

# New digital tools to help residents have their say on local developments

Members of the public will be able to use innovative new technology to have a greater say in shaping and regenerating their communities, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) announced today (21 March 2022).

Over £3.25 million from the Proptech Engagement Fund will be spent on 28 projects across England trialing cutting edge digital tools to make the planning system more open, engaging and accessible.

The projects include using 3D interactive maps and virtual reality to help local people better envisage proposed new developments in their communities and encourage them get more involved in planning locally.

Modernising the planning system and using digital technology will help increase community participation in local decision making, including underrepresented groups such as renters and those from black and ethnic minority groups. By empowering communities and giving local people greater say in shaping their neighbourhoods, towns and cities in this way supports the government's efforts to level up across the country.

Minister for Housing Rt Hon Stuart Andrew said:

We need a modernised planning system which fully embraces digital technology to create places in which people take real pride.

By bringing the planning system up to date with the latest methods, we are ensuring that communities can have more of a say on the development of their town, city or neighbourhood.

The selected projects include:

- Watford Borough Council will develop a digital platform to help residents have their say on how to spend contributions from developers towards infrastructure in their community
- Walsall Council will use funding to encourage underrepresented community voices to have their say on the regeneration of Bloxwich and Walsall Town Centre, which are supported by the Towns Fund
- Plymouth Council, alongside South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council, will produce a set of interactive maps for residents to identify what infrastructure is needed in their local area

The pilots, which will run until September 2022, will inform the government's work to modernise the planning system and DLUHC is working closely with planning authorities across the country to establish best practice and identify where further digital guidance and innovations are needed.

Today's announcement builds on the launch of two Neighbourhood Planning pilots, which focus on boosting community planning in urban and deprived areas to help more people have a say over the future of their local areas.

The PropTech Engagement Fund was initially launched in August 2021. In October 2021, the Department announced 13 areas that received a share of £1.1 million in the first round of funding.

A breakdown of the Local Planning Authorities that have been allocated funding under the second round of the PropTech Engagement Fund and the amount they have received is below:

- Plymouth City Council (joint bid with South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council): £285,000
  - Newham Council: £125,000
  - Epping Forest District Council (joint bid with East Herts District Council, Harlow Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Essex County Council): £228,800
  - East Hampshire District Council: £40,500
  - West Oxfordshire District Council: £118,250
  - Watford Borough Council: £123,000
  - Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council: £120,000
  - Birmingham City Council: £65,500
  - South Cambridgeshire District Council: £117,000
  - Redbridge London Borough: £125,000
  - Haringey London Borough: £99,000
  - Waltham Forest London Borough: £69,500
  - Havant Borough Council: £83,450
  - Southampton City Council: £125,000
  - Harborough District Council: £125,000
  - Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea: £118,000
  - Epsom and Ewell Borough Council: £125,000
  - Runnymede Borough Council: £90,020
  - Lambeth London Borough: £92,164
  - Leicester City Council: £86,750
  - Stevenage Borough Council: £125,000
  - Wandsworth: £98,000
  - Cornwall Council: £125,000
  - Wirral Council: £92,950
  - Bolsover District Council: £95,800
  - Dacorum Borough Council (joint bid with St Albans City & District Council, Three Rivers District Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, Watford Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council): £121,750
  - Lewes District Council: £112,500
  - Surrey County Council: £121,187
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# New report confirms fluoridation can reduce tooth decay among children

- Benefits are greater for those in more deprived areas, reducing inequalities and helping level up oral health
- Health and Care Bill will cut bureaucracy and make it simpler to expand water fluoridation schemes

Adding fluoride to drinking water can significantly reduce tooth extractions and cavities among children and young people, according to the latest health monitoring report for England.

The findings, from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), show children and young people in areas in England with higher fluoride concentrations were up to 63% less likely to be admitted to hospital for tooth extractions due to decay than those in areas with low fluoride concentrations. The difference was greatest in the most deprived areas as children and young people in these areas benefitted the most from fluoridation.

Fluoride occurs naturally and is present in water and some foods in varying concentrations. In some areas with low natural fluoride levels, fluoride is added to drinking water, in line with safe limits, to improve dental health for children and adults as an effective and safe public health measure.

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care Sajid Javid said:

The evidence is clear: water fluoridation is a safe and effective measure to help improve our nation's oral health.

This report continues to highlight how fluoridation can help reduce cavities and tooth extractions among children, especially those in more deprived communities, helping us level up health across the country.

Through our Health and Care Bill, we will aim to make it simpler to roll out water fluoridation in more areas.

