

# Government announces 10 councils to test the use of digital tools in planning process

- £1.1 million grant fund to implement a 'pathfinder' programme across 10 councils to test the use of digital tools in the planning process.
- New system to use digital tools so planning proposals are more accessible and interactive.
- Part of Planning for the future reforms to harness the latest technology through online maps and data.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP has today (1 June 2021) announced a £1.1 million fund to test the use of digital tools and data standards across 10 local areas.

The planning white paper '[Planning for the future](#)', published in August 2020, proposed reforms to the planning system to streamline and modernise the planning process.

The pathfinder programme will look at the digital transformation of local plans which will increase community involvement and speed up the planning process.

By introducing a digital system that makes plans map-based and accessible online, local people will be able to engage with planning in their local area, which will help get homes built quicker.

Councils will test how existing local plans translate into the new system, including moving away from long text documents to an interactive map with accompanying annotation document, and the adaptation of existing site allocation policies into the proposed land categorisation format.

This will enable planners to understand the impact of proposed land designations and associated policy implications on land allocations and inform a wide range of policies across the reform programme.

Community engagement will continue to play a key role for ensuring that the right levels of growth are identified to meet the needs of the community. In the new system digital tools will be key for making planning proposals more accessible and interactive, supporting the ambition for more effective community engagement.

Housing Minister Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP said:

We are moving away from notices on lamp posts to an interactive and accessible map-based online system – placing planning at the fingertips of people.

Today's announcement will ensure the planning process will be brought into the digital age. Communities will be reconnected to a planning process that is supposed to serve them, with residents more engaged over what happens in their areas.

While the current system excludes residents, who do not have the time to contribute to the lengthy and complex planning process, local democracy and accountability will now be enhanced by technology and transparency.

Local Government Association Chairman Cllr James Jamieson said:

Councils want communities to be able to shape and define the area they live in, and support measures to enhance public participation in the planning process through a more digital service.

This will help to make the planning system more accessible and efficient, and we look forward to working with government to ensure that all residents can engage in the planning process.

Cllr David Ritchie, Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management at East Suffolk Council said:

East Suffolk Council is extremely pleased to be selected as one of 10 local authorities to test how existing local plans can adapt to a new approach.

We welcome this opportunity to engage directly with MHCLG and other local authorities to assist in informing and shaping a more digitised and interactive local plan process. We hope that this will not only increase community participation but will also speed up the planning process.

The 10 bids from local councils to be selected are:

1. Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council
2. Stratford upon Avon District Council and Warwick District Council
3. Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council
4. Dacorum Borough Council
5. Broxbourne Borough Council
6. Birmingham City Council
7. East Suffolk Council
8. London Borough Hounslow

9. Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
10. Ashford Borough Council

Bringing planning into the digital age will provide a range of exciting opportunities for PropTech companies to innovate and bring forward new ideas.

This project will build on the work of the United Kingdom government that has helped millions of people continue to provide for their families as part of its [Plan for Jobs](#) to protect, support and create employment.

The [planning white paper](#) committed to working with local authorities to test the proposals, and the use of digital to help.

## **Conversion of Local Plans**

Local councils will test how existing local plans translate into the new system, including moving away from long text documents to an interactive map with accompanying annotation document, and the adaptation of existing site allocation policies into the proposed land categorisation format.

This will help us to understand the impact of proposed land designations and associated policy implications on land allocations, inform a wide range of policies across the reform programme and help to provide evidence for our work on local plan data standards and structural templates.

## **Data standards and site selection**

Data standards within local plans are key for increasing accessibility, transparency and improved decision-making in the planning process and wider planning sector. Local authorities are going to work, with the support of MHCLG, to develop and test data standards through the site selection process.