council

Local Planning Authority  
Birmingham City Council

## Project type

Community engagement in estate regeneration project

## Consultation dates

April – November 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund  
£70,000

## Link to project report

[Birmingham City Council report](#)



## THE PROJECT

Birmingham City Council received £70,000 in funding from the PropTech Innovation Fund to enhance public engagement in their planning consultations. The council recognised an opportunity to adopt digital tools to support regeneration of the Druids Heath Estate where there were historical challenges engaging with the local community.

## THEIR APPROACH

By working with partners including [Parametrix](#) and [The Pioneer Group](#). Birmingham City Council developed and adopted a suite of digital tools including a bespoke website, virtual reality and augmented reality to create an immersive and interactive consultation experience. The bespoke website enabled residents to explore the proposed regeneration process, view 3D models of buildings enabling the visualisation and impact of potential developments, and provide feedback.

Such tools supported face-to-face methods of engagement which included community planning events.

## RESULTS

The iterative nature of the engagement, in tandem with the developed digital modelling tools, has recorded over 60% positive support for development for the Druids Heath regeneration, and improved perception of outcomes with residents. This reflects the simplified reporting technique of ‘you said, we did’ approach to feedback from residents through face-to-face engagement, storyboards and the website journey.

In addition, the number of people engaged increased from 406 in the council’s 2017 BeHeard survey to 2,216 in this pilot through a mixture of digital and in-person engagement. One resident reported that engagement had been the most successful to date, demonstrating the success of the consultation.





# Leicester City Council

Local Planning Authority  
Leicester City Council

## Project type

Community engagement on masterplan proposals

## Consultation dates

April – May 2022

## Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£86,750

## Link to project report

[Leicester City Council report](#)



## THE PROJECT

[Leicester City Council](#), as part of their efforts to build on the success of [two previous public engagement exercises](#) at Stocking Farm to deliver new council homes and community facilities, received £86,750 in funding from the PropTech Innovation Fund. Their objective was to continue engaging and gather insights from the local community to shape a vision that will bring unused land and property back into use.

## THEIR APPROACH

Taking a bottom-up approach to the planning process, Leicester City Council partnered with [Deetu](#) utilising their [Engaged Space platform](#) to truly understand how those local to the area felt about how the site was being currently used and its potential for future development.

The [digital platform](#) evolved through a multi-stage engagement approach allowing residents to provide feedback on the existing facilities, review initial proposals, and track the evolution of the project. To ensure inclusivity, the council conducted in-person events, business drop-ins, stakeholder workshops and in-person conversations with the community in addition to the digital engagement methods.



The funding also enabled further youth engagement, through the creation of a [Digital Classroom Toolkit](#) designed for local secondary school students, which was integrated with the Geography GCSE syllabus, providing a consultation case study, valuable insights and an engaging quiz.

## RESULTS

The adoption of digital tools and a comprehensive consultation approach yielded positive results for Leicester City Council. Despite the digital poverty in the area, 90% of respondents accessed the consultation platform via their smartphone to provide valuable feedback from the public and stakeholders, which significantly influenced and helped to shape the development plans. In the context of increased public awareness of the project through community engagement, no formal letters of objection were submitted during the planning application process.



# Lambeth Council

Local Planning Authority  
Lambeth Council

## Project type

Community engagement on improving public spaces

## Consultation dates

June – August 2022

## Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£92,164

## Link to project report

[Lambeth Council report](#)



## THE PROJECT

**Lambeth Council** is creating more pleasant streets and neighbourhoods that are healthy, safe, accessible and climate resilient, while supporting active travel. Lambeth's Climate Action Plan and the Transport Strategy set out clear objectives to become net zero compatible by 2030 by reducing overall motor vehicle journeys.

Five trial low traffic neighbourhoods introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic have now become permanent. During that process, the council received funding to trial 3D modelling technology to drive public engagement for **Oval to Stockwell** and **Railton** LTNs to refine and improve both schemes.

## THEIR APPROACH

Lambeth Council collaborated with **Cityscape**, **Commonplace** and **Vu City** to visualise public realm proposals for LTNs enabling more meaningful and focused feedback from the community. Immersive 3D models were integrated into the engagement process and made accessible through a **digital platform**.

By using the platform, in tandem with in-person events including six workshops across different schools, residents both young and old could engage in discussions with Lambeth's Community Street Design Officer team and provide feedback on the proposals.

## RESULTS

Through the integration of 3D visualisations and digital engagement tools, Lambeth Council achieved a significant increase in positive responses across two consultations to 60% and 73%. Feedback from the community indicated that the immersive street environments helped residents better understand the proposals and actively participate in shaping their local spaces.



# Bolsover District Council

**Local Planning Authority**  
Bolsover District Council

**Project type**

Gamification of plan-making to support development proposals

**Consultation dates**

August – October 2022

**Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund**

£95,800



## THE PROJECT

**Bolsover District Council**, in partnership with **The Future Fox**, developed an interactive, web-based **'PlaceBuilder'** master planning tool that gamifies plan making consultation to drive collaboration and engagement. Their primary objective was to reach a wider audience particularly young people and gather diverse perspectives on development proposals.

