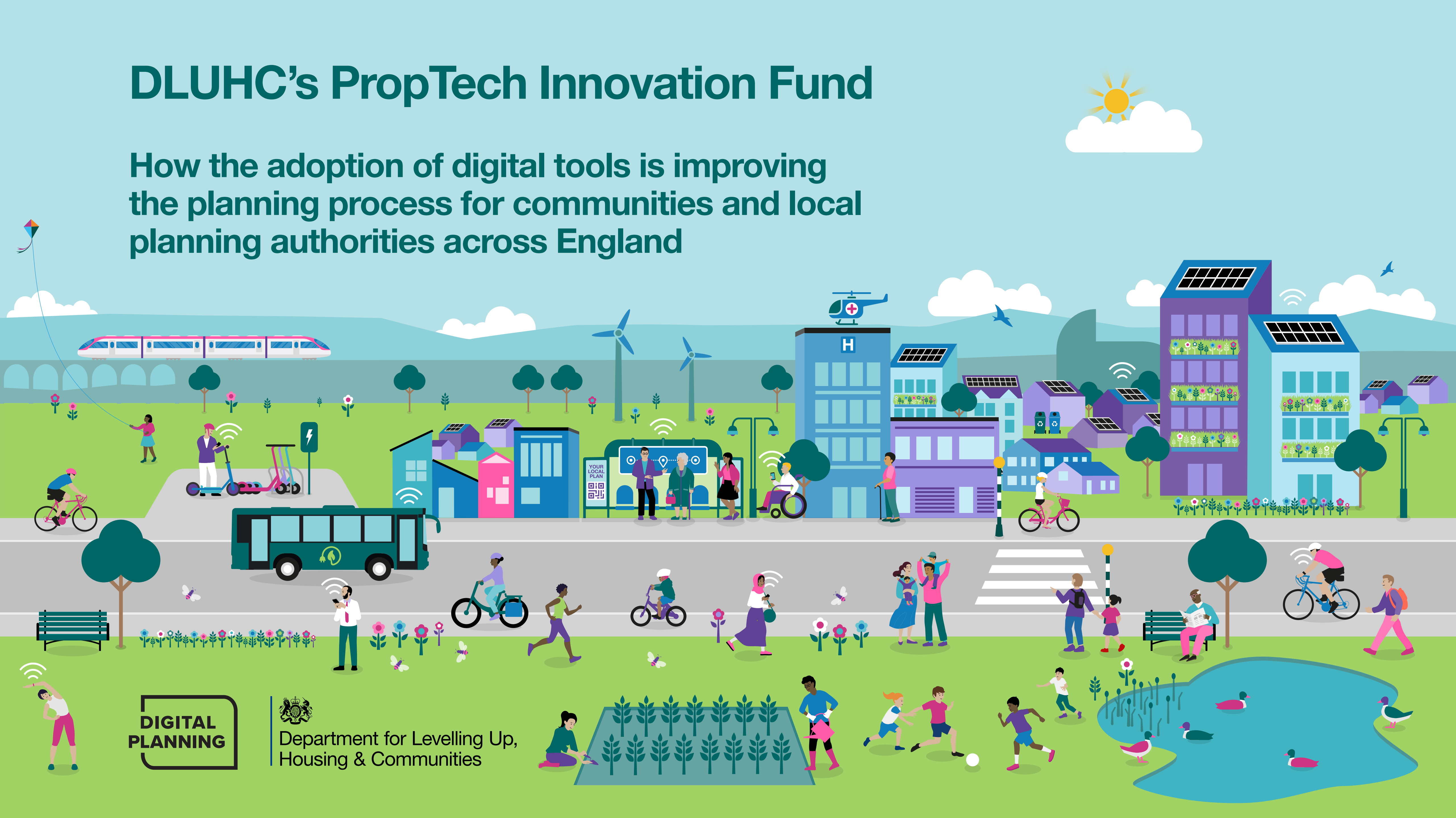


DLUHC's PropTech Innovation Fund

How the adoption of digital tools is improving the planning process for communities and local planning authorities across England



**DIGITAL
PLANNING**


Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

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How the adoption of digital tools increased the number of responses to planning consultations

THE CHALLENGE

Planning consultations are an important method of gathering public input to shape the future development of communities. However, despite the resources invested, consultations are reportedly still difficult to find, access and use, which restricts those that can participate. This is reflected by [less than 1% of local people currently engaging in the plan making process](#) and challenges in getting a more diverse audience to respond to consultations.

Across Round 2 of the PropTech Innovation Fund, local authorities have tried to address this challenge by successfully adopting Property Technology (PropTech) tools to increase the number of consultation responses they received. In this case study we will share the approach taken by [Harlow & Gilston Garden Town, South West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan \(JSP\)](#), and [Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan](#) to increase their engagement by up to 300% in comparison to previous consultations.

Read on to find out about the different methods of engagement they used.



Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

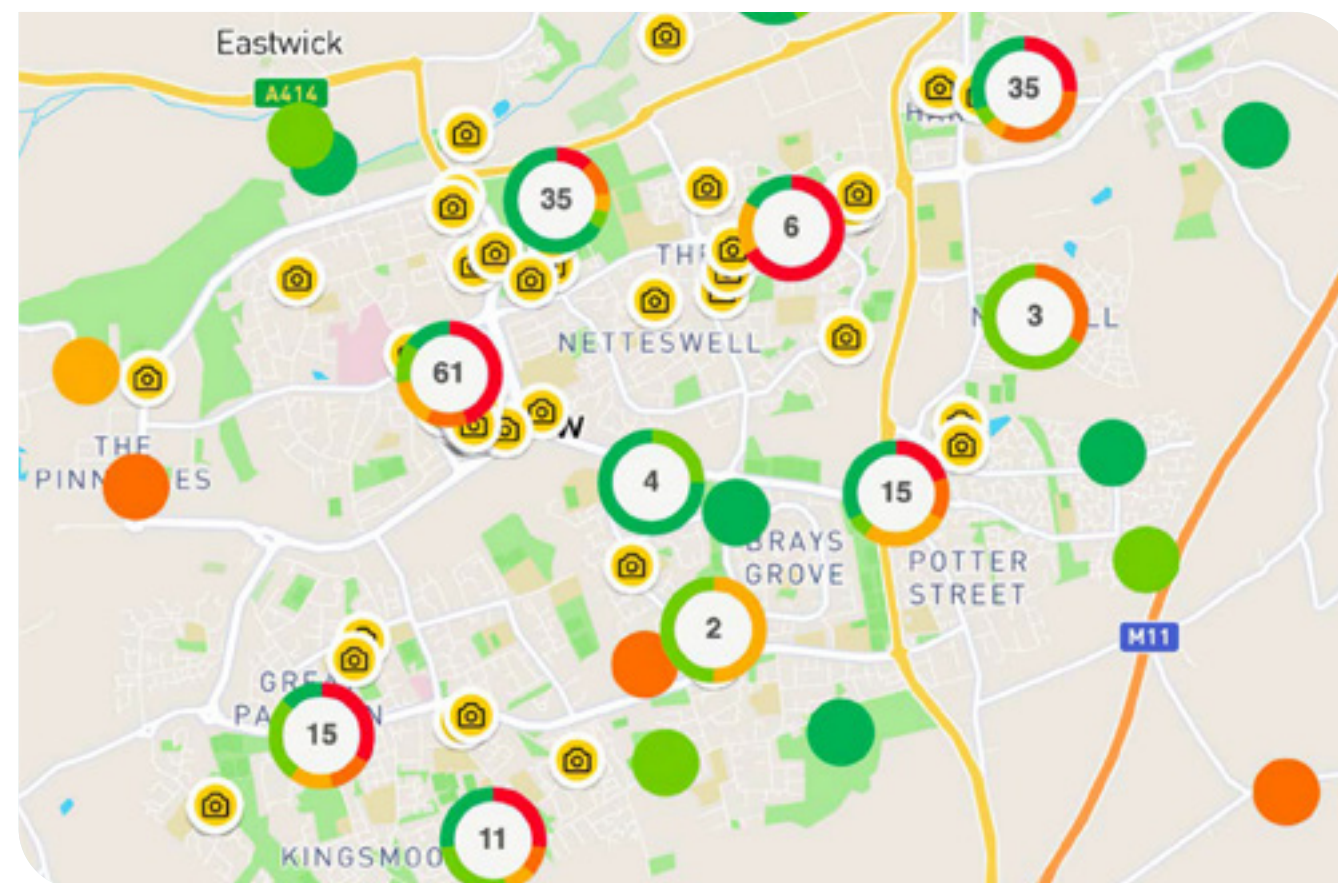
Local Planning Authority
Harlow and Gilston Garden Town

Project type
Quality of life and social value mapping

Consultation dates
July – October 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund
£228,800

Link to project report
[Harlow and Gilston Garden Town report](#)



PropTech Innovation Fund – Case study 1

THE PROJECT

Harlow & Gilston Garden Town (HGGT) received £228,800 from the fund to better understand the local community value and need in their area through a public digital consultation named “**Your Quality of Life**”. The consultation ran from 15 July to 14 October 2022 and allowed the Garden Town to establish a baseline to monitor change in quality of life and social value through future consultations.

