UNBOXED

BOPS

Back Office Planning System

Service definition

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A new operating system for planning

1. Service overview

BOPS is a cloud-hosted SaaS back-office planning system that supports local authorities to receive, assess, consult on, determine and publish planning applications using structured, open data.

BOPS is available in both shared (multi-tenanted) and dedicated (single-instance) SaaS deployment models.

BOPS is delivered by Unboxed, a digital service and product development agency with 20 years' experience of designing and building better experiences in public services.

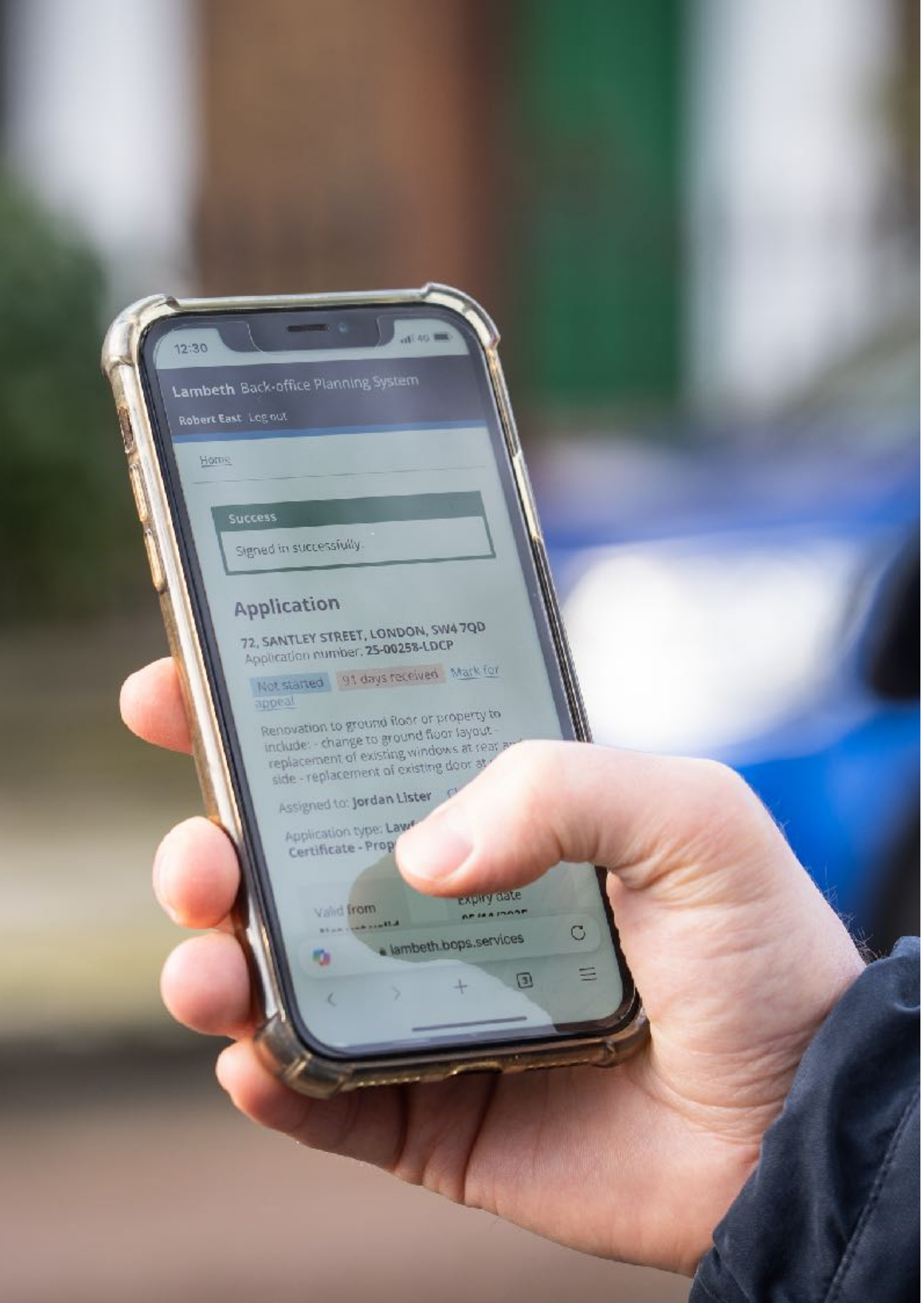
2. The problem we’re solving

Local planning authorities are under pressure to deliver faster and more consistent planning decisions - all while managing growing workloads and shrinking resources.

Many are still relying on outdated systems and manual processes that make even simple tasks time-consuming. Officers spend valuable time on admin instead of advising applicants. Applicants face long waits for responses and limited visibility of progress.

