

October 2025

The monthly summary of
consultation matters by
Consultation Guru –

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Consultation Catch-up

There was a time when Party conferences were the occasion to consult the members. Policy positions would be hammered out and voted upon; it was when the Parliamentarians reported back to the rank-and-file. Not any more! No Party can now take the risk of being lumbered with unpopular policies and become unelectable. So, are there occasions when *consultors* can't possibly consult for fear of what might ensue? And, if so, is it cowardice or plain common sense and the search for different processes to take account of stakeholder views and then take decisions? All Parties need to look again at their policy-making machinery. Consultation will be in there ...somewhere!

Best of the Blogs

Why we are all now on 'Neighbourhood' Watch

(Blog 112)



The buzzword of the moment is 'Neighbourhoods'. Have you noticed? They are everywhere and are central to Government policies on policing, health, planning and, of course, local government reorganisation. How coherent is this? And what's the significance when the 'Plan for Neighbourhoods' suddenly becomes 'Pride in Place'? Is it just 'Goodbye Rayner; Hello Steve Reid'? Or is there more to it? This Blog explores recent developments – and wonders whether Ministers need help to clarify what they really intend...

What to do if your consultation is flawed? (Blog No 111)



We've all been there. A consultation that isn't as we intended ... or something unexpected happens. Do you press on regardless, or does someone have the courage to shout 'Stop'? It raises matters of integrity, of reputation and maybe of competence. There are few right or wrong answers, but this Blog examines the key issues. Spoiler alert – it's not flawless!

Welsh Rugby's difficult options: who exactly are the key stakeholders? (Blog 110)



Forget Donald Trump, Keir Starmer, Rayner and an ex-Ambassador ... If you're Welsh THIS is what really matters! It is mainly about reducing the four professional teams to two, but it leaves many Welsh supporters and communities deeply unhappy. The trouble is that the Welsh Rugby Union has chosen to split it into a formal 'key stakeholder' consultation – and a separate questionnaire for the rest of us! The four controversial options are covered in the former. But not in the latter. A bit like the 'missing question'

case in Sheffield some years ago which went to the High Court. It's a clumsy way to do it, and risks getting the WRU into all sorts of trouble. This is my analysis.

On Page 2 this month, I'm concerned that the big NHS listening exercise hasn't reported; there's a Judicial Review from Trafford, some questions about New Towns, a networking opportunity and a review of the best book so far on High-speed Two

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Instant insights

- October marks the anniversary of the massive **Change NHS** consultation. My Blog 82, was called [“The NHS Big Conversation – is it any good?”](#) The answer is that, yes, it was VERY successful in engaging thousands of people – well explained by Lucy Farrow of [Thinks Dialogue](#) at the [ACEP](#) online conference this week. **But where is the Output report?** The [NHS Ten-Year Plan](#) drew upon some of its findings and had 11 quotes from participants to illustrate good as well as bad news. But consultation needs to be transparent. What solutions do *people* (as opposed to *politicians* or *medics* ...) want? What are their priorities and preferences? How were these given ‘conscientious consideration’? What inconvenient truths emerged? You can’t entice 1.9m visits to a website and have 17,000 attend local events – and not tell them what you learnt! Unfinished business!
- An important judgment emerges from a judicial review of a Council Tax reduction scheme by [Trafford Council](#). A flawed scheme had the effect of depriving two residents of their 100% relief from the tax. One was disabled and the other was her carer. Despite the Council rectifying the unfairness by using its discretion, the Court found that the Scheme had not been lawfully approved and that there had been a breach of the **Public Sector Equality Duty**. – notably the S.149 ‘*due regard*’ provisions. The Judge’s remarks about the ‘perfunctory’ Impact assessment will be of interest to anyone organising a public consultation and I will prepare a more detailed commentary in the coming days. Yet another reason to follow developments in the High Court closely.

Consultation Law

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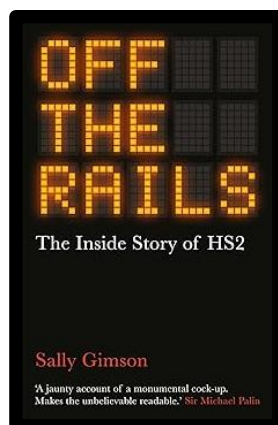
Rhion delivers in person for 6-16 people in a 4-hour session tailored to the most relevant aspects for **your** organisation

Autumn 2025 dates still available

Straws in the wind

- To no-one’s surprise, England is going to have several New Towns! That seems pretty certain now that we have the Government’s initial [response to the Taskforce](#) that produced a shortlist of potential sites. The key sentence is this. “*Final selection of placemaking principles will be subject to environmental assessment and consultation.*” But wait a moment, is that the same as consulting local communities about the principle of having a new town on their doorstep? [The Taskforce’s first recommendation](#) is quite specific - “*We recommend that the government consults on the 12 recommended locations in this report.*” It suggests to me that Ministers will take the decisions themselves. They have more or less signalled where the first three will be. *Fait accompli* ? Or will a judicial review or two be needed to rule on *pre-determination*?
- We clearly need more Stakeholder Managers for such infrastructure! I’m delighted therefore to see moves towards creating a forum called the **Community Engagement for Infrastructure Network UK**. Contact Melanie Layton (mejlayton@gmail.com) for details.

The Reading List



[Sally Gimson has written a thoroughly readable account](#) of how not to build a railway. She chronicles the well-known story of dither, delay and indecision with good humour and thoughtful insight. She paints a picture of arrogant politicians wishing to build the best in the world, worthy environmentalists who wanted the greenest, project developers who kept on offering different engineering options and distressed communities desperate to avoid HS2 coming anywhere near *them*. She wins the award for the best chapter heading I’ve seen (“*Euston – we have a problem!*”) and reveals the folly of telling the world how much something costs before you’ve agreed what it is you’re going to build. Of course, the politicians – of all main parties – are mostly to blame but the true conclusion is the need to consult more and better at the very start of ambitious projects like this. One should not enjoy reading about incompetence and worse. But Gimson’s book is the best storytelling since Thomas the Tank Engine!

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