What Does Digitising Planning Mean?

04/05/2022

- **Digitising planning is about using tech alongside culture, process, and practice to help us plan better places into the future.** Computers are good at holding information and following rules - this can really benefit the planning system. It allows planners to move from focussing resource on process to increasing the focus on enabling good, well-designed places. The 'heavy lifting' of process can therefore be sped up and supported by tech.

- **The key to using tech well is to put information on the web -** not as pdf documents where information is hard to find, but as data rich, well designed interfaces which are easy to use and navigate people to the detail they need.

- **For planning to work well in a digital environment, a change of approach is required –** some parts of this need collaboration, for example to produce interfaces to organise and standardise data. Other parts, however, are possible for authorities to adopt independently if they can invest some time and resource into the start-up needed - and are prepared to keep some ongoing resource to manage them well. It's a case of up-front effort which will equal saved resource in the longer term, both within Planning but also across other parts of the authority.

- **A number of local authorities have already made progress in developing tools which can be accessed to explore their potential elsewhere**, for example LB Southwark's service to check if planning permission is needed, or LB Enfield's Interactive Proposals Map. These kinds of tools show authorities what can be achieved - by adopting changes in a few key areas, the kind of shifts in ways of working needed can be tested and evaluated to spur further change.

- **Once tools have been adopted, support is needed for new users, however this can be provided by tutorial videos which are easily shared and stored.** Some ongoing management is needed and there are increasing numbers of planners who can learn skills in both planning and tech to allow them to provide a tech management role.

- **To experiment and trial digital tools, there may be staff across the authority who can provide support, such as a Digital Transformation Officer**. The authority may have or be in the process of developing a strategy to focus on areas where key benefits can be gained. Draw a group together of staff who are keen to act and remember there are no stupid questions! Probing why things are done the way they always have can open up key areas which can benefit from change. Consultation with users is key to understand what people need to know – flow charts by planners allow processes to be coded into robust systems which work well.
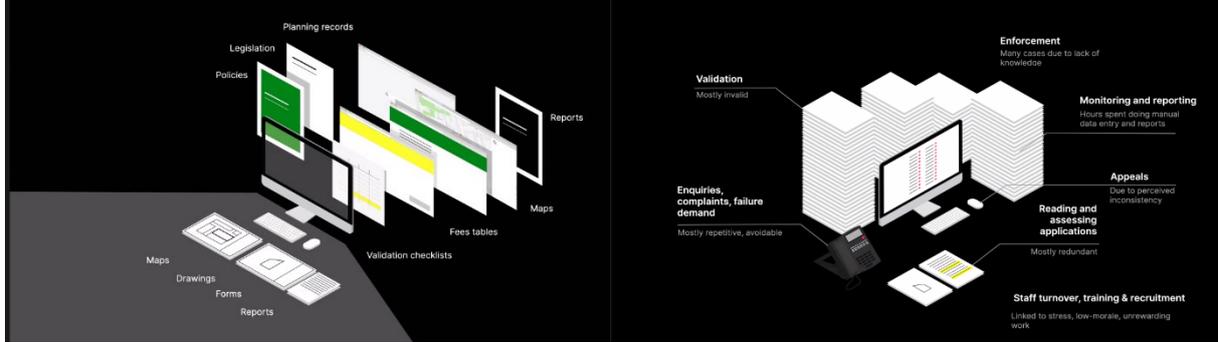
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Speakers:

Esther Euan Mills, Independent Urban Designer

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Facilitators:

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Attendees: 81

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