

# CONSULTATION TOP TIPS

ESSENTIALS FOR EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION

# OVERVIEW

3	<b>TERMS &amp; CONDITIONS</b>
4	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
5	<b>CONSULTATION</b> OVERVIEW
7	<b>YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY</b> PLANNING YOUR CONSULTATION PROGRAMME
9	<b>YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY</b> DURING CONSULTATION
10	<b>YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY</b> AFTER CONSULTATION
11	<b>FURTHER ADVICE</b>



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# INTRODUCTION

**This document serves as guidance for towns who are seeking to consult stakeholders and the public. Its purpose is to provide practical advice and ideas on the consultation process.**

This guide provides advice to help support consultation for planning applications alongside your local planning teams. If your project is categorised as a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP), you will need to undertake a separate process to obtain development consent rather than applying for planning permission. For more information, please visit the *HMG Planning Inspectorate* website.



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



What are the objectives of the consultation, will your stakeholders understand why and what you are consulting on and 'what you are asking of them'?



Understand your audience and who you want to reach. Identify any statutory stakeholders with whom you are required to consult including your planning authority.



Check and adhere to your own local planning authority protocols for planning applications. Is a Statement of Community Engagement required that is agreed with the planning authority in advance?



Plan early - plan consultation at a formative stage to ensure stakeholders can make a meaningful contribution to project development.



Allow sufficient time to plan and prepare for consultation. Programme in at least six to eight weeks planning time before consultation starts and possibly longer.



Develop materials that are engaging and accessible to all.



Recognise the difference between consultation that is a process and engagement that is dialogue outside a process.



The Gunning Principles have served as good practice for public consultation, and are designed to make consultation a fair process.



Ensure you are compliant with data protection regulations when handling personal data for consultations and throughout the period in which you will continue to hold and manage personal data for your project.

# CONSULTATION



## OVERVIEW

Once you have submitted a planning application to the local planning authority it will undertake a period of consultation where views on the proposed development can be expressed. This formal consultation period will last at least 21 days and during this period the local planning authority will identify and consult a number of different stakeholders.

The consultation undertaken by the local planning authority will include public consultation, statutory consultation and non-statutory consultation. The different levels of consultation required are set out within the Town and County Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (as amended) (DMPO).



## PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Local planning authorities will need to undertake a formal period of public consultation, before submitting a planning application. You can find more information in **Article 15**, DMPO.

Anyone can respond to a planning consultation. This includes individuals who might be directly affected by a planning application; community groups and specific local or national interest groups may also wish to provide representations.



## STATUTORY CONSULTEES

Planning law recommends where local planning authorities are required to consult specified bodies before a decision is made on the application.

Depending on the location and potential impact of the proposed development, statutory consultees may include organisations such as the Environment Agency, Natural England, Historic England, National Highways, and so on. These consultees can in some cases hold the key to planning approval, and it is important to engage with them early to understand any concerns that they may have.

A full list of all statutory consultees can be found in **Schedule 4** of the DMPO.

# CONSULTATION



## NON-STATUTORY CONSULTEES

As well as statutory consultees, local planning authorities will consider whether there are planning policy reasons to engage other consultees who, whilst not designated in law, are likely to have an interest in a proposed development.

These non-statutory consultees can include local wildlife trusts, sports groups, local schools and hospitals, utilities and infrastructure providers, etc.

Local planning authorities are encouraged to produce a locally specific list of non-statutory consultees to help applicants, so it is worth speaking to the local planning authority to understand who these are.



## PRE-APPLICATION CONSULTATION

It is advised before submitting a planning application that pre-application discussions are undertaken with the local planning authority. During these discussions, you will be able to confirm the list of statutory consultees with the local planning authority, as well as ask them to identify any non-statutory bodies that may be consulted.

In instances where there are potential negative impacts of the proposed development, it is advised that you undertake pre-application consultation with statutory bodies. For example, if it is known that the development will impact habitats and species, Natural England should be consulted along with any local wildlife trust.

Undertaking pre-application consultation will help to reduce the risk of objections being made to the planning application. Discussing concerns with the local planning authority and consultees can help inform the design of the proposed development and identify any mitigation measures required.

It may also help you understand the justification or reasoning for the development that you need to include in your application.

It is important to understand the impact of your project on the local population, particularly any residents or businesses that are directly impacted by the development. Early consultation will for the development reduce the risk of delay to the planning application, determining if any changes are probably to be made as a result of an objection. If this is the case, the local planning authority will likely need to reconsult - adding an additional 14-21 days.

# YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY

## PLANNING YOUR CONSULTATION PROGRAMME



### SET OBJECTIVES

Be clear about your objectives for consultation, who you want to reach, and what you are asking of stakeholders - what they can influence and what they cannot.

Prepare a consultation strategy that considers all of these elements and ideally share it with your planning authority for their assessment, and publish it. This may be a requirement of your local planning authority's protocols but it is also best practice and fosters openness and transparency.

Set objectives that seek participation from those who have a direct interest in your project proposals, either as beneficiaries or where there may be impacts on them, as well as from your wider public – residents, visitors, commuters - and statutory stakeholders who are required to comment on them.



### STATUTORY AND NON-STATUTORY CONSULTEES

Identify that your consultation is with community, public and other statutory stakeholders.

Your local planning authority will help you identify relevant statutory consultees to consult for your project. These are bodies and organisations that have a statutory obligation, within their sphere of technical expertise, to comment on planning proposals and applications, such as Natural England or English Heritage.