Around 10% of the English population lives in areas with water fluoridation schemes. These schemes cover much of the North East and Midlands and the North West, East of England and Yorkshire and the Humber. The report highlights that:

- In the most deprived 20% of areas, the chance of five-year old children having cavities was 25% lower in areas with a fluoridation scheme than in areas without.
- Five-year-olds in areas with higher fluoride concentrations were less likely to experience dental cavities than in areas with low fluoride

concentrations.

- Up to 56% of hospital admissions for the removal of decayed teeth among children and young people could be prevented in the most deprived areas through water fluoridation schemes.

Director of Public Health Analysis from Office of Health Improvement and Disparities John Newton said:

This report supports the view, as recently underlined by the UK Chief Medical Officers, that water fluoridation is an effective public health intervention for reducing the prevalence of tooth decay and improving dental health equality.

Tony Fletcher, from UK Health Security Agency's Environmental Epidemiology Group, said:

The environmental epidemiology team in UKHSA conducted analyses of data across English districts with varying drinking water fluoride concentrations. The results support previous findings that higher levels of fluoride are associated with improved dental health outcomes.

We found no new evidence to conclude there is a risk of general health harms at the water fluoride concentrations studied, which are all within UK regulatory limits.

There is no convincing scientific evidence that fluoride in drinking water at levels used in fluoridation schemes is harmful, whereas studies show that appropriate levels of fluoride can reduce the prevalence and severity of tooth decay in both adults and children.

Expanding water fluoridation is one aspect of OHID's ambitious agenda to tackle inequalities in health and care and support children's healthy development. A white paper setting out a plan to address health inequalities will be published by the Department for Health and Social Care later this year.

### **Additional information:**

- The Water fluoridation: health monitoring report for England 2022 report is available on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). The next report will be due by March 2026 at the latest.
- The Health and Care Bill will make it simpler to expand schemes by allowing decisions to be made centrally. Any planned expansion will be subject to the successful passage of the Bill, funding being agreed and public consultation.
- OHID and UKHSA have a duty under the Water Industry Act 1991 to monitor the effects of fluoride on people living in areas covered by water fluoridation schemes on behalf of the Secretary of State. They report on

this at least every four years.

- The UK Chief Medical Officers recently published a joint technical statement outlining the issue of tooth decay in the UK and the role of water fluoridation in improving the dental health of both adults and children. This statement is publicly available on GOV.UK, accessible [here](#).

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## Government Chemist contributes to food allergen guidance

News story

The GC team collaborated with experts to develop quantitative risk assessment guidance for food allergens



Selection of foods that can cause allergic reactions

### **Background**

Food allergen risk assessment (RA) is the use of information on the characteristics of unintended allergen presence in food to estimate the likelihood and nature of potential adverse effects experienced by consumers with food allergy, due to exposure in the consumed final product.

Quantitative risk assessment (QRA) of cross contamination by food allergens brings sharper focus to decision making in the subsequent risk management. This includes the interpretation of analytical findings, handling of potential food recalls and the management of precautionary allergen labelling. Allergen QRA exists in many different forms with different requirements placed on the risk assessor depending on the question that needs to be answered.

## Published guidance

Representing the Government Chemist, [Professor Michael Walker](#) is co-chair of an International Life Sciences Institute, European section, ILSI Europe Expert Group (EG) on food allergen QRA. The EG was created to attempt to achieve consensus on the methods needed for allergen QRAs by food business operators, and their implementation. An electronic workshop was held in October 2020 with representatives from a wide range of food allergy and allergen stakeholder groups. The workshop identified that a summary of current best in class guidance, identified gaps, potential improvements & harmonization of allergen QRA arising largely from cross contact would be very beneficial.

The EG have now published an introduction to allergen QRA and an overview of inputs potentially needed for different QRA methods, when deemed feasible and necessary. The paper also introduces the EG. Areas of focus include proactive assessments for food production under normal conditions, both in the upstream supply chain and in food production facilities, and reactive assessments as part of an allergen incident response. The paper offers insights into more detailed guidance for allergen QRA that will be published later in the year in open access as an ILSI Europe report.

The [paper is currently available as a pre-print](#).

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## [UK hosts NATO Multi-Domain Operations conference](#)

News story

Strategic Command and NATO Allied Command Transformation led discussions on the future of integrated military operations.



On 16-18 March, Strategic Command and NATO's Allied Command Transformation co-hosted the first-ever Multi-Domain Operations Conference in Oxford.

Multi-Domain Operations is about ensuring that military operations can be conducted seamlessly across all five warfighting domains – maritime, land, air, space, and cyberspace – and in a unified way with allies.

The conference gathered senior military representatives from NATO member nations, as well as experts from other government departments, industry, and academia.

General Sir Patrick Sanders, Commander of UK Strategic Command, said:

Being integrated with our NATO Allies has never been so important.

