GREATER**LONDON**AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2691

Title: Planning London Datahub - Data Quality Improvement

Executive Summary:

The Planning London DataHub collects data on all planning applications made in London, together with commencement and completions data. This now forms a key dataset which is used by both the public and private sectors working in the built environment.

Since its first launch there have been a number of changes to the planning system that need to be incorporated into the database (for example the introduction of use class E). In addition some opportunities for data improvements have been identified during the initial period of use and feedback. These are mainly focused on improving data granularity which should help enhance the value of the data for Londoners. To facilitate this, a number of updates need be made to the Planning Portal which have a knock-on impact on how data is collected and how the database is constructed.

In addition we have been asked by inputters and users to produce further guidance for applicants to improve the accuracy and usefulness of the data they submit. This will further improve the quality of the data available via the DataHub.

This decision seeks authority to spend money from the existing digitalisation budget to deliver these improvements, and further enhance the accuracy and granularity of the data.

Decision:

That the Assistant Director of Planning and Regeneration approves:

1. the expenditure of £45,000 towards technical improvements and updates on the collection and flow of data through the Planning Portal and the Planning London DataHub

2. the expenditure of up to £4,000 towards producing guidance setting out the role of data in the Planning London DataHub, and how to answer specific questions to improve the granularity and accuracy of data.

AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Lucinda Turner	**Position:** Assistant Director, Planning and Regeneration
Signature:	**Date:**
	11/12/2023

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

1.1 The Planning London DataHub collects and combines three key data sources for the planning system, namely: (i) the data supplied by the applicant as part of the planning application (ii) business process data from planning authorities' back office systems and (iii) the starts and completions data provided annually by boroughs. The collection of data started in November 2020, and it now collects data on c.120,000+ applications each year.

1.2 This data is central to many services that the GLA provides, including being a core data feed for the infrastructure mapping service and monitoring data for the London Plan and provides vital insights for developing the GLA Planning service and our associated work. The data also forms an open dataset which is used extensively by the public and private sector.

1.3 Whilst the technicalities of how the DataHub works vary across systems and organisations, the fundamental inputs of data are the same for each planning authority. This means applicants for planning permission are asked the same questions by each authority regardless of their location / local priorities. The vast majority of planning applications in London are submitted through the Planning Portal (a business owned as a partnership between government and Terra Quest) with just a smaller number of applications still being submitted on paper. The DataHub then collects the data submitted for each planning application (once it is made valid).

1.4 Since the launch of the Planning London Datahub in 2020 the planning system has undergone a number of changes, including:

- new types of prior approvals

- amendments to the use classes order (more specifically creating class E)

- subsequent subdivision of class E into smaller classes

- additional types of householder applications.

1.5 Implications of these changes for the DataHub mainly centre on the format data arrives in and how to turn it into a useful dataset for planning.

1.6 Through analysis of the data, and listening to feedback from the industry, it has become clear that answering some of the questions can be challenging (e.g. the urban greening score and energy requirements). The accuracy of the data is important and these challenges have meant that some of the data that we have received has limited value to the GLA in monitoring change. Having reviewed options for improvement, we are now proposing to produce simple guides to support applicants in providing the relevant information. We also consider that the granularity of some of the data could be improved.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

2.1 There are a number of key objectives from these data quality improvement works as set out below.

Improved Granularity of Data

2.2 One objective is to improve the granularity of the data coming through to the DataHub from the Planning Portal. This will have some very specific outputs:

Commercial Floorspace: the ability to track what is changing in commercial and office space now falls within class E of the use classes order. The proposed work will enable us to track how town centres

and commercial sites are changing and provide a better understanding of key issues e.g. the loss of retail and industrial floor space.

Floorspace Data: delivering improvements to floorspace data on a unit basis, enabling us to attribute floorspace within developments to specific units. This enables us to identify bed spaces; whether compliance is being achieved with the London Plan space standards; and a better understanding of delivery in practice and which units are being provided.

Polygons: providing polygons to support planning applications. This data is currently collected as part of the planning application process in the Planning Portal, however due to technical constraints it has not yet been fully integrated by any of the London boroughs. This means that neither the planning authorities, nor industry get the benefit of applicants providing the polygons part of the planning application. By integrating these into the DataHub, all parties in the planning process in London should be able to access and use the data. This is beneficial for a number of reasons:

- it enables the GLA to more easily understand the extent of development sites in London and to identify the precise locations of developments and which schemes overlap and potentially limit the delivery of other development sites

- it enables the data to be consumed by other platforms the GLA operates, including the Infrastructure Mapping Application and National Underground Asset Register, supporting a better understanding of the relationships between development proposals

- it provides a better inter-relationship with other databases of landownership and constraints and enables the GLA to support the boroughs with their own reporting on development taking place on constrained sites, such as greenbelt, Metropolitan open land, sports fields and conservation areas

- external users of the data have expressed keenness for these changes to take place to enable their own platforms to consume the data as part of their own business processes (e.g. Thames Water and London Fire Brigade).

Up To Date Data Sets

2.3   A second objective is to ensure the DataHub reflects the latest position following the changes in the planning system highlighted above.

