



**RTPI
Research
Paper**

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Transforming Planning, Places and Scotland: The benefits of investing in a digital planning service

USER AND CUSTOMER IMPACT ANALYSIS

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We would also like to thank David Pendlebury and Adam Mason at KPMG¹ who undertook discreet pieces of work during the project which resulted in the economic impact analysis and the case study reports.

¹ KPMG is a global network of professional services firms providing Audit, Tax and Advisory services. They operate in 147 countries and territories and have more than 219,000 people working in member firms around the world.

2. Document Series

The Benefits of Investing in a Digital Planning Service research series is funded by Scottish Government. In commissioning RTPI to undertake this work Scottish Government aimed to explore the evidence base in implementing a Digital Planning Strategy through examining:

- the economic and societal benefits arising from digital transformation
- efficiencies that accrue within the planning system from investment in new technology and validation of the estimated cost and time savings
- the costs (financial and other) of not taking forward digital approaches across the planning service.

For this research RTPI Scotland has coordinated a programme of work analysing the need, demand and possible impacts of supporting a digital planning strategy. This comprises:

- An **economic impact analysis**, which was undertaken by KPMG, to assess the potential efficiencies that could be provided from a digital planning service
- A **user and customer impact analysis** setting out the benefits for planning authorities, planning applicants and communities
- A **policy impact analysis** setting out the range of policy ambitions that rely upon a digital planning service
- **Case studies**, which have been written by KPMG, analysing the impact that digital planning could have on Scottish Government aspirations on its net zero carbon targets, in tackling health inequalities and as part of post Covid-19 recovery.
- A **summary document** setting out the key findings across the papers
- An **infographic**

This paper provides the user and customer impact analysis.

3. Executive Summary

3.1 Findings

User and Customer benefits

Estimated **savings to planning authorities of up to £20.4m** in the implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 over 10 years

An estimated **£50.5m** arising from a 'digital dividend' if applied to the broader construction sector over 10 years

Potential income generation of **£5.5m** through introducing charges for using the e-development portal service over 10 years

Individuals and communities will be **better able to engage with the planning process** to further reinforce data available to planners to compound better data benefits.

Applicants will face a much more **streamlined application process**, which will incentivise investment through delivering more efficient engagement with the planning system

Planners will have access to **more and better data** and from greater levels of supported engagement of a useable quality

Planners will be able to **better understand the potential impact of plan options** on specific communities and their impact on strategic local and national policy

4. Introduction

4.1 Digital Planning Services and Benefits

As part of this research we have engaged with those who manage and use the system and its customers to ascertain their views on the opportunities and potential of a digitised planning service. Our engagement has been undertaken through an advisory group, which met twice, and a series of discussions with and inputs from key stakeholders. Both of these involved people and organisations from a range of sectors. The membership of the advisory group are outlined at Annex ii.

"Intangible value for people to be able to see what is happening with planning – monitoring data – enables people to understand it better, which would benefit everyone – politicians, offices responsible for delivering, communities, industry."

A property professional

These discussions were framed around a vision of what digital planning services could comprise. The key elements of this are set out below.

4.1.1 A Planning Gateway

A new Planning Scotland gateway website could act as the entry point to all information and services relating to planning, that makes the best use of new technology

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------------|--|
| Public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the ability to view, comment and collaborate on any applications real time status updates and notifications a unified payment service ready access to information and advice such as interactive guidance, FAQs, site specific data access to development plans |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> checklists to reduce invalid applications reduction in manual handling accessible upfront information reducing the need to contact planning departments |
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> supported workflow management arrangements batch processing a national mapping platform support for Local Place Plan development consistent and engaging plans improved reporting, tracking and monitoring in real time improved performance reporting |

- trend analysis
- transparent communications

4.1.2 Digital Tools

Providing digital planning tools can support meaningful and inclusive engagement and promote the conversation about place and communities

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------------|--|
| Public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide communities with a voice • help people understand the value and impact of their contribution • broader and more inclusive representation |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to view and comment on applications • track application types e.g. wind farms |
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Planmaker' shared platform for LDPs • mapping tools and local datasets • insights from community engagement • PlaceBuilder support for Local Place Plan development • mapping platform which highlights investment opportunities • ability to handle greater volume of engagement data |

4.1.3 Shared Platforms

Providing a connected suite of shared (national) platforms and tools can help to assess cases, monitor (real-time) progress and support the move to a plan-led system

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------------|---|
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shared platforms - Gateway, National data platform, Planmaker platform, Digital performance platform • systems that talk to each other, Loosely coupled architecture • flexibility to adopt new platforms when appropriate • simple and effective user experience • reduction in manual handling and workflow • enabling of cross-authority workflow • enabling consistency in the preparation of local plans • real-time performance reporting • shared knowledge and best practice • greater alignment between development planning and development management |

4.1.4 Data

Creating an open, smart and data-driven planning system through a new shared (national) data platform can help to establish improved data standards and management.

