

CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT FOR INFRASTRUCTURE 2023

19 OCTOBER 2023 | LONDON

Ahead of the [Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement for Infrastructure 2023](#) (taking place 19 October, London), **Charlotte Hewes**, **Stakeholder Engagement Manager at SSE Renewables**, shares some advice for those developing consultation and engagement strategies.



CHARLOTTE HEWES
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT MANAGER
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WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO THOSE OUTLINING THEIR CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY?

Just because something worked on another project doesn't necessarily mean it will work this time. Get to know the area before launching too far into consultation or engagement planning. One of the quickest turn offs when you're engaging is not correctly pronouncing local place names!

Accept that not everyone will turn into supporters of your project – but that doesn't mean you can't do a good job for them in consulting and engaging.

Being able to empathise with communities is key in understanding their concerns – try and imagine those residents are your friends and family.

WHAT ARE THE EMERGING CHALLENGES FACING CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT?

Social media is most certainly turning into the biggest challenge facing us. Misinformation is too easy to propagate and can be hard to recover from when it's playing on fears of the unknown.

In certain types of infrastructure development, there is a growing expectation that you need 100% community buy-in to be able to succeed in a planning application – it just isn't realistic. Can we see this requirement becoming the case for more and more development, where even a handful of dissenters can spell the end for your project?

When it comes to Community Benefit Funds associated with infrastructure development we are in a somewhat 'wild-west' situation. There is some need for regulation to ensure that they are fair, proportionate and aren't designed to appear as blackmail to persuade communities to support schemes.

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WHAT NEW APPROACHES ARE HELPING TO ENGAGE WIDER COMMUNITIES AND SHOWCASING THE LOCAL BENEFITS?

Certainly, for carbon-zero infrastructure development, climate change is something that is of growing importance to people and explaining the role the community will be playing as part of the solution is a real 'hearts and minds' opportunity. Battery Energy Storage Systems are new concepts to many and there are great chances to educate communities to understand their role in supporting wide scale development of renewable energy generators.

Digitally rendered and 3D visualisations are playing an increasingly important role in helping communities to understand the visual impacts of proposed schemes. Similarly, the use of sound booths and other technologies are helping us to answer some questions about our developments. However, the community and stakeholders must trust the technology and the people who have programmed it for it to really work.

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