2.4   New types of application have meant that certain elements of development have not been able to be monitored (e.g. the use and loss of shops as well as new types of householder extensions). Whilst some more resource intensive workarounds have been made, the proposed works should streamline this and enable more detailed analysis to be undertaken and more live understanding of the impacts of changes in legislation and policy.

2.5   The majority of these changes have already been made in the Planning Portal, and this will give us the ability to consume the more up to date data.

Guidance on how to answer planning application questions

2.6   It has become apparent that some applicants have struggled to answer some of the specific question, thus impacting on the quality and usefulness of some of the data. This includes some questions around tenure, site areas, environment, and infrastructure.

2.7   We are therefore proposing to produce some simple guidance which will enable applicants to better understand how to answer the questions, without having to review complex policy documentation. This should help ensure that these data points become a useful resource in monitoring the impact of the London Plan and the Mayor's Environment Strategy.

3. Equality comments

3.1 The GLA is subject to the public sector equality duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act (Act) 2010. The Act requires the identification and evaluation of the likely potential impacts, both positive and negative, of GLA decisions on those with protected characteristics.[1] The Mayor is to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation as well as to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This may involve, in particular, removing or minimising any disadvantage suffered by those who share a relevant protected characteristic and taking steps to meet the needs of such people. In certain circumstances compliance with the Act may involve treating people with a protected characteristic more favourably than those without it.

3.2 The vast majority of this work is 'back-office' and operates behind the scenes, and does not have a direct material impact on any user of the system. That being said the data itself helps inform policy development and service delivery across the city and thus impacts indirectly on Londoners. We consider that there would be positive impacts in terms of how better data can support the planning, delivery and monitoring of development in London. However that impact is likely to be no lesser or greater for people in relation to their protected characteristic(s).

3.3 The production of guidance will be produced in a format that meets or exceeds our published accessibility standards, and be capable of being understood and of use to all users. To achieve that it is intended that they will be produced iteratively, using much of the learning that the GLA has led in ensuring that digital formats are accessible both in terms of language and by multiple screen readers.

4. Other considerations

Procurement

4.1. Due to the nature of the work being funded through this decision, we will need to consider procurement carefully and the GLA guidance will be followed at all stages. We may need to consider whether single source procurement is necessary and justified in respect of the work for the Planning Portal and our own supplier for the management of the database (given the inter-operability and technical constraints). This latter area of work could be delivered through an amendment to an existing contract, while more detailed and specific advice on work with the Planning Portal may be entailed through the single source justification process.

4.2. Procurement for the accessible guidance will be carried out through our standard open tender processes.

Risks

4.3. The key risks relating to this project include:

Risk	Mitigation/Response	Probability	Impact	Overall
Project milestones are not met, or are not met on time	• Teams are in place with appropriate resources to ensure work is kept on track and to budget • Given reliance on external partners for some projects, an agile project management approach will also be used to allow flexibility	LOW	MEDIUM	GREEN

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[1] These are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, sex, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and (in certain circumstances) marriage and civil partnership.

Guidance not completed in an accessible or easy to use format	• Guidance on the accessibility of documentation will be issued as part of the tender process and will be a key deliverable in the programme • Check in points with our digital team will be arranged at the start of the programme of delivery	LOW	HIGH	AMBER
The programme does not have the expected benefits / long term impact	• A monitoring framework is being put in place to keep track of the impact of the changes to ensure continued delivery and improvement. This includes working those with local authorities and with the development industry.	LOW	HIGH	AMBER

4.4. The proposals set out in this Assistant Director Decision support a number of key Mayoral strategies and objectives as set out in the table below

London Recovery Missions	• A Green New Deal – Promoting new jobs and opportunities in the green economy • High Streets for All – Working with community groups to plan for a diverse, resilient and thriving mix of high street and town centre activities
Environment Strategy	• Monitoring a number of the key policies, including the urban greening score and energy and infrastructure requirements
Housing Strategy	• Monitoring how we are meeting London's diverse housing need • Well-designed, safe, good quality and environmentally sustainable homes
London Plan	• Promoting community engagement as set out in the relevant chapter • Implementation and monitoring of key policies, particularly environment and housing, including housing space standards
The Mayor's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy	• Supporting London as a great place to live through the implementation of the London Plan

Conflicts of interest

4.5 No one involved in the drafting or clearance of this document has any conflicts of interest to declare.

5. Financial comments

5.1 Approval is requested for:

- expenditure of £45,000 towards technical improvements and updates associated with the Planning London DataHub

- expenditure of up to £4,000 towards producing guidance to support the provision and quality of data to the Planning London DataHub.

5.2   This expenditure will be funded from the Digitalisation budget within the Planning and Regeneration Unit's approved budget for 2023-24 financial year.

5.3   All expenditure will be incurred by 31 March 2024.

6.   Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Procurement of contract	January 2024
Delivery Start Date	February 2024
Delivery End Date	March 2024
Project Closure:	May 2024

Appendices and supporting papers:
None.

Part 1 - Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form – NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:	Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)
Drafting officer: Peter Kemp has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:	✓
Corporate Investment Board A summary of this decision was reviewed by the Corporate Investment Board on 11 December 2023.	✓

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, FINANCIAL SERVICES

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature:

Anna Custeolt

Date:

11/12/2023