

Planning Data Standards Transition Discussion

Date: 3 February 2026

We held an **Open Data Standards Community** deep dive that we facilitated via Lean Coffee method

We had 65 attendees including local planning authorities (LPAs), software suppliers, and policy officers

The session was to obtain feedback on what were the concerns relating to the implementation of data standards for planning permissions. We co-created a list of topics to discuss and then explored the issues raised. This document captures a summary of the key themes with some details.

Historical Data Management

Overwhelming consensus emerged that attempting to retroactively convert **all** historical planning data to new standards would be impractical:

- One authority noted they lost significant data during a 2020 system migration, leaving pre-2020 records primarily in document form
- Multiple authorities highlighted the impossibility of standardising decades of varied decision-making terminology and formats
- Strong support for establishing a clear cut-off point, a 'line in the sand', with historical data remaining as archived legacy information
 - Depending on where this line is drawn is the impact and cost of converting old records.
 - Suggested we should consider the costs associated with the LLC digitisation work carried out by HMLR to understand the possible magnitude of costs to digitise.

Specific Historical Challenges

- Decision terminology varies significantly between councils and has changed over time within individual authorities
- Some historic applications lack recorded decisions entirely
- Conditions were sometimes managed via letters/emails rather than back-office systems
- Site locations for demolished or redeveloped areas create insurmountable data validation problems
- Reference number formats vary widely across authorities and time periods

Software providers points:

- Even with immediate development, rolling out changes to all clients may take 18+ months minimum

- Authorities take software updates at different paces based on resource availability
- Current testing (DMSF) contracts only cover submission standards; decision standards aren't in scope
- Risk of smaller/older software providers exiting the market rather than implementing changes
- One supplier questioned whether mandation includes authority requirements to adopt updated software, and who covers costs
- Risk that data collection requirements could slow planning process rather than speed it
- Particular concern for large/complex applications (e.g., 37-storey towers) where iterative changes multiply data maintenance burden
- Question whether granular detail appropriate for all application scales (extensions vs. major developments)
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Authority Concerns:

- Software upgrades typically require months of testing and validation
- One authority noted version upgrades historically break existing functionality, requiring extensive troubleshooting
- A single month implementation window was universally rejected as insufficient
- Authorities need clarity on what specific changes are required before estimating resource needs
- Training requirements for staff on new processes cannot be determined until changes are defined
- Hundreds of fields currently extracted from back-office systems for monitoring
- Established Power BI implementations and data pipelines serving multiple purposes
- PSI/PS2 quarterly returns already configured with existing field mappings
- Local plan monitoring and Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) built on current data structures

Resource Requirements:

- Updating queries to reference new field names represents "colossal work"
- Not all authorities have technical capacity for complex query rewrites
- Mapping between old and new standards should ideally happen at supplier level (one-to-many) rather than requiring each authority to map independently
- Concern that this burden falls disproportionately on smaller authorities without dedicated data teams
- Cannot estimate transition time without knowing scope of changes
- Every template, process, and workflow may need updating
- Potential for changes to break existing functionality requiring iterative fixes
- Need for pilot/testing period before wider rollout
- Consideration of staggered implementation rather than simultaneous national rollout
- Risk that data collection requirements could slow planning process rather than speed it

- Particular concern for large/complex applications (e.g., 37-storey towers) where iterative changes multiply data maintenance burden
- Question whether granular detail appropriate for all application scales (extensions vs. major developments)

Data Quality Monitoring:

- Systems to monitor compliance as applications arrive under new standards
- Feedback loops to identify and address quality issues
- Understanding that quality won't be perfect immediately – applicants need time to understand requirements
- Tools to validate data and support the transition period

Conditions & Amendments:

- Concern about maintaining data currency when amendments submitted
- "As per plans" specifications create re-keying burden if granular material data required
- Question of whether LPAs expected to extract and re-key information from drawings
- Historic conditions discharge via various methods (letters, emails) not consistently recorded

Legislative Change:

- Point-in-time references (e.g., Use Classes changes) create complications
- Standards need to accommodate policy evolution without breaking historical references

File Types & Formats:

- Need clarity on acceptable formats
- Integration with existing document management systems
- Storage requirements for data-rich standards

Cross-Boundary Work:

- Particularly valuable for local government reorganisation (LGR) where boundaries change
- Useful for regional data alignment and collaborative planning

Communications Requirements:

- What exactly is expected of authorities vs. suppliers
- Detailed timelines with realistic milestones
- Formal consultation process and how feedback will be incorporated
- Transition period duration post-mandation
- Comprehensive communications plan addressing both technical and process changes

Positive Observations

- This represents a genuine opportunity to solve acknowledged problems

- Standardisation enables interoperability that's currently severely lacking
- Migration between software providers would become significantly easier
- Planning system transparency would dramatically improve
- Foundation for future digital planning transformation
- Alignment across geographies would support LGR and regional planning

National-Level Benefits:

- Consistent decision-making data across England enabling benchmarking
- Appeal decisions and case law analysis made significantly easier
- PS1/PS2 automation and near-realtime reporting
- National picture of planning activity for government

Local Authority Benefits:

- Elimination of data re-keying between systems (e.g., from application to appeals, from submission to PS1/PS2)
- Granular permission details in usable format rather than locked in PDFs
- Improved monitoring for development management and enforcement
- Digital AMR monitoring and housing number tracking
- Condition discharge tracking and status visibility

Developer/Applicant Benefits:

- Consistency of approach across all authorities
- Reduced ambiguity in requirements
- Data flows through systems more efficiently
- Potential for automated status updates and process integration