Key Points from Community session on 20/8/25

1. Introduction

The team reiterated project's core aim:

to develop open, reusable, and modular data specifications to define the data underpinning the planning permission process.

This modular approach is like creating "Lego bricks" that can be combined to build a digital planning system.

The community's role is to help co-create these specifications, ensuring they are robust and effective before they are mandated in law. This includes helping to prioritise future work and acting as a central hub for sharing and supporting other projects across the community..

2. Discussions on Submissions Data

The team has transitioned from initial information models to machine-readable declarative models.

This is seen as a huge step forward as it can allow for, amongst other things, automatic validation of data payloads.

Tools built on the declarative models are already proving useful, such as an integrity checker and a generator that automatically keeps information models in sync with the declarative models.

Community Feedback:

The community's most significant request is for the team to take the individual declarative modules and combine them into a single, standardised JSON specification that represents an entire application payload.

This would serve as an exchangeable format and provide clear rules for how the modules fit together, reducing ambiguity and preventing the emergence of multiple, slightly different proprietary approaches..

This approach is compared to the success of Open Banking, though some note that planning has a much wider scope.

Concerns were raised that an overly rigid schema could constrain innovation and that a phased version control might be needed to balance stability with flexibility. The team was asked to provide a clear version control and evolution methodology for the standard to avoid breaking existing systems when changes are made.

A request was made to create a standardised list of "work types" or "proposal types" to which the conditional logic could be attached. This would allow a system to ask only the relevant questions for a specific project (e.g., a loft conversion) and

avoid irrelevant ones. This more dynamic approach is needed to avoid "form fatigue."

A request was made for a spreadsheet version of the specifications to make it easier for non-technical users to provide field-by-field feedback.

There is a request for a TypeScript/Zod/Typebox version of the specifications for developers.

The team was asked to explore how to handle attachments, with a move towards GeoJSON content and mapping references instead of PDF plans.

A tool was requested to connect the national submission specifications to an LPA's specific local area requirements, allowing a system to ask for data relevant to a particular policy.

A critical request was to provide a "recipient party" or a test environment (e.g., a fake LPA or a national service) to which the community could send test applications. This would allow them to fully test their implementations of the new specifications.

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3. Updates on Decisions Data

This is in the pre-*working draft specification* stage for decision data, taking an evidence-led approach.

The early findings from the decision data project reveal that users need more than just the final outcome. The research shows a clear demand for granular, structured data to better understand the planning process and its outcomes. For example:

- Policy Analysis: There is a need for robust data to assess the impact of policy changes, as current high-level statistics are insufficient for detailed analysis.
- Process Transparency: Users want to track the planning process, including when documents are requested, when consultations happen, and how many representations are received.
- Structured Outputs: The community believes that decision outputs, such as conditions and officer reports, should be provided as data rather than just as documents (e.g., PDFs).
- Specific Data Points: Initial feedback has highlighted the importance of capturing data on residential unit numbers, as well as the need to decide whether to include consultation comments and a list of contacted statutory consultees.

Community Feedback:

The team was asked to clarify the scope of what they are calling "decisions data." The community suggests making a clear distinction between the final, legally-binding decision notice and the broader "post-submission data," which

includes all events and information collected after the initial application, such as validation timestamps, consultation details, and appeal information.

- Decision Notice: This should be a legal document, and care must be taken to not confuse it with procedural information.
- It should be minimal and include the application/scheme data as determined, conditions, and other supporting documentation as data rather than just PDFs.

There was a debate about whether to include comments from consultations, especially from members of the public. Concerns were raised about GDPR and the administrative burden of redacting sensitive information. It was suggested that these comments are often summarised in the officer's report, which could be a more appropriate data point.

A critical point is that key data, such as unit numbers, can change between submission and decision. It was suggested that we should be able to take snapshots of an application at any stage of the process (e.g., as submitted, as validated, as amended, as determined). This would provide a dynamic way to track changes in key data points, which can evolve over time and are crucial for subsequent monitoring.

The team was encouraged to standardise the data for conditions, as these are a critical part of the decision. This includes:

- Creating a body of standardised conditions that are reusable across different local authorities.
- Developing a standardised way to represent conditions in the data, even if the exact wording is amended by an LPA for a bespoke situation. The suggestion is to have a common code or identifier for a core condition type.

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4. Next Steps and next meeting

The community is asked to test the existing declarative models for submissions and provide evidence-based feedback on whether they work in real-world systems.

Fill out the short decisions data survey to help the team understand what information is most valuable and should be prioritised in the next phase of work.

People are encouraged to volunteer for research sessions to provide more detailed insights into what data is needed and how it will be used.

The team requests volunteers to provide updates on their own work and projects in the digital planning space during the next meeting. This helps the community see how the data standards are being implemented and supports a collaborative environment.