

Attendees: MHCLG, Defra, Natural England, Environment Agency, Historic England

Context for the meeting: Defra's spatial planning project in the openly published ODSC meeting notes and Historic England suggested joining up the conversations.

We confirmed the group's commitment to publishing notes from this meeting alongside other ODSC materials. The principle throughout the community work has been to publish everything openly. This serves transparency, invites participation, and demonstrates cross-government collaboration.

MHCLG planning data standards - current position:

- 400+ data fields defined across planning application forms, organised into 82 data modules covering submission and decision specifications.
- The submission spec is at or near candidate status, ready for handover into the mandation process
- The decision spec is between working draft and pilot. It will be mandated on the same statutory instrument timeline as submissions, but is likely to continue to iterate.
- DMSF (funded supplier engagement) has five major back-office suppliers doing RAG analysis of the 82 modules and 400+ fields against their systems. Next phase: understanding effort to become compliant and potentially pushing test payloads through systems.
- Current quarter ending; next quarter (from April) will focus more on understanding implementation, such as showing standards in working environments, potentially building on Open Digital Planning community tools.
- The "don't break anything" constraint
 - Explained that up until this point MHCLG was not trying to re-engineer the current process.
 - The mandated standards are based on the existing forms and processes.
 - The intention has been to establish a baseline that can then be iterated and the Defra/statutory consultee work arriving now is well-timed to inform that iteration.

Statutory consultee data needs - key themes from discussion:

Location and designation standardisation:

Standardising how development sites are described geographically, plus creating an index of designations (SSSIs, flood zones, listed buildings, etc.) and converters between designation systems. Designations often sit outside planning teams' control even within their own organisations.

Business rules and triggers:

Codifying statutory consultation triggers as machine-readable rules - e.g. "if development polygon overlaps main river polygon, then consult Environment Agency."

Different rule types exist: geospatial overlaps, non-geospatial triggers (e.g. mining operations).

Standardising how these rules are described could enable automation and reduce inappropriate consultations. It was noted this would be "government describing legislation as business logic for machines to consume" - a fundamentally new thing for government.

End-to-end data requirements:

Questioned how far MHCLG has gone in understanding what each statutory consultee actually needs from the planning application to do their job.

Currently it's all manual, emails with documents attached. For full digitisation, "everything has to be data, there can't be a document attached to anything."

Automated triaging and multi-routing of consultations to the right ALBs is the goal.

Ensuring that the data flow is consistent rather than making separate technological interventions

Interaction and handoff patterns:

Standardising data alone isn't enough. The planning system is distributed across LPAs, ALBs, developers, and agents.

Without standardised interaction and handoff patterns between these agents, you don't fully realise the automation benefits of common data.

Historic England perspective:

Developing a new casework management system, but still receiving consultations via email and re-keying everything.

Key pain point: receiving consultations they don't need to respond to, and officers spending time working out why they were consulted.

Citizen data burden:

Defra proposed a useful heuristic: "*We should never expect a citizen to provide us with information that they're going to have to gather from another bit of government.*" e.g. flood risk questions on application forms could be answered by data rather than asked of applicants.

Working in the open: Community as a vehicle: Discussion about whether Defra and Historic England could use the existing ODSC community (~300 members: developers, planning consultants, LPAs, academics, statutory consultees) rather than creating separate engagement channels. Agreement that this makes sense, with this group developing into a statutory consultee subgroup under ODSC.

Next Steps

1. Reconvene in one month
 - a. MHCLG to schedule a follow-up for approximately late April.
 - b. All attendees invited to bring additional people from their organisation and invite others
2. Share existing statutory consultee research
 - a. Defra requested that the MHCLG statutory consultee report (produced ~1 year ago by another team) be shared with the group.
3. Establish this group as a statutory consultee subgroup of ODSC
 - a. Discuss and formalise the relationship with the existing community on 31st March,
 - b. Identify how to enable Defra and Historic England to engage through the community rather than creating parallel structures.
4. Items for next meeting
 - a. Develop a common workplan, for example
 - i. Identify common patterns for statutory consultation triggers
 - ii. Begin mapping the generic pattern (designation + geospatial/rule-based trigger → consultation requirement) across different statutory consultees, as a foundation for future data standards work.
 - b. Identify who is missing from other statutory consultees and make sure they are invited