It’s clear: something needs to change


Lambeth Back office Planning System
Check, tag and confirm documents
Check application details
Confirm application requirements
Lambeth Back office Planning System
Proposed red line boundary



3. Introducing BOPS

BOPS (Back Office Planning System) is an intuitive, modern, open-source back-office system designed with councils, for councils.

It supports planning officers and support teams to process applications and deliver pre-application advice more efficiently, consistently and transparently.

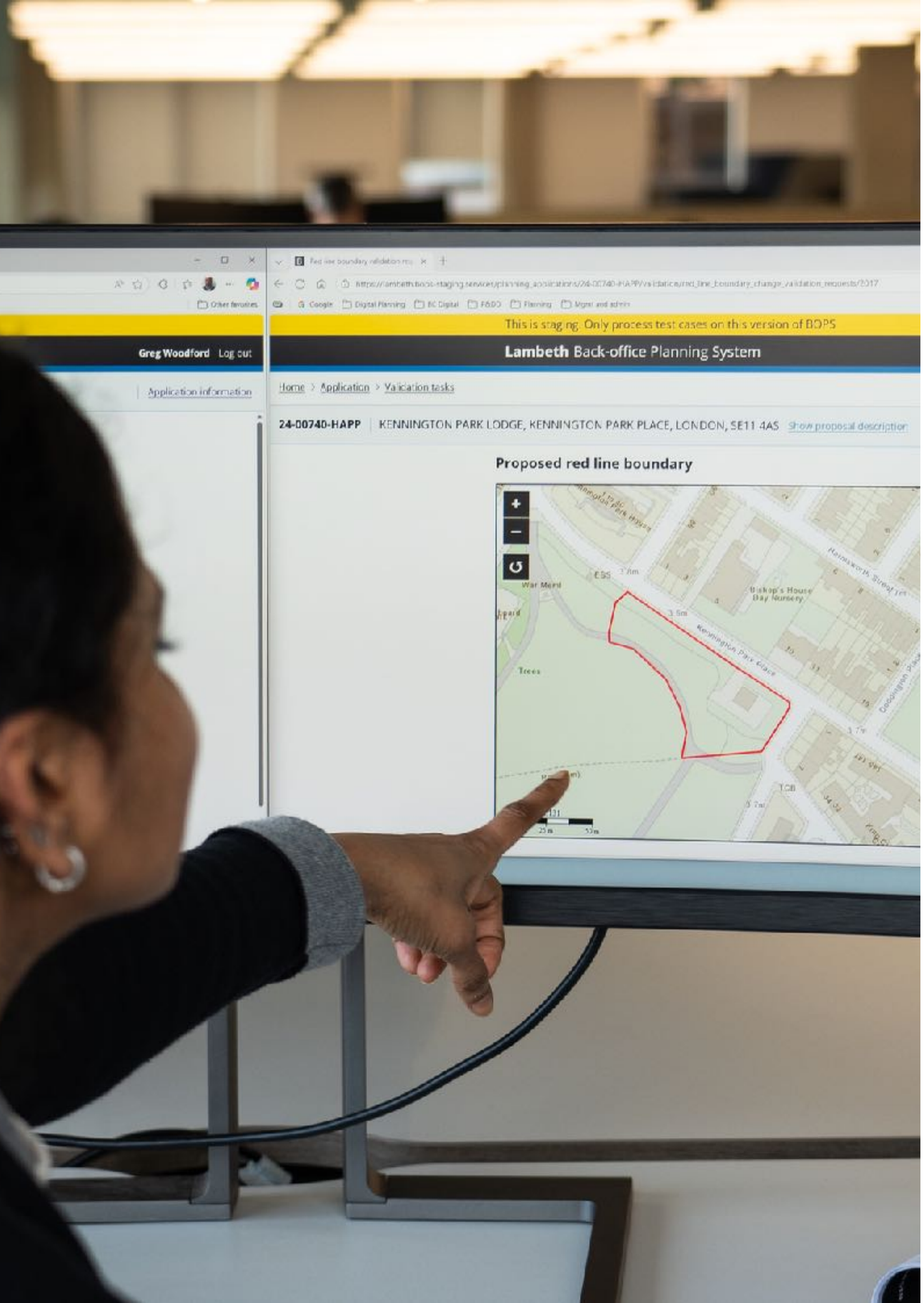
BOPS is built through ongoing collaboration between local authorities and delivery partners, combining real user insight with modern technology to create tools that genuinely make officers' work easier.

4. Designed by planners, for planners

BOPS has been co-designed and tested with planning teams across multiple councils.

Every feature is shaped by real feedback from the people who use it - from validation officers to planners and managers.

The result is a tool that feels intuitive from day one, supports better working practices, and is continually refined through collaboration across the BOPS community.