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------------|---|
| Public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data that is easier to find and use • enabling data driven applications |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • data that is easier to find and use • enabling data driven applications |
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better understanding of data • improved data management and standards • national data platform, • enabled sharing • visualising planning data • improves quality of planning data • more effective and efficient data collection and analysis |

4.1.5 Information and Consistency

Developing easy to understand information on planning and consistent processes that underpin the adoption of shared platforms and as building blocks to future innovation

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------------|---|
| Public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better understanding of planning • easier to participate in planning • increased satisfaction of service and customer experience |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better understanding of planning • easier to participate in planning • increased satisfaction of service and customer experience • reduced complexity and cost for working across-boundaries |
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • more consistent processes through shared platforms • reduced volume of invalid applications • measure and monitor the impact of planning decisions • more effective sharing of knowledge and best practice across • more effective and meaningful involvement |

4.1.6 Innovation

Embedding a culture of digital innovation in planning can be taken forward through establishing an Innovation Lab to research, test and implement new technologies

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------|--|
| Public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a partnership across public, private and university sectors, Continue to sponsor public sector innovation challenges • making most of potential from data |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commercial opportunities - Foster opportunities for continued growth in Scotland's tech sector • understanding of the commercial opportunities to enable a long term sustainable approach to digital innovation in planning |

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a system continually evolving to meet changing needs and expectations • commercial opportunities - Foster opportunities for continued growth in Scotland's tech sector • understanding of the commercial opportunities to enable a long term sustainable approach to digital innovation in planning • a system continually evolving to meet changing needs and expectations |
|-------------------|--|

4.1.7 Collaboration

Create the conditions for successful delivery through greater collaboration and support for Local Authorities, working with academia to provide the right digital skills for the planners of tomorrow

| Stakeholder | Potential Benefits |
|-------------------|--|
| Public | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • streamlined integration and adoption with minimised interruptions to work |
| Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • streamlined integration and adoption with minimised interruptions to work |
| Planning Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • managed change with agreed lead authorities and early adopters, change champions network • better understanding of the skills needed for future systems • supported migration of planning data to new platforms • streamlined integration and adoption with minimised interruptions to work |

4.2 Digital Planning Solutions

In 2016 the Future Cities Catapult undertook user research² that talked to planners, citizen groups, developers and politicians in England. This identified four areas where it was felt that digital approaches could improve the planning system.

4.2.1 Data Informed Planning

The research concluded that the data that exists is largely unavailable, inaccessible and lacking in common standards or clear purpose and that planning authorities lack the ability to effectively monitor the outputs or outcomes of plans. It also claimed that during the plan making process planning authorities can pay hundreds of thousands of pounds for consultants to collect, clean and analyse data. Possible solutions put forward included that proposals are tested iteratively against policy, live city data, and other live development proposals; that the system uses a diverse range of data sources to understand a live picture at any given point; and existing data is pulled together and published openly in a centralised system.

² <http://futurecities.catapult.org.uk/resource/user-research-insights-report-prototyping-future-planning/>

4.2.2 Flexible Planning

The research said that it can a long time to produce a Local Plan and during that time significant economic, political and technological shifts occur. It also suggested that plans, in their current form, lack adaptability to be flexible. It looked towards a situation where planning authorities are able to forecast the effects that planning proposals will have on quality of life for local communities, where the policies can be visualised and fine tuned in real time and where proposals are tested against policy, live city data, and live development proposals.

“The Digital Transformation Programme (DTP) was opening the door to the future - one where effectiveness and efficiency will be experienced in equal measure - before the Covid crisis came along and kicked it in! Thankfully, because the door was already ajar the impact of Covid on service delivery was lessened, not only by keeping the hinges and handles intact, but preparing Scotland’s planning system to be more robust and resilient the next time a crisis comes calling.

The context for Scotland’s planning system changes daily, but the DTP is building in a new agility and operational flexibility that will enable its strategic purpose, of supporting inclusive, sustainable growth, to shine like a beacon demonstrating a clear direction of travel.”

An economic development professional

4.2.3 Improving User Experiences for Planning Applicants

The research suggested that the planning application process is opaque and confusing to the inexperienced, that local planning policy can be hard to interpret and that the development management planning application process is labour intensive. It felt that digital panning could help move to a situation where planning applications are simpler so that citizens are able to complete their own applications without expert advice; where proposals are tested through an automated, rules based system before progressing to officer negotiation; and applications are submitted using BIM files.

4.2.4 Increasing Citizen Influence

The research reported that citizens’ input often has limited influence on decision making and that engagement usually takes the form of ‘objections’ rather than positive ways to influence plan making and local development in a meaningful way. It also suggested that citizen engagement follows the traditional ask/ respond consultation model and is largely dictated by legislation and only reached the same groups of people. The Future Cities Catapult believed that digital approaches could go some way to providing solutions to these challenges through enabling citizens to positively engaged with local developments because they can understand the impact and see what it looks like; citizens are able to exercise real influence over plans and proposals at key points in the process; and communities are engaged and empowered to provide on the ground monitoring and insight into what should be built and what has been built.