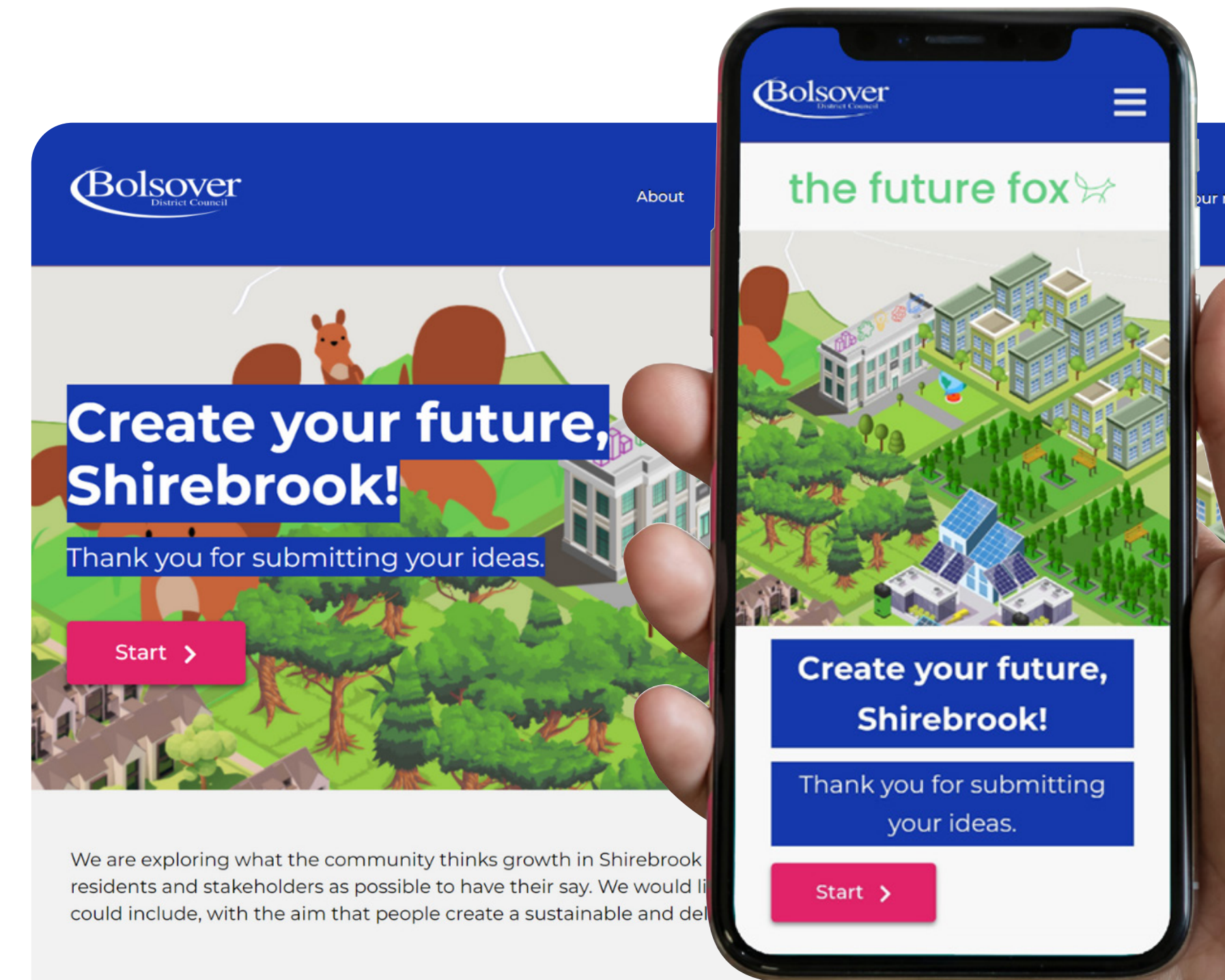
## THEIR APPROACH

To enable local communities to better understand development proposals put forward by councils and developers, the master planning tool provides citizens with the same choices about potential land use that planning officers and developers have when planning new site development.

Residents were able to put land use tiles on a potential development site, allowing them to see the cost impacts of their decisions in real-time, and to consider how to balance budgets between income-generating land uses such as new housing, and expenditure on local infrastructure.

## RESULTS

The implementation of digital engagement tools and strategic use of social media enabled Bolsover District Council to achieve an increase in responses and community involvement. The council observed a more diverse range of participants, including younger residents who were traditionally underrepresented in previous consultations.





## CONCLUSION

This case study highlights the value digital tools can bring to support more positive conversations around planning. These digital initiatives have enabled a more meaningful two-way engagement, demonstrating the potential of technology to bridge the gap between communities and decision-makers, enabling greater transparency and collaboration which will consequently build trust between communities and local authorities.

You can find out more about the work of the Digital Planning Programme as we work to use digital to modernise England's planning system by reading our [programme overview document](#). A [plain text version of our programme overview is available](#). If you require another format please [email the team](#).

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