

September 2025

The monthly summary of
consultation matters by
Consultation Guru –

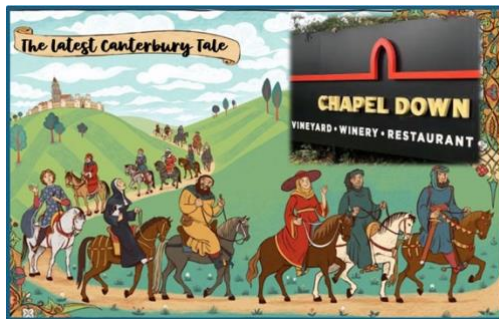
Rhion Jones

Consultation Catch-up



Many public engagement professionals will attest that it's often a tough ask to motivate people to take part in a consultation. But it's never a problem when communities believe passionately in something. There's no better current example than the angst and fury felt as the Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) launches its consultation on reducing the number of professional teams from four to two. It's really about the economics of the modern game, but to the eyes of my fellow-countrymen, it's about identity and heritage. We're not sure if this is a 'stakeholder consultation' or for everyone! In Wales, however, when it comes to Rugby, we are ALL stakeholders! **WRU must not drop the ball!**

Denying opponents the right to be heard; a new Canterbury Tale! (Blog 109)



The latest Canterbury Tale may not be as raunchy as *The Wife of Bath* or as vulgar as *The Miller's Tale*, but probably reflects 2025 society quite well. The Court of Appeal has had to rule on whether the Chapel Down vineyard in Kent could expand in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, despite some opposing campaigners being denied the right to speak at the planning committee. Yes, it was procedurally unfair. But was this enough to quash the planning permission? It made me reflect upon the role of personal representations in the forthcoming age of AI, and how the human voice remains a terrific mode of storytelling. If you like English wine, you may be pleased to know that the Winery won!

Consultation: Research tool or Democratic safeguard?



(Blog No 108) I'm always struck by the amount of confusion and uncertainty people exhibit when talking about consultation! I suppose it's because we are so accustomed to being asked our views about everything from a McDonald's burger to the Donald Trump tweets. Is it just a research technique or something much more? In this Blog, I've put together some reflections on consultation as it has evolved into something a good deal more significant ...

See you there?

Autumn opportunities for learning and networking

The coming weeks sees several events likely to interest readers of the Catch-up. I expect to be following the 2nd October [Public Participation Summit](#) webinar organised by the Association of Consultation & Engagement Professionals (ACEP), and I will be speaking at [TRACTIVITY](#)'s Birmingham 'by invitation' event for those most interested in stakeholder management – mostly existing clients. I will also speak at the Waterfront [Consultation & Stakeholder engagement for Infrastructure](#) on 22nd October. Finally, may I recommend the 5th November [Football Governance Act event](#) I co-host with Kevin Rye of Think Fan engagement. It will matter to many communities.

**November 5
London**
How football needs to respond to new statutory duties in a regulated environment ... and how Communities can benefit. With
Kevin Rye Think Fan Engagement
Rhion Jones Consultation Guru

Meaningful fan engagement & consultation
[Details & Booking](#)

Consultation Law
The definitive in-house course
by the Consultation GuRU
Rhion delivers in person for 16-16 people in a 4-hour session tailored to the most relevant aspects for your organisation
Autumn 2025 dates still available

On Page 2 this month, the NSIPs engagement consultation, a new legal case, the woes of the Water industry and a Select Committee!
The book review is Michael Heseltine's 'From Acorns to Oaks'

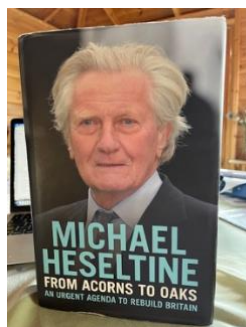
[Click here](#)

Instant insights

- For those interested in [Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects \(NSIPs\)](#) and the Government's desire to reduce the burden of consultations on them, you have a busy autumn. The [Consultation on Streamlining infrastructure Planning](#) was launched on 1st September and you have until 27th October to help Ministers square an almost impossible circle. The trouble is that developers have told the politicians that abolishing pre-application statutory consultation will reduce the time taken to achieve a Development Consent Order by a year. Personally, I don't believe that to be true. But even if it was – the idea is that *"We still expect high quality early meaningful and constructive engagement and consultation to take place with those affected by NSIP proposals."* So, the consultation is about removing the gold-plating and devising a comprehensive set of Guidance that will reduce the public engagement commitment (in order to save time) without diminishing its quality, and in ways that will convince the public and the Courts that affected stakeholders are being treated fairly. There's a lot of wishful thinking in this consultation. I think it's case of *'Please, please can anyone think of things we can say in the Guidance that won't jeopardise the whole project if developers then disregard them.'* Maybe that is too cynical, but I look forward to discussing with NSIP engagement specialists how to respond to this important consultation.
- An interesting recent case in the High Court turned on whether a local authority could proceed to implement a **Traffic Regulation order** in Harrogate. In [Baines v North Yorkshire](#), a new controversial scheme had been approved, subject to a 'satisfactory ...public engagement outcome' The judgement includes the observation that *" 'Engagement' is not consultation. Engagement can consist solely in publicity and communication, and the word (even when associated with 'successful') does not, to my mind imply any of the obligations arising out of consultation."* Neither was there a Legitimate expectation. I'm not entirely convinced by this; maybe something to discuss in the law courses! .
- We are still in the backwash (sorry) of the Water industry Review by Sir Jon Cunliffe and I have written a piece for **TRACTIVITY** on the relevant [Lessons for Stakeholder Management](#). There is also a [video](#) that explains my thinking. One of the latest developments is that OfWAT now proposes a rule to require Water companies to involve consumers in some of their decisions. There's a [consultation](#) about it, but don't hold your breath; it's not as radical as it sounds ... and it's a consultation without any questions to answer. They still ask for responses though ...!
- On 3rd Sept, a Parliamentary Select Committee heard evidence on [public perceptions of climate change and energy transition](#) The highlight for me was Professor Rebecca Willis, of Lancaster University pointing out that research showed MPs *underestimated* public support and *overestimated* opposition to solar farms. Successive witnesses lamented the role of the media in fuelling (probably the right word!) misinformation that undermined the science behind net zero policies. Involve and others championed Climate Assemblies but faced tough questioning from MPs. Fascinating stuff!

Straws in the wind

The Reading List



Michael Heseltine published his autobiography 25 years ago, but, well into his nineties, he now publishes [From Acorns To Oaks](#) to reflect on all that has happened since. Successive Governments turned to him but did not always listen. He is most associated with state intervention and industrial strategy, and he has a compelling tale to tell about Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Teesside and, of course, London Docklands. He complains that his own Conservative colleagues torpedoed much of what he tried to do and coupled with his disdain for Brexit and its backers, one finishes this book wondering what on earth kept him in the Tory party so long..

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