



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Permission Data Standards Progress Report

January 2026

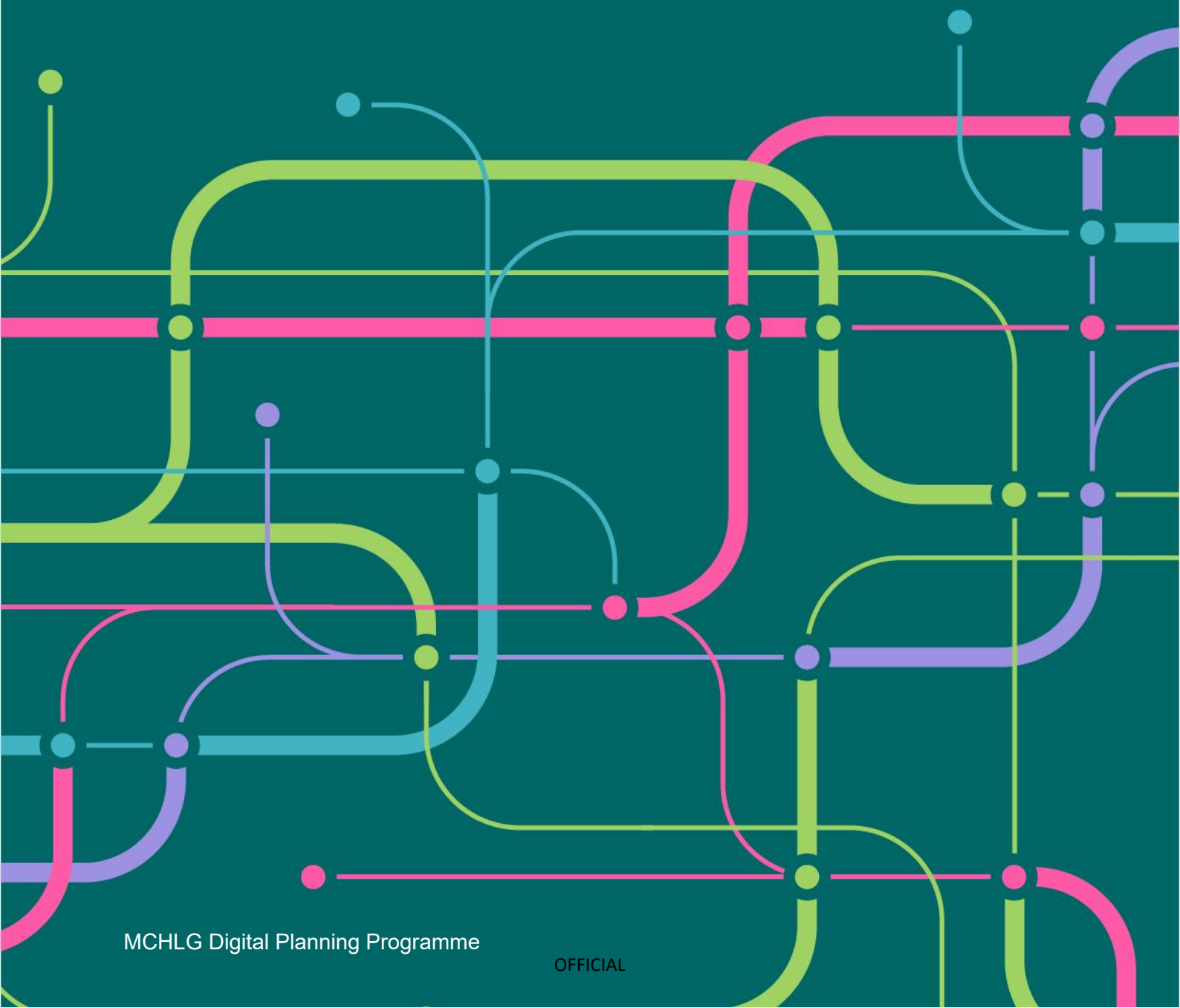


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MHCLG Digital Planning Programme

Digital Planning is a dedicated programme within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to modernise England's planning system and make it fit for the 21st century. We are scaling the foundations for digital transformation in planning that are critical to permitting 1.5m homes, delivering planning reform and the Government's Plan for Change.