HGGT, where 23,000 new homes are planned, is committed to delivering healthy growth and successful, scalable stewardship arrangements, but needed a way to measure whether these are being achieved, and a platform to enable the community to have a say in those decisions.

Through designing a hybrid engagement programme which combined digital and in-person events, HGGT more than tripled the number of people taking part in conversations about their local area, compared to their previous consultations, enabling community feedback to influence projects and policy now, and in the future.





THEIR APPROACH

HGGT found that the Quality of Life Foundation’s [monitoring framework](#) was closely aligned, however, they still needed a platform to engage.

HGGT already used several digital solutions in their consultations including surveys, online workshops, video promotions and social media. However they found that this approach usually limited respondents to those who had the time, skills and tools to engage, and it also made collating and analysing the responses a very long and manual process.

To improve this, HGGT worked with [Commonplace](#), [Quality of Life Foundation](#), [Rainbow Services](#) and [Stantec](#) to make their consultation approaches more inclusive and engaging among young people and underrepresented groups.

Some examples of how they did this include:



Running user research sessions with the Harlow and Epping Youth Councils to understand what engages young people between the ages of 13 and 18 years old.



Employing two local young people under the age of 21 as Community Researchers to support Rainbow Services and community outreach.



Taking part in 49 in-person events, going to places where people already spend time.



Setting up a [new website page](#) for digital consultations with [Commonplace](#), where people can comment and see each other’s comments.

RESULTS

This more inclusive approach to their consultation helped HGGT triple the number of people that responded to the Your Quality of Life consultation in comparison to two previous HGGT-wide consultations. They received over 7,000 visitors to the Your Quality of Life Commonplace consultation platform, 554 individual respondents, and even doubled the percentage of respondents over the age of 75.

But that’s not all. Community feedback has resulted in change. Following the consultation, independent recommendations from Quality of Life Foundation have been translated into a HGGT Action Plan of projects and proposals, including:

- Updating Communications and Engagement policies
- Establishing a physical Urban Room to enable ongoing in-person engagement
- A Quality of Life monitoring strategy, enabling HGGT to measure stewardship outcomes and quality of life over time
- Progressing a public facing digital dashboard, for accessible and transparent data.

These examples will ensure the local community have more of a say – and more equitably – in proposals and policies.

South West Hertfordshire

Local Planning Authority

Five authorities within South West Hertfordshire (SW Herts)

Project type

Community engagement to support Joint Strategic Plan development

Consultation dates

September – November 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£121,750

Link to project report

[South West Hertfordshire report](#)

THE PROJECT

The five authorities that make up [South West Hertfordshire](#) (SW Herts) are preparing a Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) working alongside Hertfordshire County Council. The plan will look ahead to 2050 and will address strategic issues across the area.

In Round 2 of the PropTech Innovation Fund they received £121,750 to generate interest, enthusiasm and engagement in a vision for SW Herts that will guide the next stages of the plan. Following on from a successful initial engagement in early 2020 entitled “[SW Herts – Your Future](#)”, the SW Herts authorities identified a lack of local youth engagement in plan making. To address this, their ‘Realising our Potential’ Regulation 18 consultation in 2022 sought to focus on engaging the 18-25 demographic and other hard to reach groups.

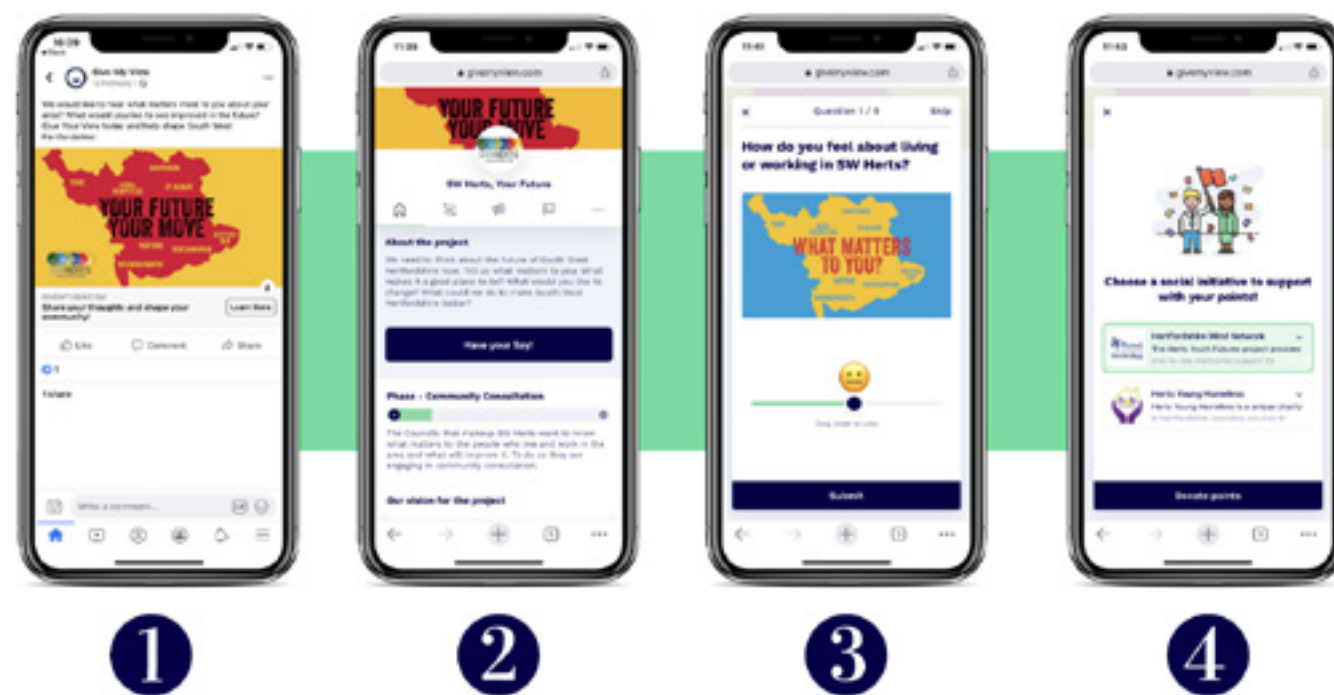
authorities approaching consultations using traditional methods such as in person events, leaflets, lengthy questionnaires, and with limited scope for digital participation.

Taking a strategic and inclusive approach to digital innovation, the SW Herts authorities chose to collaborate with suppliers [Bang the Table](#), [Built-ID](#), [Penknife](#), [Hyas](#) and [Iceni Projects](#) to attempt to increase engagement with hard-to-reach groups. They also leveraged feedback from a newly formed Youth Forum, which was set up to advise the councils on the consultation approach and how to engage the younger demographic. Their approach included an interactive online-based consultation document, with an embedded infographic-led survey that could be completed and submitted online, together with targeted series of distilled ‘quick fire’ polls that were hosted on social media.

