

1. Thought Leadership Paper - Applying Government Soft Landings and delivering the Golden Thread of data in a local authority context

1.1. Executive Summary

Local Authorities are under increasing pressure to deliver carbon reductions and improve local services in the face of increasing pressures on budgets. Local authorities also need to consider new and pending legislation that will impact asset owners including the Building Safety Bill, Fire Safety Bill and the new planning gateway process.

A collaborative approach to the planning, construction and management of assets and service delivery can help unlock hidden benefits, deliver capital cost benefits and deliver better outcomes across the whole lifecycle of an asset. Getting this right could deliver substantial savings of tens of millions of pounds across the sector.

Embedding Government Soft Landings (GSL) and a 'Golden Thread' data delivery approach to capital project delivery, will help local authorities to comply with new legislation and wider statutory obligations and policy drivers.

This paper references key English legislation and pending legislation, but the pressures faced by the local authority sector and the potential benefits, are relevant across all UK devolved nations. Devolved nations have their own legislation and pending legislation, however, the approaches and benefits outlined for project delivery and information management, as addressed in this paper, are relevant across all organisations.

1.1.1. Background:

There is a total of 343 councils in England, 123 of which are unitary authorities and London Boroughs. Local Authorities in England spent c£25bn on capital expenditure in 2017 / 2018. This represents a 25% increase over a five-year period. New construction, conversion and renovation represents c55% of this spend (£13.8bn) land acquisition and existing buildings represents a further 16% (£4bn). (*Reference data MHCLG LA Capital Exp Receipts England 2017-18 Final Outturn paper*).

The Local Authority estate portfolio is complex and mixed including schools, residential, care homes, offices and parks etc. The sector is facing pressures with budget constraints and responsibility for meeting key national policy delivery, including carbon reduction. There is also an increasing central Government focus on applications for key policy funding such as the Towns Fund, Future High Streets Fund etc.

Given these mixed pressures there is an imperative to deliver new build, refurbished and converted assets that deliver value and benefits at all stages of an asset lifecycle. Further, following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower a number of key changes to the way assets are built and operated have been introduced or pending. The Building Safety Bill (BSB) which is progressing through Parliament with an expected Royal assent in the next year, identifies new statutory roles and improved documentation for the asset (the Golden Thread.) Although the bill is focused on high rise buildings the moral obligation, and an imperative in the case of care facilities and facilities for vulnerable residents, for local authorities to know more about their owned and managed assets and to demonstrably manage their safety, is applicable across all asset types. The Building Fire Safety Bill has already reached Royal Assent and like the BSB places a requirement on the asset operator / owner to have a developed knowledge of their assets. There is also the new Gateway building regulations process which again requires an evidenced digital thread of information, demonstrating good practice and compliance has been applied throughout the delivery phase to enable operations to be optimised.

Adoption of the Government Soft Landings (GSL) approach will serve to release tensions in delivery between budget expenditure, capital delivery and operations. Further, embedding the requirements of the Golden Thread of information from the outset of a project will ensure all required information is delivered in a timely and validated fashion, enabling all statutory, moral and good practice requirements to be met.

This paper aims to drive awareness of GSL and the Golden Thread. It provides links to key tools and guidance to support local authorities to increase their subject knowledge and help implementation.

1.2. Soft Landings

1.2.1. What is it?



Put simply, soft landings help to break down the barriers between capital delivery and asset operations. The approach provides a clear line of sight from inception right through to handover and operations, enabling the management and safeguarding of the projects stated outcomes. The soft landings approach supports delivery of the BS8536 – Briefing for Design and Construction (part 1 buildings infrastructure and part 2 linear and geographical infrastructure) Soft landings has been in place for a number of years. However, it has been viewed as a standalone approach and not widely adopted. A likely key reason is the link between project

briefing, capital delivery, operational management and service delivery, is broken. Budgets and outcomes are considered in silos. A collaborative approach can help unlock hidden benefits, deliver capital cost benefits and deliver better outcomes across the whole lifecycle of an asset. BS8536 (Soft Landings) is now also incorporated into the UK BIM Framework. The UK BIM Framework is the overarching approach to implementing BIM in the UK, using

the framework for managing information provided by the ISO 19650 series. Soft landings should not be viewed as standalone in the future.

Through effective collaboration from the very outset of a project ensuring consideration of the end-user and the ongoing operation has been made. GSL provides an activity overview and a mechanism to facilitate collaboration and ensure that the objectives throughout the design and build phase maintain alignment with the objectives for the building in operation. GSL is intended to deliver assets that support better service outcomes, helping to provide schools that improve teaching outcomes, offices that use less energy and workplaces that result in occupants being more effective. GSL is intended to support the public sector but will also provide benefit for the private sector in enabling a smooth transition from construction to operation. It is therefore well aligned to publicly built – privately operated contracts and full turnkey projects, where the asset will reside back with the authority. However, in all cases the assets that we build should enhance the outcomes and experience of those that use them. Therefore, an adoption of the soft landings approach will help safeguard the public money invested in operational assets.