Find out more: [The MHCLG Digital Planning Programme | Local Digital](#)

Open Data Standards for England's planning system

Our aims

Planning data is defined in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 as information which is sent to or used by planning authorities or for the purposes of planning or development.

To power a better planning system, MHCLG's Digital Planning programme are standardising key data that flow through the planning process making it more consistent and easier to use. This will create a national foundation for users across the public and private sector with clearer processes, faster decisions, better reporting, stronger digital services and opportunities for future improvement and innovation across the sector.

Our ways of working

[Data design](#) is the method that brings a range of data points, working practices and policy requirements together into a coherent, consumable system.

A national standard must work across the full ecosystem, reflect real operational practice and support all stakeholders who depend on accurate, structured information. We are designing data openly, collaboratively and iteratively, to build a shared, trusted baseline for how planning information is structured and exchanged.

Our approach to this work is to be 'open' by default, evidence-led, co-create iteratively with the sector and strengthen partnerships across government. Through the process, planning authorities and planners, software suppliers, statisticians, policy analysts, legal experts and others are closely involved, ensuring that future standards maximise the full value of each dataset for multiple users in the system.

Our focus areas

The planning process is often dependent on efficient exchanges of information between parties.

MHCLG's Digital Planning Programme has developed data standards for planning submissions and decisions first because they bring together many different contributors to the planning process and trigger numerous statutory activities to deliver positive planning outcomes for communities. However, currently data about these interactions is recorded inconsistently across local and central government bodies and the software products they use.

New standards are also being developed to support Local Plans created under the new plan-making system and Strategic Plans ensuring that future plans and policies can be prepared more easily and make them easier to understand and engage with.

Summary: Progress in 2025

In 2025, we've made significant progress to deliver:

- **an established, tested and repeatable process for creating and maintaining planning data standards**
- **a 'planning submission' standard** covering 22 application types has reached a sufficient stage of maturity to be approved and implemented. Major structural work is complete, and only minor refinements are expected. This gives local planning authorities (LPAs) and suppliers a reliable baseline to build from as mandation is prepared
- **a 'planning decisions' data standard** has a small, defined working draft informed by user research. Application records, decision notices and planning conditions now have early data models, forming the first step towards a structured, national approach to decisions

This progress has been enabled by:

- an active 'Open Data Standards' community, convened by MHCLG in 11 public sessions and subject-specific deep dives, advisory groups, research interviews and cross-government engagement with around 300 contributors
- co-ordinated analysis with LPAs and suppliers is underway through the [Development Management Software Fund](#) to understand where system adaptations might be needed for compliance. Initial feedback on proposed changes is being gathered to prepare mitigations and utilise best practice
- active participation from MHCLG's policy and legal colleagues, confirming a pathway for the mandation of submission and decision data by summer 2026