5. Service Users

5.1 Planning Authorities

5.1.1 The Potential for Planning Services

"The digital pathway for planning is vital. There is no other alternative."

A Head of Service in a Local Authority

Our engagement has told us that stakeholders across sectors and organisations has been overwhelmingly positive with planning and local authorities recognising the potential to make best use of resources available to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the planning service. They also highlighted the scope to reinvest any savings made into the planning service. It was also felt by some that digital planning could enhance planning's engagement with communities and lead to a better understanding of what planning is, how it works and what direct impacts it can have on people's lives.

Property professionals generally saw the benefits that could be accrued in terms of quicker decision making times, more transparent and accessible processes and procedures, and, access to spatial data.

A number of challenges were also raised including the need to reconcile conflicting data from local authorities and government and the need to do this collaboratively. Consistency of data standards, and their governance was seen to be key, as was the need for compatibility and complementarity with broader local government systems.

The issue of digital literacy and the different understanding and use of digital platforms by different age demographics was also raised.

5.1.2 Resourcing context

Planning authorities across Scotland are currently facing a situation where there is an increasing demand for their services at a time of reduction in resources. Research by RTPI Scotland³ has said:

- Scottish Local Government Financial Statistics 2009/10 and 2016/17 show that planning authorities' budgets have decreased in real terms by 40.8% between 2009 and 2019
- Budget cuts are impacting on staffing numbers. A comparison between the Planning Workforce Survey 2010 and the Planning Performance Frameworks for 2017/18 highlight that there has been a 25.7% loss of staff in planning departments between 2009 and 2019
- Scottish Government figures between 2009/10 and 2016/17 show that expenditure on

³ <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/media/1496/resourcing-the-planning-system-rtpi-scotland-key-trends-and-findings-2019.pdf>

- planning reduced by 25%, the highest of any local government service by a margin of 10%
- Scottish Local Government Provisional Outturn and Budget Estimates for 2019 show that only 0.32% of net revenue budgets in local authorities were spent on development management and development planning. This is reduction from 0.63% in 2015.

The Heads of Planning Scotland Costing the Planning Service⁴ survey published in February 2019 outlined that:

- The average rate for applications being valid on receipt is only 42%
- 29% of all planning applications received generated zero fee
- 97% of the applications were granted permission

It also says that the fees collected on planning application fees only meet 32.9% of the full costs of delivering the full cost of the planning service 42.7% of the costs of the development management service or 65.6% if measured against the core planning application processing costs. The costs average is broken down as 50% for handling the planning application, 17% for indirect costs, 24% for planning policy assessment and engagement and 9% for ensuring compliance and delivery.

The Full Time Equivalent (FTE) investment is quoted as 30% for handling planning applications, 11% covering indirect work, 13% for assessing and engaging planning policy, 6% for ensuring compliance and delivery 9% generic tasks, 13% not being art work and 19% for non planning tasks.

The research says that the cost per average productive hour are, £52 for handling applications, £45 indirect costs, £59 for planning policy and £48 for compliance and delivery.

Scottish Government estimates⁵ that the implementation of a digital planning system can free up 28% of a planners overall time, equivalent to 2 hours every working day or an extra 176 planners in Scotland.

Several stakeholders - from across sectors and organisation - pointed out that any 'savings' made should be at least partly re-invested in areas such as improving engagement and customer service, delivery of strategic infrastructure projects promoting sustainability and wellbeing and enforcement. It was also suggested that it would be important to continue to invest in the development of young people entering the profession through student placements and graduate internships.

"Myself and staff are fully committed to the digital plan, we just need consistency to make sure we can drive this forward, in particular in training of staff. COVID-19 has made us need to recognise the complexity of the situation of needing to be digitally aware"

A Head of Service in a Local Authority

⁴ <https://hopscotland.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/hops-costing-the-planning-service-action-report-220219.pdf>

⁵ See companion document The Benefits of Investing in a Digital Planning Service – economic impact analysis

5.1.3 Planning Act (Scotland) 2019

Research undertaken by RTPI Scotland⁶ estimated that the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 would introduce 49 new and unfunded additional duties on planning authorities with costing estimates of between £12.1M and £59.1M over a ten year period. If this is the case it is estimated that staff numbers will need to increase from between 1.9% and 9.4% to merely maintain a 'business as usual' planning service.