1.3. Why is it relevant to local authority projects?

Roughly speaking the ratio between capital spend, lifetime maintenance and operational outcomes, is often quoted as 1:5:200 (Royal Academy of Engineering paper 'the long term cost of owning and using buildings 1998) where for every one pound spent on construction cost, five are spent on maintenance and building operating costs and 200 on staffing and business operating costs. This ratio has been contested, but there is a consensus that the capital investment can have a major impact on the through life cost of the asset and can impact business outcomes and competitiveness. Therefore, as local authorities are spending public money and are providing key services, it is incumbent on them to demonstrably put in place practices that support enhanced outcomes. Further, given the budgetary constraints, driving a long-term reduction in operation costs will enable a better focus on front line service provision. This will become an increasing challenge in the years to come.

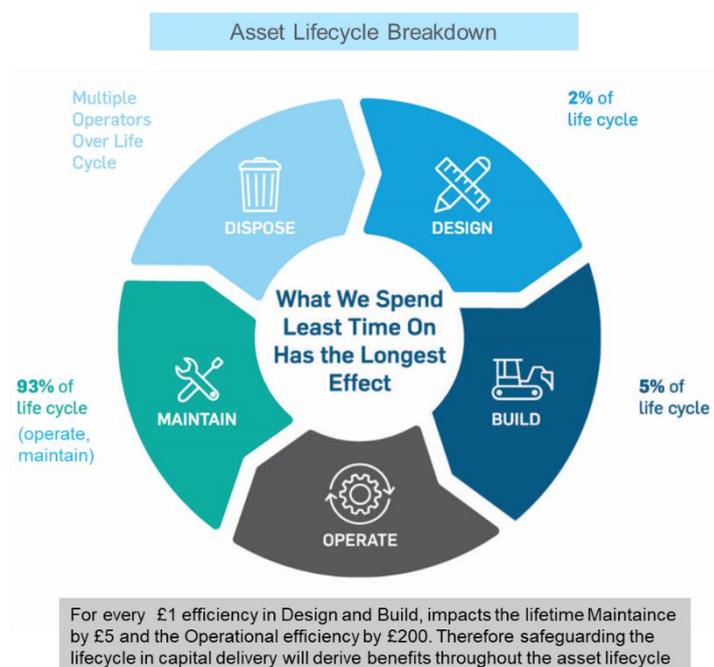
1.4. What are the benefits in adoption?

Many organisations struggle to effectively implement a through life approach when planning and delivering their built assets. There is often tension between capital delivery teams, operational maintenance teams and the end users. Further, there is often a lag at the end of a project in receipt of the 'as built' information. This impacts the handover and can lead to poorly tendered facilities management contracting or systems set up. If the asset has not been configured to suit the end user's requirements, this can lead to costly physical alterations but the largest impact will be through a workforce or service output not being motivated or optimised. The impact of this loss of benefit will be multiplied over the lifetime of the asset, which will be considerable.

Therefore, the potential benefits of implementing a soft landings approach will be in terms of money (capital out turn and ongoing maintenance) and output / outcome (non-interrupted service delivery, efficient service delivery and contented workforce.) This is difficult to measure as most organisations do not have benchmarks for operational delivery. However, as an indication of savings per 1% efficiency of the annual £13.8bn spent on new construction, conversion and renovation, represents £138m capital saving. If the same 1%, reduction is applied using the 1:5:200 ratio, this represents a cost saving of £690m for lifetime cost of the asset for maintenance and building operating costs

and £2.7bn in lifetime staffing and business operating costs. Hypothetically, if this is divided across the 343 councils this would be an estimated saving per council, per every 1% efficiency a c£2m (life cycle) saving in maintenance and operating costs and c£8m in lifetime staffing and business costs.

It is acknowledged these figures will not be correct in terms of quantum, but they do serve to indicate the escalated impact of getting the capital delivery right. Through effective planning and stakeholder engagement and the setting of operational outcome requirements, that the soft landings approach encourages, the sector will deliver better and more cost effective projects and service delivery outcomes. All of which can help in the face of real and future budgetary constraints, both capital and revenue.



1.5. How can it be implemented?

The Construction Innovation Hub has developed a [GSL navigator tool](#) for local authorities.

The navigator tool provides a stage by stage guide, checklists, templates and roles. It will support you in making the provision for soft landings into contracts. The toolkit also breaks down actions into required and desired. Meaning it can be used across projects of all sizes and by organisations of various levels of capability and size of programmes.

