ODSC Community Session — Session Summary

25 February 2026 | Open Data Standards Community

Key Points

1. **The expectations around data transition to mandated standards must be clearly communicated so all parties understand expectations.** A clear department position on what data will need to be provided from the existing planning permission systems pre the mandate is needed soon.

2. **The decision stage specification is open, testable and growing - community input is needed now.** Eight datasets have been scoped and a new specification viewer is live. Unlike submissions, the decision specification has not yet gone through community iteration. Active engagement from LPAs, suppliers and consultants is critical to ensure it is fit for purpose before it progresses towards mandation.

3. **The question of who is penalised for non-compliance post-mandation requires a clear answer.** The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act places responsibility on local authorities, which cascades to suppliers. Communications to LPAs and a framework to support LPAs manage supplier accountability should be developed before mandation, this work has not yet started.

4. **The community has significant unanswered questions about data between submission and decision.** Validation, consultation, amendments and case management data are not yet addressed. The programme team is beginning to map the full process flow, but this is a gap that will need resourcing and stakeholder input in the next phase.

5. **The scope of these standards is increasingly strategic — a broader ownership conversation may be needed.** The community is asking how planning data standards connect to Building Control, statutory consultees, local government reorganisation, Spatial Development Strategies and climate metrics. The aspiration is for this community to act as a standards authority across all related datasets. Senior sponsorship and cross-departmental coordination will be needed to realise this.

Session Overview

Transition and Historical Data

We shared high level findings from our 'transition data' open session on 3 Feb (~65 participants). A more detailed write-up is available separately. Key points:

- Strong consensus against retrospective conversion of historical planning records - a 'line in the sand' cutoff is the preferred approach, potentially with pre-standard data retained as a legacy archive.
- Software supplier compliance is the critical dependency; data mapping work should ideally sit with suppliers rather than individual LPAs.

- LPA capacity is a genuine concern - both for administering the change and for maintaining data quality on live schemes through a transition.
- The standards are seen as an opportunity to fix long-standing interoperability issues and lay the groundwork for local government reorganisation, SDSs and wider planning reform.
- Lessons from the Local Land Charges digitisation programme (HMLR) were flagged as a useful reference point for understanding the scale and effort involved.

Specification Development Update

Submission specification

- The submission specification is moving towards a mandate-ready baseline.
- Active issues are split into three buckets: 'fix now' (trending towards zero), 'clarify and align' (majority of remaining active tickets), and 'future' (captures work beyond the current phase).
- Both the 'fix now' and 'clarify and align' buckets need to be substantially resolved before mandation. Some items in "clarify and align" require policy clarification from within the department.

Decision stage specification

- The decision stage specification continues to grow, with two new datasets added since the last session: a planning application document dataset and a planning permission timeline dataset.
- There are now eight datasets in the decision stage specification, covering: application record, site, application documents, application timeline, decision notice, planning conditions, decision conditions, and Section 106 agreements. This number may grow as feedback is received etc.
- Document versioning was discussed - the approach will record an original document as one record, with subsequent versions as additional records.
- The officer's report / decision report was raised as a gap - currently not explicitly captured as a standalone dataset; to be explored further.
- Informatives within decision notices were flagged as a potential future addition, to be considered once a clear use case is submitted.
- The planning permission time limit (typically three years) was raised as a data point worth capturing explicitly, with nuances noted for outline permissions, reserved matters, tree works applications and enforcement cases.
- Links to the appeals process are being developed in liaison with the Planning Inspectorate (PINs), focusing on the interface between decision data and appeals data.

Specification viewer

- A new specification viewer has been launched to make the specifications easier to explore and understand without navigating raw GitHub files.
- The viewer covers submissions, decisions and shared elements (fields and codelists).
- Users can follow a connected path from application types through to field level, and from user needs through to data model and rationale.
- GitHub remains the canonical source; the viewer is the access layer.
- Community feedback on the viewer was invited — it is still in early development.

- Access note: some community members reported GitHub is blocked by their IT departments, which is a known issue the team is aware of.

Lean Coffee — Community Questions and Discussion

The Lean Coffee session used a digital voting board to surface and prioritise community questions. The topics below reflect those that received the most votes. All questions are preserved and will inform a communications plan.

What do you want from this community going forwards? (27 votes)

- Community members valued the cross-sector knowledge sharing - hearing implementation experiences from LPAs, suppliers, planning consultants and new market entrants.
- There was a strong appetite for deeper, focused 'stream' sessions on specific topics (e.g. data exchange, the full process flow) rather than always convening everyone for everything whilst keeping sessions open for anyone to join.
- We noted the community is entering a new phase as the specifications approach mandation. Shaping what the community does next is a priority for the MHCLG team.
- A straw poll at the end of the session showed strong support for continuing the Lean Coffee format within the community sessions.

If systems are non-compliant post-mandation, who will be penalised - LPA or system provider? (19 votes)

- The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act places the compliance obligation on the local authority. This cascades: suppliers must provide services that enable their LPA clients to comply, otherwise those services are effectively non-compliant.
- Two distinct conversations are needed that have not yet happened: (1) clearly explaining to LPAs exactly what data they will be required to provide and from when; (2) supporting LPAs in having the resulting conversations with their suppliers.
- The community highlighted a practical difficulty: LPA supplier contracts are often long-term and include penalty clauses. Even where a supplier is non-compliant, switching is not a simple decision and can take over a year to research and execute.
- The team acknowledged this communication work has not yet started but it is an immediate priority for the next phase.

Evidence base data standards for longer-term planning (Local Plans / SDSs) - on the radar? (16 votes)

- Not the primary focus of this work, but there is genuine aspiration for these standards to serve as a foundation others can build on. They are published and open.
- Active conversations are happening with teams working on New Towns and Spatial Development Strategies within the department; the aim is alignment not duplication.
- The community raised the importance of statutory consultee data (e.g. National Highways modelling) for plan-making , which is currently difficult to access in a structured way and contributing to data silos.
- The team noted an aspiration for MHCLG to act as a standards authority for all datasets relating to its work, though bridging the communication gap between data specialists and policy teams is a recognised challenge.

What about data in between submission and decision? (Validation, consultation, etc.) (15 votes)

- The community asked for clearer coverage of the process between submission and determination, including validation, consultation dates/responses, amendments, and case-management events.
- The team clarified that, despite the current "decision stage" name, this specification is intended to cover the full post-submission process, not only the final decision output.
- The community raised that capturing what has changed between submission and decision has been one of their biggest challenges - poorly submitted data and changes to the number of homes during the process create a significant burden on councils.
- The community noted the importance of distinguishing what was originally permitted versus what was actually implemented.
- The community raised planning committee meeting minutes as another source of useful data not currently captured.
- The team confirmed work on breaking down the full planning process flow stage by stage is underway, which will inform how these gaps are addressed. A deep-dive session on this was proposed for the next phase.
- Statutory consultee dates (consultation issued / reply received) were raised as particularly useful, especially where fees are charged for this service.

Other topics were raised and are captured for carrying forward in the lean coffee pdf.

Next Steps

- Next community session: Tuesday 31 March 2026
- Session will include: transition update with responses to questions raised; decision stage specification update; community ask-anything session.
- The team will review and begin responding to the Lean Coffee questions as part of a developing comms plan.
- The project GitHub board is being actively updated with tasks tagged by implementation, integration, improvement and innovation.
- Session notes and links will be shared via the community mailing list.