



Planning Applications; reimagining the future

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Why planning applications?

The impact of planning applications (and subsequent decisions) is far reaching:

- The service is crucial for local areas and their amenities (not just home extensions!)
- Every citizen of a planning authority is a potential service user (as an applicant, consultee or both)
- The service is complex and highly professionalised meaning any interaction with it can be costly and time consuming

Why planning applications?

There are some widely recognised pain points in the current service:

- Elements of statutory process is reliant on laminated posters on lampposts
- Not widely digitised so struggles to respond to user and societal trends effectively
- Each planning authority has its own policies and practises which are not stored anywhere centrally
- High volume of invalid applications are received as a result of complexities and information availability

Why planning applications?

Some statistics around the pain points:

- **Three** application types make up **60%** of applications received (full planning 31%, householder planning consent 15%, discharge of conditions 14%) ¹
- **76%** of full planning, **61%** of householder planning consent and **42%** of discharge of conditions applications are **invalid** on first submission ¹
- Invalid applications need, on average, **2 communications** from planners before they are **valid** ²
- **20%** of invalid applications are **missing documents** (elevations, sections, reports etc.) ²

¹ London Borough of Hackney applications April 2017 - July 2018

² London Borough of Hackney invalid applications June 2018

Why planning applications?

So, what are the opportunities:

- To provide a clear view of what policies are, which areas they affect and how that impacts on an application you're making
- To free up planners time by making sure applications are submitted valid first time
- To implement a data structure which can be easily interpreted and consumed by other local planning authorities
- To provide service users with a journey which minimises complexity and empowers self-service

What are we doing about it?

Our product vision:

Submit my Plan is for **professionals and householders** who **submit planning applications**. It will **guide** applicants through the submission process, helping them include the **right information, accurate and complete** documentation and the **correct** fee. It will reduce anxiety during waiting periods by providing **notifications** to applicants about what's happening now and next.

How are we doing it?

We are:

- Partnering with Snook and Hactar
- Collaborating with Southwark and Camden borough councils to ensure we build something that's transferable and not bespoke
- Designing with a 'furthest first' approach (designing for the needs of the top and bottom users, we have a greater chance of serving the needs of the middle)
- Running an agile project using Lean UX principles

SNOOK

Hactar



Camden



What have we done so far?

Results of our user research showed:

- Lack of understanding around what documents are required
- Professionals like the fact that Planning Portal stores old applications so they can refer back
- Confusion around what certificates to provide
- People don't know what form to choose
- Architects need their clients to fill in sections
- If you overfill the form it could be rejected
- People struggle with open text fields, they don't know what to write.
- Lack of consistency around file names which causes problems for people finding documents
- Lots of sections of the forms are not relevant to some people
- Fee breakdown is unclear and payment channel inconsistent

What have we done so far?

We've identified 6 key components needed to deliver meaningful change:

Accounts	Constraint finder	Dynamic forms	Document upload	Payment	Notifications
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Time to get involved!

Let's spend some time thinking about the features the core components will need to have, how they might work and how they could look!

SNOCOK

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Accounts

What is it?

Professional users submit applications in multiple boroughs therefore need an account. General public have this choice but can also operate as a guest user with a code for modifications.

A hand-drawn sketch of a web form titled "SUBMIT MY PLANNING APPLICATION". The form is divided into two columns by a vertical dashed line. The left column is labeled "Guest" and contains a horizontal line, a text input field labeled "email address", a text input field labeled "confirm email", and a green button labeled "APPLY". The right column is labeled "log in" and contains a text input field labeled "Email", a text input field labeled "Password", and a green button labeled "log in".