The best outcomes for an asset development and delivery are to include end to end stakeholder representatives in brief development, project delivery and handover. However, even when this may be an issue, ensuring the asset functions have been demonstrably considered will help to deliver better outcomes. This could be achieved through engaging with other service / sector providers or appointed service champions from the client / design team. This will ensure the spirit of the GSL approach is adopted, which will deliver better outcomes.

1.6. The Golden Thread - What is it?

The Golden Thread is both:

- The information about a building that allows someone to understand a building and keep it safe;
- The information management to ensure the information is accurate, easily understandable, can be accessed by those who need it and is up to date.

The Golden Thread of information will ensure building owners have to hand well-documented and accurate evidence of their risk assessments and safety arrangements, as well as the documentation supporting these. This will make it easier for them to manage relevant safety information and provide assurance to relevant bodies and boards, to demonstrate that effective and proportionate measures are in place to manage risk and keep buildings and users safe, without the need for further costly surveys or discovery work. The Golden Thread will support the safety case approach the government is introducing by ensuring information is accessible, accurate and up to date. Under the safety case approach, accountable persons must ensure reasonable steps are taken to manage fire and structural safety risks through prevention, control and ongoing management.

Read the [Department for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities](#) (formerly MHCLG) report, lead authored by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC).

Read the [Golden Thread](#) summary.

1.7. Why is it relevant to local authority projects?

The Golden Thread is a product of the Government's Building Safety Bill, which has a focus on high rise residential and other in scope buildings. However, its concept of ensuring key information about a building is identified, collected, checked, issued and held as a single version of the truth, is applicable to any public sector building.

Holding and maintaining a knowledge of an asset make up, condition etc. can also form the basis of a wider set of estates management data that will enhance maintenance programming, disposal planning, net zero planning etc. Holding a reliable set of data will also aid the sharing and accessing of building information by the fire and rescue services and aid efficient reply to residents' and user queries. Collecting and holding validated and updated asset data can and should be undertaken by asset owners of any size, district councils through to large county councils and London boroughs. The link below ('how can it be implemented') to an earlier CDBB publication for the low cost implementation of information management practice, will help asset owners who are starting their journey.

Changes to the Town and Country planning requirements includes a new Gateway process. The new process requires a higher level of evidence-based planning and construction. The gateway process came into effect in August 2021. Although it is focused on high rise residential and other in scope buildings, its approach is good practice across all public buildings. It requires a golden data thread to evidence intent, application and construction of the building safety measures to prove they have been thought through and installed.

1.8. What are the benefits in adoption?

The tragic event of the Grenfell Tower fire identified the low level of knowledge building / asset owners have of their buildings. The cost of retrospectively gathering information was substantial and more importantly delayed the identification of unsafe buildings. Holding key data and information of an asset supports timely reporting and decision making. It also allows effective planning which will result in better and more impactful use of available budgets. The Cambridge University Centre for Digital Built Britain (CDBB) as a partner in the Construction Innovation Hub commissioned a report to look at the [value of information management](#).

The report found that for every £1 invested in information management a return of c£6 could be realised. In addition savings up to 18% in the lifecycle cost of a assets could be achieved. Given the budget investment of local authorities and the cost of answering FOI, member and public enquiries, the implementation of effective data / information gathering and management would have a big impact in helping to reduce authorities revenue budget / grow staff effectiveness.

1.9. How can it be implemented?

An Information Management approach can be put in place very cheaply through the use of existing software and building the requirements into contracts at early stages.

The Local Authority Digital Working Group is chaired by Terry Stocks and enabled by the Construction Innovation Hub with membership drawn from local authorities, key framework providers and UK BIM Alliance.

The group is convened to provide insight, knowledge and support for the development of sector specific knowledge papers relating to digital initiatives and their potential beneficial impacts on local authority outcomes.

In collaboration with the wider local authority sector the group developed a simple IM implementation toolkit as well as a range of other [tools and resources](#) to support local authorities on their digital asset management journey.

The [Dept LUHC \(formerly MHCLG\) / BRAC](#) report also provides guidance of what the Golden Thread of data should include.

1.9.1. Members of the Local Authorities (LA) Working Group

[3C Shared Services - Building Control \(Cambridge City, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire\)](#)

[Crown Commercial Service](#)

[East Riding of Yorkshire Council](#)

[Hampshire County Council](#)

[Islington Council](#)

[Oxfordshire County Council](#)

Northern Ireland Gov – Finance and Procurement

Scottish Futures Trust

Sevenoaks District Council

Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council

Southampton City Council

UK BIM Alliance

UK Health Security Agency

West Sussex County Council

Wokingham Borough Council

For more information about the local authority working group see www.cdbb.cam.ac.uk/localauthorities