

ODSC Community Session Summary

Session Title: Open Data Standards Community Group

Date: 24 June 2026

Session Format: Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

Key Points

- The planning application data specifications are at candidate stage and effectively fixed for the consultation and mandation process, with later changes handled through structured change control.
- The standard will require all new planning application data held in the statutory planning register to conform, with only a defined subset, the planning register national public view, published as open data.
- The department will initially assess compliance with the statutory instrument by evaluating the conformance of that national public view open data collected by the planning data platform.
- A line in the sand approach will apply: the mandated standard covers all new applications from the mandate date. Existing data is still expected to be made available at whatever level an authority can provide, but it will not have to be retrospectively converted to the new standard, is not expected to meet it in full, and authorities will not be expected to digitise hard copies.
- DEFRA presented early-stage thinking on transforming planning advice across its arms length bodies, with the planning application data standard positioned as a foundational input.

Session Overview

MHCLG update: consultation, mandation and register definitions

The team restated the project aim of standardising the data that flows through the planning permission process to create a baseline for continuous improvement.

It was explained that the work is at the point of being prepared for consultation around mandating the standard, that the team is getting materials ready, and that the team is not in control of the consultation or mandating process, which depends on an internal MHCLG approval and sign-off steps.

Three register terms were distinguished, explanations appear in the slides.

In response to a question on whether the standards apply across the end-to-end process and all key parties and systems, the team confirmed the intention that the standard applies into the whole process.

Conformance, compliance and existing data

The team set out the distinction between conformance and compliance. Explanations appear in the slides.

The team also set out the position on existing data, the team noted these slides were first shared in March and the position is unchanged.

Specification to software demonstration

The team demonstrated code that takes the specification and converts it into working software:

- For web forms, it was shown that the application types represented by the specification are listed, that forms are generated with text fields and radio buttons. Validation is performed when the form is submitted with values from the form output in a specification compliant payload.
- For PDFs, it was shown that a PDF is generated live and that local variants, including a GLA mode, produce differences in the form such as housing type variations.

The team demonstrated changing the specification by adding a text field named "Reason" to the submission details markdown file, stating the compile process takes four seconds, after which the new field appeared in the form and could be validated.

The validator was demonstrated against a JSON payload, with the team noting the specification does not define the encoding and that JSON is used for the demo.

A field named modules was flagged as possibly interpreted differently, to be worked through with a colleague, and removing it returned a valid payload. The team noted the demo excluded the check for all required fields to keep it simple.

It was stated the code is already in the open on the digital land GitHub repository, that it is in the process of being deployed for use, that it demonstrates one approach, and that the validation parts could be useful to developers within the open licence.

GLA variations and extending the specification

A community member asked whether the standard proposes to include basic data such as numbers of units and floor space at a national level for national monitoring, given the GLA specification has additional fields.

The team responded that the standard is independent of the GLA and at the moment only represents the national forms, with no plan to incorporate the GLA

fields into the national standard, while noting this could change over time as the baseline iterates.

It was explained that code lists sit behind the markdown files as CSV files of values, that a profile such as GLA can change which values or fields apply, and that variations for GLA additional questions have not been built into the specification but the specification can be extended so a GLA related authority can add its own values on top of what MHCLG asks.

It was noted that GLA uses slightly different values for areas such as housing types and tenure types, and that building these in directly could have broken things, hence the option to indicate GLA or non-GLA.

DEFRA planning advice transformation

A representative from Defra introduced the department and its role in planning, for example consulting Natural England on a site of special scientific interest or the Environment Agency on a flood zone, advice on nationally significant infrastructure projects, input to local plans, and pre-application advice.

Defra set out challenges identified from feedback from local planning authorities and developers, including inconsistency, lack of clarity on when and how to engage arms length bodies and what information is needed, reliance on legacy systems without a single standardised way of capturing and communicating data, resulting duplication, manual work and delay, and data siloed within bodies limiting visibility and interoperability.

Stated goals were to understand risk earlier, help customers decide with confidence through consistent and proportionate advice, act more as one organisation by sharing and reusing data, and deliver better outcomes with less effort.

Defra described the work as at the stage of having completed initial discovery and now exploring opportunities, with focus areas of providing the right advice at the right time, automating and simplifying using clear rules and quality data, addressing legacy tools and processes, and making guidance content clear and transparent.

The planning application data standard was positioned as a foundational input that could allow advice to be given earlier or requests to be routed consistently. Defra invited feedback on what the community would want from such a service.

Community Input (Lean Coffee / Questions)

A Lean Coffee board was used, with participants invited to add cards, then vote, then discuss. Two prompt questions were used: what the community would like to see from a DEFRA planning service, and what specific challenges participants face with current DEFRA related planning activities.

Topics raised and discussed:

- All data sets in one place. A community member described having to search multiple portals with slight variations of the same thing while building up GIS capability, and asked for a single portal as a single source of truth. The stated consequence of shopping around was that users may give up and return another day, with uncertainty over whether the data is current or the right version.
- A supplier echoed this, asking to be able to arrive at a client with the DEFRA layers available out of the box, removing repetitive work across authorities, and later asking that published spatial data be authoritative with clear coverage and worked examples of how it can be used to automate consultation.
- Open and free APIs and interoperability. A community member raised improving system to system connectivity across the ecosystem and a modular landscape of connected services.
- Biodiversity net gain. A community member asked whether the work focuses on arms length bodies as consultees rather than wider services such as the biodiversity net gain metric and register, and noted this should be made clear to avoid assumptions. Defra responded that planning related advice requests to arms length bodies are in scope, while licensing and permitting are not the focus.
- A single portal to access advice covering the arms length body remit. A community member described submitting one advice request and receiving a consistent response rather than separate responses from each body, or at least a single authoritative place for the spatial data, noting concerns that existing sources may not be up to date or integrated.

Defra stated they would like to return to present updates in future and to involve interested participants in further research, and that this forum is intended to be reused over time rather than a one-off.

Redaction, exempt information and the two-version question

A supplier asked whether two versions of the standard would be needed, one containing redacted or exempt information for consultees and one excluding it, giving the example that a consultee may need to know a request relates to a protected site that is not public information.

The same member also asked whether authorities would need to clear down data held in back office systems before publishing, to avoid publishing data that was not updated when an application was approved.

The team responded that what should not be published is controlled by the LPA, that the data standard applies to the whole process so that data within the system should be conformant, and that the standard does not define what an authority needs to share for its own purposes.

It was stated that what is shared with Defra for a statutory consultee is for the authority to decide, that only a defined subset, the public view, is required to be

provided as open data, and that authorities will continue to make publication decisions based on existing legislation, rules and precedent rather than those decisions being made nationally, but the data provided should be conformant with the standard.

Next session date: 22 July 2026. Invites should already be in your diaries for July 22. Please expect an agenda to be shared in advance a week before the meeting.

Subsequent session: 19 August.