The new, unfunded duties include:

- gathering and assessing a range of information to assist in the preparation of the National Planning Framework
- planning authorities preparing and publishing strategies such as an open space strategy and a forestry and woodland strategy.
- planning authorities preparing Regional Spatial Strategies
- planning authorities needing to provide evidence to support a range of policies including those on water refill locations, public conveniences, housing needs, land for the purposes of resettlement, health needs, education needs, the extent to which rural areas have declining populations, the desirability of maintaining an appropriate number and range of cultural venues and facilities, the supply of energy and the desirability of preserving disused railway infrastructure.
- promoting and facilitating participation by children and young people in the preparation of the Local Development Plan (LDP),
- LDP evidence reports including details on the action taken by the planning authority to meet the housing needs of older people and disabled people and to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers; how the planning authority has invited local communities to prepare local place plans; and action taken to include the views of Gypsies and disabled persons, children and young people and community councils
- planning authorities assessing the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in preparing an evidence report
- planning authorities maintaining registers of people who are interested in acquiring land in the authority's area for self-build housing and of local place plans.

As mentioned above Scottish Government analysis estimates that the implementation of a digital planning system can free up 28% of a planners overall time. If this is applied the duties on planning authorities to be introduced to by the Planning Act it is considered that this would result in up to £18.4m of savings over ten years.

The Planning Act also sets out a duty for planning authorities keep a register of local place plans. this is estimated to cost in the region of £680,000 to £2,040,000 over 10 years If taken forward individually by each planning authority. We understand that this register is now being developed and coordinated by the Scottish Government digital planning team which will therefore provide a direct saving of up to £2m.

The potential savings that could be made in total therefore come to £20.4m.

⁶ <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2019/august/financial-implications-of-implementing-the-planning-scotland-act-2019/>

The assumptions made and calculations undertaken for the costing estimates are set out in full in annex i.

There are other provisions in the Act that have not been costed but where it is considered digital approaches can have a role to play. For example, the Act contains provisions for planning authorities to produce and annual report on the performance of their functions. Although this is already done voluntarily by planning authorities, research currently being undertaken (commissioned by RTPI and supported by Scottish Government) is developing a toolkit to support this. It is envisaged that this toolkit would benefit from being placed on a digital platform to support consistency in its implementation and to share lessons learned. This would support the work of the new Planning Improvement Coordinator who will have an oversight of performance.

5.1.4 Planning Applications for Housing

In August 2018 Scottish Government published research it had commissioned on Reasons for Delays with Planning Applications for Housing⁷. This identified that the most common reasons for delay that arose when deciding planning applications for major housing developments were:

1. Delayed Response by Applicant to additional information request (55% of cases)
2. Legal Agreement (drafting / signing) (53%).
3. Delayed Action / Response by Planning officer (25%)
4. Delayed Action / Response by Other Council Officer (23%)
5. Other reason for delay (14%)
6. Delays - planning authority availability / staffing (11%)
7. Committee Determination Required (outwith timescale) (7%)
8. Applicant / agent asked for delay in decision making (2%)
9. Delayed Response by Statutory Consultees (1%)

Some of the components of a digital planning strategy, as noted above in Section 2.1, provide the potential to:

- reduce manual handling of planning applications
- provide accessible upfront information
- improve reporting, tracking and monitoring in real time
- improve quality and accessibility of planning data
- provide streamlined integration and adoption with minimised interruptions to work

It is considered that these could play a supportive role in tackling the tasks highlighted by the research, particularly regarding delayed responses to information requests by applicants, planning officers, other council staff and statutory consultees.

⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/reasons-delays-planning-applications-housing/pages/2/>

5.2 Local Government

"The ability to easily cross reference and interpret data from a range of different sources on a geographical basis will make it easier and quicker to identify issues and promote potential solutions or derive policy objectives. It will also be much easier to monitor the effectiveness of planning solutions in terms of outcomes on the ground, including those relating to health and wellbeing."

An Executive Director in a Local Authority

It has been made clear to us that those working in local government and its customers see real added value in introducing digitised planning services. The possibilities of enhancing engagement with communities and stakeholders has been highlighted, along with new ways of gathering and organising data. However, an important – and possibly game-changing - opportunity that has been emphasised is the power of using this data to support the attainment of higher level outcomes. It is felt that there can be savings made through prevention of issues rather than costly interventions once a problem has been created through a lack of data, engagement or efficient processes. This ties in very much with the Christie Commission's⁸ recommendations on public services that stemmed from the fact that a third of public monies was spent was being paid out to solve issues that were preventable.

It was pointed out that digital planning could allow planners to be evidence-led, to undertake more inclusive engagement and save process time so there is, in turn, time to focus more on the implementation of policy to prevent the creation of places that end up costing public services money down the line.

Planning ultimately feeds into the delivery of Scotland's National Outcomes and it was felt that there is potential take the opportunity to identify some indicators that can feed into this, enabled by digital planning approaches to support consistency in gathering and monitoring the appropriate data. This would not only saving time, but also highlight the importance of National Outcomes to the planning system, and vice versa.