5. Built on data, not documents

BOPS goes beyond traditional document-heavy systems by putting structured, open data at the heart of planning. BOPS:

- reduces reliance on inaccessible documents
- provides an open, standardised data platform
- cuts errors and inconsistencies that cause delays and appeals
- makes policy and process data available for real-time analysis and reporting
- interoperates seamlessly with new and innovative products
- frees planning officers to focus on higher-value, meaningful work

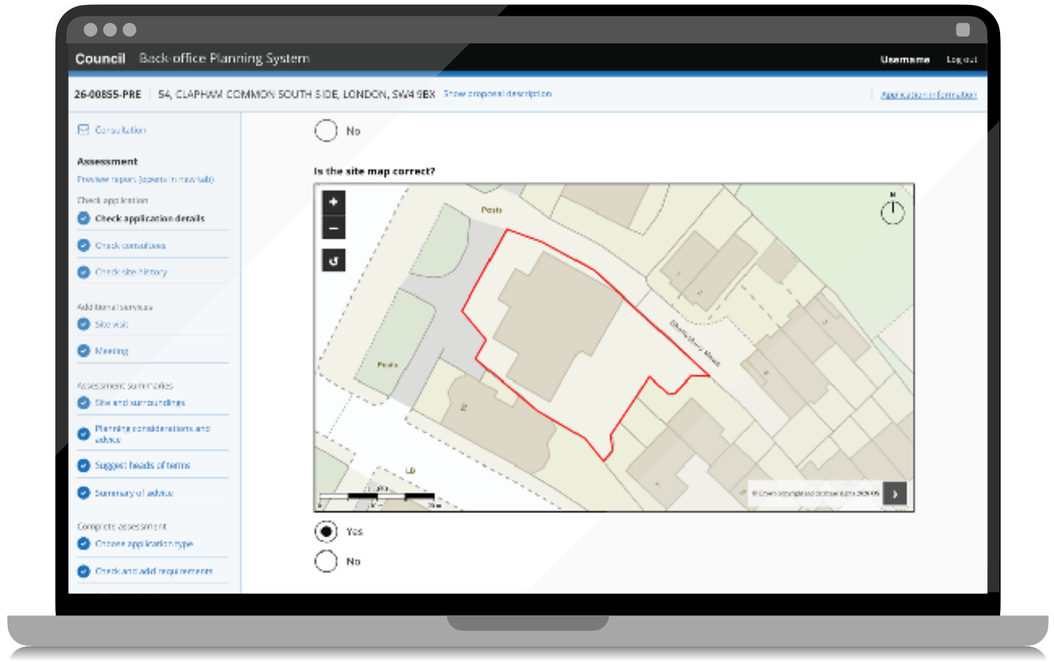
6. Features and functionality

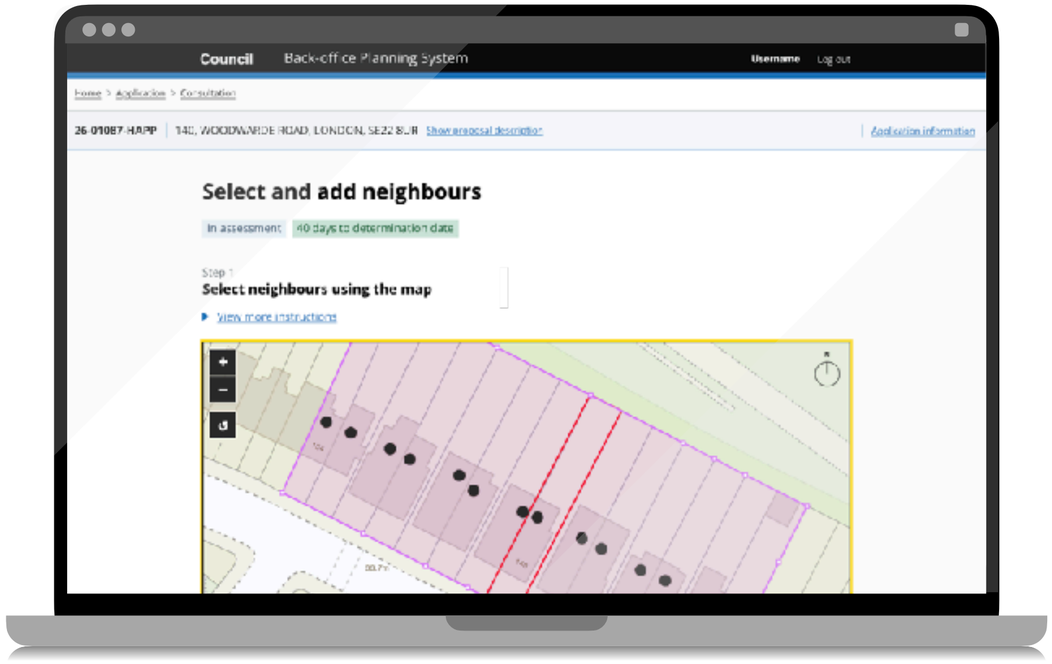
Key functionality

Pre-application

A data-driven pre-application service, designed to help planners tailor their advice for a more consistent service to customers.

