

Development Management Insights 3 - Is electronic planning such a good idea after all?

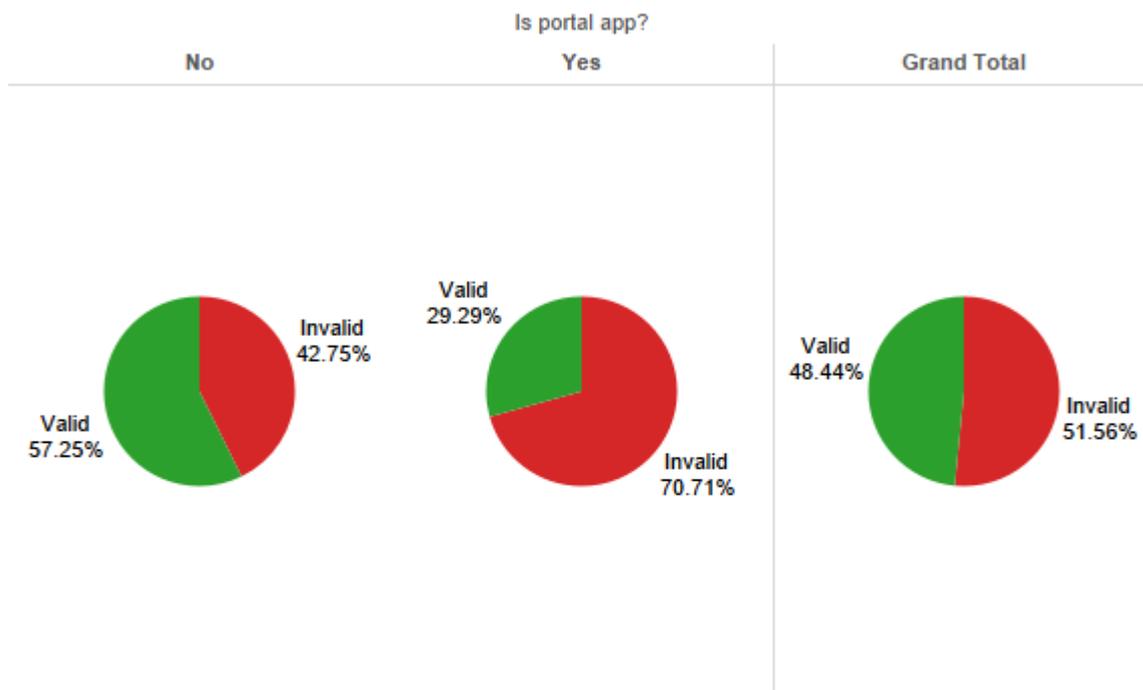
We've been working hard with a number of LPAs recently looking to improve the Development Management (DM) process in local authorities and a few things have struck us. This short series of mini insights highlights just a few points that we hope might help others looking at improving efficiency, effectiveness and outcomes from DM.

Insight

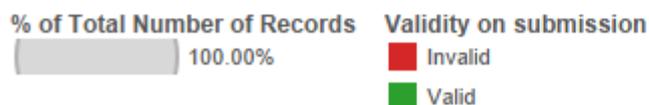
The planning portal has been a great success in terms of take up and the vast majority of applicants now use this to submit their application. But, there is compelling evidence that portal applications are actually more problematic at every stage in the process and may be costing applicants much more than they realise.

Analytics

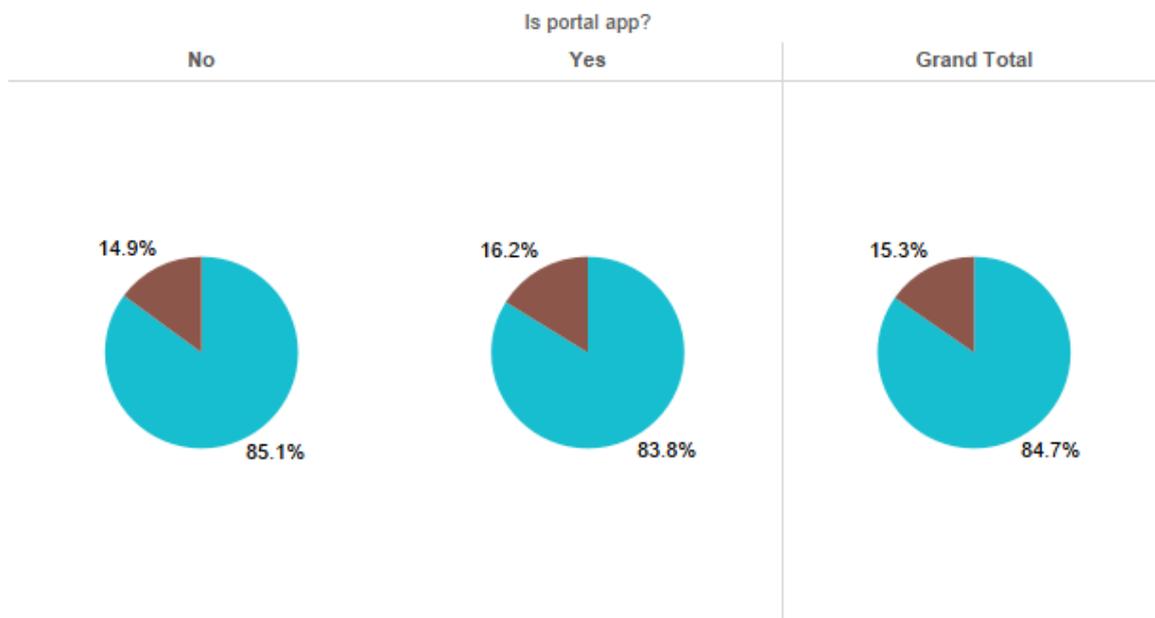
Planning portal applications have formed the majority of applications for some years. Many authorities have adapted to the increased cost of accepting e-applications by reducing or eliminating the costs of plan printing through end to end electronic planning and some may be achieving a positive return on their investments. But does e-planning save applicants as much as they think?



Proportion of valid applications by application route
Produced by i-three analytics Aug 2017



We've looked at this with a number of LPAs over the years and the picture is consistent. An electronic application is more likely to be invalid (chart 1 is an example from one LPA), has a longer end to end process time as a result and even has a slightly lower chance of being approved (chart 2)! These unintended consequences may be costing applicants dearly with delays, resubmissions or wasted spend on architects and agents' fees only to get a refusal.



Approval rates by application route
Produced by i-three analytics Sep 2017

Decision issued (group)
■ Approved
■ Refused

The obvious question is why do portal applications generate worse outcomes for the applicant. This is not simply down to issues with fee payments for on-line submissions (we've checked) and we think the most likely reason is that an electronic application breaks the one-to-one relationship with the LPA. Every dealing an LPA has with an applicant is a chance to increase their knowledge of what you need from them. Remove this dialogue and the ability to educate the applicant is diminished.

Application

LPAs are increasingly using e-planning but may do well to make sure that the benefits of one to one communication are not lost along the way. This argues for strong applicant support package through guidance and pre-app advice. If applicants knew that good pre-app advice increased the chance of a 'yes' and speeded up the process this may increase their appetite to pay. A primary focus of pre-apps should be on driving up the ability to say yes and quickly and the benefits of this advice should be clearly presented as part of the marketing of the pre-app service.

Contact: arobertson@i-three.co.uk for additional advice and support enquires.