

January 2023

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



Best of the Blogs

Consultation Catch-up

Since its launch on 6th December, I have received so many messages of encouragement. Thanks to every one of you.



Abolish the Lords: Labour's consultation dilemma

Analysing the issues arising from the Labour Party's commitment to consult on radical plans to replace the Lords with an elected second chamber.



Cambridge Congestion Charging illustrates challenges facing many towns and cities

Considers the difficulty of asking the public to approve major changes that need substantial investment in the local transport infrastructure.



Why the pre-closure consultation for Doncaster Airport was lawful after all.

Examines the High Court's refusal to allow a Judicial Review of the decision to close the airport and the claim that the consultation had been inadequate

Instant insights

- Central Bedfordshire Council is one of ten Councils recently selected to promote [Community Energy](#) projects in its area. Government funding and using specialist facilitators (Community Energy South) the programme is an example of intensive community involvement. Rhion Jones foresees considerable competition for grassroots commitment and is monitoring its progress.
- Very sad to see the demise of the respected consultancy, **Traverse**, formerly known as OPM. Having acquired *Dialogue by Design*, the Company conducted many important public consultations, and we wish its staff every success in securing new positions in the public engagement sector.
- Early in December, Rhion looked at the [Think Luton](#) event, and wondered whether this is a template for face-to-face sessions with business communities across the country. It had much emphasis on information-sharing – an important prelude to a “Tell us what you think” session.
- Ready for the 25th Anniversary of the **Good Friday Agreement**, the Government has announced a [special educational package](#) for schools and young people. This is really welcome, if only because civics education in the UK has been sorely neglected and the uplifting story of peace in Northern Ireland is a perfect motivator for public involvement. If we ever get an *Office of Public Engagement* – it should carry the brief for educating the next generations to value and practice active citizenship.

Straws in the wind

- [IPSOS-MORI's research](#) shows that the public (or at least the richer, better educated public) remain supportive of many **net zero policies**, though cost-of-living pressures are beginning to affect the numbers. As public agencies move from supporting generalised propositions to local hard choices, expect many 2023 consultations to become controversial and in need of external scrutiny or quality assurance.
- James Dunn of **DXC Technology** has written in the New Statesman on the subject of '[Five ways the metaverse could transform British politics over the next five years.](#)' Apart from predicting the eclipse of face-to-face conferences in favour of virtual alternatives, it offers the prospect of 'increasing representative democracy from within a virtual world'. Many will agree with these forecasts, but it's less clear that it is the metaverse that will be the key driver. But it WILL be a significant talking point in 2023.
- It seems no amount of consultation can guarantee a wholly satisfactory outcome when it comes to water quality in our rivers. The Environment Agency consulted extensively and were no doubt told by well-informed stakeholders how dire the situation has become. Yet the [River Basin Management Plans](#) – published just before Christmas suggest it will take decades to fix the problem. Expect more bottom-up public engagement and campaigning in 2023 by those who claim that the Agency and/or the Government is not listening!
- Another issue which may arouse considerable contention will be the prospect of legislation to enact [Martyn's Law](#); the 'protect duty' will require venue managers to undergo training and take steps to minimise risks, with one set of standards for venues designed for >100 people and another for those >800. Last year's consultation revealed serious disagreements on much of the detail, especially from small churches and village halls. No Bill has yet appeared but expect growing demands in 2023 for further consultation. But dare a government facing an election defer further the recommendations of the Manchester Arena Inquiry?

The Reading List

- A New Zealand Judge named David Goddard has written a book called [Making Laws that Work: How laws fail and how we can do better.](#) This piece doesn't mention 'consultation' but that is one of the main underlying themes. Rather reminiscent of the seminal 2014 book '*The blunders of our Government*', but still highly relevant. One of its key conclusions was an 'absence of deliberation'. For anyone interested, the archive page on the Guru website contains a slightly updated version of Rhion's original review and explains its findings. (See <https://lnkd.in/eGe8PCpJ>)
- Maybe 18 months ago, but for anyone who is yet to come across Becky Hirst's persuasive [For the Love of Community Engagement](#), this is an important book to read. Becky is a Brit-turned-Aussie with a flair for promoting her enthusiastic brand of community stimulation. [Rhion's review](#) was published by the Consultation Institute and is a good starting-point for appreciating her work



Rhion Jones has one key resolution for 2023. To find audiences to convince of the continuing relevance and importance of public engagement. He believes that the last 20 years is full of valuable lessons we can all learn and seeks opportunities to disseminate key messages.

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