

April 2026

The monthly summary of  
consultation matters by  
Consultation GuRU –

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# Consultation Catch-up



The Government foolishly allowed an over-zealous PR wordsmith to describe its plans to make some improvements to consultation as ‘*ripping-up*’ the consultation culture. That is a pity because a culture of listening to stakeholders is needed by anyone who genuinely wants to avoid mistakes and get things right. If Ministers want to make positive changes there are lots they can do, and they could start by reflecting on WHY they consult. I will send them my FOUR FUNCTIONS FRAMEWORK and introduce some reality into their thinking. My ‘on the day’ reaction is here, but I’ll prepare a more considered submission soon

## [Ministers to ‘rip-up’ the consultation culture. Wishful thinking or Stroke of genius?](#) ( Blog 124)

*Best of the Blogs*



Ministers say want to rip-up the ‘consultation culture!’ I’ve argued for months that many aspects of consultation are now no longer fit for purpose and we need a full re-think. But they’ve got off to a bad start with excessive hyperbole. Their modest proposals don’t amount to very much and are a million miles from ‘ripping-up’ ANY culture. Whitehall needs to do much better, and there are far better ways of listening to stakeholders - and the public. There are really important issues being consulted upon at this very

moment, and trashing its own policymaking process is hardly a smart thing to do. So - good initiative; please don’t screw it up!

## [Double Jeopardy: The Perils of Poor Stakeholder Management](#)

(Article for Tractivity)



Failure to invest adequately in stakeholder relations can have serious consequences. Reflecting upon current and recent organisational and public sector failures, this Blog considers how many were predictable – and WERE predicted. It identifies three scenarios of above-average vulnerability – where industries face major problems; where projects are in difficulty and where public policies are in trouble. How does best practice stakeholder management help?

## [Trump’s ‘failure to consult’ may cost him dearly – and tell us much about consultation !](#) (Blog 123)



Not often do the international headlines allow us to reflect on consultation issues. This Blog was prompted by Trump’s travails and the complaints of European allies and others that they weren’t consulted about the Iran war. It let me speculate about the wider lessons including ‘the revenge of the unconsulted!’ Is it ever right to say “*What a fine mess you’ve got yourself into! Don’t expect us to come to your rescue. YOU SHOULD HAVE CONSULTED us first!*”

**On Page 2** this month, some recent Court cases on consultation, the contrasting approaches to engaging with neighbourhoods and a more generous review of Nicke Clegg’s book on ‘How to Save the Internet’ than he’s received elsewhere!

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## Instant insights

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- For those who frequently challenge public engagement advocates to ‘*show us where consultation has made a difference*’, here is a good recent example. In 2025, the **Ministry of Justice** consulted on a new structure for managing magistrates courts following the abolition of Local Justice Areas under previous legislation. It meant 58 new ‘*Bench areas*’ - fewer than the exiting model. *Consultees* argued that there would be a loss of local identity and accountability as well as making recruitment more challenging. Nine months later in the [feedback](#) published in March, Minister Sarah Sackman announced that, in response to the consultation, the Government will not now proceed with this change. But why such a delay? I guess it was not the consultation – but the other pressures on the justice and courts system.
- The Courts have been busy and have issued two judgments specifically on whether or not there should have been a consultation before Government or Parliamentary action. The ‘Conservative Home’ website described the latest judgment on the continuous saga of displaced **Chagos islanders** as ‘out of touch’ because Mrs Justice Stacey ruled that there was no basis for requiring a consultation before the Government agreed the terms of a Treaty on the sovereignty of the Islands ( [Pompe v Foreign Office](#)). Then the claim by the **Greyhound Board of Great Britain** (GBGB) that the failure to consult prevented the Welsh Senedd from lawfully legislating to ban the sport was also rejected ( [GBGB v Welsh Ministers](#)). Both illustrate the confusion on when a consultation is required and when not! Maybe this is a matter of politics and constitutional law, but the relationship between Parliament and the Government’s treaty-making power remains unsatisfactorily obscure.
- More conventional legal challenges have also failed in the High Court. The campaign group ‘**Open Roads for Oxford**’ (ORO) could not persuade the Court that the consultation questionnaire prevented opponents from expressing their views ( [ORO v Oxfordshire CC](#)). And in [Howe v Buckinghamshire](#) the Court decided that there was no need to re-consult when one of two day-care-centres threatened with closure was reprieved. The law of consultation continues to evolve!
- There are two contrasting approaches to **neighbourhood engagement** from the Government. MHCLG has now published its blueprint for [Neighbourhood or Town Boards](#) who “must lead organising across their community carrying out extensive engagement with the people who live there.” For a helpful analysis of what this may mean and how they are designed to help repeated failures to secure such engagement in the past read Just Neighbourhood’s [Working Paper 6](#). Basically it sounds positive. But can we say the same of the NHS? Its [Neighbourhood health framework](#) is an impressive wish-list of radical changes (though without any costs or funding !!!) that totally ignores the statutory provisions for engaging/consulting with patients and public where there are changes to the service. We will look closely at this; maybe health bosses have just taken this as normal standard practice. Shame, therefore, that they have just fired so many experienced engagement professionals!

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## Straws in the wind

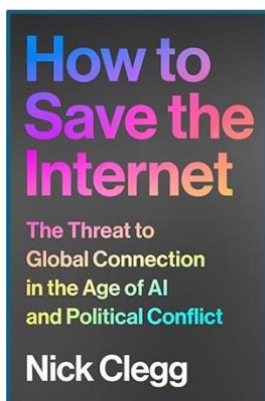
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## The Reading List

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Critics of Mark Zuckerberg’s META have loudly dismissed [Nick Clegg’s book](#) as an unconvincing defence of Big Tech, but I found it well-balanced. After all, the former Deputy PM understands politics, and his recent work experience means he has wrestled with tough dilemmas that modern social media and AI present. (His critics have done neither!) . His core argument is that USA domination means that we have enjoyed a liberal global, democratic internet based on open data exchange and free speech, and that it is in real danger of fragmentation as Countries – including the UK – rush to enact restrictive domestic legislation alongside growing techno-protectionism. He describes a world of rival AI environments in China and the USA and wants the EU and other democracies to work

together to defend the open, liberal, globalised platforms that have delivered so much. As an analysis of issues that affect us all, I found this readable and useful, though whether he is closer to knowing the solutions remains pretty doubtful. **See all GuRU book reviews [here](#)**

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