"Data is crucial to an evidence led local development plan. Digital planning will enable authorities to more consistently identify much needed data to inform their policy. The crucial point where this saves time, money and creates better places (where people thrive rather than cost money to help) is that it can lead to reduction in time spent at LDP inquiries arguing what evidence to rely on and discussing objections."

A public sector planner

It was also pointed out that digital planning can bring benefits to wider council services by helping

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/commission-future-delivery-public-services/>

to plan for changing demands in education, transportation, health and social services through using more accurate local data, thereby making impacts easier to monitor. The emerging work of the Place Principle and the need to have a good digital planning platform to align data on social outcomes and employability outcomes can bring in more clarity and alignment on spatial investments.

5.3 Key Agencies

Key agencies have also underlined the importance of digital planning. In responding to the NPF4 call for ideas Scottish Water outlined that digital infrastructure will play a key role in achieving both the NPF4 objectives and the ambitions they had to provide effective services. Their response stated that they “are looking forward to the launch of the Digital Strategy for Planning which will be instrumental in making the planning process more efficient and inclusive.” Key benefits identified included the ability to better facilitate engagement with residents/customers, businesses and communities in decision making processes; to support the NPF to become fully digitally connected with communities; and to support the implementation of new technologies that will allow Scottish Water to manage their assets more efficiently

5.4 Income Generation

5.4.1 Charging for Online Services

Since September 2018, the Planning Portal in England⁹ has processed all payments for planning applications made online. This means that the online application is paid for using a standardised set of payment options. The current service charge of £20.83 (+ VAT) applies to all planning applications submitted through the online application system, excluding applications which do not attract a planning application fee and those with a fee below £60. This is payable at the time of submission. The Planning Portal launched the Financial Transaction Service (FTS) in September 2018 and it says that the service that has brought many benefits to applicants and local planning authorities and has “vastly improved the process of submitting and receiving planning applications for all our users”. The income generated has allowed the Planning Portal to develop new services including:

- The range of free-to-use content and interactive guidance to explain planning, from permitted development on common projects through to applying for planning permission for homeowners and others
- Free-to-use technical and legislative content for planning and building professionals
- A dedicated customer support team
- A national building control service
- The development of the planning application service, including increasing the maximum file size of supporting documents, e-enabling further application types and improvements to local validation, amongst many others

This presents an opportunity to provide a value added service for users of the system. In 2018/19 planning authorities decided 26,585 local planning applications and 307 major planning

⁹ <https://www.planningportal.co.uk/>

applications, across Scotland¹⁰. Taking these figures as an average, If a charge was introduced as per the Planning Portal this could generating around £553,766 a year, the equivalent of £5.5m over 10 years to re-invest in the planning service. This would rise if there as an increase in the number of planning applications, or a fee higher than £20.83 was charged.

5.4.2 Value Added Services

There may also be opportunities to monetise the digital planning services provided to the business sector. Our engagement on this research has found that there are developers who would be comfortable to pay for up-to-date and reliable spatial data at site level providing information on, for example, utilities that they can use when assessing the viability and possible use of a location. Where relevant this can also be used to inform any planning applications and the development of master plans.

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/planning-performance-statistics-2018-19-annual/pages/2/#:~:text=In%202018%2F19%20Planning%20Authorities,Most%20Planning%20applications%20were%20approved.>

6. Customers

6.1 Property Profession and Business

6.1.1 Economic Impact Analysis

An accompanying document to this report "The Benefits of Investing in a Digital Planning Service Digital Planning Service - economic impact analysis" outlines how, in using latest market and Government data for the GVA and jobs impact of homes delivered in Scotland, the total economic impact for housebuilding could result in £107m gross-additional GVA from homes delivered across Scotland and the equivalent to a 1.2% overall additional GVA 'digital dividend' to the construction sector.

The saving for the broader construction sector was not quantified but given the assumption that housebuilding makes up two thirds of the construction sector it could be extrapolated that the savings to the broader construction sector of £53.5m over ten years.

6.1.2 Developers and Housebuilders

In our discussions with property professionals they have welcomed improvements in digital planning that have been made in Scotland in recent years and the commitment in the Planning Act to development of the strategic business case for digital transformation. Developers see potential to speed up the consenting process.

An example pointed out by a property professional in a commercial context is that the Fraser of Allander Institute¹¹ have estimated that the Scottish property/ real estate industry contributes £5 billion to the Scottish economy per annum; if a quarter of that went into new development that needed planning consent, that is £1.25 billion; if borrowing cost of that was 5% per annum then that is £62.5 million; which shows there is potential to reduce costs to applicants across Scotland by around £175,000 per day.

"We are very supportive of the proposals being considered as part of the digital transformation programme for Planning. By digitalising our planning process this would bring benefits to those submitting planning applications and the respective decision makers, however the greater benefit would be for the wider public. A digital planning process will allow for more effective place making by being able to use data to better understand not only the area planned for development but also the wider surrounding area and digital technology would help make it more accessible and visible to the wider public to help influence this process."