- digital report for easy navigation
- secure link access to documents for consultees
- no need to email PDFs back and forth
- designed and tested with agents, householders and planning officers





Receive and validate

Receive applications from your preferred source, including Planning Portal and PlanX.

- integrated applicant communication for rapid validation
- intelligent document tagging and validation
- digital red line and automated constraints
- easy version control
- ability to integrate with redaction tools

Consult

Manage consultation within one system, with no need for emails. BOPS uses GOV.UK Notify to automate emails and letters, with your templates.

- map based neighbour selection
- integrated consultation and public-facing portal for comments
- consultees recommended based on constraints
- follow up managed in-system
- reduced bounce-backs through trusted government platform

Assess

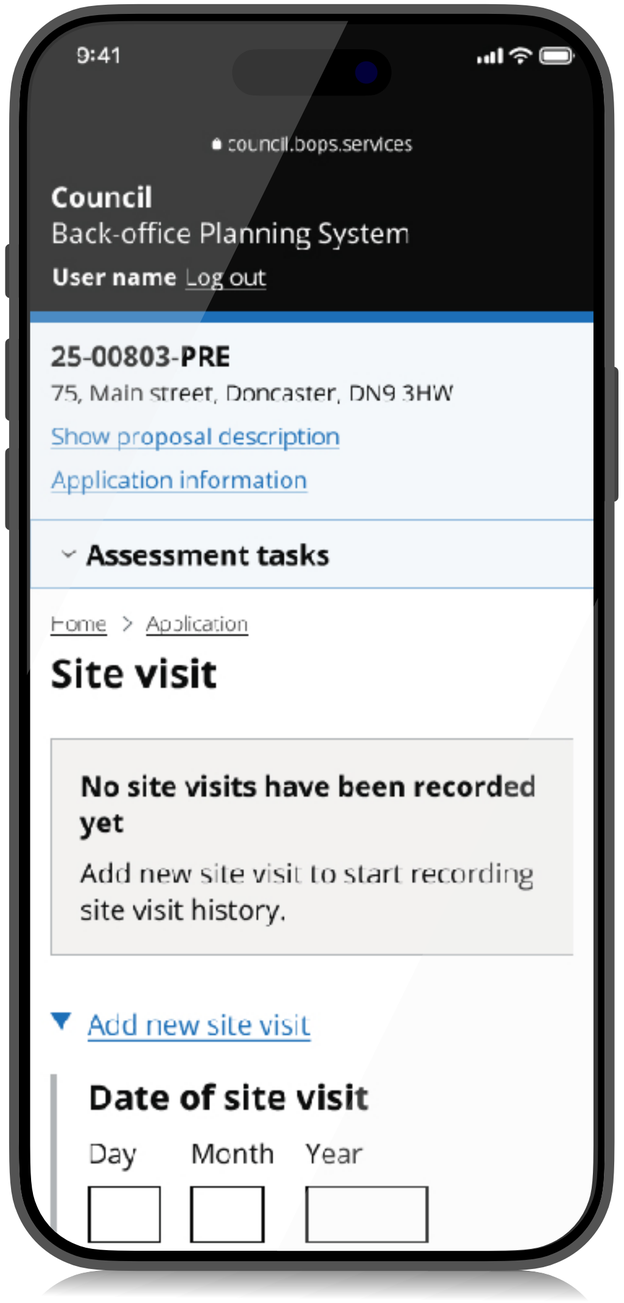
A data-driven workflow designed to help planners make better decisions, faster:

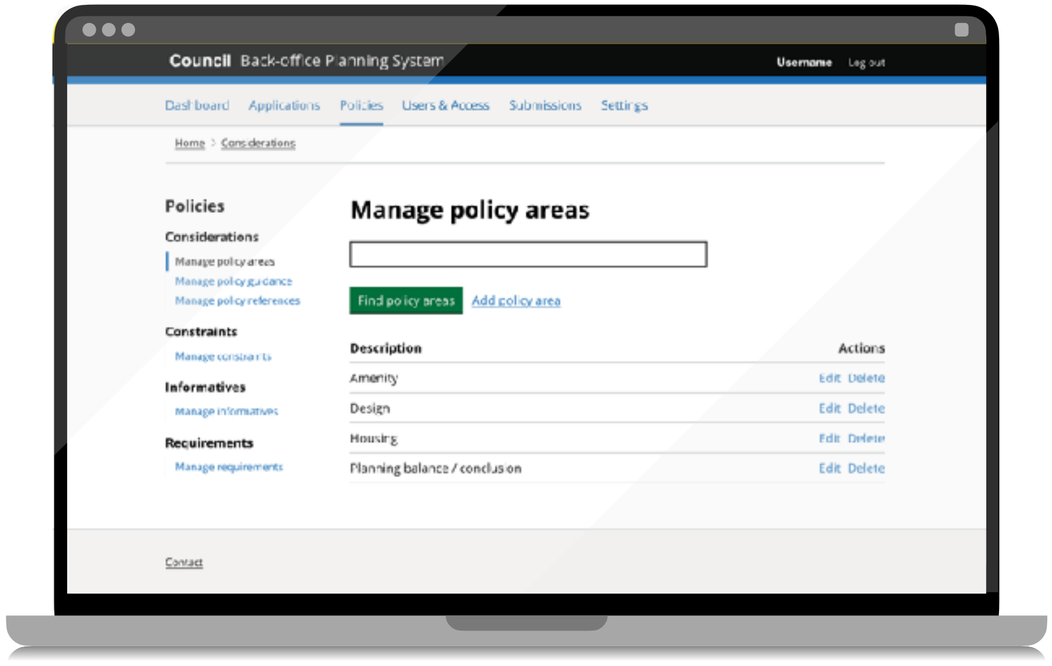
- system-generated report that builds as you work, with no need to jump between screens
- locally configured policies, conditions and informative
- automated policy summaries and suggested considerations
- all the information a planner needs, when they need it, and nothing else