THEIR APPROACH

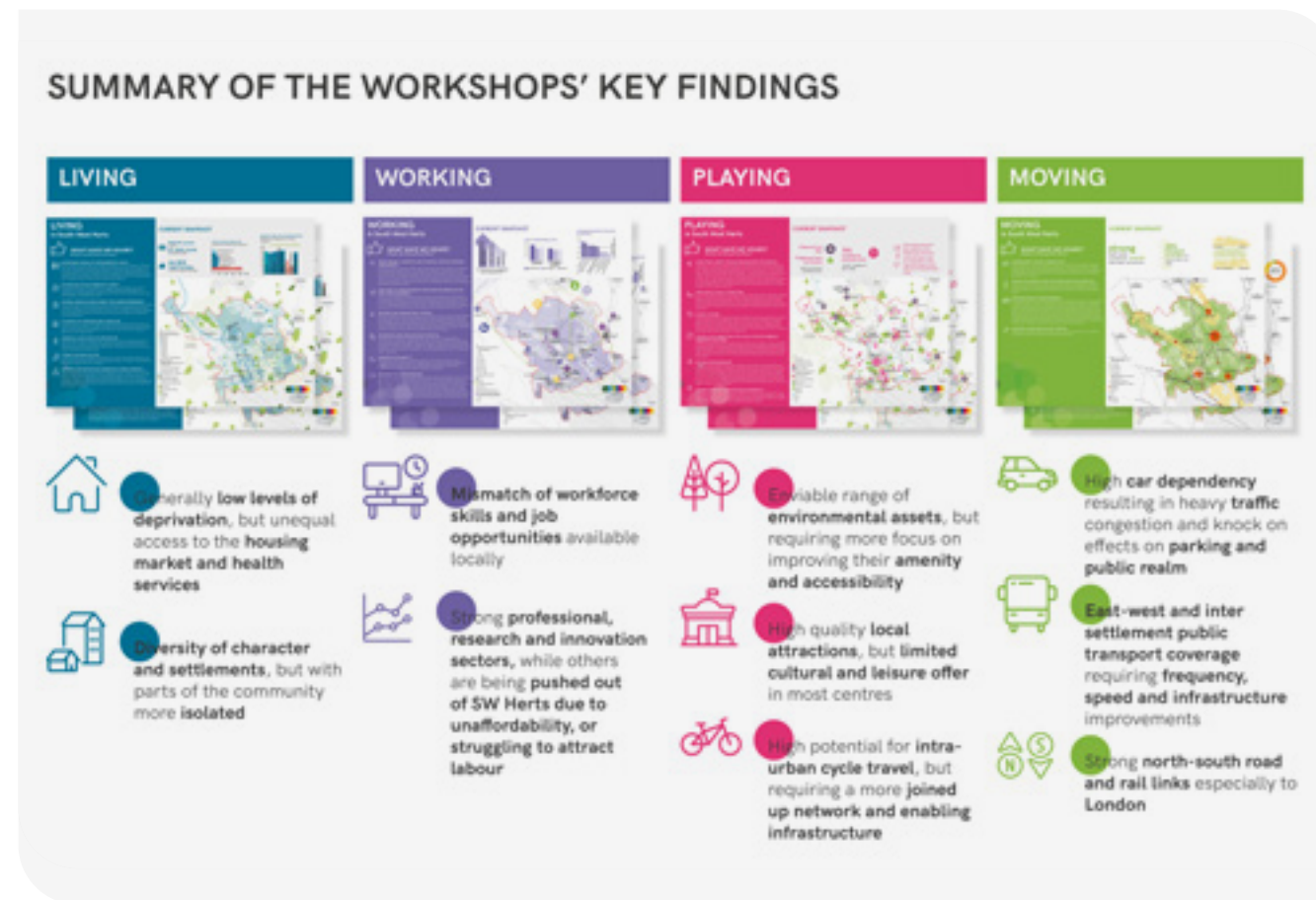
Budget and technological constraints often hinder efficient Local Plan consultations and put a strain on limited local authority resources. As part of their strategy to adopt a more innovative and digital approach to their Regulation 18 consultation, the SW Herts authorities sought to expand and improve on the ‘typical Local Plan’ consultation processes which often result in local planning

A key principle embraced by the SW Herts authorities in designing, and then deploying the consultation strategy was to ensure that all communication was done in a simple and concise way. This included writing the consultation material and associated questions in as simple language as possible to make it accessible to the general public, non-native English speakers, and those with other accessibility needs.



RESULTS

Compared to the ‘SW Herts – Your Future’ engagement in 2020, the 2022 engagement saw a significant increase in both visits and responses to the consultation. These results are even more positive when considering that the 2020 poll ran for twice the length of the 2022 poll, and the 2020 poll included fewer questions.



Your
Future Poll
2020

Realising Our
Potential Poll
2022

Total visits to poll

10,647

15,944

Total number of voters

3,291

3,122

Total number of
questions answered

15,042

24,734

Pieces of free-text
feedback provided

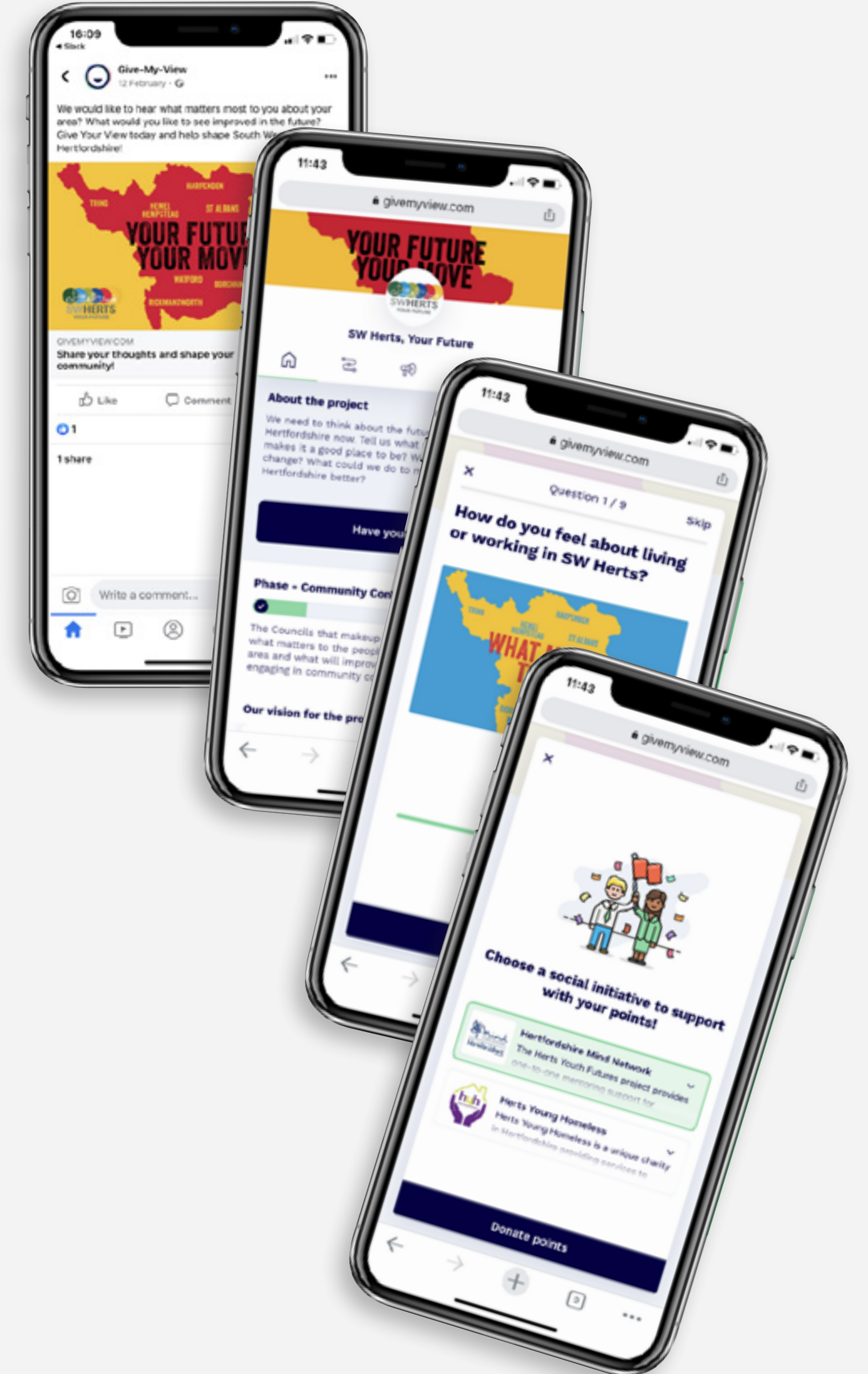
2,082

5,198

Number of voters who
left their email address
to allow future contact

1,057

1,007



Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon Joint Local Plan

Local Planning Authority

Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council

Project type

Community engagement to support Joint Local Plan development

Consultation dates

July – October 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£285,000

Link to project report

[Plymouth, South Hams and West Devon report](#)

THE PROJECT

The third example of using PropTech to increase community engagement in consultations is [Plymouth City Council](#), [South Hams District Council](#), and [West Devon Borough Council](#). As part of work on their Joint Local Plan (JLP), they wished to improve their understanding of the role of settlements and neighbourhoods throughout their plan area, receiving a total of £285,000 in funding.

This work has helped them to form a basis for future conversations about Neighbourhood and Strategic plans ahead of a review of the JLP in 2024, including informing emerging briefs for evidence work to ensure consultation is informing planning policy from the earliest possible stage.

