
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Sandra Tudor
Head of Profession for Statistics
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)
(by email)

2 March 2022

Dear Sandra

Statistics on planning applications in England

We recently completed our compliance check of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' (DLUHC) [Planning applications in England statistics](#), against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics.

The statistics are routinely used to provide evidence for ministerial decisions to [designate planning authorities that are not adequately performing their function of determining applications](#), with this use specified in secondary legislation. With moves towards increasing the [digitisation of the planning system](#) and the UK Government's levelling up priorities, there is potential for increased user interest in these statistics. We also see potential to enhance their value for informing key questions related to planning and housing more broadly over the coming years, such as the planning performance of local authorities in the twenty English towns and cities identified as priorities for redevelopment in the [UK Government's Levelling up white paper](#).

Our review found a range of positive features that demonstrate the trustworthiness, quality, and value of the statistics:

- The statistics are published in a well-presented bulletin with good supporting information – the use of graphics helps support interpretation of the key trends and narrative is informative
- The statistics are accompanied by an accessible and informative technical report – including a helpful summary of the team's assurances around data quality, and commentary on the primary uses of the data, and their historical context and policy relevance
- The new [county](#) and [district](#) planning dashboards are well constructed and easy to use, with clear guidance that enhances the accessibility of the statistics for a broader range of users – we understand there are plans to merge the two dashboards into one, to further enhance the user experience

- Enhancing the value of insight offered by including of data on housing permissions from a contractor, Glenigan, to show the number of residential units associated with the planning applications approved and the distribution of units associated with projects of different sizes. The narrative included around why permissions granted may not result in homes being delivered in practice is helpful
- Plans to further develop the statistics, such as to:
 - Realise benefits from the [digitisation of the planning system](#), which should bring more transparency to the status of local plans across England. Over the longer term this should lead to a standard set of data relating to the planning process for all local authorities that is consistent, and could reduce the need for DLUHC to collect planning data from local authorities. The team told us that other benefits may include the ability to monitor spatial data on planning applications in closer to real time, and allow linkage to progress in developments against local plans. We encourage the statisticians to set out clearly and transparently the potential benefits this work may bring to the further development of the planning statistics
 - Further explore the potential of Glenigan data (or other suitable sources), subject to contractual constraints and the quality of local area data, to answer key questions – around, for example, the number of houses granted permission in each local area, or help explain, why planning permissions are lower in London than in North East England
 - Complete current work to migrate data to a consolidated data store – this should enable the statistics team to work with the data more efficiently, and facilitate the team publishing future releases in html and further producing live tables using R. We have published a [review into the use of Reproducible Analytical Pipeline \(RAP\) principles and overcoming barriers](#) which may be useful to your team as you consider a more automated approach such as RAP
- Plans to engage with users around how the statistics might be developed in future – for example, whether Glenigan or other sources, might be used to monitor commercial developments, or if sub-national commentary should be introduced to help explore questions around, for example, trends in planning to support regeneration in the twenty English towns and cities prioritised in the UK Government’s Levelling up white paper

Our review also identified several ways in which we consider that you could further enhance the trustworthiness, quality, and value of the statistics:

- The team should enhance its user engagement approach as it takes forward planned development work, building on the established feedback channels to proactively obtain users’ views on how the statistics might be further enhanced to answer key questions. To maximise benefits from this work we encourage the team to feed in to the planned update of the department’s published [Engagement strategy](#), and publish information on its overall engagement approach. This will provide a channel to communicate with users about your future development plans and allow users to feed in their views
- Develop the narrative and analysis included to show how the statistics can help to answer key questions – for example, by enhancing the narrative around local authority planning performance in relation to statutory targets. The team informed us of the need to meet the needs of different users of the statistics. These include those interested in local authority planning performance, as well as those using the statistics to understand the flow of residential planning permissions through to

building completions, and an increasing interest in planning data relating to the development of vacant and derelict land. As part of its broader engagement around future developments, we encourage the team to engage with colleagues in Scottish Government responsible for vacant and derelict land statistics, who are exploring [alternative approaches to measuring these areas, in the context of a move to digital e-planning](#) in Scotland

- Explore what further analyses of planning system data from Glenigan (or alternative sources) would be of value to users, and include references to ad hoc analyses of Glenigan data showing [residential planning applications lapsing](#) in the statistics, to enhance the insight and coherent overview offered to users
- Enhance accessibility of the different products – for example, by adding additional links and commentary to aid accessibility between the bulletin and the dashboards, tables, technical note, and glossary of terms, to enhance the navigation and use of the full range of products
- Present an account of data quality drawing on the range of quality dimensions published in [DLUHC's quality guidelines](#) for users. To support the information included in the technical report on administrative data quality, provide an account the different systems used by local authorities and possible inaccuracies associated with their processes, as well as whether these manifest in greater revisions between quarters, for some local authorities than others
- More clearly communicate the extent of revisions made between the provisional and revised data in the different outputs, including in the data dashboards, to support appropriate interpretation by users. And more clearly communicate the rationale for decisions around the different rounding approaches used and why imputation is not carried out for county applications

I would like to thank your team for their positive engagement on this review. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further. I am copying this letter to Andrew Presland and Alexander Reynolds, the responsible statisticians, and Richard Field, head of housing and planning statistics at DLUHC.

Yours sincerely



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