Review and publish

A clear overview of everything managers need to review an application and guide their team to better decisions:

- easy to navigate between officer's assessment and documentation
- collate feedback as you go and notify officer of required changes
- live audit log





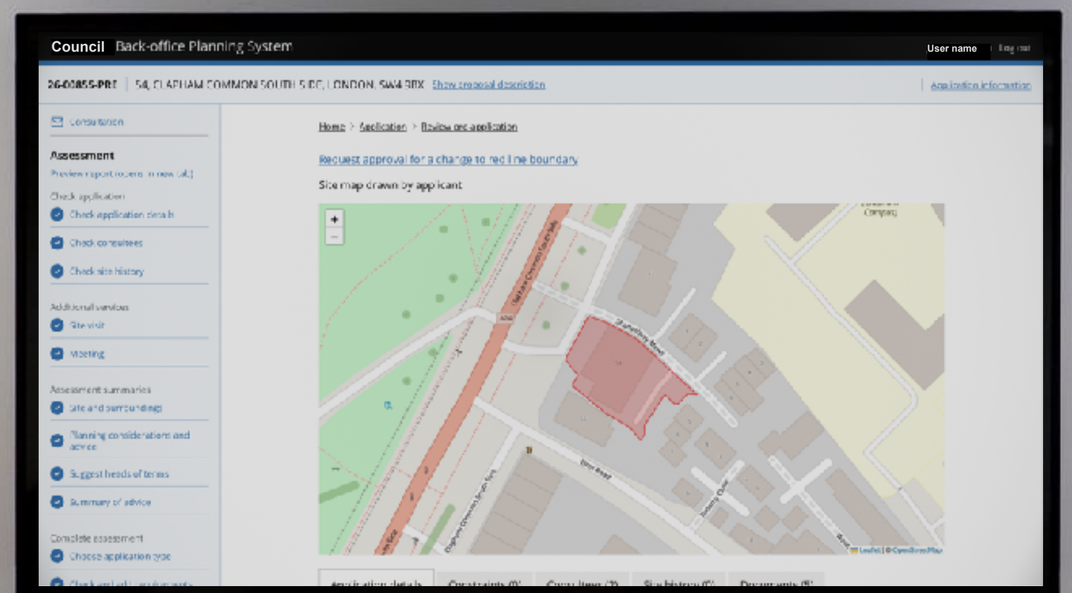
System admin

Adapt to local needs while benefitting from nationally coordinated standards:

- configure applications types, legislation, decision reasons and GDPO rules centrally
- standardised defaults for quick onboarding
- global dashboard for system-wide insights
- tailor validation rules and policy guidance to local plans
- manage consultees and user roles
- track team activity through local dashboards

Integration with other services

- in system appeals and enforcement functionality


Council Back-office Planning System
User name
Home > Application > Review pre-application
Request approval for a change to red line boundary
Site map drawn by applicant
Assessment
Check application
Check application details
Check consultees
Check site history
Additional services
Site visit
Meeting
Assessment summaries
Site and surroundings
Planning considerations and advice
Suggest heads of terms
Summary of advice
Complete assessment
Choose application type

Features and benefits

An open, intuitive system

Feature	Benefit
Open, standardised data	Stores planning data in open, standardised formats, reducing duplication across systems and supporting consistent reporting and audit activity.
Open API	Allows integration with existing council systems such as GIS, CRM, LLPG and finance systems without additional licence fees or data access charges.
Cloud-hosted SaaS model	A fully managed cloud service removes the need for local infrastructure, local installation or costly upgrades.
Browser-based, responsive user interface	Modern, accessible interface built for the next generation of planners; reduces onboarding time, simplifies complex tasks and supports non-linear workflows.
Multi-channel application intake	Accepts submissions from multiple platforms, including PlanX and Planning Portal, while maintaining a single internal workflow.

