

Internship Project Report

Purpose: To research how community consultations for renewable energy developments are being delivered following changes introduced by the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, and to develop evidence-based recommendations for best practice stakeholder engagement.

[NSIP consultation guidance - what it means for developers - Pier](#)

[Consultation - Clean Air Solar Farm](#)

[Tarchon Interconnector | Connecting Germany and the UK](#)

[One Earth Solar Farm - Virtual Exhibition](#)

[As NSIP consultation reform takes shape, engagement matters more than ever - Camargue](#)

[Planning Act 2008: Introduction to National Infrastructure Planning Guidance \(July 2026\) - GOV.UK](#)

[Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025](#)

[Process guide - pre-application](#)

[NSIPs Reference Guide for Local Authorities pg11-15](#)

[Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and the people and organisations involved in the process - GOV.UK](#)

[Why Branding Is Such A Critical—Yet Often Overlooked—Asset](#)

[Top Branding for Energy & Sustainability | Design For Tomorrow](#)

[Why traditional approaches to consultation will no longer cut it](#)

[The Importance of Branding in the Renewables Sector - Cool Blue](#)

[Why should you use social media in a consultation?](#)

[Engaging Youth In Renewable Energy Education Programs • Eeco.co.za](#)

[Methods for engaging young people - GOV.UK](#)

[Creating Video Content for Renewable Energy Projects](#)

[Furzen Solar Farm](#)

[The end of statutory pre-application consultation and other DCO regime changes | BCLP - Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner](#)

[Interactive Consultation Platform: Trydan Gwyrdd Cymru Experience | DoDA](#)

[Virya Energy | Fit For Purpose Energy](#)

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Abbreviations and Definitions

- NSIP – Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project
- Stakeholder – person or group affected by a project
- Consultation – two-way conversation with those affected by a project
- Engagement - one-way, giving information to communities
- Seldom-Heard Groups - typically under-served or marginalised populations

Introduction

Consultation is a two-way conversation between stakeholders and developers. This period of time allows developers or agencies to explain their project to those who will be affected, and these stakeholders are able to give their opinions and feedback regarding the proposed ideas. The guidelines for this have recently changed and developers need to know what this will mean for their projects.

Section One – Consultation Requirements

Previous Requirements	New Guidelines
○ Required to last at least 28 days. ○ Had to publish Statement of Community Consultation in order to be granted consent. ○ Statutory duty to consult in the pre-application process. ○ Strict process and formal consultation stages. ○ Reporting what was done through a Consultation Report.	○ The Secretary of State will provide guidance and direction. ○ Duty to consult has been removed from the Planning Act 2008. ○ Applicants must notify the relevant Secretary of State & host local authority of their proposed application as early as possible. ○ Engagement is encouraged and should be proportionate to the project.

The new guidance aims to streamline the planning process in order to ensure that major infrastructure projects can be delivered more efficiently. As a result, the statutory requirement for pre-application public consultation has been removed, and developers are recommended to make their consultations and engagement ‘proportionate to the scale and nature’ of the project. The use of project websites is being encouraged more so that people can be quickly and regularly updated as the project progresses. Other methods such as press release, in-person events, and newsletters are still beneficial, especially for seldom-heard groups or those who struggle to access technology. The important thing is to recognise who the stakeholders are and their needs so that the examination process can be easier.

When planning for consultation and engagement periods it is important to consider the purpose and complexity of the project, the number and type of stakeholders, the available amount of time and resources, and the desired level of engagement. These factors will determine how agencies should approach the consultation period and what methods will be most effective. Effective consultations engage stakeholders early on in the process and continuing to communicate throughout the project. They provide clear, accessible information and create a safe and respectful

environment for stakeholders so that they feel seen and listened to. Feedback from stakeholders should be taken into consideration and communicated back to the concerned parties. This reinforces stakeholder's trust in both the project team and the project itself, and teams should identify the priorities of their audience and act accordingly. For example, a general information booklet or in-person event can be held initially to give a wide overview of the project, and later on topic-specific material can be released in the form of webinars or leaflets so that stakeholders can recognise that their feedback has been listened to and taken into consideration.