Dashboard

Account details

My Apps

Extension	Hackney	05	PROGRESS
Roof	Hackney	05	INVALID
Shed	Lambeth	05	DRAFT
Extension	Camden	04	PROGRESS

Application

Hackney

Extension # 432

Personal Details

Documents

Location v

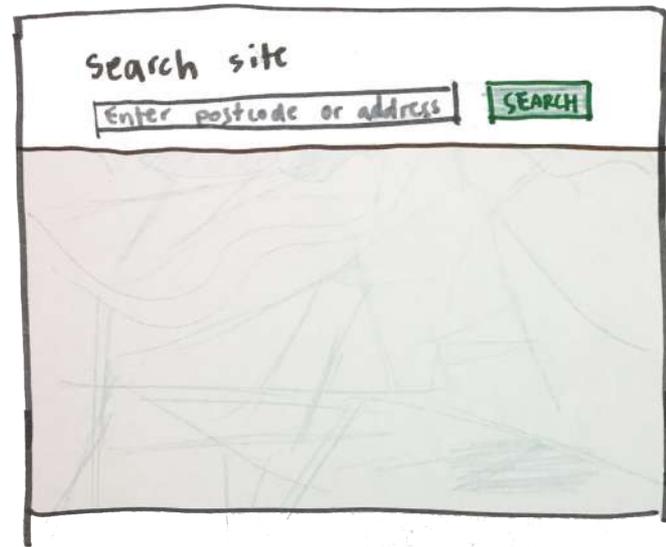
- Hackney
- Lambeth
- Camden

Add +

Constraint finder

What is it?

Applicants input address, intention and use (if they know it). System displays previous uses (if we have them) area policy constraints (e.g. conservation area) and site specific policies to consider. Link to previous applications.



Address _____

BOUNDARY _____

CONSTRAINTS _____

PLANNING HISTORY _____

What are you planning?

