



**RTPI
Research
Paper**

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

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to Diane Rennie, Martyn Milne and Samantha Stewart at Scottish Government for their guidance and advice in taking forward this work.

Thanks also go to the individuals and organisations who gave up their time to provide views which have helped to frame this work across the series of documents. In particular we would like to express our gratitude to the members of our advisory group, whose input was very helpful.

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 sets out a summary of the findings.

Summary of Findings

Broad Economic Benefits

The economic impact analysis, which was undertaken by KPMG to assess the potential efficiencies that could be provided from a digital planning service, reports that there could be the following benefits over 10 years:

Up to £200m generated in economic benefits directly to users of the planning system (applicants) and from unlocked GVA from the development of marginally viable sites

Up to 1,600 jobs in the construction and development sectors and their supply chains

£50.5m generated in economic benefits for the broader construction sector, based on application of a 'digital dividend' of 1.2% of the annual output of the housebuilding sector

avoidance of up to £23.7m of "Do Nothing costs" to the Scottish economy

User and Customer Benefits

It is considered that user and customer benefits over 10 years that could be accrued by investing in a digital planning service include

Estimated £20.4m savings to local authorities on the costs of introducing the new duties arising from the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019

Potential of £5.5m income generated over 10 years through charging for submitting planning applications through the e-development portal

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

Policy Benefits - Economic Recovery Post Covid-19

It is considered that a digital planning system could have the following outcomes:

Increased output / higher growth (recovery) rates

from incentivised additional economic activity via improvements in planning efficiency, as outlined in the quantitative analysis. And ensuring planners have the capacity to deal with additionally incentivised case load.

More productive land use

from better capture and application of spatial data (e.g. in relation to transport connectivity) to determine the most economically efficient locations for new development

Increased land values

from the range of effects – i.e. via data analytics, community engagement, and value capture from benefits to developers – that will help support quality place-making and amenity value at new and existing sites

Welfare benefits for households and residents for increased ‘utility of place’

through new digital platforms that better facilitate informed engagement with communities in both place-making and development management, ensuring planning decisions are better informed from a welfare perspective.

Better matching of employment land to sector needs in local areas

through more and better data availability and accessibility that enables planning strategy and vision to better integrate economic development objectives.

Lower costs for business and increased inward investment
from system efficiencies which reduce the perceived burden of engagement (time and cost) of applying for planning permissions

Policy Benefits - Environment and Climate Change: meeting the net zero carbon emission target by 2045

A digital planning system could have the following outcomes:

Lower energy demand
from the ability to use better data and engagement to plan for efficient accessibility (e.g. between homes and jobs) and density

Better integrated (and local) energy supply
from the ability to use better spatial data and engagement with the private sector, communities and statutory consultees to inform the efficient development of generation and supply in relation to new and existing communities

Lower transport demand and emissions
from placemaking that encourages modal shift; and from planning for improved accessibility that lowers non-active transport requirements

Ability to support the achievement of incoming building regulations
through smart applications and the planning gateway that better informs and educates applicants

Reducing emissions of individuals and communities via behavioural changes
through placemaking and planning that encourages sustainable ways of living, working and socially engaging within communities.

Policy Benefits - Improving Health and Wellbeing

A digital planning system could have the following outcomes:

Supporting more inclusive engagement, encouraging individuals to take a stake in their communities
through facilitated and improved digital engagement (via the planning gateway), that encourages and incentivises engagement (through ease of use). Freeing up planners time through more efficient systems and processes to undertake more effective community engagement if required.

Supporting physical and mental health in communities, reducing NHS costs and economic-days-lost

through utilising spatial data on existing area land-use to ensure that plan-making and masterplanning account for sufficient provision of active transport and green space (and biodiversity), and social infrastructure, and provide the necessary connections to ensure sustainable accessibility between homes, jobs and recreation. Additionally, improved NPV for developers at a site level from system efficiency improvements, as set out in the quantitative analysis, will enable developer contribution negotiations to support greater provision of amenity.

Supporting economic opportunity and economic activity rates

through the incorporation of spatial data that allows for economic inclusion (such as defined by connectivity to jobs) to be incorporated into planning considerations

Supporting community safety, reducing crime and increasing community engagement

through a smart application system that can help better enforce and explain planning guidelines, standards and regulations

Policy Benefits - Scottish Government ambitions

It is considered that a digital planning system can add value to Scottish Government policy ambitions contained in the following plans and strategies:

Digital Strategy for Scotland	Programme for Government 2020/1
National Performance Framework	The Place Principle
Infrastructure Investment Plan	City Region Deals
Economic Action Plan	Town Centre Action Plan
Advisory Group on Economic Recovery	Housing 2040
National Transport Strategy	Climate Change Plan
Land Use Strategy	National Marine Plan
Public Health Priorities	National Planning Framework



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