Section Two – Stakeholder Importance

Stakeholders are people who are affected by or have an interest in a project. These can be individuals or groups like residents, communities, tourists, and recreational visitors. Statutory stakeholders refer to those who must be consulted about a project such as planning authorities and local councils. There are seldom-heard groups that should be considered as well – people with disabilities, different ethnic groups, those who live in isolated settings, and more. It is important for developers to consider and consult all of these stakeholder groups when beginning a project application.

These interested parties play a necessary role in the decision-making process as they can influence the development and implementation of NSIPs. Developers need to partake in community engagement in order to gain feedback and insights from locals who will potentially be affected, directly or indirectly, by their project. These opinions should be listened to and taken into consideration during the initial phases of the project so that changes can be made. Many of these NSIPs also impact the local economy as they create jobs, improve infrastructure and access to services, and promote economic growth. Before, stakeholders could affect the efficiency and speed of a project as better consultation lead to quicker approval of the project and minimise any future concerns or complaints. However, under the new guidance, consultation adequacy isn't a defining factor in terms of application acceptance; document quality is now considered more important.

Section Three – Consultation Methods

There are many materials and methods currently used in consultations for renewable energy and other NSIP projects. Some physical examples include information booklets, banners, posters, leaflets, newsletters, and maps. These are often available at in-person events in order to provide the attendees with as much information as possible. Materials such as newsletters and leaflets can be mailed to the

local residents to keep them informed about the project and upcoming events. Press releases are another method used by developers to advertise and explain the project on a larger scale, as these can often be viewed either online or in the local newspapers. Digital methods like webinars and websites are more modern and useful for younger generations to easily access information about the project, including any documents used during the consultation period and regular updates on the project's progress.

Whilst developers still commonly use the mentioned methods, some are beginning to consider slightly more experimental solutions. For example, 3D mapping can be used to allow stakeholders to visualise what the project will look like from various locations. This means that they can see what it will look like from their house or any other places they are concerned about like walking routes or farmland. Topic-specific webinars can take place to address frequently mentioned worries from the feedback forms submitted by stakeholders which should help to alleviate any major concerns. Another new method that can be used to further explain information is videos. Animated videos can show the construction process in a simplified way that's accessible for all and other videos can be used to explain the purpose and intent of the project audibly.

During my research, I discovered some additional techniques used by other companies for their own consultation and engagement. An interesting example that I found was a virtual exhibition used by One Earth Solar Farm. In this virtual exhibition you could click on various banners, set up in a digital room, which provide project information such as construction plans, community benefits, environmental issues, and a section for feedback. I thought that this was a unique way to mimic an in-person event in a digital format that can be accessed at any time via the documents section on the website. Later in my research, I discovered that RWE Renewables often use these virtual exhibitions as part of their webpages for individual projects, alongside site layout and location maps, and photomontages. These followed the same layout as One Earth Solar Farm and also included information about the project manager of each specific project. Many websites incorporated a number of diagrams to explain the construction process in a simple visual way, and several also included visual timelines of the project's progression. These highlight key points in the project's timeline and offered estimates for dates of when certain aspects would be happening, such as consultation periods and construction deadlines. Some companies have set up school engagement programmes and workshops in order to involve younger people in what is happening in their local community and encouraging them to have opinions and insight about NSIPs.

Section Four – Project Branding

Branding a project is important for a number of reasons. Branding shapes the purpose, goals, and values of a project through its choice of colours, typography, and iconography. It allows for cohesion across any documents related to a specific project and creates differentiation between similar projects and companies. Branding can also help to build connections between developers and stakeholders as it conveys the personality and mission of each project, which helps the development of trust and can help manage public perception during the consultation period and beyond.

