

January 2026

The monthly summary of  
consultation matters by  
Consultation GuRU –

Rhion Jones

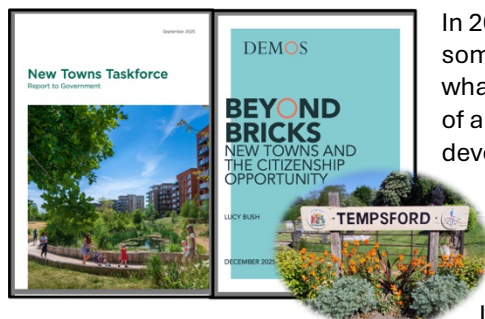


# Consultation Catch-up

For 2026, I hope we can be more assertive about the role of consultation in policy-making. There has been a trend to minimise its importance – not helped by the IAP2 spectrum which regards it as just providing ‘feedback’. My **FOUR FUNCTIONS FRAMEWORK** is designed to switch the emphasis from the *form* of dialogue to the *function* it performs, and this should enable organisations to select more agile and quicker ways to establish what stakeholders think when appropriate. But as long as Government depts and others use consultation in volume, we must continue to invest in promoting and ensuring *best practice*.

## Best of the Blogs

### New thoughts on New towns for New Year: a more consultative approach? ( Blog 117)




In 2026, might you find that there will be a New Town somewhere near you? And if so, would you want a say in what they build? Indeed, as a matter of principle, how much of a voice should the public have when planners and developers sometimes think they know best?

I've been looking at the recent DEMOS paper called 'Beyond Bricks' and hope that Ministers forsake their anti-blockers rhetoric and take the more consultative stance that the DEMOS paper suggests.

In fact, the Government needs to make a New Year resolution to stop seeing consultation as a problem and use it properly as a better way to govern. It can start with the New Towns.

### Consult ... all ye faithful!

### Seasons Greetings from the Consultation GuRU (Blog No 116)

	<p><b>A new Carol for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government</b></p> <p>God rest ye merry stakeholders The planners won't delay. The Planning Infrastructure Bill Became the law today To save us all from saying 'No' For 'growth' has gone astray</p> <p><i>(Chorus of housing developers)</i> We have thousands of NIMBYs to annoy To annoy ... Oh, thousands of NIMBYs to annoy</p> <p>To Parliament, sing praises For giving us this Act....</p>
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Despite the Min of Housing, Communities & Local Government seemingly seeking to weaken public consultation, the spirit of goodwill impels me to be generous and compose for them a new carol, conveniently fitting the tune of a well-established favourite. Click to read the Blog entitled 'Consult All Ye Faithful' and join me in the next two verses.

Click to read the  
newsletter on the  
website

### Communicating with Stakeholders:

(An article for TRACTIVITY)

### The Growing Challenge?

In this article, I identified five different communications scenarios – stakeholders we need to keep **informed**; those we need to **hear**; those with whom we need to **dialogue**; those we need to **consult**; and those with whom we need to **collaborate**. Read the analysis and the challenges these different requirements pose stakeholder managers in 2026



**On Page 2 this month, some thoughts on the new Planning & Infrastructure Bill, Banning greyhound racing in Wales, a provocative piece on 'stakeholders' and a forthcoming mega-consultation. The Book I review is *Mismanaged Decline*. But don't be put off!**

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## Instant insights

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- Ministers like to promise that new legislation will help clarify law and bring certainty, but in the case of changes to current consultation practices in the **Planning and Infrastructure Act**, we simply do not know! Most commentators and practitioners – including the GuRU – accept the Government’s case that many NSIP consultations were problematic – but aren’t sure that abolishing the pre-application statutory requirement will necessarily improve matters – especially as we will all be governed by a *Code of Practice* which no-one has yet seen. Look at [Copper consultancy’s note](#) for one of the best, succinct analysis of the situation. Of course, it’s all designed to speed things up, and I have always doubted that consultation was a significant cause of delay. Poor forward planning; confused objectives (as in HS2), engineering issues and financing difficulties are all equally relevant. How long before we find out if the Act helps?
- Something of a consultation dogfight is emerging in Wales. Its Government – facing the fight of its life next May - strangely - has given a high priority is to **making greyhound racing illegal** and **legislation is imminent**. Unsurprisingly, there is widespread opposition, and it seems certain to mount a legal challenge, alleging inadequate consultation. In fact, there WAS a **consultation**, closing on 1 March 2024 – but on wider issues of animal welfare. Campaigners for a ban on dog racing responded in numbers to the two questions specifically on the subject, but if this consultation is subject to forensic analysis in Court, who knows what else might emerge?

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## Straws in the wind

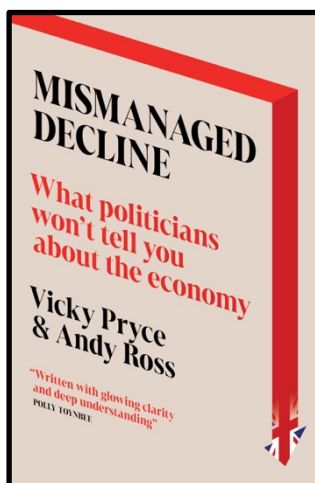
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- Ex-10 Downing Street Chief of Strategy, **Paul Ovenden** has ruffled feathers with an article in the Times seeming to blame **‘The stakeholder state’** for the problems of securing change in British politics. He claims that Ministers are hobbled by a “*complex coalition of campaign groups, regulators, litigators, trade bodies and well-networked organisations ... and incubated by a political perma-class that exists within every party and every department.*” Follow the debate on [LinkedIn](#), and note the view held by many that these **stakeholders expect to be consulted rather too often**. If that’s the prevailing sentiment at the centre of Government, it explains rather a lot, and reinforces the need for far more clarity in when consultation is and isn’t required.
- In contrast, two ex-officials who want to see rather more public input. Matthew Rycroft and Catherine Day are leading an impressive gathering of the like-minded under the banner of the **National Strategy Project**. One of its early priorities is to organise a massive ‘**national dialogue**’ which will be of great interest to readers of this Catch-up. Serious people are involved in this including the world-renowned [Prof James Fishkin](#) of Stanford University. But there are lots of other reasons to watch this initiative closely.

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## The Reading List

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Are you anxious ... or depressed? New Year Blues? Or maybe just fed up with bad news? Then don’t read this book for a few weeks. Much of it is miserable reading, made worse for being clearly well-researched and authoritatively presented. That said, Vicky Pryce and Andy Ross’ [Mismanaged Decline](#) is a lucid, accessible description of many economic issues where myth often distorts the popular perception. It is at its best analysing the problems of securing GDP growth, immigration and environmental politics and is coruscating on (what the authors regard as) the disastrous self-inflicted consequences of Brexit. Somehow this book morphs from the pessimism of regretful hindsight to a more optimistic view of a future potential realism – but only if politicians and media start being honest with the electorate and stop promoting impossible doctrinaire solutions to curry favour. Well, that should be easy. Shouldn’t it?

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