



KEY INSIGHTS

THE PROMOTION OF MAJOR
INFRASTRUCTURE:

CONSENTS AND ENGAGEMENT

2024

WELCOME TO KEY INSIGHTS - CONSENTS AND ENGAGEMENT

What's driving - or preventing - the efficient promotion of major projects right now, and what will be at the top of the agenda in the next five years?

The development of major projects is evolving. The Development Consent Order (DCO) process was introduced to streamline the planning process for large-scale projects, aiming to reduce delays and uncertainties for promoters and stakeholders.

Yet more projects are behind schedule with the increased risk of disengaging impacted communities.

How can we prevent this from happening? To gain an understanding we asked 65 industry leaders across government, transport, nuclear, renewable energy, engineering, construction and utilities to find out.

Here we present the findings from our conversations, to learn about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

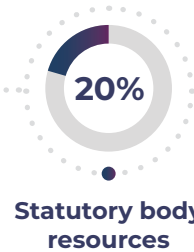
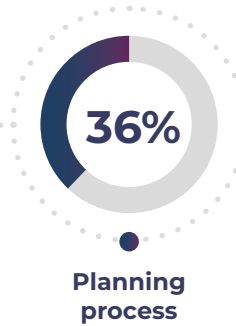
VIEWS FROM THE TOP

CJ Associates would like to thank the Major Projects Association and its members and other industry leaders who gave their time to share their experiences and insights to create this edition of Key Insights.

Who we talked to:



WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE IN THE PLANNING PROCESS?



"It is critical that planning and stakeholder engagement is embedded from project inception to minimise risk to consent and improve outcomes."

Viral Desai
Practice Director
Planning, Environmental Consenting
and Communities
AtkinsRéalis



"The number, and level of detail that's needed to discharge requirements and other consents once the Order is made is huge and should not be underestimated."

Liz Wood-Griffiths
Head of Consents Authority
Tideway

BEHIND THE FIGURES

While the understanding of the DCO process has become more widespread, the industry is still grappling with many challenges.

Stakeholder engagement

Nearly nine in ten emphasised that engaging stakeholders is the greatest challenge and a significant risk to gaining consent. It was perceived that not enough time and resources are allocated to provide adequate early engagement with stakeholders to build trust, secure support and seek agreement.

Navigating the complex stakeholder landscape and managing expectations was recognised as being difficult. There was a strong view that early engagement needs to be prioritised with senior resources to engage the community, key stakeholders and politicians.

Planning process

Politics, legal challenge and delayed decisions were cited as slowing down the consenting process and increasing uncertainty and costs.

Almost all stated that the planning regime is costly, complex and lengthy. **Over a third see that policy and reforms continue to be a major challenge.** Promoters cite accelerated programmes, funding constraints, complex applications, multiple consultations and environmental assessments as contributing to programme uncertainty.

Many are specifically concerned that the excessive application material has become inaccessible for stakeholders and overwhelming for statutory bodies, leading to opposition and further delays.

Statutory body resources

20 percent raised the impact of lack of capacity, capability and continuity of local planning officers, statutory bodies and the planning inspectorate as a concern.

Planning and statutory bodies are already stretched, affecting their ability to engage, respond to and determine applications within required timeframes.

While funding mechanisms have sought to address the issue, many see the ongoing lack of experienced resources as a significant risk.

Organisational design

Many felt that design, environment, planning and engagement teams often do not work closely or early enough with each other, or sufficiently understand each other's roles. **18 percent cited that moving to an integrated design and delivery team would improve outcomes.**

Along with ensuring that representatives from the planning and engagement teams are part of all decision making from the outset to help mitigate risks.

The health and wellbeing of teams during the examination period was also raised as a concern due to the high-pressure timetable of the hearings.