Some clients choose to base their branding on the local area as well as the purpose of the project – for example, many renewable energy projects are likely to include green as a prominent colour due to its connotations of nature and life. Colour psychology plays a big part in companies design decisions where branding is involved as these visually communicate moods and influence perception. Developers will lean towards colours such as greens and blues because these appear calmer and more natural to help show the intent of their energy project. Including elements of a local area helps stakeholders to feel more connected to the project and feel seen by the developers. Typography can also impact how stakeholders view a brand. Modern and readable fonts make the project accessible and attractive for any group, especially for printed materials, and adds to the cohesion of the materials. Using these elements alongside one another creates a strong brand identity, promotes consistency, and helps to appeal to stakeholders.

Branding is an important aspect of the current renewable energy industry as the ever-growing competitive market means that companies and developers need a way to differentiate themselves from others. A brand image is an effective way to do this because it gives people a visual representation of the company and the values that are being shown. Research has highlighted that strong, consistent branding builds trust and creating respect between developers and stakeholders. These factors assist the company and their projects to be received better by stakeholders and helps to build their confidence in the developers.

Some examples of branded energy projects include Tarchon and Clean Air Solar Farm, both of which involve Pier. Tarchon is an interconnector project that will create a direct power link between the UK and Germany. This project will be located underground and underwater. The branding used in the project website and documents reflects the sea element through its colour palette and choice of images. When stakeholders view these branded materials, they can see the serious and professional nature of the project. Similarly, the branding for Clean Air Solar Farm reflects its mission and purpose. As it will be built in the East Riding of Yorkshire, a predominantly agricultural area, the colour palette and imagery used highlights this factor through the natural soft toned colours that creates a natural feel to the project which is evident

across all of the related materials and documents for the project. Branding has been used in order to help differentiate between solar farm projects in the area, which will help stakeholders to identify which development they are being informed about.

Section Five – Creative Methods for Consultations and Engagement

Due to the changes in the Planning Act, consultation and engagement methods now have the opportunity to be more creative and take advantage of digital platforms to a further extent. This will allow developers to reach a large audience quickly and experiment with more modern and innovative approaches.

Social media is a large part of our lives, so using it as an engagement or consultation tool creates an opportunity reach a range of stakeholders. Projects could have specific accounts across various platforms like Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and others. Sharing short videos and updates via these platforms is a quick way to give information to a large number of people in both an entertaining and informative way. Content can be tailored to the demographic of each app in order to attract the desired audiences and provide easy to understand information in a visual format. Social media can be used throughout the entire project, even once construction is complete, to provide up-to-date information and promote the work of the project. Adverts on social media have been used before, and should continue to be, to market any events related to the project alongside the development itself. This also helps to engage a younger audience, as they can relate to the content more and it may help them to feel considered as well as those who attend in-person events.

Benefits of using social media	Risks of using social media
○ Increased accessibility and wider outreach ○ Convenient for consultees ○ Can connect with existing online communities ○ Able to access data analytics ○ Cost effective methodology ○ Real time communication	○ Potential spread of misinformation ○ Digital exclusion for those who can't access the internet ○ Fake accounts ○ Risk of hacking

The involvement of younger people could also be considered more in the future. The voices of young people matter as projects happening in their local area will affect them and they should be able to share their thoughts and opinions. An easy way to do this is to send out surveys via schools and colleges as these are easy for young people to access online or to be given paper versions. Workshops and focus groups can also be put in place to inform young people about these projects and help them expand their knowledge on renewable energy. There are also renewable energy education

programmes designed to teach young people about renewable energy in a structured way. These help them to enhance practical skills, gain hands-on learning experience, and reinforce theoretical knowledge, as well as promoting collaboration with local communities and stakeholders. Digital engagement also reaches younger generations well because they are the primary users of many social media platforms and are often more comfortable using online tools to engage with and to learn about various topics. Involving the younger generation in consultation and engagement encourages them to contribute ideas and perspectives regarding energy projects that will affect them and their futures. Their involvement is important as it increases awareness and support for clean energy technologies and ensures that future energy systems are designed with younger people in mind.