1. I want to

select option 

Build something new

Renovate

Change use

2. Type of use

Policies: Employment

1 _____
Link >

2 _____
Link >

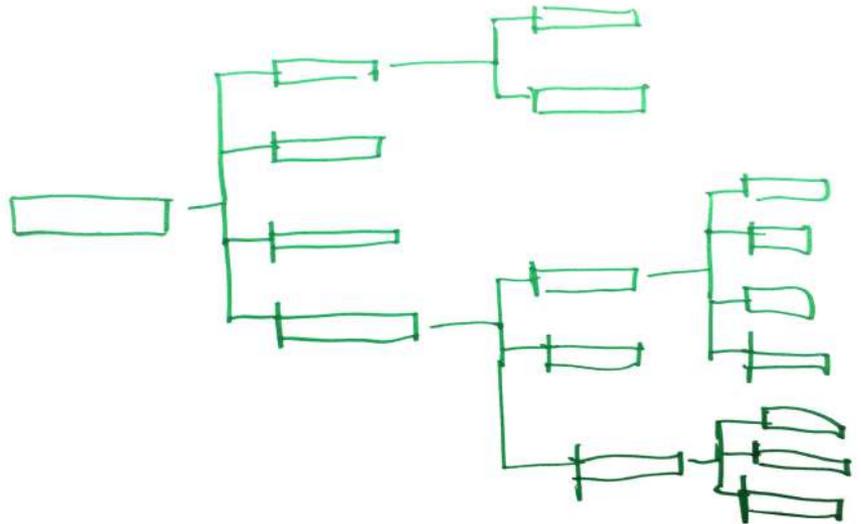
Policies: Conservation area

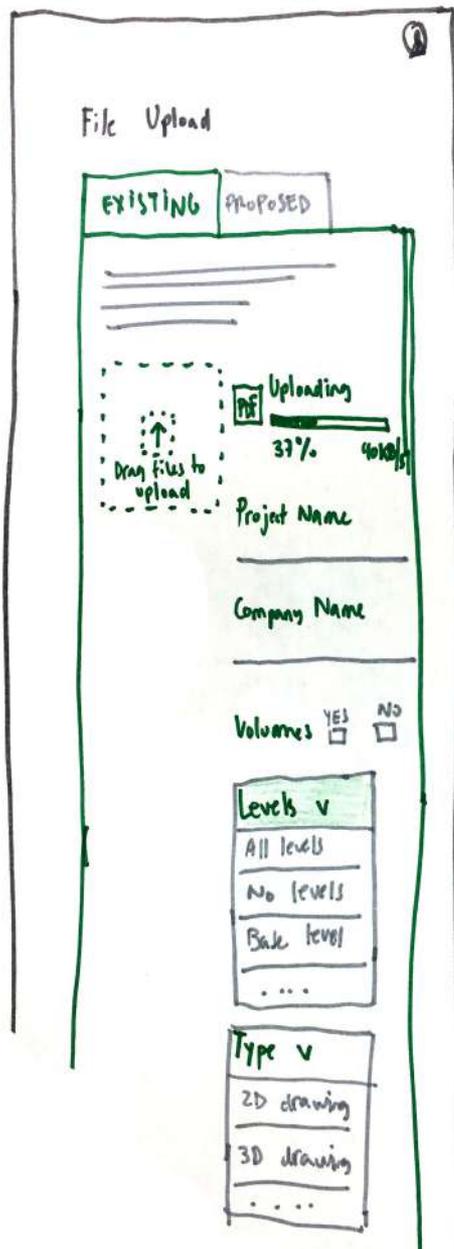
1 _____
Link >
Master plan >

Dynamic forms

What is it?

Instead of having to choose what application to submit, users answer a series of questions about their development. Questions are determined based on previous answers and match policy requirements.





RIBA
BIM
Naming
Convention

Document upload

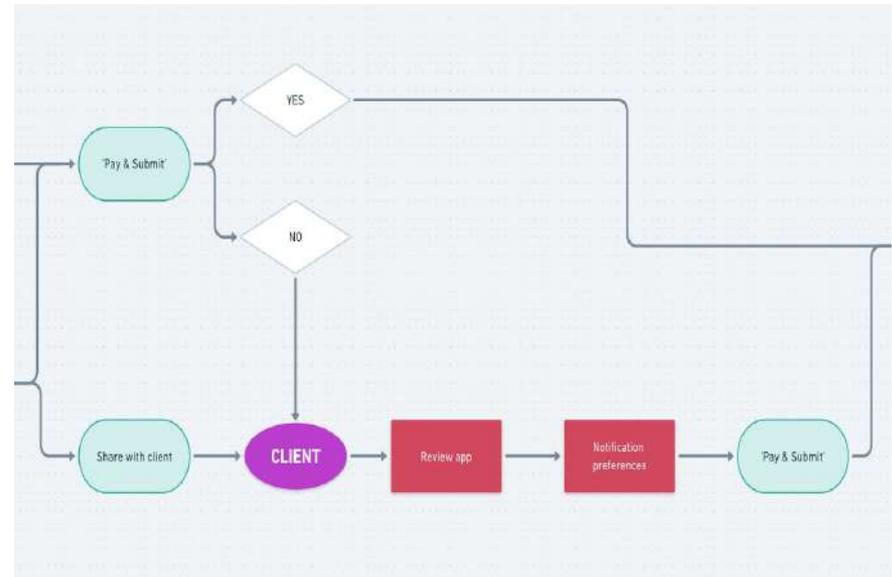
What is it?

Upload of documents required for the application with contextual guidance to support provision of the correct and complete documents. Potentially not after the form but within.

Payment

What is it?

Payment was an unforeseen contributor to invalid applications. 15% of applications in June² were invalid due to payment issue. Payment should be integrated within the application process like a checkout journey.



Notifications

What is it?

Automated notifications sent at key moments during the planning application process in plain English to alleviate anxiety. Moments include: confirmation of receipt, validation complete, consultation ended, reassuring update two weeks before end.