A property professional

¹¹<https://www.scottishpropertyfederation.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/The%20economic%20contribution%20of%20the%20commercial%20property%20sector%20-%20March%202018%20FINAL.pdf>

Another potential advantage mentioned by house builders is the possibility of digital planning being able to better join up the multiple consents which are required in taking forward development, such as planning consent, road construction consent, building regulations and, in some cases, listed building consent.

Respondents felt that another application of digital planning is to address which sites are 'effective'. This is important as upfront spend can be expensive and so having access to details of the costs of build, access and drainage can allow developers to potentially make savings. Developers have said that it would make a big difference if there was a searchable portal or toolkit that would facilitate the identification of housing land sites, employment land and derelict land along with ownership details, constraints, infrastructure and utilities available. It has been suggested that developers can spend between £100,000 and £200,000 upfront, and at their own risk as they may not have access to this information.

It has also been suggested digital planning services can help to better coordinate, and provide easier access to reliable data to inform, the range of assessments that should be undertaken. This could also support a move to more consistency in the data provided and, therefore move towards more objectivity in interpretation. Examples of impact assessments include transport impact assessment, noise assessments, environmental impact assessments and the emerging health impact assessments. Such consistency may well in itself lead to savings for developers - and indeed planning authorities - in terms of time and wasted effort.

"Digitisation can bring more transparency. Our industry can benefit from this as our industry is viewed with suspicion and mistrust, so the more of what is in the public domain the less people will view that we are pulling the 'wool over their eyes'.

A Housebuilder

6.1.3 Business

Our engagement has told us that the broader business sector also sees the benefit of digital planning and spatial analysis.

Interestingly the CBI and KPMG published "Industrial Strategy and Regional Growth: The CBI/ KPMG Scottish Productivity Index in September 2019¹² given that to makes sure that action to be taken to improve productivity is based on reliable evidence and progress can be tracked over time.

It aims to pulls out the key underlying factors that drive productivity and a key plank of the index is the establishment of a 'Productivity Data Bank' for Scotland. This aims to provide access to and improve productivity tracking data from across both the UK and Scottish Governments, the public sector and the economy for experts to analyse. An important part of this will be to "Integrate productivity data into the evaluation and prioritisation of infrastructure strategies and projects to ensure a long-term focus on productivity improvement."

¹² https://www.cbi.org.uk/media/3331/cbi-scotland_scottish-productivity-final.pdf

The document also has an ambition to:

"Join-up infrastructure strategies across transport, housing and digital as all will have an impact on productivity, including clear coordination across local authorities so projects that cut across local boundaries can deliver wide-spread benefits."

Indeed our engagement with CBI Scotland led to their Head of Policy Mari Tunby saying:

"CBI Scotland has long advocated improving the quality and availability of government data to help solve challenges across transport, housing, education and business. The recent work of the planning team shows what is possible through a shared platform approach, backed by real-time open source data, and provides a model that other areas of government can follow and build-on. "By joining-up existing government data sources and making them more widely available for stakeholders to contribute their own solutions, we can deliver better evidenced policy and decision-making."

6.2 Communities

6.2.1 Planning Act (Scotland) 2019

The Planning Act (Scotland) 2019 introduces new Local Place Plans that aim to give people the opportunity to come up with proposals and ideas for the development and use of land in the place where they live. They aim to stimulate and encourage constructive debate about the future of a place, and provide a mechanism to let communities outline what their neighbourhood can look like in the future.

"Is there an opportunity (for digital planning) to help citizens come together to produce local place plans?"

A Property Professional

Although generally welcomed across the community, development and planning sectors fears have been raised about the need for funding to support communities to develop these plans. Research undertaken by RTPI Scotland which costed the implementation of the Planning Act estimates that this will cost between £3.38m and £9.84m to do this over ten years.

We are aware that the digital planning team in Scottish Government is currently testing a Placebuilder platform that can support community engagement. Placebuilder can be used to support developers to better understand communities' views at an early stage in the design of their development proposal. This can therefore allow developers to take into account communities' views in taking forward their proposals which may - in theory - minimise the opposition. In future by using a commercial version of Placebuilder, developers could collaborate with communities in designing their proposals. Similarly, it could support Local Place Plans through allowing communities and planning authorities to gain a clearer understanding of one another's aspirations for places to support collaborative approaches to their development.

In this way, it is possible that improved early engagement achieved using Placebuilder could allow planning applications to progress faster, supporting easier and increased investment in business and infrastructure and faster delivery of both mainstream and affordable housing. We cannot quantify the savings that would be made by using the Placebuilder platform, however it is likely that it could have an impact that reduces costs.

6.2.2 Customer Care

In August 2018 Scottish Government published a research study that it had commissioned on Customer Service and the Planning System¹³. This aimed to explore how customer service is measured by a range of public and private sector organisations. The purpose was to highlight examples of good practice and forward considerations for strengthening customer service within the planning system.