Our Progress

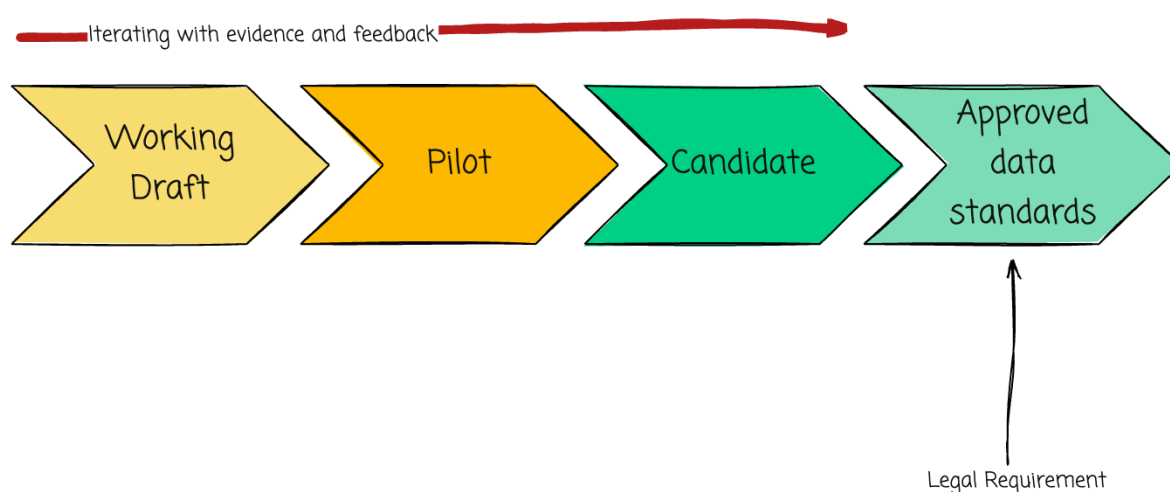
Establishing our process

In 2025, we established a rigorous, transparent and repeatable process for turning user needs into stable, machine-readable national standards. Our method provides the backbone for process re-engineering, improved reporting and the future evolution of digital planning services. It also helps ensure the standards are safe to mandate and sustainable to maintain.

The process includes:

A clear lifecycle for specifications

Every data specification moves through a strict maturity cycle:



Each standard progresses as it evolves:

Working Draft specification	Pilot specification	Candidate specification	Approved, open data standard
A preliminary version of a specification is still being actively discussed and developed.	This version is tested in real-world conditions with a small group, allowing them to try using the specification to identify issues and provide feedback, which can result in changes.	This version is sufficiently mature and stable to be recommended for approval as the final standard	This version is regulated under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 , requiring local planning authorities and their software providers to create and provide planning data in a consistent way.

This lifecycle provides clarity for suppliers, policy teams and LPAs, while giving assurance that what is eventually mandated is technically sound and operationally viable.

Co-designed, consensus-based specifications

We facilitate multi stakeholder engagement to define essential data attributes, ensuring the standards work for those who will create, use and rely on the data.

This significantly reduces downstream risks, including mismatches between legislation, operational practice and digital service needs.

Machine-readable models as a foundation for automation

In 2025, the work transitioned from human-readable conceptual models to machine-readable designs for submissions and decisions. This unlocks potential automation, reduces re-keying, and supports the generation of validation tools and consistent outputs.

Mandation of approved data standards

Mandating national planning data standards is a major system change. Work to date provides a strong foundation, but several enabling conditions will be important for successful adoption in 2026. These include:

- technical stability and clarity
- clear ownership and governance
- evidence-led implementation planning
- a national transition strategy for active and historic application records
- a functioning community governance model
- supplier and LPA readiness

A governance model for the future

The work highlights an important shift:

- moving from static form changes to dynamic, data driven specifications
- establishing codelists that need to have clear ownership
- implementing change control processes that balance flexibility with operational stability

Durable ‘Business as Usual’ structures will be essential once standards are mandated to manage updates carefully, ensuring the wider planning system can operate confidently and consistently across planning authorities, the development sector, software suppliers and central government.

These processes should support long-term digital transformation in the planning system, accelerating the implementation, integration, improvement and innovative uses for planning data standards as they evolve to meet changing needs.

Planning Submission data specification – candidate stage reached



[View the candidate specification](#)

Planning submissions are the first, statutory step in the planning process, from which all other decision-making processes flow. Applicants submit proposals for development or other types of land use change to a local planning authority so that it can be validated, reviewed, consulted and – ultimately – decided on.

The planning system has never had an open, stable, testable national model for submissions. The work done in 2025 creates that foundation and is a prerequisite for the next stages of reform.

In 2025, we delivered a structurally complete ‘Candidate specification’ for planning submissions.