THEIR APPROACH

The JLP team worked with [Commonplace](#) and [City Science](#) to run a two-stage process. The first stage involved a consultation across the three partner local authorities using the Commonplace online engagement platform, while the second stage encompassed a quantitative analysis using data from Open Government Licences and emerging GIS tools (Cadence 360) to benchmark results. Their aim was to test whether a digital consultation tool could improve representation rates across the JLP when measured at a parish and ward level and engage residents who had not previously participated in consultation on the JLP.

To make sure that they reached lower represented areas, in addition to their [new consultation platform](#), the pilot team continued to monitor participation throughout the consultation, using data from previous consultations and parish and ward population estimates to measure participation rates live. This proactive approach allowed them to adjust their approach during the consultation to capture responses from less represented areas. It also allowed them to capture demographic data for the first time which will now directly inform future targeted work with less represented demographic groups such as adults under the age of 35.



RESULTS

Along with increasing the number of visits and responses to the consultation, the JLP learned a number of things, including that:

- Spatial analysis indicated a link between low representation and areas of high deprivation in urban areas
- The digital platform allowed for better segmentation analysis than previous platforms
- Despite offering paper surveys, no groups or parish councils requested them in addition to the digital platform.

In total they received 10,471 visitors to the online consultation, which collected 99.9% of all survey responses.

jointlocalplan@plymouth.gov.uk'. To the right is a graphic with a house icon, trees, and the text 'MY PLACE MY VIEWS'."/>

Plymouth and South West Devon Joint Local Plan

Log in

Be part of the conversation about your neighbourhood

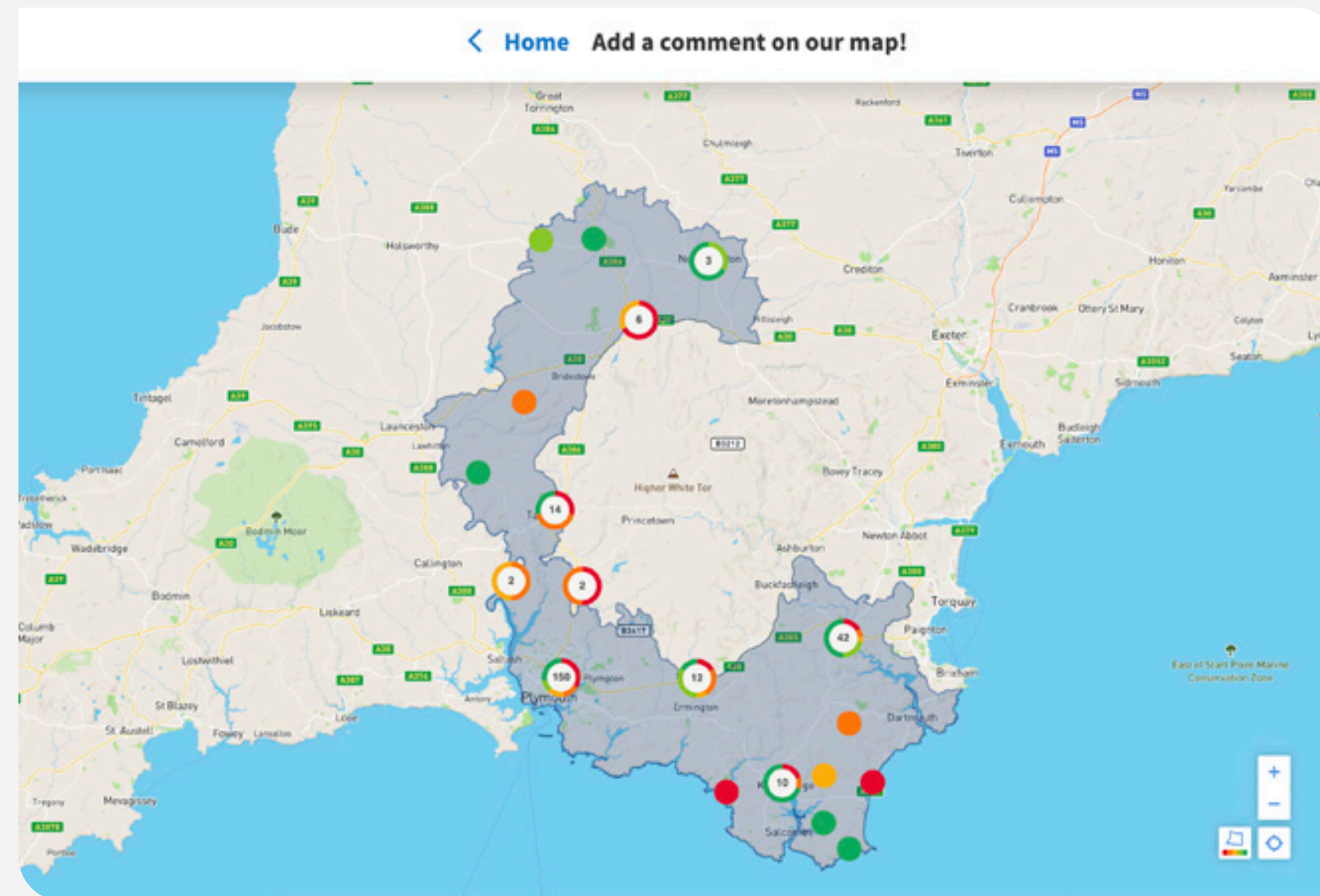
We want to hear how people use their local spaces and places to help us shape the future over the next decade through the Joint Local Plan.

We know people's habits are quickly changing, particularly since the pandemic, so we want to make sure we understand how these changes are affecting local communities and are reflected in our future plans.

Ensure you stay a part of the conversation about the future uses of land in our city, towns, villages and countryside by providing your e-mail address.

You can also get in touch with us at jointlocalplan@plymouth.gov.uk

MY PLACE MY VIEWS



CONCLUSION

These authorities used PropTech in a variety of ways to achieve the same goal, increased community engagement. By leveraging tools like online consultation platforms, GIS maps, and social media, the three pilot projects have all managed to increase responses to their consultations, including from identified hard-to-reach communities. The learnings from these projects will undoubtedly contribute to future advancements in citizen engagement strategies.

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How the adoption of digital tools supported a more diverse audience to respond to planning consultations

THE CHALLENGE

In Round 2 of the Innovation Fund, Property Technology (PropTech) was used alongside a variety of methods to help increase the diversity of people responding to planning consultations. Historically, local planning authorities have reported that it's challenging to engage certain demographics, including young people and hard-to-reach communities. This leads to a lack of diversity and representation in consultations.

Research from [People Powered Planning](#) has shown that by engaging a wider audience in planning conversations it can open up broader, often more positive and supportive conversations. For example, a survey found 57% of 18-24 year olds support the development of new homes in their local area in comparison to 39% of over 55s. This is a clear demonstration that broader engagement can unlock untapped pockets of support for new housing and positive plan making.

Read on to find out the methods used by [Newham Council](#), the [Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea](#) and [Lewes District Council](#) to increase the diversity of their engagement.



Newham Council

Local Planning Authority
Newham Council

Project type

Community engagement to engage a more diverse range of voices

Consultation dates

August – September 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£125,000

Link to project report

[Newham Council report](#)

THE PROJECT

This pilot project aimed to engage Newham residents as part of a community-led visioning process on the transformation of a local area, Beckton Riverside, receiving £125,000 in funding. This included co-creating a vision and principles for a future town centre, neighbourhood, and community in this area. With the potential to provide around 8,000 new homes and a new town centre as part of a sustainable new neighbourhood, Beckton Riverside has the potential to be unlocked through a DLR Extension to Thamesmead via Beckton Riverside and is one of the borough’s largest strategic sites and forms the most significant long-term regeneration opportunity in east London.

THEIR APPROACH

In this pilot, the project team aimed to engage a more representative range of diverse voices, including young people, hard-to-reach groups and particularly the digitally excluded. They used a variety of engagement methods to achieve this, including through targeted support, which aimed to build skills and confidence to support independent participation.

The consultation was open from 17 August 2022 to 11 September 2022 and used a hybrid engagement approach, collecting most of the feedback through the [Newham Co-Create platform](#) developed in partnership with [CitizenLab](#). This digital platform was supported by a range of communication and in-person events to improve access and involvement.

As part of a social value offer, they also hired two youth interns to work alongside engagement consultants. The team reported that:

“Working with interns who live in Newham as part of the project gave us a greater insight into the borough and made the team more approachable on the street. The interns were able to recommend times and places that would be busy, and to publicise the project across their own networks of young residents”.