In discussing the effectiveness of 'e-planning' in this context, the report says that planning authorities overwhelmingly believe that it has had a positive effect on customer service with perceived benefits including "more efficient information flows, better prioritisation of work, reduced printing costs, and greater transparency/ easier access to information by the public".

The report says that stakeholders echoed planning authorities in terms of the improved transparency and accessibility that e-planning offers, as well as enabling stronger collaboration on applications. It did warn however that the growth of digital communication channels means that many organisations are choosing to rely more and more on remote customer engagement, for example through FAQs and live chat sessions and that care is needed to ensure customers with perhaps quite complex and bespoke queries know where to go for information, how their queries will be dealt with and in what timescale.

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/customer-service-planning-system-research-study/>

Annex i: Planning (Scotland) Act 2019: Estimated saving from digital planning

| Additional Duty | Lower estimate | Higher estimate | Digital Planning Benefit | Saving at 28%, where applicable |
|--|---|-----------------|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the area | £52,299 | £52,299 | data collection | £14,624 |
| 2. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the capacity of education services in the area | £225,428 | £225,428 | data collection shared platforms | £63,120 |
| 3. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the capacity of health services in the area | £450,857 | £450,857 | data collection shared platforms | £126,240 |
| 4. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the health needs of the population of the area | £18,034 | £18,034 | data collection shared platforms | £5,050 |
| 5. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the housing needs of the population of the area, the housing needs of older people and disabled people within the area | £450,857 | £450,857 | data collection consistency shared platforms | £126,240 |
| 6. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the desirability of allocating land for the purposes of resettlement | £149,684 | £149,684 | data collection consistency shared platforms | £41,912 |
| 7. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the infrastructure of the area (including communications, transport and drainage systems and systems for the supply of water and energy), | Work already undertaken in planning authorities | | data collection consistency shared platforms | - |
| 8. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to how that infrastructure is used | Work already undertaken in planning authorities | | data collection consistency shared platforms | - |
| 9. Information to assist in the preparation of NPF in regards to the supply of energy including land available for the development and use of facilities for renewable sources of energy | £18,034 | £18,034 | data collection consistency shared platforms | £5,050 |
| 10. A planning authority is to prepare | £450,000 | £450,000 | data collection | £126,000 |

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| and publish an open space strategy | | | consistency engagement | |
| 11. Contribute evidence to Scottish Ministers towards a report on how the planning system is operating to help ensure that the housing needs of older people and disabled people are met | £690,000 | £690,000 | data collection consistency shared platforms | £193,200 |
| 12. A planning authority, or two or more such authorities acting jointly, are to prepare and adopt a regional spatial strategy | £4,080,000 | £23,800,000 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £1,142,400 - £6,664,000 |
| 13. LDP is to include a statement of the planning authority's policies and proposals as to the provision of water refill locations | £225,428 | £225,428 | data collection | £63,120 |
| 14. LDP is to include a statement of the planning authority's policies and proposals as to the provision of public conveniences | £225,428 | £225,428 | data collection | £63,120 |
| 15. LDP is to include targets for meeting the housing needs of people living in the part of the district to which it relates, the housing needs of the population of the area, including, in particular, the needs of persons undertaking further and higher education, older people and disabled people and the availability of land in the district for housing, including for older people and disabled people | £901,714 | £901,714 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £252,480 |
| 16. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the desirability of allocating land for the purposes of resettlement | £149,684 | £149,684 | data collection | £41,912 |
| 17. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the health needs of the population of the district and the likely effects of development and use of land on those health needs | £34,265 | £34,265 | data collection consistency | £9,594 |
| 18. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the education needs of the population of the district and the likely effects of development and use of land on those education needs | £450,857 | £450,857 | data collection consistency | £126,240 |
| 19. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the extent to which there are rural areas within the district in relation to which there has been a substantial decline in population | £34,265 | £34,265 | data collection consistency | £9,594 |
| 20. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the capacity of education services in the district | £450,857 | £450,857 | data collection consistency | £126,240 |