How the submission specification was developed:

- baselining existing planning application forms, recreating [existing templates](#)’ purpose as structured data rather than redesigning the system prematurely
- iterative refinement with LPAs, suppliers (including the Planning Portal), and policy colleagues, so the model mirrors real operational needs
- moving from human-readable representations to machine-readable models, enabling consistent generation of JSON schemas, Excel views and automated validation tools

What is now included:

- coverage of [22 application types](#), organised into 82 modules and more than 400 fields
- community analysis that confirmed only minor adjustments are expected going forward, with the structure considered sound and stable

Why this matters:

- a Candidate specification gives suppliers and LPAs a reliable target for implementation
- machine-readable outputs allow systems to validate upfront, reducing invalid applications and unnecessary back and forth
- a stable input standard allows downstream processes such as consultation, analysis and decision making to become more automated and consistent

What to look out for in 2026:

- Project Support: Ongoing support for test implementations of the data standard through the of the Development Management Software Funding (DMSF) project with LPAs and suppliers.
- Project Support: Engagement with preparation for implementation of the funded DMSF project with LPAs and suppliers.
- Refinement: Continued support for the mandating process and specification refinement.
- Regulation: formal consultation and laying of regulations under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act to mandate use of the decisions standard. This will include further iterations to reach an approved standard based on final analysis, testing and feedback

Planning Decision data specification – working draft in progress



[View the working draft specification](#)

Unlike submissions, decision data has not previously had any consistent national structure (the application forms on gov.uk).

The planning system is moving towards a common language for how planning decisions are represented, enabling transparency and interoperability across the sector. 2025 was the first year in which we began to define what a planning decision is as a consistent, machine-readable dataset that can unlock downstream benefits and efficiencies in the planning process.

We've made progress to develop:

A research first approach

The decision specification is being designed from evidence, based on interviews, deep-dive sessions and user research with those who use and produce decision information. Decision data is recognised as more than a single outcome. It includes:

- the decision notice
- reasons for the decision
- planning conditions
- the application process log and timeline
- status updates such as invalid, withdrawn or extensions of time

The specification therefore reflects real operational needs rather than historic document formats.

Building the working draft:

- defined early data models for application records, decision notices and planning conditions
- began modelling the application log, which tracks consultations, actions and timelines
- started work on application status, including variations in real world practice across LPAs
- have begun integrating PS1 and PS2 return requirements, paving the way for automated reporting and reduced burden on LPAs
- ensured alignment with Open Digital Planning and legal colleagues on a legally valid, machine-readable digital decision notice

Where this leads:

- a minimal open working draft will be shared with the community by January 2026
- deep dive engagement will continue through Q1 to test impacts, validate structures and refine the model
- the intention is for decision data to be mandated alongside submission data in summer 2026
- as with all specifications, the model will continue to develop during mandation based on evidence and operational feedback

Why this matters:

- structured conditions for downstream processes such as Local Land Charges, enforcement and appeals
- clearer, more consistent information for applicants and consultees
- reduced manual interpretation of documents
- the ability to automate parts of decision making and reporting

What to look for in 2026:

- Research: Deep-dive research into decision requirements to test the draft
- Drafting: Publishing the initial working draft of the decision specification
- Refinement: Feedback, amendments, and expansion of the working draft decision specification
- Feedback: Gather structured feedback on the working draft; expand and amend the model based on evidence.
- Implementation: Initial MHCLG engagement regarding the impacts and implementation of the decision specification.
- Engagement: Continued, detailed MHCLG engagement on impacts and implementation.
- Finalisation: Final amendments to the initial working draft following engagement.
- Reporting: Delivery of a "State of Play" report for decision data.

Find out more and get involved

We encourage planners and other interested parties in the public, private and legal sector to get directly involved in finalising the data standards developed by MHCLG's Digital Planning programme in 2025 and shape the next generation of standards that will follow.

Get updates about our work to modernise the planning system:

[Read MHCLG Digital Planning blog](#)

[Follow the MHCLG Digital Planning Programme on LinkedIn](#)

Participate in our planning standards community:

[Read the open records of our standards journey](#)

[Join the Open Data Standards Community monthly calls](#)