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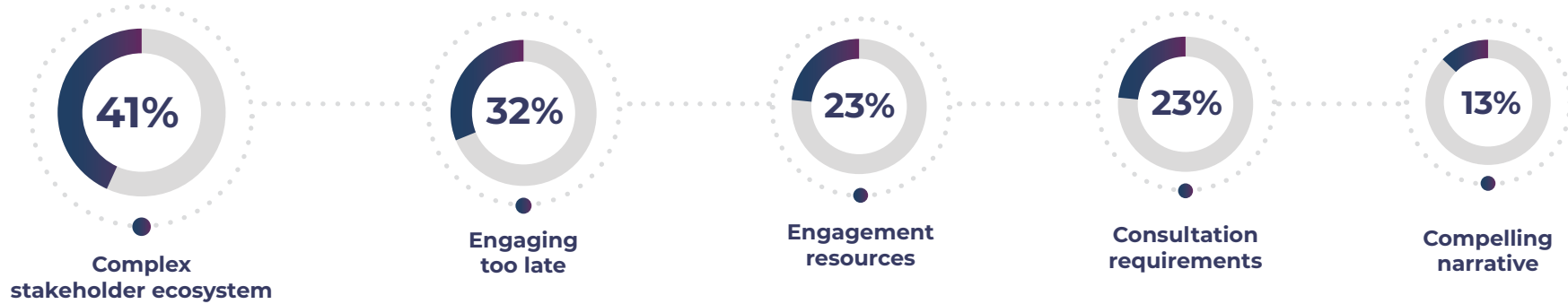
The planning process is often criticised, but is the framework the problem? Why does it take so long to gain consent and will the proposed planning reforms help?

Our industry has a significant amount of experience to draw on and learn from previous examinations and judicial reviews. Projects need to work with government and stakeholders to ensure these issues are fully understood and that there is alignment with national policies and local needs.

There is a huge amount of work to deliver. The pipeline of energy and water projects alone will tie up the industry for many years. So, let's be on the front foot in bringing all stakeholders together, and changing requirements if required to shape the best outcome for the communities that we serve.

Through proactive engagement and communication, there is the opportunity to be more efficient and effective in how we, as an industry, navigate the planning process and reduce the risk of opposition and legal challenges.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE IN ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS AND THE COMMUNITY?



“Engagement needs to be seen as a continuous process that’s well resourced to deliver effective engagement throughout the project, from inception to operation, rather than starting just before the DCO process and ending shortly after consent has been given. Any break in continuity of engagement time and resources is normally very disconcerting for the community.”

Robbie Owen
Partner & Parliamentary Agent
Head of Planning & Government Affairs
Pinsent Masons LLP



“Local communities always start off sceptical about projects ...To build trust and buy-in you need specialist resources that consistently engage with stakeholders, communicates the benefits and provides continuity throughout the project.”

Dr Francesco Di Maddaloni
Lecturer in Project Studies & Major Infrastructure
The Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction
University College of London

BEHIND THE FIGURES

The importance of early, effective and meaningful engagement cannot be understated as critical to achieving consent and the efficient completion of the construction programme.

Complex stakeholder ecosystem

When looking at the challenge of engagement, the volume and complexity of the stakeholder ecosystem was again cited by more than 40 percent. Major projects, especially linear schemes, impact multiple councils, constituencies and diverse communities.

Understanding and managing expectations of a wide range of stakeholders, securing support, building advocacy, and creating a positive reputation was cited in almost all interviews. To address this the need for a strategic and tailored approach to proactively planned engagement and consultation was consistently recognised.

Engaging too late

More than a third were concerned that key stakeholders are engaged too late and were missing out on the benefits. While some see involving stakeholders early as challenging, the majority felt that **stakeholders, engaged early and listened to, can help shape proposals, mitigate impacts** and identify opportunities to deliver social value and community benefits. Engaging too late adds risk to consent and is an essential lesson projects need to learn.

Engagement resources

Almost a quarter of respondents cited the lack of sufficiently experienced stakeholder resources as affecting the ability to meaningfully engage and consult stakeholders and communities.

Expert stakeholder managers with experience of the complex infrastructure, the planning regime and consultation requirements are rare. The need for skilled resources embedded at a senior level, from the inception of the programme, was raised again.