Lessons learned:



GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

One of Newham Council's approaches was to visit busy high streets and festivals with pop-up stalls. This allowed them to engage people who have typically been harder to reach in planning consultations due to factors like digital access and lack of awareness, understanding of, or interest in why planning matters.



MAKE LOCAL AND YOUNG PEOPLE PART OF THE TEAM

Working with young local residents either as interns or through focus groups is recommended to help reach a wider range of the population and empower younger residents.



CONSIDER TARGETED TRANSLATION AND LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Whether through in-person or online engagement, councils should consider how to cater for the broad range of languages in their local area. The team identified that there are more than 240 languages and dialects spoken in Newham. They suggest allocating a budget to producing translated versions of engagement materials and including bilingual members of staff at pop-up stalls to capture voices that could be otherwise missed.

RESULTS

Newham Council's primary objective for this pilot project was to improve the demographic representation of their residents in consultations. Across five pop-up events and a four week online engagement, the council received engagement from over 250 participants. Some of the key data they noted included:

- **Ethnicity:** 54% of respondents identified as being from ethnic minority backgrounds
- **Age:** 17% of respondents were under the age of 24, compared to 10% of under-24s who were previously involved in digital engagement in Newham
- **Disability:** 11% of respondents identified as having a disability
- **Religion:** 26% of respondents identified as Muslim which was more representative of the borough's diverse population and demographics compared with previous consultations.
- **Increased awareness:** 78% of participants had not previously used the Newham co-create engagement platform.



Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea

Local Planning Authority

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

Project type

Digital engagement to tackle engagement fatigue

Consultation dates

September 2022 – February 2023

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund

£118,000

Link to project report

[Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea report](#)

THE PROJECT

In Round 2 of the fund, the [Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea](#) (RBKC) focused on the Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team as part of an estate-wide energy efficient refurbishment and engagement programme, aiming to provide support to over 2,000 residents with their housing needs, improving health and wellbeing, and access to employment and training.

Previously, like many other councils, RBKC relied on in-person methods to engage local residents in their consultations. However, they identified that not only was this approach time-consuming, but they heard from residents that they were fatigued from the number of engagement letters and had in fact requested new methods.

To address this, they launched their pilot consultation, “Your Neighbourhood, Your Voice”, which delivered a co-designed app and webpage to encourage Lancaster West residents to participate in the co-design of refurbishment, gardens on the estate, wider services, as well as a bespoke employment and training hub developing on the estate.

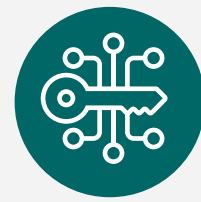
THEIR APPROACH

As part of RBKC’s goals to make their consultation process more inclusive, they transformed their existing [WeAreW11 app](#) by adding new accessibility and translation functions. As well as this, the team worked with [PingLocker](#) and [Built-ID](#) to incorporate a number of additional functions, including:

- [A calendar with all activities happening on the estate](#)
- [Accessible and gamified surveys](#) embedded into the existing app
- Automated translation functionality into multiple languages
- Integration of an accessibility menu – for example a dyslexia friendly function
- A bespoke online survey, using geographical targeting and marketing through social media platforms.



Lessons learned:



UNDERSTAND YOUR RESIDENTS' DIGITAL ACCESS

The RBKC team conducted a review of their residents' digital usage levels against the University of Liverpool's internet user classification system. This data was used to deliver dedicated digital inclusion initiatives, for example, providing residents with free data and devices to access the internet and further benefit from the services offered, including an employment and training hub, online booking systems and chat functions.



UNDERSTAND THE DEMOGRAPHIC OF YOUR AUDIENCE

The team were able to engage broader audiences in their consultation by reflecting on the council's existing demographic information. This helped them to identify the most common languages spoken by their community and develop a translation function on the app to improve accessibility. The app currently translates into six languages.



USE COMMUNITY FEEDBACK TO INFLUENCE DELIVERY

By working closely with residents from the Lancaster West Residents' Association and [Built-ID](#), the team were able to use their digital platform to inform emerging designs and considerations for regeneration plans. For example, through the app, residents were able to express interest in a range of green skills, employment and training initiatives, as well as sustainability learning options. That data was used to inform and validate the development of an employment and training hub, working with eight local partners, as well as their inhouse Green Skills Academy.

RESULTS

Through transforming the [WeAreW11 app](#) and adding new inclusive and accessible features, RBKC received 3,981 visits to the platform during the consultation period, and increased their online readership on Instagram from 829 to 6,716 reel views.

The digital employment and training survey received 75 completions, and further profiled their online presence and accessibility.

Through online promotion, they received over 200 attendees to their employment and training fair, 83 attendees to three in-person engagement events between September 2022 and February 2023, and were enabled to complete 207 co-design surveys across three projects.



Lewes District Council

Local Planning Authority
Lewes District Council

Project type
Piloting a central hub for the local community

Consultation dates
July – October 2022

Funding from PropTech Innovation Fund
£112,500

Link to project report
[Lewes District Council report](#)

THE PROJECT

Lewes District Council aimed to address feedback from residents that they do not feel listened to or involved in change, by piloting a blended, place-based central hub for the community. The project sought to increase access information, facilitate meaningful civic engagement and build trust with the local community in relation to Newhaven’s regeneration and planning programme.

THEIR APPROACH

The council recognised the opportunity to procure a comprehensive **digital platform** that would combat the current limitations of their existing website for publishing information and gathering ongoing data. To do so, the council partnered with **Commonplace** utilising their platform to gather residents’ insights through a blended hybrid approach.

The council engaged in partner discussions and conducted user-testing with local students and resident groups to develop the digital platform which included multiple surveys and an **introductory animated video**. To maximise reach, the pilot employed an incentivisation scheme in addition to a social media push, reaching over 20,000 people and generating 382,505 impressions. In tandem to this, drop-in sessions and community events sparked conversations and provided valuable feedback.



RESULTS

One of the primary aims of this pilot was to reach a younger demographic given that previous consultations have seen over 90% of respondents being 35 and over. To do so, the project team conducted a youth survey which received a large number of responses (399) primarily from the target age groups: 38% under 15, 8% aged 16-24, 8% aged 25 and above, and 28% with unknown ages.



CONCLUSION

This case study highlights how hybrid engagement utilising innovative digital tools have proven to successfully increase diversity and inclusivity in planning consultations. The varying digital tools adopted by each of the three pilot projects highlights the value of digital tools and tailored approaches to foster diversity, accessibility and representation in planning consultations.

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

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.