Flexible case management workflow

Feature	Benefit
Data-driven workflow	Presents the information that planners need, when they need it, reducing administrative tasks and the risk of errors.
Intuitive document handling	In-system document management for faster validation and easy version control.
Automated constraints, consultee and policy suggestions	Surfaces relevant constraints, consultees and policy considerations within the workflow, supporting consistent assessment.

Integrated communication

Feature	Benefit
In-system, public facing communications interface	Communications with applicants, agents and consultees managed within workflow, reducing demand on call centres and support teams.
Integrated consultation and response management	Consultation requests and responses tracked within the service, reducing need for separate inboxes, increasing accountability and statutory compliance.
Configurable email and letter templates via GOV.UK Notify	GOV.UK Notify provides reliable email and letter delivery and unlimited free emails using a trusted government platform.
Automated publishing to the Digital Planning Register	Publishes application and decision data automatically, reducing effort and improving public access to information.

Reporting and insight

Feature	Benefit
Policy represented as structured data	Captures policy considerations as structured data, supporting statutory reporting, monitoring and service analysis without manual data processing.

Benefits compared to legacy planning

BOPS offers a full service for handling all types of applications received through multiple sources, including Planning Portal and PlanX. Councils piloting BOPS report over 50% faster end-to-end processing times compared with legacy systems.

Feature	Benefit
Local authority-led product development	Roadmap informed by ongoing, structured feedback from local authorities using the service, with upgrades released to all customers as standard.
Developed through the UK Government's Open Digital Planning programme	Built using standards and patterns developed with and by planning teams, supporting consistency across authorities.
Alignment with GDS design standards	Delivered to meet best practice in Government design and accessibility standards.
Open standards and shared platform	Reduces supplier lock-in by using open standards, supporting future interoperability and service continuity.
Centralised configuration and updates	Legislative and policy changes are delivered as part of the managed service, reducing local maintenance effort and avoiding disruptive upgrade cycles.
End-to-end audit trails	The service maintains structured records of actions and decisions, supporting appeals, complaints handling, inspections and FOI responses.

7. Interfaces and integrations

BOPS is accessed through a web browser (no local installation) and is designed to be responsive across devices, with most day-to-day use expected on desktop.

Interfaces

Applicant interface

Applicants can view and respond to requests from their case officer (for example, providing missing information or clarifications). Responses update the underlying application data in near real time, reducing back-and-forth and cutting process delays.

Officer interface

Role-based views support different planning functions, including validation teams, planning officers and reviewers/managers. Access levels control what each user can see and do, helping teams focus on the right tasks at the right time (and supporting appropriate approvals and oversight).

Admin dashboard

Authorised administrators can manage user access and configure council-specific parameters (for example: application types, local policies and guidance, informatives, and consultee details). This supports local variation without bespoke code changes.

Open REST API

BOPS provides an open REST API secured by per-user API tokens managed via the admin interface. The API supports retrieving applications (individually or as filtered lists) and related documents. It can also support submission of planning applications and public comments via API where needed. API documentation is provided using OpenAPI/Swagger, and a sandbox/test environment is available.

Integrations

BOPS is designed to integrate with common planning and government components, including:

- Application intake: receives applications from multiple sources, including PlanX and Planning Portal
- Notifications: integrated communications using GOV.UK Notify templates
- Payments: integration with GOV.UK Pay (configured during onboarding)
- Publishing: automated publishing via the Digital Planning Register
- Mapping/constraints: use of third-party mapping APIs (including Ordnance Survey services where applicable)

8. Using BOPS (onboarding & implementation)

BOPS is provided as a browser-based, multi-tenant SaaS service and requires no local software installation. Customers access the service using a modern web browser.

Onboarding and setup

BOPS can be configured on a self-service basis using the admin interface. Customers configure local parameters such as application types, policies and guidance, informatives, consultee details and user access roles.

The service includes a set of standard integrations. Where required, the BOPS team is available during onboarding to provide troubleshooting support and limited training. Any bespoke integrations or additional training can be provided by agreement.

BOPS is designed to be configured using shared platform tools and does not typically require bespoke per-authority code changes.

Data migration

Where customers choose to migrate legacy data, this is planned and agreed as part of onboarding. Migration activity requires customer involvement to identify and prepare source data. Data can be imported using open, commonly used formats and APIs.

Training and documentation

BOPS provides user documentation in accessible formats, including HTML guidance and end-to-end video demonstrations. Developer documentation is available for customers using the public API. Documentation meets WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility standards.

Day-to-day operation

BOPS follows a configuration-first SaaS model. Core workflows and data structures are shared across all customers to ensure consistency, security and alignment with national planning data standards. Regular updates and improvements are delivered without service downtime.