Consultation requirements

Projects are grappling with how and when to involve, inform and consult stakeholders and the community. Planning requirements and stakeholders' expectations are typically not aligned.

Striking the balance of proportionate engagement and consultation is not easy, but more meaningful engagement rather than less is supported. Expert consultation resources who understand the legal and planning requirements, and implications, are essential to minimising the risks of legal challenge and delay.

Compelling narrative

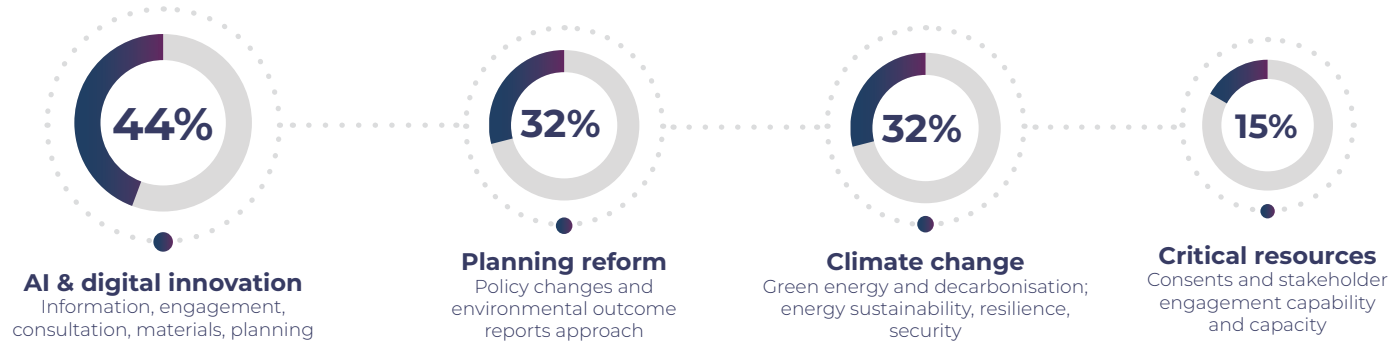
Creating a compelling, clear and consistent narrative is seen as vital to building trust, advocacy and support. Stakeholders and communities often feel that projects 'are done to them' and they want to know 'what's in it for them'. 13 percent of respondents raised the need to effectively and consistently communicate the scheme benefits, focusing on social value. Projects need to become better at storytelling to win the hearts and minds of communities.

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How many times have we heard how critical effective stakeholder engagement is, and yet, typically, there is insufficient funding for a well-resourced and experienced stakeholder team?

The relationship between programme teams and their stakeholders can last for many years on these significant projects. We need to get it right from the outset and take them on the journey with us. There are many benefits to strategically planned, early and ongoing engagement that builds trust with stakeholders to ultimately gain support and local ownership of major projects.

WHAT'S THE NEXT BIG THING IN PLANNING AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT?



“There is great potential for AI and digital tools to transform the planning process, by improving access to information and increasing transparency. Success in this area would see a reduced administrative burden on planners and improved public engagement.”

Karl FitzGerald
Projects Director
Infrastructure and Projects Authority



“To meet the climate and net zero carbon challenge, we need a paradigm shift. We can't just look at short-term costs. We need a whole life-cycle perspective.”

Eleanor Wright
Senior Projects Director
Fluor Limited

BEHIND THE FIGURES

The variety of major projects is only matched by the variety of innovation being championed by passionate individuals throughout the industry.

AI & digital innovation

It is no surprise that almost half view artificial intelligence (AI) and digital innovation as either an opportunity and/or challenge.

How do we harness the power of AI, machine learning and digital tools to improve or access the vast amounts of technical information both for planning authorities and for local communities? **Although not well understood, it was agreed that AI, digital engagement and consultation tools can help us engage and better understand stakeholder concerns and needs.**

AI has the potential to make preparing and assessing applications less onerous and expensive; improve modelling, design and environmental assessments; and assist with information provision, consultations and tailored interactions with the public. Many envisage a future of full digitalisation of the planning process.