This conference was an excellent opportunity for Alliance members to unify our thinking on Multi-Domain Operations and the future of warfighting. We can't afford to get this wrong.

The UK was invited to host the conference so Alliance members could learn from the UK's approach to an integrated defence, a concept known as [Multi-Domain Integration](#).

Delegates at the conference had the opportunity to hear from experts on Multi-Domain Integration, digital enablement, and integrated training and culture.

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## [Ship safety: amendments to merchant](#)

# shipping regulations

I am making this statement for the purposes of paragraph 14 of Schedule 8 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. The instrument to which this statement relates does not substantively amend EU standards, but the provisions of Schedule 8 apply to a consequential amendment proposed to be made by the instrument to a definition contained in the Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998.

The proposed Regulations implement the findings of the review of standards for older passenger ships carried out by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) in conjunction with the Domestic Passenger Ships Steering Group (DPSSG), which is a group on which both government and industry representatives sit to discuss safety matter relating to domestically operating passenger vessels.

The review of standards for older passenger ships was driven by recommendations from:

- the Thames Safety Inquiry, which was Lord Justice Clarke's investigation into the Marchioness tragedy, where 51 lives were lost. The investigation and resultant recommendations considered scenarios wider than just that of the Marchioness tragedy itself, and covered a range of possible circumstances anticipated for passenger vessels more generally
- the Formal Safety Assessment Study of Domestic Passenger Ship Safety, published in 2005
- the Marine Accident Investigation Branch

The relevant recommendations from the Thames Safety Inquiry were implemented for newer non-seagoing passenger ships in 2010, but the more challenging task of doing a similar thing for older passenger ships has been carefully considered over subsequent years.

The proposed regulations cover aspects of the following subject areas:

- damage stability (survivability) – the main purpose of this measure is to keep vessels afloat long enough to evacuate them in an emergency
- life-saving equipment – except in the lowest risk areas, this is to ensure there are sufficient spaces in life rafts and lifejackets for all onboard. Vessels operating at night to carry lifejackets with lights
- fire detection – unmanned engine rooms on passenger ships and any passenger sleeping accommodation to be fitted with fire detection to the standard of BS EN54
- fixed firefighting – engine rooms to be fitted with fixed firefighting equipment
- powered pumps: passenger ships to have a means of pumping out bilge water without reliance on hand pumps. Following consultation, a requirement for powered fire pumps was dropped
- bilge alarm: to be fitted in all compartments containing propulsion machinery and in any other compartment where bilge water can accumulate



One of the potentially most significant aspects of these proposals is the damage stability, or survivability, element. The reason vessels need to meet adequate standards in this area is that in the event of an incident, it is vital to keep a vessel afloat for long enough for persons to ascend to the upper deck, don lifejackets and remain above the surface of the water while awaiting rescue services.

Vessels that do not meet modern standards can sink in literally seconds, resulting in persons being cast into the water and possibly trapped beneath a submerged hull. The death toll is expected to be high in such a situation, as passenger vessels can carry anything from 13 to 250 persons. This is a tragedy waiting to happen.

The other measures combat the risks associated with fire and flooding and provide more robust standards for life-saving equipment.

This is a package designed to provide a safety regime that ensures a high level of consistency in safety standards across the range of passenger vessels, so that the public can be assured that on whichever passenger vessel they choose to travel, safety standards on that vessel are fit for the 21st century.

It has been suggested that these measures target historic vessels and even those vessels known as “Dunkirk Little Ships” (DLS). However, the proposals focus on passenger vessels, i.e., those carrying members of the public, regardless of age. A few of these are historic in nature – others simply old – and a very small proportion of DLS included are subject to the measures.

No more than 2% to 3% of the pool of DLS are affected, as most DLS do not operate as passenger vessels.

The draft regulations are an important step forward to ensure standards for all UK passenger ships are suitable for the 21st century and to protect members of the travelling public. I am not prepared to see another tragedy on the scale of the Marchioness. A similar disaster, or one greater, would have an unacceptable social cost and have a damaging effect on the reputation of the tourist industry, which is so important to many areas of the United Kingdom.

The regulations are being published in draft 28 days before they are due to be laid for approval by each House of Parliament.

This is required under paragraph 14 of Schedule 8 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, because they make a consequential amendment to a definition that was substituted in the Merchant Shipping (Fire Protection: Small Ships) Regulations 1998 by the Merchant Shipping (Marine Equipment) Regulations 2016, which were made (in part) under section 2(2) of the European Communities Act 1972.

Further details are set out in the annex to the accompanying draft explanatory memorandum.

The [draft regulations, the accompanying draft explanatory memorandum and the](#)

[impact assessment](#) can be found on GOV.UK.