Non-statutory consultees are other stakeholders such as communities, community and special interest groups, business bodies and organisations, residents, visitors, commuters and the wider public.



### PLANNING AHEAD

Allow sufficient time for planning a consultation programme and have a consultation plan to manage all the elements in the lead time you have allowed before your consultation starts.

Design a consultation programme that is proportionate and reasonable to your project and that offers stakeholders choice of access.

Carefully consider the length, start and end dates of your consultation. Avoid public and school holidays if you can, or consider extending the consultation period to enable them to access it outside peak holiday periods if they need to. Consulting during these periods could make it look as if you have something to hide and open your consultation to challenge.

# YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY

## PLANNING YOUR CONSULTATION PROGRAMME



### CONSULTATION METHODS – DIGITAL AND NON-DIGITAL

You will need to decide which consultation methods will help you reach your stakeholders, communities and the public most effectively.

Digital consultation can enable greater reach, and it allows stakeholders who may not be able to engage easily through face-to-face methods. Similarly, consider those who may not have access to the internet and offer them non-digital access to encourage them to participate. Non-digital consultation can include face-to-face meetings, focus groups, drop-in sessions or public events.

For both digital and non-digital interactive activity, ensure you have your technical experts on hand to answer questions alongside your consultation delivery team.



### DESIGNING YOUR CONSULTATION QUESTION

Design open and closed questions that ask for feedback on aspects of the project that stakeholders can influence and will inform how the design of your project develops.

At this stage, consider ahead how you will analyse, collate and publish the feedback you receive to ensure the process you will follow is fit for purpose.



### CONSULTATION MATERIALS

In developing your consultation materials, keep your audiences front of mind.

Make your materials clear and simple to understand, and consider producing them in different formats or languages if this is most appropriate.

Have a clear narrative which explains your proposals and how and why you have arrived at them.

Information booklets should contain all the necessary information your stakeholders need to know about the consultation process, your proposals and what you are seeking feedback on.

Consider using diagrams or infographics to present your information in a more accessible way. If you are using digital methods, you could produce videos or animations to explain your proposals.

Include a glossary of terms. This is particularly helpful if there are technical terms that need to be explained.



# YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY

## DURING CONSULTATION



### ADVERTISING AND PROMOTION

As with the production of consultation materials, the channels you use to advertise and promote your consultation should have your audiences front of mind.

Paid-for digital and traditional advertising methods can be used to reach specific target audiences. Consider placement options that will increase exposure of your consultation among these audiences while offering value for money.

Promotional activity, whether online or offline, can signpost wider audiences to your consultation. Depending on the scale of your project, you may have a dedicated website or webpage that enables access to all your consultation materials.

Social and traditional media editorial content can be highly effective promotional tools to reach a broad audience. While print-based methods such as posters and hoardings can reach local communities and passers-by

Advertising and promotion before and during consultation offers your audience every opportunity to know about your consultation and engage with it.



### MANAGING QUESTIONS AND ENQUIRIES

Once your consultation has started, you can expect stakeholders to raise questions. Unless they are statutory consultees who will have technical questions that should be answered by your technical expert team, any supplementary information provided should also be made public and available to all. Where possible, direct enquirers to the consultation materials you have rather than trying to reinvent answers.

Identify communication channels for raising questions such as telephone surgeries or a dedicated project email, and create an escalation process for managing and directing enquiries to relevant members of your project team.



### MANAGING CHANGE

While you cannot change the substance of what you are consulting on mid-flow, consultation arrangements can be changed providing the principles are consistent with what you have committed to in your consultation strategy. If you are following a local authority planning protocol, you will need to ensure your proposed changes are compliant with it.

It might be necessary to adapt to changes outside your control, such as a weather event, or following suggestions from stakeholders. One example of a change could be an extension of the consultation period or offering additional opportunities for stakeholders to engage with your project team and provide feedback.

# YOUR CONSULTATION JOURNEY AFTER CONSULTATION



## ANALYSING YOUR CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

As you receive feedback, you can start to collate and analyse it and share it with your project team. Identifying themes as well as detailed suggestions will help your team to consider the feedback and how your project can be designed, where possible, to take it into account.



## PRODUCING YOUR CONSULTATION REPORT

A consultation report will be required as part of your project's planning application and this may be called a 'Statement of Community Engagement'. You will be expected to show the level and nature of the feedback you have received and how it has been considered in progressing your project's design.

Be sure to keep stakeholders who have engaged in your consultation updated too. A summary version of the consultation report in an easily readable format is a good way to update consultees who may not wish to read the full report. This could be a 'You Said, We Did' document. It also allows you to explain what happens next.



## KEEPING STAKEHOLDERS UPDATED

Consultation is only part of your project's journey. Maintaining relationships with stakeholders and keeping them informed and engaged will be important beyond the planning process as you move into construction and delivery of your project.

Keep public and news content such as a project or programme website and via social media and traditional media channels.

There are also many different methods you can use to maintain relationships and foster collaborative working. These include ambassador networks for specific stakeholder or community groups and local businesses, and stakeholder panels, forums or working groups that speak on a range of topics.

## FURTHER ADVICE

If you would like more advice and guidance on consultation planning, engagement or communications please do not hesitate to contact your Town Coordinator.





Visit the [Town's Fund website](#)  
for more resources