Planning reform

Over a third see the forthcoming planning reforms as a major challenge and potential opportunity. While there's a universal clamour for a more efficient process, consistent and timely decision making, many question whether the reforms will deliver improvements.

Specifically, changes to the EIA process and the move to an environmental outcomes report approach is also top of mind.

Climate change

Over a third believe that climate change is the greatest challenge we're facing. To achieve the government's targets and protect the environment for future generations, it has been proposed that we need to find ways to make our projects more sustainable. **Promoters see the need to address climate change, decarbonisation, energy sustainability, resilience and security.**

The pressure on the planning system will only increase with the future pipeline of renewable energy and utilities projects. Further reform to the planning policies and additional planning resources are needed to meet this challenge.

Critical resources

A recurring theme is the insufficient number of experienced personnel to effectively engage and consult stakeholders and communities and manage the planning process.

Projects see the need to invest in skills, training and build resources to meet current and future requirements. However, many are concerned that the ongoing lack of resources from statutory and planning authorities will continue to cause delay.

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Climate change is upon us. Ensuring we can deliver the pipeline of renewable energy, new nuclear and utility programmes quickly is critical.

We need to harness the power of AI and digital tools, and create an environment that supports our colleagues across the industry in bringing forward innovation.

Bringing together the best minds will help solve our biggest problems, and transform how we deliver major projects.

PLANNING CONSENTS AND ENGAGEMENT EXEMPLARS

Some of the many examples of good practice identified across the industry.

Anglia Water Cambridge Waste Water Treatment Plant Relocation

Early engagement and established effective community engagement groups

Hinkley Point C

Engagement with local communities and businesses creating amenity and delivering social value

HS2 Phase 2B

Dedicated stakeholder engagement resulting in significantly reduced number of petitions

National Grid Snowdonia Visual Impact Provision project

Collaborative stakeholder engagement at the heart of the project

National Highways

Customer and community engagement across schemes

A417 Missing Link project

Collaborative stakeholder engagement at the heart of the project

A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet improvement scheme

Well managed DCO and examination and effective stakeholder engagement

A66 Northern Trans-Pennine Project

Innovative engagement with local communities

Lower Thames Crossing

Communications programme delivering a compelling narrative

M25 junction 10/A3 Wisley interchange improvement

Strategic approach to engagement and well managed DCO and examination

Oxford Street Upgrade

Tailored engagement with local businesses

Paired Norfolk Vanguard offshore wind developments

Effective engagement and collaboration with the local council

Port of Tilbury - The Logistics Terminal

Tailored engagement approach

Sellafield Ltd

Strategic partnership to deliver 20 year infrastructure pipeline

Sizewell C

Social value funding for skills, education, employment, positive mitigation

Thames River Scheme

Compelling narrative and meaningful community engagement

Tideway

Compelling narrative, vision, culture, engagement

Transport for London

Approach to planning and significant investment in local authority engagement

Barking Riverside extension in London Overground

Effective Network Rail and developer joint working and project teams

ADAPT NOW

The main findings from our discussions and survey clearly demonstrate the key issues we face in engaging stakeholders and the community to secure consent and deliver complex infrastructure in the UK. While the challenges can't be underestimated, there is a shared commitment to improve, innovate and learn lessons across our industry. It was exciting to hear so many examples where excellent and important work is being delivered.

As government looks to us to drive efficiencies through the delivery of major projects, we must not overlook the importance of the planning process and engaging stakeholders. The solutions are in our grasp; we can rise to meet the challenges and accelerate progress with:



Bold leadership, creativity,
innovation and collaboration



Better data and knowledge
sharing



A long-term, committed
pipeline of activity to build a
sustainable environment



A commitment to boost and
develop skills, and worker
shortage



In the next edition of Key Insights, CJ Associates will publish the findings from the discussions of this report at the Major Projects Association Seminar, and will include tangible actions, innovative ideas and initiatives to help address the issues raised - and deliver better outcomes for all.

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