Open Data Standards Community: consultation special

Date: 25 November 2026

Where this fits

Digital transformation sits alongside the wider planning reforms. It is one of the ways those reforms are made to work in practice. The programme has learned that good products only go so far if the data underneath is fragmented.

The direction to around 2030 is common foundations: national digital infrastructure, common standards, and modern planning software, including AI. The work sits in three areas: data for decisions and plans, supported software and services, and turning reform into practice. Standards underpin all three.

The budget made two commitments for the end of 2027. First, the AI tool now being tested will be made available to all councils, if testing succeeds. Second, government will mandate the digitisation and publication of key planning documents as open data. That second commitment is about the four core datasets: Article 4 directions, listed buildings, tree preservation orders and conservation areas. It is related to this consultation but separate from it.

How we got here

- **Autumn 2024:** the work began with the forms.
- **Early 2025:** drafting in the open on GitHub began.
- **Mid-2025:** the specifications became machine-readable.
- **After that:** a period of proving with the community.
- **Early 2026:** big changes stopped, ahead of mandation.

The thinking moved a long way. It went from forms to data, from submissions to the whole process, from collection to publication through the national public view, and from describing data to checking conformance and compliance. **The team thanked the community for shaping all of it.**

The consultation

There are seven questions. They cover:

- the move to a data-led approach
- the list of application types in scope, which covers 97% of the types set out in legislation

- impacts on people with protected characteristics, because of the exemption for applicants who can't reasonably comply
- the scope and fields of the decision specification
- roles and responsibilities, including change control, publication and redaction
- existing data.

The consultation is about principles. Responses will shape the government response, which is expected in early 2027.

What came up

Many answers were "please put that in your response". That is how a point gets formally considered.

Paper and email. The forms will still be published. Where the exemption applies, it is the LPA's job to get the data into the standard. Agents who email applications to avoid a fee won't be pushed onto any particular service, because the duty is to meet the standard.

Rejection is not invalidation. The power to reject data that doesn't meet the standard belongs to the planning authority, not to suppliers.

Appeals. The intention is a seamless flow through to appeal. The Planning Inspectorate falls within the definition of a planning authority. This will be made clearer.

Data that changes before the decision. "Processing" is defined broadly and includes storing and maintaining data. The focus is on the points where data comes out of systems. This needs explaining better.

Wales. Planning is devolved. The powers to set standards exist, and Wales is being encouraged to use them. A supplier was concerned about the cost of running two solutions.

Existing data. People supported the principle, but were clear about the reality on the ground:

- digital maturity varies, and some councils still have microfiche archives
- one authority was quoted about a quarter of a million pounds just to scan its backlog
- some digitisation in the early 2000s was done badly
- any requirement needs thorough guidance and realistic timing.

Questions we owe an answer on

We'll answer these by email to all attendees:

1. Whether minerals, pipelines and major transport schemes are in scope.

2. Whether there is work on standardised paper forms that can be read automatically and turned into standard data.
3. Whether a combined application keeps one reference through to the decision.

The team also committed to answer, in the same email, any appropriate questions from the “chat”, but we encouraged them to be raised in the consultation also.

Next steps

- There's no session in December. The next date will be circulated soon.
- Consultation responses are due by 30 December.
- The government response is expected in early 2027. The aim is for changes to take effect by mid-2027.