

Local areas to trial new digital initiatives to make planning process more accessible

Innovative digital tools to help local people have their say in the planning process will be trialled in 13 areas across England, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced today (22 October 2021).

Over £1 million of government funding has been allocated to 13 planning authorities under the PropTech Engagement Fund to test new digital initiatives to make the planning process more open and accessible and boost public engagement.

The selected projects include:

- The London Borough of Hounslow will create an online 3D map, helping residents to visualise and comment on proposals.
- Watford Borough Council will develop a QR code system for residents allowing them to view an interactive map and access planning information.
- Greater Cambridge Shared Planning will use digital technology to capture views outside of the formal consultation process, including social media comments, media articles and blog posts.

The pilots, which will run until March 2022, will inform the government's work to modernise the planning system and the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Communities is working with planning authorities to establish best practice and identify where further digital guidance and innovations are needed.

These initiatives are also aimed at encouraging groups typically underrepresented in planning decisions – like renters, young people and those from black and ethnic minority communities – to make their voices heard on planning in their area.

Minister for Housing Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

We want to use digital technology to make the planning system fit for the 21st century and empower people from all backgrounds to get involved in decisions that impact their communities.

From scannable QR codes giving people local planning information straight to their mobile devices, to interactive online maps, these digital pilots will help us create a more accessible and transparent system and ensure people are informed, engaged and can have their say.

The planning authorities that will receive funding are: Dacorum Borough Council, Chesterfield Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, Southampton City Council, Greater Cambridge, Stockport Council, London Borough of Hounslow, London Borough of Wandsworth, Dorset Council, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, Watford Borough Council, Bolsover District Council and North Lincolnshire Council.

The PropTech Engagement Fund was launched in August 2021. Local planning authorities were invited to submit bids for up to £100,000 to run pilots to boost engagement in Local Plan consultations, better publicise proposed developments, or to analyse consultation responses.

Feedback from the pilots will help the department understand how best to support councils to adopt digital planning tools across the country.

A breakdown of the local planning authorities that have been allocated funding and the amount they have received is below:

- Dacorum Borough Council – £100,000
- Chesterfield Borough Council – £100,000
- Cotswold District Council – £53,193
- Southampton City Council – £100,000
- Greater Cambridge – £98,250
- Stockport Council – £90,000
- London Borough of Hounslow – £100,000
- London Borough of Wandsworth – £30,000
- Dorset Council – £95,000
- London Borough of Barking and Dagenham – £100,000
- Watford Borough Council – £99,975
- Bolsover District Council – £100,000
- North Lincolnshire Council – £100,000