

November 2023

A monthly summary of consultation matters by Consultation Guru – Rhion Jones.

Consultation Catch-up



I enjoyed myself hugely, presenting *'The Magic of Stakeholder Mapping'* on 10th October at the **Tractivity** Stakeholder engagement Summit. Partly because it was a clued-up audience most of whom knew a lot about Stakeholder Mapping and one where I could therefore focus on probing and provoking. Like many techniques with which we are familiar, we do not always derive the best from them. Thanks to the delegate who called me *'vibrant, entertaining and full of magic.'* A copy of my presentation, but, sadly, lacking the drama of sawing a stakeholder in half is available [here](#)

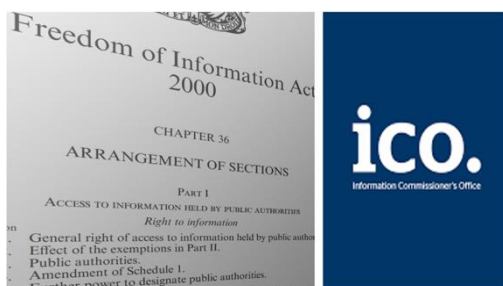
Best of the Blogs

[Non-selective badger-culling through 'controlled shooting'. Consultation declared unlawful](#)



I find it amazing that officials - fully aware how divisive and controversial this emotive issue could be - should have deliberately hidden from *consultees* the rationale used to determine the preferred option so many people found unacceptable! The Judge ruled that it broke the rules and declared the consultation unlawful. It's another reminder that criteria, weightings and scoring methods **MUST** be disclosed so that consultation responders have a fair opportunity to comment.

[Accounting for our engagement activities: Lessons from recent FOIA requests](#)



This is an article I recently wrote for TRACTIVITY and includes a video that covers the main points summarising some recent decisions of the Information Commissioner on requests involving public consultations. I conclude that organisations these days need to invest in adequate stakeholder management systems. Many public bodies get it wrong, so I guess there is also still a need for training and advice on this tricky issue.

[Consultation and the 'Plan for Drivers' - High on rhetoric; hesitant on content](#)



If you're a motorist, I trust you're delighted that Ministers' [Plan for Drivers](#) is about to save you from all manner of iniquities - like driving forever at 20mph as in the land of my fathers! They are serious about this – and think you might vote for them as a result. But my interest is in the EIGHT - yes EIGHT different consultations announced in this document. It isn't a plan. It's a flip-chart! Just a pretty random list of possible policies they might implement after first using the rhetoric at an Election. And because they're not quite sure about some

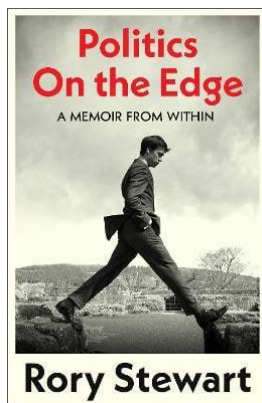
of these ideas, they're covering their backsides by consulting the public first. Another case of doing the right thing - even if it's for the wrong reasons!

Instant insights

- How often have we heard the cynics' challenge? *Show me an important decision where consultation made a real difference!* Well last week, Transport Focus reported on a consultation on proposed closures of [railway station ticket offices](#) where 700,000 people responded. The Government's Hi-Speed U-turn was the fastest thing seen on the Railways all year!
- We have had two weighty Acts of Parliament given the Royal Assent. [The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act](#) is all of 523 pages long and could potentially streamline much of the current town planning methodology. But don't hold your breath. Respected solicitors, Capsticks, emphasised that *'before LURA 2023 can take full effect there will need to be a raft of technical consultations, secondary legislation and an update to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)*. Here is an example. Michael Gove – ever the optimist - asserts that this is about *'Communities taking back control of their future with new powers to shape their local area'*. But this is substantially dependent upon a not-quite-developed idea of a [street votes](#) - where residents can propose development on their street and vote on whether planning permission should be given. Now before anyone is as negative as to ask awkward questions like whether the same residents can 'oppose' as well as 'propose', let's accept that there are further consultations in the offing before this becomes a reality, and if not exactly half-baked, let's note that it is ...still in the oven.
- The other major tome is the [Energy Act](#), claimed as the most ambitious shake-up of the Sector for a decade or more. It's all terribly top-down, focused on regulation, markets and legal frameworks with little to ignite the imagination. Except that, in that peculiar British way of doing the right things by accident, Parliament started to consider what could be done to stimulate community energy – already a major net zero strategy in other countries. It was too much for the Government to legislate but, to stave off defeat in the Lords, it accepted the principle of **a consultation to identify the barriers facing community energy**. Then in October, under pressure from a further Lords amendment to seek a six month timescale, it agreed to proceed immediately. So, we can now look forward to an early dialogue with local authorities, energy entrepreneurs and financiers to increase this important bottom-up aspect of energy policy. My friends in [Community Energy South](#) will be delighted!
- Interesting developments in Scotland may be a sign of coming times as many high-rise flats come towards the end of their design life. In [Aberdeen, a consultation has been launched](#) about the future of eight blocks – and considering a range of options from outright demolition to piecemeal refurbishments. It comes soon after **Glasgow's** massive social housing provider, the Wheatley Group lost a judicial review as it had not adequately 'explained' its decision to replace four blocks on the [Wyndford Estate in spite of a strong campaign by residents](#) to back a retrofitting option instead.

Straws in the wind

The Reading List



[Rory Stewart's account of his political career](#) is revealing, shocking, depressing and ... optimistic at the same time. Like the ex-military, rather gauche, intellectual and now star of [The rest is politics podcast](#) with Alistair Campbell, this book is full of fascinating contradictions. An idealist hopelessly at sea at a time when the Conservative Party was rushing headlong towards unthinking populism, his story of being a diligent backbencher and an often-thwarted Minister are fascinating. Everyone should read his recollections of his first days working for Liz Truss when she was a Sec of State – if only to realise that the COVID-enquiry does not cover the full extent of Governmental incompetence. For those interested in how big decisions are taken in the UK, this is a great cautionary tale. His description of how he never became Leader is hard to follow, but one senses it was never really on, and had he read the early parts of his own book, he probably shouldn't have bothered.

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