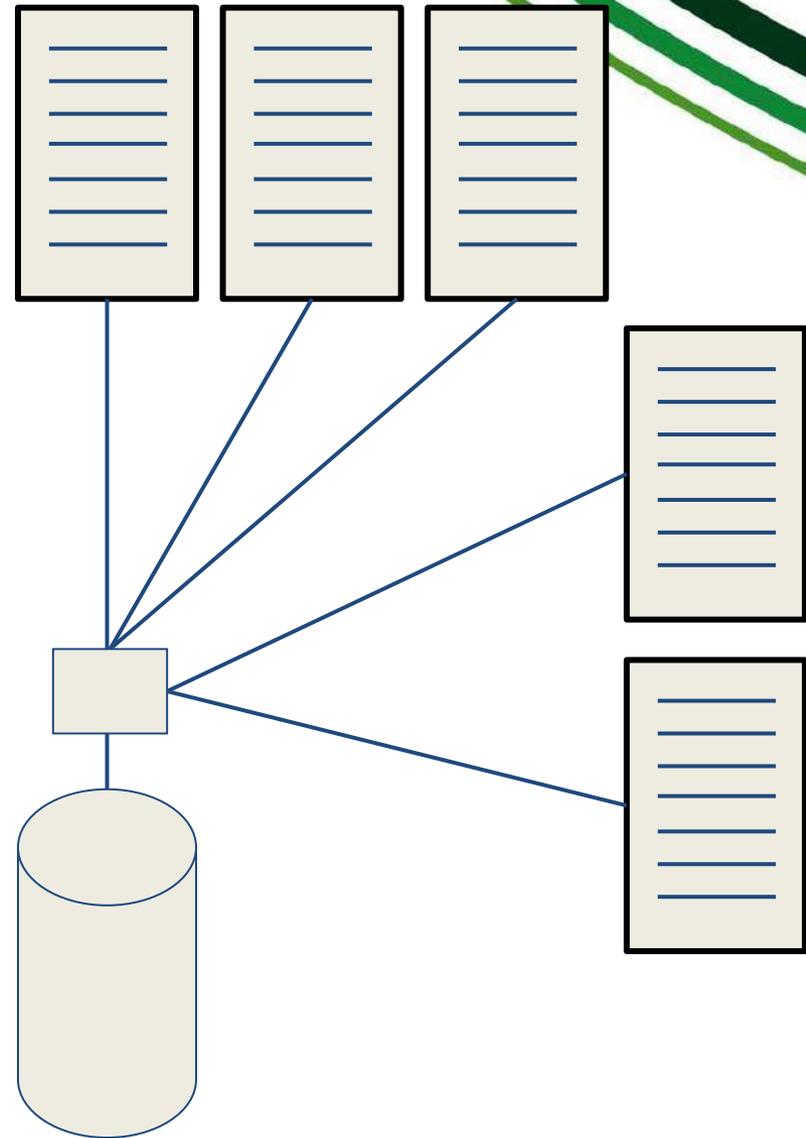
WEEK 5



The future?

Planning data authority and innovation platform

Rather than selling software as a package, Submit my plan acts as a centralised data processor, offering services to submit and access planning data. We offer innovative cloud applications for people to interact with our data service.



The future?

- Applicants experience a complete 'self-service' journey in a single platform. This should be from initial fact finding, submission through to booking a site visit and getting a decision
- 3D models of proposed buildings displayed in the context of the site location to really 'see' the building
- Pre-application will be digitised
- Totally paperless service
- Live application tracking and updates at every stage

The future?

To achieve our vision of the future we'd need a lot of things to happen:

- Nationwide collaboration between planning authorities
- An open data schema for planning applications would need to be designed, built, implemented and have uptake amongst local planning authorities
- National and local policies would need to be standardised, stored and maintained centrally
- Geo-spatial constraint data for each local planning authority would need to be standardised, stored and maintained centrally



Thank you for your time

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<https://sites.google.com/hackney.gov.uk/submit-my-planning-application>

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Camden

