How could better use of data and digital technologies improve the planning system?

Dr Reyhaneh Shojaei
The key issues

• What are the critical issues facing the planning system?

• Which of these issues could be solved by digital solutions?

• To what extent is the current planning system digitised? How could it be improved, and what are the potential benefits?

• What are the constraints on the wider use of data and digitisation in the UK planning system?

• What are the disadvantages of digital technology adoption, and how we can overcome them?
Overview of the UK planning system

- Planning objectives: Campbell’s (1996) triangle
- A 'plan-led' system
- Different actors, levels, and a multi-scalar regulatory framework
- Local Planning Authorities' elaborate Local Plans, compliance with NPPF
- Planning applications: developers/landowners apply for project-specific planning permission
The planning system is slow, complex, costly and un-transparent....

- Lack of up-to-date plans
- Slow process
- Over-production of documents
- Lack of transparency

Digitisation of the planning system

• Only have basic digital tools in place, such as the Planning Portal (2002) for e-submission, now 90% of applications

• But it's not a fully digitised process:
  1. person-centric process
  2. ill-suited for sharing
  3. no aggregation of data
  4. no coordination between different actors
Data usage in the planning system

- Plan making process
- Planning application process
- Site search and appraisal process
- Plan monitoring process
Expected benefits of the digitisation of the planning system

- The use of digital tools can improve **transparency**, **efficiency** and allow **cost and time savings**

- Benefits are expected at every stage of the planning process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site search and appraisal</th>
<th>Plan monitoring</th>
<th>Public consultation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Integrate data in single platforms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coordinate stakeholders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Allow more accurate assessment of outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Make data more accessible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Digital platforms can encourage community involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Make planning information more visual and accessible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But note!

- Digitisation is not a cheap and quick solution
What are the constraints on the wider use of data and digitisation in the UK planning system?

• Decentralisation
• Data collection: issues of ownership, privacy and security
• Lack of time, skills or resources for change
• Resistance to change
• Scattered and uncoordinated innovation
The digital divide

• Of the eight million people in the UK who don’t use the internet, 90% also suffer from other economic or social disadvantages

• Even before COVID-19, digital exclusion was a reality for a fifth of the UK’s population (across all ages)

https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/BeyondThePandemic_digitaldivide
Stakeholder engagement

• Identify stakeholders

• Choose an appropriate approach for stakeholder engagement:

  1. Prior to the stakeholder engagement process
  2. During the stakeholder engagement process
  3. After the stakeholder engagement exercise

This research forms part of Centre for Digital Built Britain’s work within the Construction Innovation Hub. The funding was provided through the Government’s modern industrial strategy by Innovate UK, part of UK Research and Innovation.