9. Deployment models

BOPS is delivered as a cloud-hosted Software as a Service (SaaS) and is available in two deployment models. Both options provide the same core product functionality, user experience, data standards and support processes. The differences relate to hosting topology, isolation and operational characteristics, which are reflected in pricing.

Multi-tenanted SaaS deployment

Under the multi-tenanted deployment model, BOPS is operated as a shared SaaS platform used by multiple local authorities. Customer data is logically separated using tenant-level access controls, encryption and role-based permissions to ensure that each authority can only access its own data.

The platform is centrally managed, with infrastructure, maintenance and application updates delivered uniformly across all customers. This deployment model is designed to support efficient adoption and cost-effective operation while maintaining appropriate security and resilience controls.

Dedicated single-instance SaaS deployment

Under the dedicated deployment model, BOPS is provided as a single-instance SaaS environment for an individual authority. Each customer is allocated a dedicated application instance, database and storage, with no other customer workloads hosted within the same environment.

This model provides enhanced infrastructure-level isolation and supports customer-specific operational arrangements, including upgrade scheduling and optional assurance or resilience measures. It is intended for authorities with higher information governance requirements, risk sensitivity or a preference for dedicated environments.

In dedicated deployments, customer-specific code changes may be considered only where configuration is insufficient, subject to technical review and separate commercial agreement.

Common service characteristics

Regardless of deployment model, BOPS provides:

- the same functional capabilities and workflows;
- the same open data model and APIs;
- alignment with national planning data standards;
- consistent security governance, support processes and exit arrangements.

10. Data protection and security

BOPS processes personal data in accordance with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

The customer remains the data controller for all personal data processed using the service. BOPS acts as a data processor and processes personal data only on documented customer instructions.

All customer data is hosted in the UK within a secure cloud environment.

In the multi-tenanted deployment model, customer data is logically separated using tenant-level isolation controls, role-based access permissions and encryption to ensure that each authority can only access its own data.

In the dedicated single-instance deployment model, customer data is hosted within a customer-specific application environment, with a dedicated database and storage and no other customer workloads hosted within the same environment.

In both deployment models, access to personal data is restricted through role-based access controls and limited to authorised users.

Personal data is protected using encryption in transit and at rest. Data is regularly backed up and can be restored in the event of data loss or service disruption.

Business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements are in place to protect the availability and integrity of personal data.

BOPS supports customer DPIA obligations by providing information on processing activities, data flows and security controls. A Data Processing Agreement (DPA) is provided as part of the contract, and personal data can be securely exported or deleted at contract end in line with customer instructions.

11. Cyber resilience and incident response

BOPS is operated as a managed SaaS service with a strong focus on cyber resilience, including the ability to respond to and recover from security incidents such as ransomware attacks.

The service is hosted on UK-based hyperscale cloud infrastructure with built-in protections against common attack types, including denial-of-service attacks and unauthorised access. Security events and service behaviour are continuously monitored.

Documented incident response procedures are in place to support rapid investigation, containment and recovery. Regular, tested backups enable restoration of service and data in the event of compromise or operational failure, without reliance on ransom payment.

Clear escalation and customer communication processes are in place, including timely notification in line with contractual and UK GDPR requirements and post-incident reporting where appropriate.

Unboxed maintains Cyber Essentials Plus certification, providing independent assurance that appropriate organisational and technical cyber security controls are in place.

12. Service levels and support

BOPS is operated as a production SaaS service with defined support arrangements, monitored availability and structured incident management.

BOPS is hosted on UK-based hyperscale cloud infrastructure and benefits from the resilience and availability of the underlying cloud platform. The BOPS application layer is continuously monitored using application and infrastructure monitoring tools, with automated alerts for service degradation or outages.

Unboxed is responsible for incident response, service restoration and customer communication for BOPS platform incidents. Response targets and service levels are defined contractually.

Support coverage

All subscriptions include standard operational support during UK business hours (Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays). Support is provided via a central service desk acting as the single point of contact.

Support covers:

- incidents and service availability issues,
- reproducible software defects,
- assistance with configuration and normal operation of the service.
- Incident management

Incidents are prioritised using defined severity levels:

- P1 (Critical) – service-wide loss of access or inability to receive and process planning applications
- P2 (High) – significant loss of functionality affecting key workflows
- P3 (Medium) – limited or non-core issues

Response times are aligned to severity, with P1 incidents prioritised immediately and actively managed until resolution. Platform-wide incidents are addressed centrally for all customers.

Clear escalation routes are in place, and customers are kept informed during active incidents. Post-incident summaries are provided where appropriate.

Enhanced support options

Optional enhanced support services are available for authorities requiring additional assurance and coverage, including authority-specific incident accountability, tailored assurance outputs, and documented readiness arrangements - over and above the standard shared platform operation.

These options do not alter the underlying service availability targets.

