

# GREATER **LONDON** AUTHORITY

## REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2566

### Title: Referred Planning Applications Website Procurement

#### Executive Summary:

300-400 planning applications are referred to the Mayor each year. These applications are the biggest and often the most controversial applications in London and attract significant community interest.

In his 2021 election manifesto, the Mayor committed to using digital platforms to better involve communities in decision making. At present the website that Londoners can use to access and make comments on applications referred to the Mayor does not make it easy to access information, and concerns have been raised about this by Assembly Members.

The proposal is for the GLA to procure an alternative front end for users that would be integrated with the existing back office system. This will enable Londoners to access, monitor, view and comment on referred applications more effectively.

#### Decision:

That the Assistant Director for Planning and Regeneration approves expenditure of up to £40,000 for the delivery of a new platform for Londoners to access information on referred planning applications.

#### AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

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:**

**1/3/22**

## **PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE**

### **Decision required – supporting report**

#### **1. Introduction and background**

- 1.1 The Greater London Authority Act 1999 created a duty on the Mayor to consider applications that have potentially strategic importance (PSI). The Mayor of London Order 2008 sets out the criteria for PSI applications, and the process through which the Mayor must respond to applications referred to him.
- 1.2 By their nature, these applications are the ones that have the greatest impact on communities across London, and as such generate the most interest and are the most contentious.
- 1.3 The GLA implemented a new back-office system (Arcus) in 2020, which has enabled significant changes and efficiencies to business process. At the time of implementation, the GLA used the supplier's own public platform to enable interested parties to view, monitor and comment on applications.
- 1.4 The Mayor, in his 2021 manifesto, committed to improving the way communities are involved in planning decisions that affect them, and to using more interactive technology to help achieve this. The Planning team are currently launching this work as a 'discovery' programme to understand how communities currently engage (or not) with the planning system with a view to finding ways to make this more effective.
- 1.5 Whilst there have been some recent improvements to the Planning website, it is clear that the current Arcus public access platform acts as a barrier to Londoners' access and understanding. This not only acts to exclude people who do not understand the planning process, but also creates confusion, and a negative perception of the work of the Mayor and the GLA as well as resulting in additional work for officers.
- 1.6 Given that Arcus is capable of connecting to other platforms, this enables a range of alternative solutions which we are proposing to explore. DLUHC, as part of the digitalisation of planning work, has seed funded a number of 'Proptech' firms to develop platforms that enable easier access to planning. Whilst none of these have yet been implemented in London, it is clear that there are products in the market that have the potential to make access to planning applications far simpler or which could be further developed to achieve this.
- 1.7 In addition to fulfilling a Mayoral manifesto commitment, this issue has been raised by Assembly Members as an area of concern.
- 1.8 Discussions are currently underway with TFL to source the best procurement solution to enable this opportunity to be open to SMEs to achieve the GLAs EDI objectives through this procurement too.

#### **2. Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

- 2.1 The objective of this work is to unlock information for Londoners so that their involvement in the planning process at the GLA can be more effective.

- 2.2 The expected outcomes are increased involvement from Londoners in the planning system, whilst pressure on resources does not increase. Other expected outcomes include less criticism of the way the planning system in London works.

### **3. Equality Comments**

- 3.1 The GLA is subject to the public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. There would not appear to be any additional impacts on any groups with protected characteristics greater than any other group from this arrangement, although those people who may not be as digitally included eg some older people, people on lower income may have less access to data than others. This situation is not worsened compared to the current position and in parallel the GLA is undertaking a range of work to increase digital inclusion.
- 3.2 Special regard will be had in the procurement to ensuring that any product meets the highest possible accessibility requirements, to ensure it can be used by the highest number of Londoners, and any proposals will be subject to stringent accessibility testing.
- 3.3 In the procurement of this platform, express regard will be given to whether this project can support SMEs and the procurement used to support increasing diversity of the workforce and businesses working in this sector.

### **4. Other Considerations**

- 4.1 There are no known, or perceived conflict of interests in this matter.

### **5. Financial comments**

- 5.1 Approval is sought for the expenditure of up to £40,000 for the delivery of a new web front end for the Planning service.
- 5.2 This expenditure will be funded from the Digitalisation programme budget within the Planning and Regeneration unit. Budgets for 2022-23 are to be confirmed as part of the budget setting process however, as Planning is a statutory function sufficient budget for all essential tasks and costs will be in place.

### **6. Legal comments**

- 6.1 Under Section 30 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999 (the 'Act') the GLA, after appropriate consultation, is entitled to do anything that will further the promotion, within Greater London, of economic development and wealth creation, social development and the improvement of the environment. The Mayor also has a subsidiary power pursuant to Section 34 of the Act to do anything which is calculated to facilitate or is conducive or incidental to the exercise of any of the statutory functions of the Authority. Section 334 of the Act requires the Mayor to prepare and publish a spatial development strategy (known as the London Plan). Section 339 of the Act requires the Mayor to keep the London Plan under review, especially matters which may be expected to affect the development of Greater London or the planning of its development. In this case, the decision to procure these specialist technical services may reasonably be regarded as facilitating,

being conducive or incidental to, the exercise of the Mayor's power under section 30, 334 and 339 of the Act.

6.2 Sections 1 to 4 of this report indicate that the decisions requested of the Assistant Director in accordance with the GLA's Contracts and Funding Code fall within the GLA's statutory powers. In formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought, officers have complied with the Authority's related statutory duties to:

- Pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people;
- Consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom; and
- Consult with appropriate bodies.

**Appendices and supporting papers:** None

**Public access to information**

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

**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**

This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 28 February 2022

✓

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:**

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

**Signature**

**Date**



**2/3/22**