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| 21. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the desirability of maintaining an appropriate number and range of cultural venues and facilities (including in particular, but not limited to, live music venues) in the district | £34,265 | £34,265 | data collection consistency | £9,594 |
| 22. LDP is to include evidence in regards to the supply of energy including land available for the development and use of facilities for renewable sources of energy | £34,265 | £34,265 | data collection consistency | £9,594 |
| 23. LDP is to have regard to the desirability of preserving disused railway infrastructure for the purpose possible future public transport requirements | £34,265 | £34,265 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £9,594 |
| 24. A planning authority must make such arrangements as they consider appropriate to promote and facilitate participation by children and young people (meaning for the purpose of this section a person aged 25 or under) in the preparation of the LDP | £204,000 | £408,000 | gateway engagement shared platforms data collection consistency innovation supporting change | £57,120 - £114,240 |
| 25. LDP evidence report must include a summary of the action taken by the planning authority to support and promote the construction and adaptation of housing to meet the housing needs of older people and disabled people in the authority's area and an analysis of the extent to which the action has helped to meet those needs | See estimate for additional duty 19 | | gateway shared platforms data collection consistency | |
| 26. LDP must include a summary of the action taken by the planning authority to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the authority's area and an analysis of the extent to which the action has helped to meet those needs. | See estimate for additional duty 28 | | gateway engagement shared platforms data collection consistency | |
| 27. LDP evidence report must set out how the planning authority has invited local communities in their district to prepare local place plans in accordance with the schedule and the assistance provided to local communities to assist them to prepare local place plans | See section 6 | See section 6 | gateway engagement shared platforms innovation supporting change | |
| 28. LDP evidence report must set out action taken to include the views of Gypsies and Travellers in the authority's area | £102,000 | £1,806,000 | gateway engagement | £28,560 - £505,680 |

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| 29. LDP evidence report must set out action taken to include the views of disabled persons | £51,000 | £51,000 | gateway engagement | £14,280 |
| 30. LDP evidence report must set out action taken to include the views of children and young people | See estimate for additional duty 23 | | gateway engagement | |
| 31. LDP evidence report must set out action taken to include the views community councils | £34,000 | £1,200,000 | gateway engagement | |
| 32. A planning authority must assess the sufficiency of play opportunities in its area for children in preparing an evidence report | £450,000 | £450,000 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £126,000 |
| 33. A planning authority is to prepare and maintain a list of persons who have registered interest with the authority with the intention of acquiring land in the authority's area for self-build housing. | £1,360,000 | £3,410,000 | gateway engagement shared platforms data collection consistency | £380,800 - £954,800 |
| 34. Every planning authority must keep a register of local place plans. | £680,000 | £2,040,000 | Taken on by Scottish Government so full savings accrued | £680,000 - £2,040,00 |
| 35. Planning authorities are to publish an invitation to local communities in their district to prepare local place plans | | | engagement shared platforms data collection | |
| 36. The making and alteration of masterplan consent area schemes including annual reporting | £340,000 | £680,000 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £95,200 - £190,400 |
| 37. A planning authority may designate all or part of its area as a short-term let control area | £640,710 | £14,756,800 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £179,399 - £4,131,904 |
| 38. The consideration is to be given, before planning permission for a national development or a major development is granted, to the likely health effects of the proposed development | £421,757 | £538,450 | gateway shared platforms data collection consistency | £118,092 - £147,966 |
| 39. Notice by planning authority of certain applications made to them | No significant resource requirements estimated | | gateway engagement | |
| 40. Assessment of environmental effects to include the net positive effects on biodiversity that would be likely to result from the development. | £101463 | £395,174 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £28,410 - £110,649 |
| 41. Noise-sensitive development to be | Work already | | data collection | |

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|--|---|--------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| subject to conditions, which take account of whether the development includes sufficient measures to mitigate, minimise or manage the effect of noise between the development and any existing cultural venues or facilities | undertaken in planning authorities | | consistency | |
| 42. Provision of toilet facilities within certain large developments | £9,478 | £21,360 | - | - |
| 43. A planning authority must prepare and keep under review a scheme of delegation | Work already undertaken in planning authorities | | - | |
| 44. Determination of applications: statement to accompany the notification | Work already undertaken in planning authorities | | gateway | |
| 45. As soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year, a planning authority is to prepare and publish a report in regards to planning obligations | £68,000 | £102,000 | data collection | £19,040 - £28,560 |
| 46. Local authorities must have regard to any guidance published by Scottish Ministers in relation to the promotion and use of mediation | £136,000 | £13,136,000 | gateway engagement shared platforms data collection | £36,080 - £3,678,080 |
| 47. Enforcement charters are to contain a statement in relation to the planning authority's monitoring of compliance with planning permissions which have been granted in respect of major developments | £340,000 | £680,000 | data collection consistency | £95,200 - £190,400 |
| 48. Annual report on the performance of functions | Work already undertaken in planning authorities | | gateway | |
| 49. Notice by planning authority of applications for LBC | - | - | gateway shared platforms data collection consistency | |
| 50. A planning authority is to prepare a forestry and woodland strategy. | £80,000 | £120,000 | shared platforms data collection consistency | £22,400 - £44,800 |
| | | | | |
| Gross cost over 10 years | £16,616,879 | £63,741,685 | | £4,445,499 - £20,400,197 |
| Net cost over 10 years | £12,138,880 | £59,263,685 | | |

Annex ii: Stakeholder Advisory Group

The following organisations participated in the Advisory Group:

- Key Agencies Group
- COSLA
- Connected Cities Catapult
- The Improvement Service
- Royal Town Planning Institute
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Property Federation
- Scottish Planning Consultants Forum
- Scotland's Towns Partnership
- Scottish Inclusive Growth
- SOLACE Scotland



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