

KEY POINTS

- The submission specification is maturing. The decision specification is the compliance anchor for mandation. Both need to reach candidate stage by 1 June 2026.
- When the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act powers are used, local planning authorities will be required to accept conformant submission data and publish conformant decision data. What happens in between will not be prescribed by the standards.
- The standards apply to the whole planning permission process, not just at submission and determination. Data accumulates at each stage and is standardized by the decision specification pulling it through.
- The enabling environment around the standards (policy, expertise, resource, and coordination) needs to be developed alongside the standards themselves. Guidance, change control, and infrastructure are all in scope for the next six weeks.
- The DMSF project covers 99% of the market. Suppliers are beginning to engage seriously with implementation questions, but clarity on what conformance practically means remains the critical blocker.
- Mandation is a foundation, not a destination. Change control, continuous improvement, and adoption support will be needed from the moment the standards are in force.

IMPACT ON LPAs AND SUPPLIERS

The session outlined how the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act creates the basis for obligations on local planning authorities. Section 84 allows the department to mandate approved data standards. Section 85 gives local planning authorities a power to require suppliers to provide data to those standards once they are in place.

When the powers are used, the obligations on local planning authorities will be twofold: to accept conformant application submission data, and to publish conformant application decision data. What happens to data in between those two points will not be defined by the standards, but the standards will create an upstream pressure on the systems that handle data throughout the process.

The team noted this is not a wholesale change to existing obligations. Local planning authorities already have a duty to accept forms from any source and to publish information on the public planning register. What will be new is the definition of the data expected to flow at those points.

The session discussed what a local planning authority may choose to require from a supplier as a logical consequence of the legislation. This could include a service to capture and ingest conformant submission data, a service to manage conformant data through the process, and a service to share conformant decision data in different views depending on the receiver. Examples of receivers include the national open data view, and bodies such as PINS who may require a more detailed private view for appeal purposes.

The team acknowledged that the specific subsets of the decision specification required for different views, including the open data public view, still need to be worked through. The national view and a local authority's own public view may differ in what data they include.

The team also noted that software supplier relationships are contractually held by local planning authorities, not by the department. The department's role is to provide clarity on what the standards require so that local planning authorities can have those conversations with their suppliers consistently across the market.

THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

The session introduced the concept of an enabling environment around the data standards. The standards themselves sit at the centre, but a set of surrounding conditions needs to be in place for them to work in practice.

Three overlapping areas were identified. The policy environment covers legislation, guidance, technical documentation and policy frameworks. The expertise environment covers the range of people needed to develop, implement and use the standards, including planners, data specialists, developers, suppliers and government policy teams. The resource environment covers budget, time, goodwill and trust.

Where these three areas overlap, coordination is needed. The community sessions are one mechanism for that coordination. Communication, alignment and navigating different positions are the core activities in that space.

At the centre, infrastructure supports the practical implementation of the standards. This includes things like validation tools, form generators and machine-readable specifications.

The community was noted as a direct manifestation of the expertise environment. The questions and challenges raised in sessions feed directly into both the standards and the wider enabling environment.

DMSF UPDATE

The Development Management Software Fund project brings together five local planning authorities, five back office suppliers, Planning Portal and MHCLG teams. The suppliers involved cover 99% of the current market.

The project is approximately nine months in and is moving through its phases collaboratively.

Phase one focused on discovery and alignment, with supplier and local planning authority pairs assessing their systems against the emerging standards using a RAG rating approach.

Phase two, now concluding, has focused on understanding and effort scoping. Suppliers have provided indicative estimates of the development time needed to reach conformance. Phase three is emerging and will focus on implementation planning, testing and early adoption activity.

The session noted a shift in focus within the project: moving from understanding what the standards mean towards understanding how the ecosystem can realistically implement them. Suppliers are increasingly engaging with implementation questions and there is growing recognition that standards adoption is the direction of travel.

Key challenges raised include uncertainty about what conformance practically means, concern that expectations may move ahead of technical readiness, and anxiety that the standards could be interpreted as requiring wholesale platform redesign. The team was clear that wholesale redesign is not what is being asked for.

The DMSF project is functioning as a live feedback loop from suppliers and local planning authorities into the data design and policy process. Implementation effort estimates gathered through the project will directly inform decisions on mandation timelines ahead of the consultation.

The next phase will focus on clarifying the implementation narrative, supporting realistic adoption planning, strengthening ecosystem alignment and beginning to move toward practical implementation and testing activity.

PLAN FOR THE NEXT 6 WEEKS

The six-week window between the session and parliamentary recess in July is the critical period for getting both specifications to candidate stage and the consultation document ready for approval.

The key milestones are as follows.

- 20 May is the final call for issues against the specifications. New issues raised after this point may be captured but cannot be guaranteed to be addressed before candidate stage.
- By 1 June, both the submission and decision specifications should reach candidate stage. Candidate stage means the specifications are stable enough to be considered for mandation. They are not frozen permanently, but changes will move into a structured change control process from this point.
- From 1 June, legal teams will be formally engaged in developing documentation. Draft guidance and consultation documentation will be produced around this time.
- From 14 June, the process of consultation sign-off begins. This involves internal departmental sign-off and ministerial sign-off. Documentation will be iterated through this period.

The aim is that by recess in July the consultation document is ready to be published. The team noted that publication itself is not within their control, but readiness is.

Within the policy environment, the team will produce draft guidance at two levels: technical guidance for those implementing the standards, and higher-level guidance for local planning authorities on what the standards will mean for them.

This will include developing practical support on procurement, covering what to look for in future contracts to ensure compliance with the standards which (this is already in progress in the programme). A consultation document and a piece of work on legislation implications, including the relationship with the Town and Country Planning Act and the planning register requirements, are also in scope.

Within the infrastructure environment, a prototype form generator will be developed. This will allow the standards to be rendered as forms comparable to the existing Gov.uk forms, demonstrating that the standards deliver what is needed without requiring people to engage directly with the technical specification.

AFTER THE 6 WEEKS

The team was clear that mandation is the end of the beginning, not the beginning of the end. A number of workstreams will continue or begin after the six-week window.

A change control process needs to be defined and documented. The team noted this should be more robust than the standard legislative formulation of "as updated by the Secretary of State from time to time." The complexity and interdependencies of the standards require a structured process that gives suppliers and local planning authorities confidence about how and when changes will happen.

The specifications are modular. Changes after mandation are likely to affect individual components rather than the whole specification. The change control process needs to be able to manage those discrete changes.

The community sessions will continue to capture needs and feedback that will feed into future changes to the specifications. Some changes will be minor and straightforward. Others may require more substantive work if they involve re-engineering how data is collected or structured at different stages of the process.

The team intends to accelerate adoption by working with other parts of the programme, including the software interoperability team and the local government reorganisation team, to position the standards as a foundation for wider work already underway.

A range of further infrastructure prototypes is being considered, including machine-readable specifications, reference implementations and data validators. How this work is mainstreamed beyond the data design team is a broader programme question.

The team confirmed that conversations have started with DEFRA and others, and that the June session will be led by DEFRA as an introduction to their vision for digital planning transformation and their data needs. Dedicated stream sessions on statutory consultee data are planned.