

Opening & Context Setting

Why we're here

- Welcome to the Planning Data Specifications Open Standards Community Group.
- This replaces earlier advisory groups and drop-in sessions – an open, structured community space.

Purpose of the community

- To co-create effective, system-agnostic data specifications for the planning system.
- To involve the community in resolving design issues, testing, and prioritising next steps.
- Emphasised this is a “new step” in government—engaging stakeholders before mandating and legislation.

Illustration with Water Standards

- Used a drinking water analogy: We trust water is drinkable because of known standards.
- Point: Standards underpin trust and usability— the same applies to planning data.

Planning data goals

- The aim is to produce open, reusable, modular data specifications across the entire planning permission process, not just submission forms.
- Specifications are based on existing legislation and policy.

Development approach

- Working iteratively:
 - Start with working drafts, test and refine.

- Move to candidate status, then mandate as legal standards via legislation.
- Target: Mandating by Autumn 2026.

Call for engagement

- Need evidence-based feedback.
 - Encouraged participants to share what they're working on and flag gaps in participation ("Tell your friends" principle).
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Specification Development Update

Submissions work

- Published working draft specifications as information models (human-readable).
- Gathered community feedback and made substantial improvements:
 - Corrected field types and logic.
 - Added missing fields (e.g. BNG exemption reason).
 - Improved alignment with GLA feedback (e.g. residential units module).

Declarative Model introduction

- Moving from information models to declarative models (machine-readable, rule-based).
- Declarative models specify:
 - Field types and constraints.
 - Code lists.
 - Module logic (e.g. conditional fields).
 - Components for reusability and consistency.
- Helps with validation, automation, maintenance, and tooling.

Current state

- Completed:
 - 6 of 21 applications
 - All 82 modules
 - 50 components
 - 406 fields
- Next: work on code lists, application types, and rationalisation.

Request to the community

- Help test the declarative model.
- Provide real and edge-case test data.
- Share how you want to use the specs (e.g. validation, form building).
- Suggest improvements, with evidence.



Decisions work (new phase)

- Just starting on specs for planning decisions (i.e. outcomes).
- Decisions data is valuable: helps connect the process start to end and supports analysis.
- Kicked off by revisiting the 2022 draft.
- Starting with research and community input before defining models.

Ask for support

- Volunteers wanted for research interviews.
 - Requests for use cases and fields you rely on.
 - A survey will be shared soon.
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Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) Discovery Project

Project background

- GMCA has MHCLG funding for a discovery project on planning application data.
- Working in partnership with the Greater London Authority (GLA) to see if the London Planning Data Hub model can work outside London.

Scope & collaboration

- Aim is to develop a shared planning data infrastructure with:
 - Local authorities (10 in GMCA)
 - Back-office providers (IDOX and Arcus)
 - Planning Portal
- Working with consultancy Atkins on data storage and dashboarding.

National Standards Alignment

- Initial plan was to develop a GM-specific schema.
- But because Salford is an early adopter, and GMCA needs all 10 authorities aligned, the team decided to:
 - Delay schema development
 - Align closely with national specifications to avoid duplication and delays.

Project aim

- Build a connector for planning data, with:
 - Open data feed
 - Geospatial fields (via JSON)
 - Dashboard visualisation of planning application data
- Support both local monitoring and national reporting.

- Designed to **reduce reporting burden** on local authorities.

Stakeholder engagement

- Engaging a wide range of actors:
 - Back-office vendors
 - Planning Officers Group (POG) as internal GMCA sounding board
 - Mapping out who adds/accesses data at different stages of the planning process.
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Digital Planning Register ODP Project

Project overview

- Leading work on the Digital Planning Register (DPR) as part of the Open Digital Planning (ODP) stack.
- Goal: a **searchable, publishable planning register** to meet legal requirements and support future functionality (e.g. enforcement).

Technical evolution

- Started with a Digital Site Notice prototype using Camden and Lambeth APIs.
- Moved to DPR by reading directly from **BOPS**, the back-office planning system for ODP.

Data challenge

- Recognised a major **legacy data problem**:
 - Needed to standardise and ingest data from multiple systems (not just BOPS).
- Led to development of the ODP schema, including a **post-submission section**.

DPR Tools

- Building a suite of tools called “DPR Tools”:
 - Allow mapping/migration of data from any source into ODP schema.
 - Output an Open API using MHCLG-compatible standards.
- Goal is not to enforce use of ODP schema, but to:
 - Make it easy to map into it
 - Facilitate migration and interoperability

Strategic insight

- Acknowledged the “XKCD 927 problem” of proliferating standards.
 - Framing ODP schema as a **bridge** between existing formats and MHCLG-approved specifications.
 - Aim is **pragmatic transition**, not a big bang shift.
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Questions and Answers

Dan (Architectural background)

Q: How do these specifications relate to IFC or other design data schemas?

We rely on community to tell us what schemas matter; IFC may be too detailed at this stage.

Now that we’re moving to declarative models, it’s a good time to start **one-to-one mapping** with existing standards.

Jenny

Q: Has the aim shifted away from other application types like listed buildings and adverts?

No – the updated aim **broadens** the focus from just submission forms to the **whole planning process**, not narrowing it.

Nick

Q1: Will there be a decision schema?

Yes – just starting. Seeking input.

Q2: Why model the change in housing units (delta) instead of capturing existing + proposed?

Agreed – that's a legacy from current forms. Declarative models can shift burden off applicants and ensure accuracy.

Chris

Q: Will you use a more formal declarative language with semantics?

Possibly in future. Current model prioritises usability and tooling; open to suggestions.

Q: Is this based on a known grammar?

Based on the planning.data.gov.uk approach, but could evolve.

Mel

Q: Will building control data also be standardised?

Yes, it's on the roadmap but timing is unknown. We're mapping the broader landscape to prioritise what's next.

Chris (on DPR tool presentation)

Q: Are you considering ISO 23386 (linked to construction/BIM interoperability)?

Not yet, but noted and will investigate.