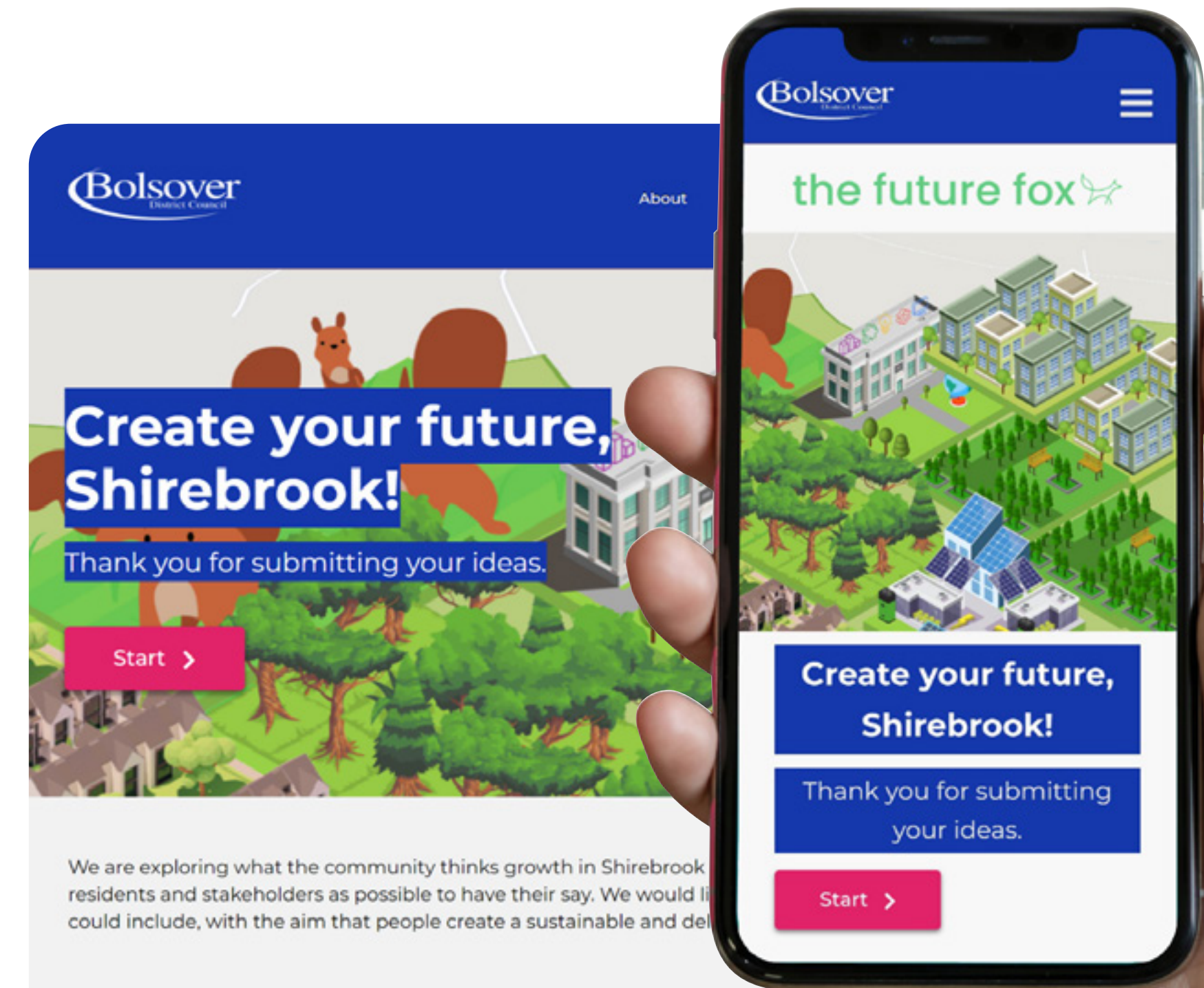
THEIR APPROACH

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.

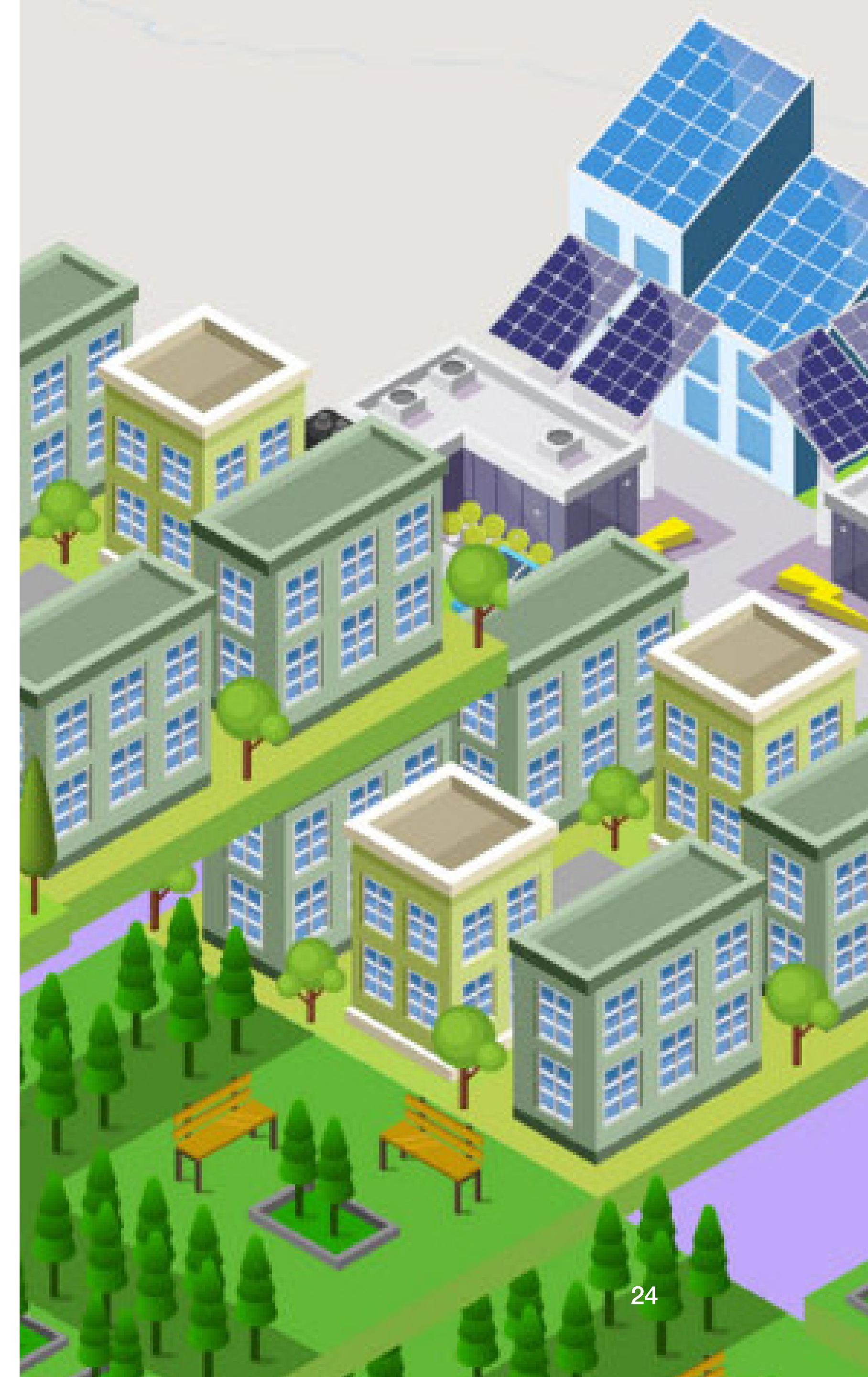


CONCLUSION

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.

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How the adoption of digital tools increased the number of responses to planning consultations

THE CHALLENGE

Local authorities have reported that gathering and analysing consultation responses, as well as providing bespoke feedback to respondents, is traditionally a time consuming and resource intensive process. It typically involves extensive manual data entry, analysis and administration, which following a nine month consultation period, can take up to 450 days of officer time to process each consultation. The lack of feedback loops also means that communities have limited visibility of how their input influences decision-making. This can lead to frustration and reduced trust in local authorities' budgetary decisions.

This case study explores the impact of pilots across Round 2 of the DLUHC PropTech Innovation Fund on reducing officer time and resources in three local authorities, [Harborough District Council](#), [West Oxfordshire District Council](#) and [Stevenage Borough Council](#). Their projects explored how digital tools and technologies could streamline processes, automate data collection and analysis and facilitate more efficient communication channels between communities and local authorities.



Harborough District Council

THE PROJECT

[Harborough District Council](#) received funding from the DLUHC PropTech Innovation Fund to encourage greater public engagement in their planning consultations. The council aimed to make their existing planning software more user-friendly enabling a broader range of community voices to be heard.

THEIR APPROACH

[Harborough District Council](#) worked with their existing technology software partners [OpusConsult](#) and [Opus Maps](#) to enhance their [digital platform](#). To improve accessibility and user experience, the digital tool was made accessible on handheld devices, and layout and formatting changes were implemented including introducing innovative question styles such as Likert scale representations and tick box selection answers.