Another creative method that could be experimented with more in the future is video content. Videos can be used to simplify complex concepts for stakeholders to understand and become educated on what the projects are about and any involved processes. Visual storytelling helps to communicate ideas and engage a wide audience of stakeholders. Videos can easily be shared on social media, project websites, and even at in-person events so these are available at any time for those who wish to watch and understand certain elements of a project. There are many types of videos that can be produced, but popular styles include documentary style, explanation videos, personal testimonials and case studies of previous developments, and behind-the-scenes or process videos. Each of these engage different audiences and showcase a variety of aspects of renewable energy projects. Within the content, key words should be naturally incorporated in order to gain attraction and clearly state the purpose of the project or video. Current trends should also be taken into consideration as this helps the content to feel recent. For example, drone footage is currently a popular video characteristic, as well as interactive video features and even VR experiences.

Section Six – Current and Future Developer Actions

Currently, there isn't any evidence of the change to the NSIP consultation guidance causing major differences to companies approaches. As the guidance is so new, companies appear to be continuing with their previous methods such as in-person events and project webpages as a way of consulting and engaging stakeholders. However, as time goes on, I believe that we will see changes happening as people adjust to the new guidelines and adapt their methods accordingly.

In my interviews with Pier team members, I asked for their opinion on how the new law will change their approach. Everyone agreed that there will be differences in the future, especially with the opportunity to explore more creative methods like social media. Although consultation is no longer statutory under the new guidelines, it is still

important for developers to consider when beginning a project. The same level of consultation should be applied and adapted depending on the client, location, and project so that stakeholders feel listened to and thought of. Everyone that I spoke to said that feedback is one of the top measures of success regarding consultations and is necessary for developers and project teams to take into consideration. If developers choose to not gather feedback under the new guidance, there will be a higher risk of opposition from stakeholders and could cause issues in the application process. Whilst there is now the chance to experiment with new techniques for consultation and engagement, methods such as mail drops and in-person events are still useful and effective for certain communities and areas and should continue to be used alongside any new ideas.

Upcoming Renewable Energy Projects to Watch for Changes	
Project Name	Consultation Period
Furzen Solar Farm	3 rd August – 14 th September
Hope Moor Wind Farm	Late 2026/early 2027
Arrow Valley Solar	Autumn – Winter 2026
Humberhead Solar Farm	November – December 2026

Section Seven – Recommendations for the Future

Throughout my research, I have discovered and thought of many methods that could be further utilised in the future:

Social media – using social media in consultations for renewable energy projects will allow developers to quickly and easily communicate information with stakeholders. There is the opportunity for each project to have its own page across various platforms so that the content is specific and solely focused on the project.

- Short videos can be made and posted to help the stakeholders feel connected to the project – for example, videos providing information regarding the progress of the proposal, ‘meet the team’ style videos to add a sense of reality to the development, and behind-the-scenes to inform the public on slightly more complex subjects.
- Following current trends on certain platforms, in a professional manner, can also help the stakeholders to feel connected to the project.
- Targeted advertisements that include important information or event notices can be made for social media platforms for those in specific postcodes or locations.
- Social media helps to engage younger people as they are often the primary users on particular platforms, and they are frequently left out of discussions regarding local developments. Typically, teenagers and young adults are the

primary users of social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok, and many use these daily.

- Younger people are often attracted to short videos and photomontages as these share information in a short form that captures attention rather than long articles or pieces of text.
- Trends that show the personality of those working on a project are often popular thanks to their humorous nature and relaxed approach.
- Following Australia's social media ban for under 16s, the UK government are looking to do the same. This will mean that any social media content posted for engagement regarding renewable energy projects needs to be targeted at users older than 16. In some ways, this makes engagement easier because people over the age of 16 are more likely to want to interact and engage with information about energy projects and will know more about the context behind them. This also means that their feedback will be more informed and will provide genuine opinions.
- Posting links to online feedback forms would allow for the younger generations to have their voices and opinions heard.
- Involving schools and colleges in the engagement and consultation process means that young people can learn about renewable energy in their local area and share their opinions about it. Holding workshops and information sessions can engage children and build an interest in the energy sector.