Contract management

Service management and contract oversight are treated as a core part of the service. This includes a named service contact, agreed review arrangements and transparent communication on incidents, updates and roadmap changes. There is no separate charge for standard contract management.

13. Pricing

BOPS is priced using a simple annual platform subscription, designed to be predictable, transparent and suitable for phased adoption by local authorities. There are no per-user, per-seat or per-module charges.

Pricing varies based on:

- the scale of planning activity determined using the authority's most recent published PS1/PS2 planning application returns; and
- the deployment model selected (multi-tenanted or dedicated single-instance).

Both deployment models provide the same core product functionality and user experience. Differences in pricing reflect the underlying hosting, isolation and operational characteristics of each deployment model, rather than differences in product capability.

Subscription structure

Pricing for BOPS is structured around:

- an annual platform subscription for operational use of the service;
- optional onboarding and data migration services, where required; and
- optional enhanced support or assurance services for authorities requiring additional coverage.

All Platform Subscription tiers include:

- unlimited users,
- full platform functionality across all supported planning workflows,
- UK-based cloud hosting of the service,
- platform resilience, security patches and ongoing maintenance,
- routine product updates and performance improvements,
- changes required to support new or amended planning legislation,
- standard integrations provided via open APIs,
- standard operational support during UK business hours,
- standard service management and contract oversight.

There are no separate upgrade fees, version change costs or mandatory paid releases during the contract term.

Data migration

Where required, historical planning data can be migrated from legacy systems using a fixed-price, criteria-based migration service. This approach provides clarity on scope and cost and avoids open-ended consultancy. Any additional migration work outside baseline criteria is scoped and priced in advance.

Contract terms and price certainty

Subscriptions are offered on 12-month terms, renewable annually, supporting flexibility and avoiding vendor lock-in. Prices are fixed for the contract term, with no automatic CPI or inflationary uplifts.

Authorities may agree a price hold of up to three years, providing they commit to a contract of that length and remain within the same subscription tier and scope of use.

Full pricing details, including subscription tiers, optional services and illustrative cost examples, are provided in the Pricing documents.

14. Technical requirements

BOPS is a web-based SaaS service and requires access via a modern web browser and internet connection. The service is designed for use by local authority planning teams and is primarily optimised for desktop use.

The service follows a configuration-first delivery model. Local parameters, including application types, policies, informatives and user roles, are configured using shared platform tools. Core workflows and data structures are intentionally standardised to maintain security, interoperability and alignment with national planning data standards.

BOPS is hosted on UK-based cloud infrastructure and benefits from the resilience and availability guarantees of the underlying cloud platform. The service relies on third-party integrations (including application submission services, payments, notifications and mapping services) which must be configured during onboarding and may be subject to the availability of those third-party providers.

Implementation and data migration require customer involvement to configure local settings and prepare legacy data. The service enforces mandatory security controls, including multi-factor authentication, session timeouts and malware scanning.

Regular updates are delivered using a continuous deployment model and are typically applied without service downtime.

15. Leaving BOPS (exit and portability)

Customers can leave the BOPS service at the end of the contract term or in line with the contract's termination provisions.

BOPS is designed to avoid vendor lock-in. The same open, secure APIs used during onboarding and integration remain available throughout the contract and at service exit.

On exit, customers can export their data in structured, commonly used formats suitable for import into another system. Planning application data, application forms, documents, public comments, structured policy assessment data and audit logs are available via open APIs, and a complete extract from the underlying managed database can be provided in an agreed format where required (including encrypted snapshots where appropriate). Exit support does not require the purchase of additional licences or modules.

If a customer stops using BOPS, the service is terminated on the agreed termination date. Following termination, the BOPS database remains available for up to 30 days to support final data extraction. After this period, Unboxed securely deletes any remaining service data (including encrypted database snapshots) in accordance with documented data sanitisation processes.

Planning application data is retained in accordance with statutory record-keeping obligations, and comprehensive audit logs are retained to support accountability and compliance throughout the contract and at exit.

16. Service constraints

BOPS is a web-based SaaS product and requires no local software installation. It is supported on modern browsers and operates in virtual desktop environments.

The multi-tenanted deployment is currently hosted on Amazon Web Services (AWS). Dedicated single-instance deployments may be hosted on AWS or an alternative UK-based hyperscale cloud provider, subject to agreement at contract start.

Infrastructure availability, resilience and recovery are aligned to the guarantees of the selected cloud provider. Application updates are centrally managed and scheduled to minimise service disruption.

The service relies on third-party integrations including submission services, GOV.UK Pay and Notify, and mapping APIs, which must be configured during onboarding.

Implementation requires customer involvement to configure local policies and migrate legacy data. Mandatory MFA, session timeouts and malware scanning apply.

UNBOXED

Built by Unboxed and developed with Local Planning Authorities through the UK Government's Open Digital Planning programme, funded by MHCLG.

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www.unboxed.co