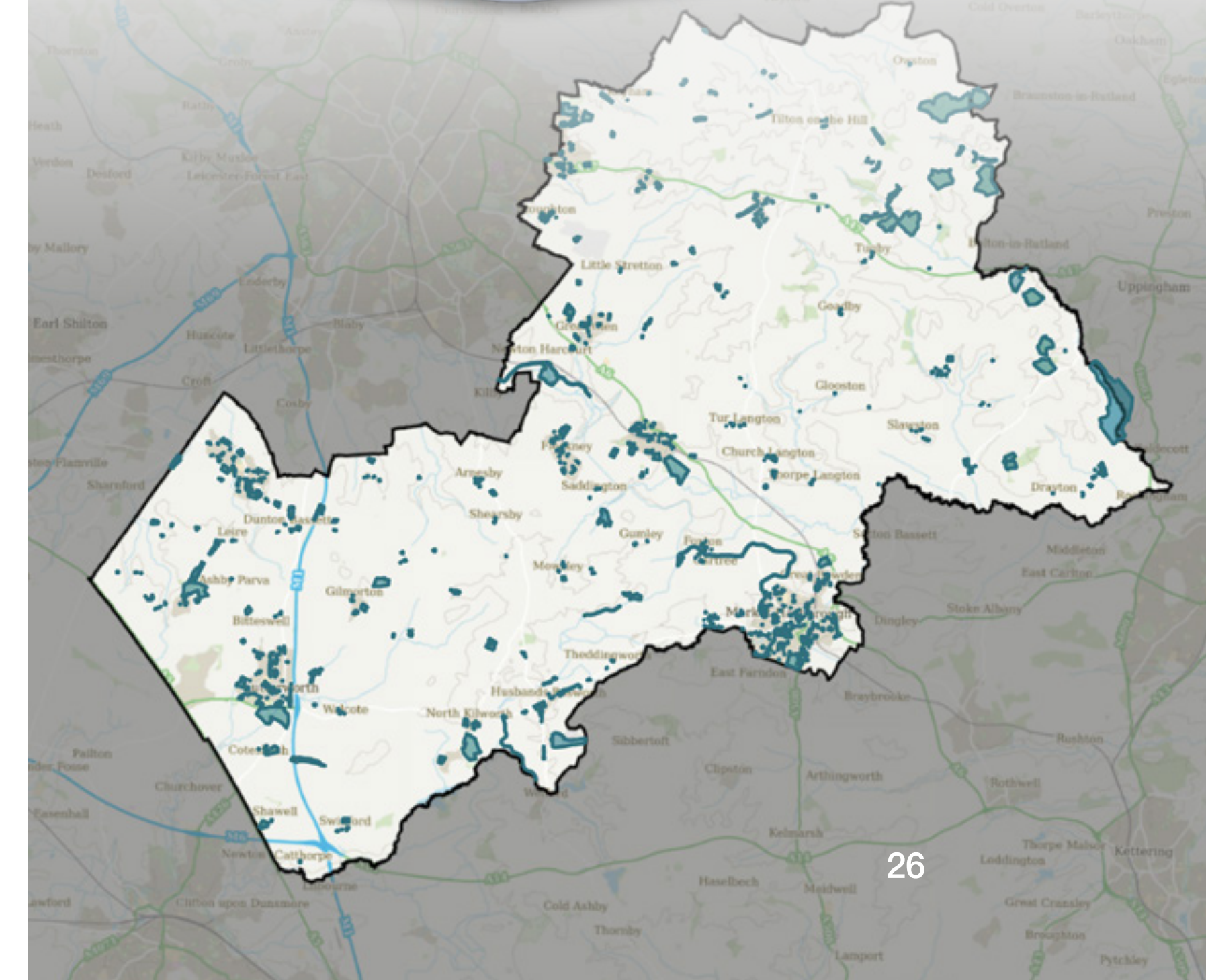
Additionally, the platform was also transformed to provide interactive information about planning restrictions, constraints and policies. The introduction of automated constraint searching proved to be a significant innovation, offering efficiency gains.



Results became more instantaneous and automated, thanks to the use of spatial data and additional field types. For example, it became easier to determine if a site was located in a flood zone. Furthermore, the implementation of secondary ID fields allowed the reuse of the same form across multiple subjects, streamlining processes.

RESULTS

[Harborough District Council](#) emphasised the significant advantages of this piloted approach, stating “The greatest benefit of this project is potentially the saving in terms of time spent on analysis and providing bespoke feedback... it’s envisioned that on average officer efficiency saving would be around 2 to 2.5 hours per week”.



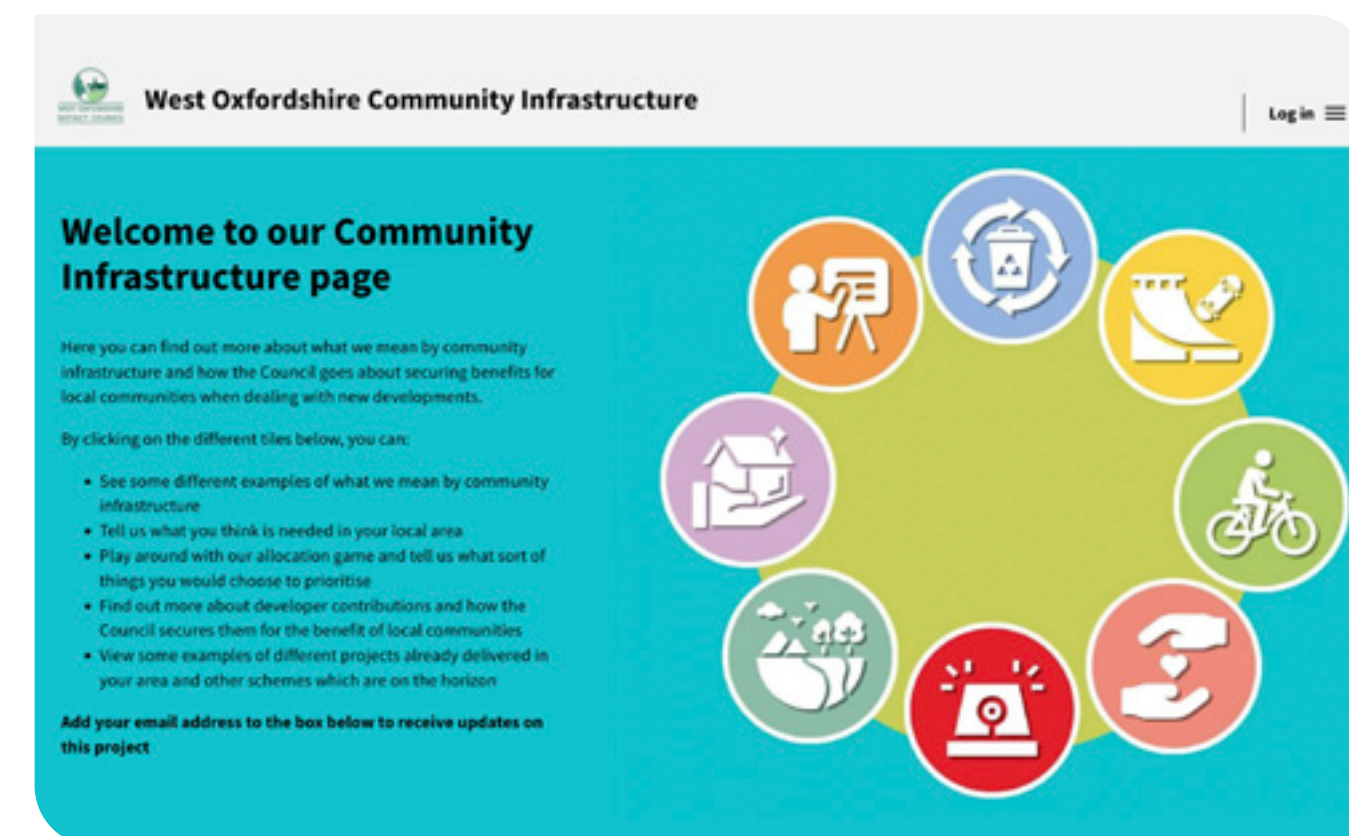
West Oxfordshire District Council

THE PROJECT

[West Oxfordshire District Council](#) aimed to implement a new digital engagement platform to create a more transparent, engaging and interactive approach towards the identification of community infrastructure priorities and funding opportunities.