VR experiences and website design – virtual reality and 3D mapping can work alongside one another to allow stakeholders to see what the project will look like in the chosen location.

- This method should help to ease any concerns people have regarding the visuals of the development against the landscape, and can be made to visualise the project at different times of year and in various weather conditions.
- These materials should be made available at both in-person events and on project websites to allow people time to explore them.

Another digital method to incorporate further are individual project websites with unique designs and branding.

- Branding helps to set up an image for the project through the use of colours, typography, and imagery, which helps to appeal to the public visually.
- 'Scrolly telling' websites are something that could be considered further in the future, especially to explain project information alongside visuals of the proposed project. These are websites that seem animated or like a video as you scroll through due to the way that images move and change. Different text boxes and images can appear as you scroll to create a narrative and share information.

Community availability – information being readily available within the affected communities is another method that could be used more in the future.

- Holding drop-in sessions in public areas, such as libraries and supermarkets, outside of formal consultation events would allow people to ask questions and give feedback without being constricted to the timeframe of formal events. These could be held on a regular basis over the course of the project across varying locations so that residents can express any concerns or opinions to someone in person after the initial in-person events.
- Community workshops would give both the developers and the community a chance to gain knowledge and feedback regarding the project. Local residents know more about their area and can provide insight on design decisions and effects on the local environment, whereas the developers can inform and explain their decisions or ideas surrounding the proposed project.
- These could work well alongside the drop-in sessions and take place during different stages of the pre-application phase.
- Have an information point in public places such as local shops, libraries, or village halls so that people can find and access physical consultation materials such as feedback forms, information booklets, and leaflets when they want to know something. This is especially helpful in areas with a predominantly elderly population or for those who aren't as confident using technology to access information.
- Attend shows and career fairs as many people attend these events and information can be quickly provided. Having a branded stall allows people to easily recognise the purpose of the stand and can help to gain attraction from those who haven't heard of the project or development before.
- Branded vans can travel around the areas within the consultation zone as pop-up style event in town centres, and team members can be available to answer questions and provide information to anyone that engages with the event. Information booklets, leaflets, and feedback forms can be available for whoever requires one. This method is useful for those who can't access the internet easily but want to provide their feedback and opinions.

Some additional slightly unconventional methods could also be considered in the future to reach certain groups of people.

- Podcasts would be accessible to visually impaired people as a digital method for them to access information regarding the project and any upcoming events that they could attend if they had any questions or concerns. These podcast episodes would also be available to others who may process information better when it's explained audibly. Radio adverts on local radio stations could equally offer this type of accessibility to elderly populations and visually impaired

people as they can access the information in a suitable format and be aware of any major updates regarding local developments.

- A video game could be created alongside the 3D mapping software to let people explore and visualise the project area from a first-person perspective. There could potentially be different characters within the game that give information about specific areas based on the roles within a project team. This is an interactive and immersive way to show a range of people what the project will look like in their area, and they can access scientific knowledge in an understandable format. These could be linked to project websites to allow access at any time so that people don't need to download or pay for any additional software.

Conclusion

At this time, there isn't evidence of any differences in approaches since the changes to the law. As time progresses, I believe that we will see a difference in developers' approach to public consultations and engagement and the further involvement of creative and digital methods. Despite no longer being statutory, consultation and engagement with stakeholders remains important and a necessary step in the timeline of a project, and should continue to be completed to the same standard.

Key Learnings

Throughout this project, I have learnt about what public consultation and engagement is, who stakeholders are, what the development process is for NSIPs, and what the law is surrounding developments and their consultations. Researching these topics has allowed me to explore consultation methods and provide recommendations developed from the research I completed and my own ideas. I have been able to improve my research techniques and use interviews as a source of information to gain insight from others own experiences.