THEIR APPROACH

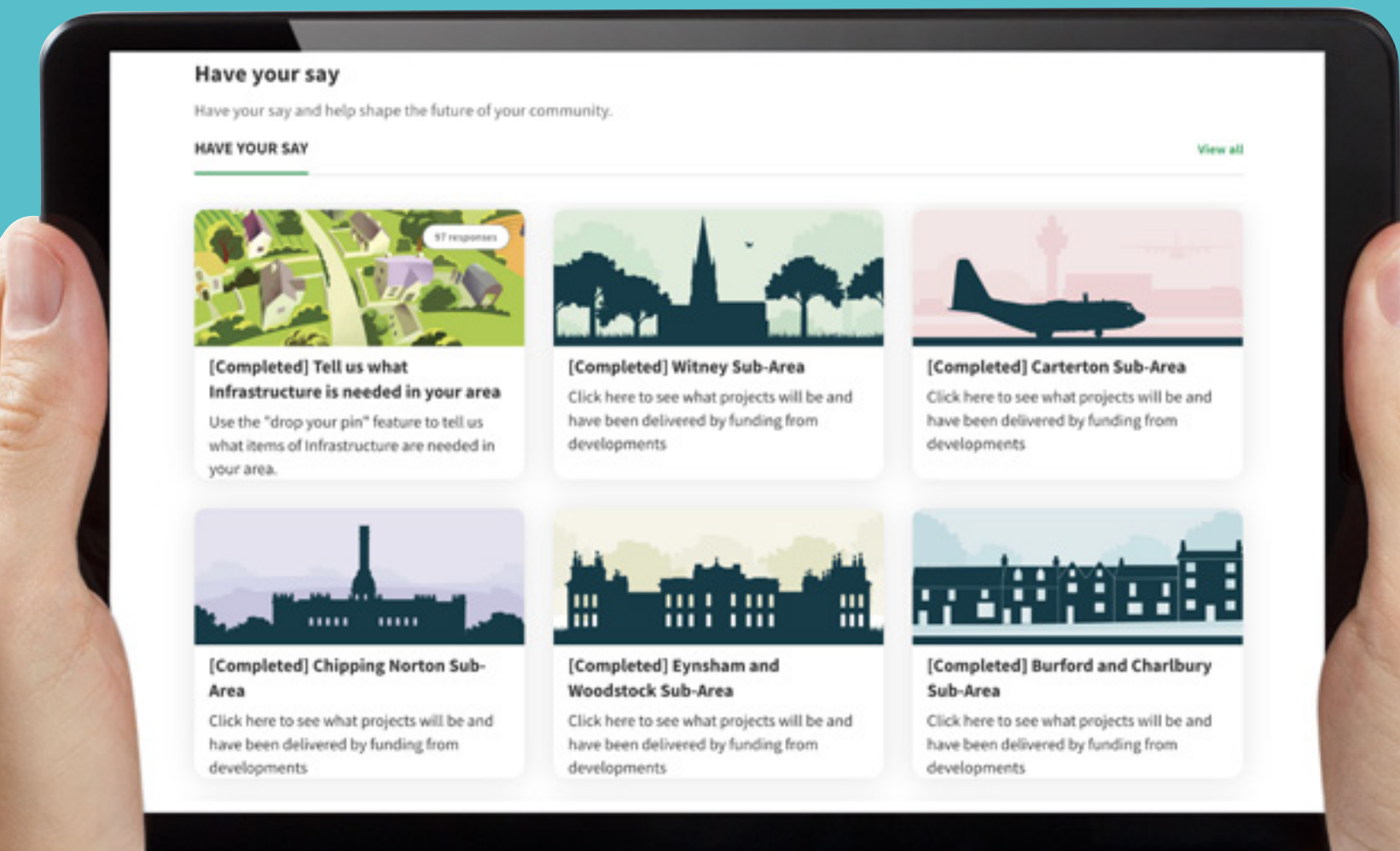
To achieve these goals, the council designed map-based and gamification elements, empowering individuals to use a simple “slider” tool to express their preferences for allocating available infrastructure funds on the [Commonplace digital platform](#). Strong visual content and design and the use of simple language were employed to engage a diverse audience.



RESULTS

The combined methods resulted in significant resource savings despite a large increase in consultation responses. The council witnessed a shift in consultation feedback methods with only 20% of responses received through letters and emails, previously the significant response methodology. The council stated “This has saved us weeks, even months [of officer time]. We estimate that this change has resulted in a 40% reduction in officer time required to manually input this information”.

Furthermore, analysis of responses became quicker, more efficient and provided the council with robust, transparent and up-to-date understanding of local community development priorities. For example, the data collected through the interactive map where users could pinpoint and express their needs in specific areas will be used alongside other evidence collected to support the council’s forthcoming Local Plan review. This will be used to help shape the future growth and development of the district until 2041.



Stevenage Borough Council

THE PROJECT

[Stevenage Borough Council](#) recognised the opportunity digital tools presented to engage the community in the planning process. The council aimed to use funding received from the DLUHC PropTech Innovation Fund to explore digital solutions which could be the building blocks of an ongoing engagement cycle which would enable a cooperative relationship with local communities.

THEIR APPROACH

Stevenage Borough Council partnered with [Novoville](#) on their [Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme](#) to gather feedback on what residents would like to highlight within their local neighbourhood. The council used a hybrid approach, with Novoville’s digital platform along with face-to-face engagements.

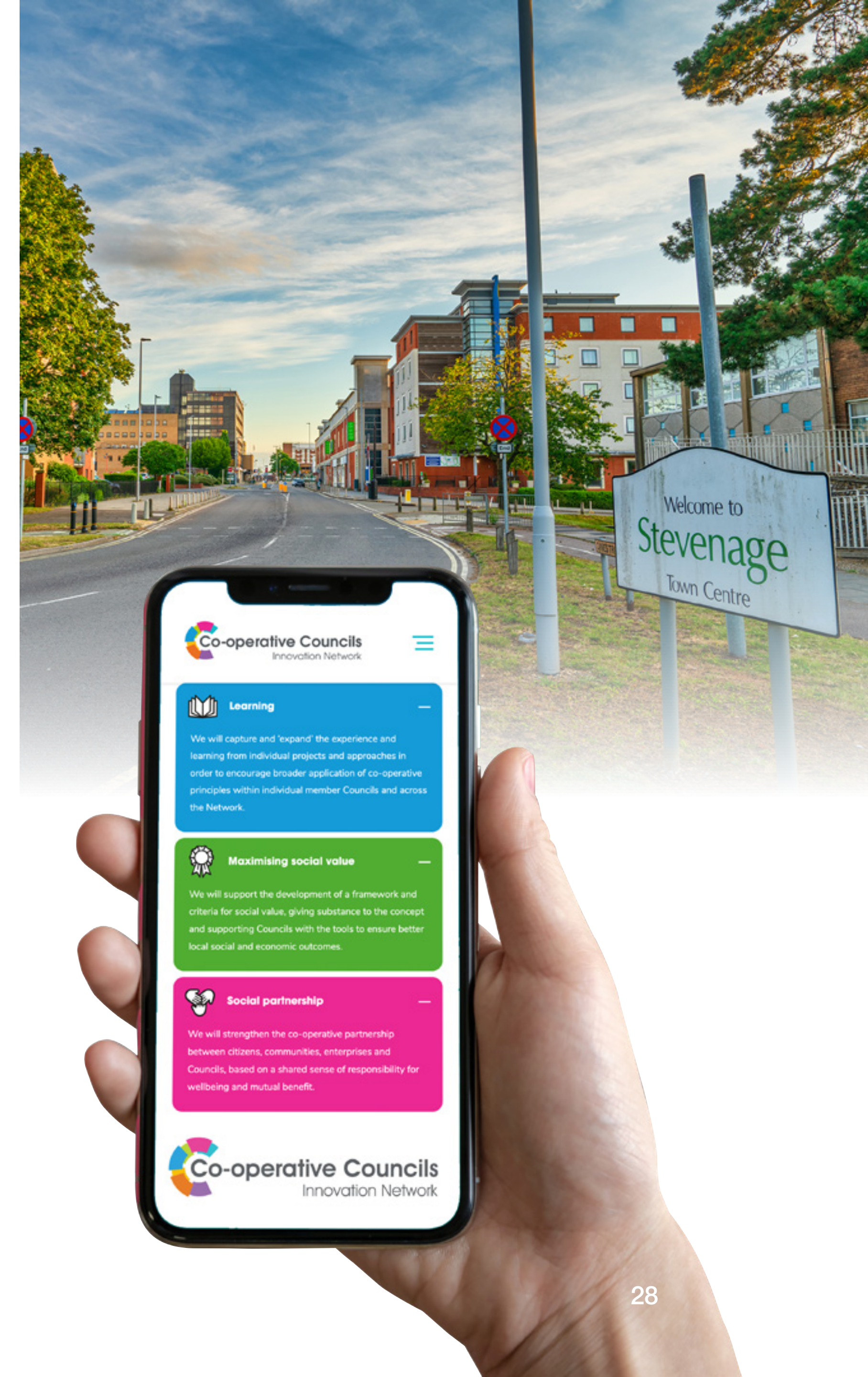


RESULTS

The adoption of digital tools as part of a hybrid engagement approach resulted in significant improvements in community involvement and resource efficiency. Previous consultations which had minimal digital elements required approximately 117 hours of officer face-to-face engagement, resulting in 487 consultation responses. Through adopting a hybrid engagement approach in this pilot the council received over 1,900 responses requiring only 40 hours of face-to-face engagement.

The council outsourced analysis to Novoville to save time, whereas historically, council officers would conduct in-house analysis of representations – taking up to 50 hours to analyse 487 responses.

By utilising supplier expertise the council were also able to produce customised reports via a dashboard. This ability to thematically analyse results enabled a more comprehensive understanding of local residents’ views.



CONCLUSION

These three pilots spotlight how the adoption of digital tools can lead to positive outcomes in terms of time and resource savings, as well as improving community engagement and transparency. These digital initiatives have successfully streamlined processes and automated data collection and analysis, optimising officer time and resources.

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