



Meeting  
Place

communications

# Community Consultation and Politics:

The public  
perceptions  
report



Marketing  
Means

# Introducing Meeting Place Communications

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Meeting Place Communications is a public affairs consultancy specialising in local government politics and community consultation. Much of our work is focused on understanding and acting on the planning system and in particular the increasing influence of politicians and the community.

Many of our clients are developers who are increasingly frustrated by delays in the planning process. Current clients include TaylorWimpey, Linden Homes, CALA Homes, Abstract Securities, Terence Butler Holdings and the University of Leicester.

In recent years planning has become increasingly political. Recommendations by council officers are often ignored. The Planning Act 2004 has provided a greater role for communities. The 2007 Planning Green Paper makes it clear that public consultation is now a prerequisite for all major schemes.

Relying on the appeal process often leads to considerable delay.

At Meeting Place Communications we recognise that 'old fashioned' lobbying doesn't work. What does make a real difference is a recognition that the community and local politicians cannot and should not be avoided. A proactive campaign designed to identify the issues and opportunities for the community of a scheme, to communicate those opportunities and seek support for a scheme's benefits can save time and achieve a planning consent.

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# 1. Background & method

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This report represents the findings of a survey conducted by Marketing Means on behalf of Meeting Place Communications. The survey was designed to gain the views of people in England about local consultation with a particular emphasis on planning consultation. The survey looked at:

- Experience of any form of consultation in their local area
- Experience of planning consultation
- The role of local politicians

The method was as follows:

- There were 1000 respondents interviewed by telephone
- The sample used was Random Digit Dialling
- The sample was stratified by region to represent England
- The final data file was weighted by age and gender to be reflective of England
- Fieldwork took place between 10<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> September 2007.

## Notes about publishing research findings

Marketing Means are members of the British Polling Council and Company Partners of the Market Research Society. As members of these bodies, the company is obliged to abide by their rules. If any or all of the research is published in a public medium, then the company is obliged to publish the full results on their website within two working days of the publication. Permission will only be granted for any press release if Marketing Means believe that it is a genuine representation of the findings of the research. Please be sure to notify Marketing Means if the research is to be used in the public domain.

## 2. Experience of local consultation

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### 2.1 How many people had been involved in local consultation? (What was it about and how was it conducted)?

The first question asked respondents to say yes or no to a list of issues that they could have been consulted on in the last two years. Just over a third of respondents (37% - 377 people) said they had been involved in some form of local consultation within the last two years. There was a clear pattern of participation in consultation by approximated social class; those in classes AB were more likely than others to have taken part in some form of consultation (47% AB compared to 32% C1C2 and 27% DE).

Nearly a fifth of respondents (19% - 188) said that they had been involved in a planning decision and a similar proportion (18% - 180) said that they had been involved in consultation about a local community service. Again an association with social class is seen - those in AB were the most likely group to have taken part in a planning decision with nearly a quarter (24%) saying yes compared to 17% of those in C1C2 and 12% in DE with a similar pattern seen for local community services (23% vs 14% 16%). (Appendix 1, Tables 1a & b)

When asked what form their most recent consultation had taken (excluding planning), most had been consulted by a questionnaire 1 survey (52%) then public meeting (10%). (Appendix 1, Table 2a)

For the fifth who said that they had taken part in a planning consultation, the method was more spread with just over a quarter saying 'questionnaire' (27%) and the same proportion saying 'public meeting'. Just under a quarter said it had been by letter only (23%). (Appendix 1, Tables 8a & b)

### 2.2 How much did people think that they were listened to (were they informed about the outcome and did they agree with it)?

People were asked, 'how much do you think that your views have been listened

to?’ For those who had taken part in a consultation other than planning, just 7% said ‘a great deal’ and 26% ‘a fair amount’ compared to 11% and 35% respectively for planning consultations. So those involved in planning decisions felt more listened to than those involved in other types of consultation. (Appendix 1, Tables 4a and 10a)

### **Did it make a difference to how ‘listened to’ people felt if they agreed or not with the decision?**

Firstly, were they informed about the decision that had been taken? The same proportion - just over a third (38%) of planning and non-planning consultees said that they were informed about the decision after their input (Appendix 1, Tables 5a and 12a) Secondly, of those who knew the outcome of either general or planning consultation, just over two-thirds agreed with the decision (69% and 66%). (Appendix 1, Tables 6a and 13a).

However of those, there was a fairly clear pattern that those who agreed with the decision felt that their views had been listened to (Appendix 1, Tables 5c and 12c).

### **Who undertook the planning consultation?**

Most people named their local council as the organisation that undertook the consultation (83%) compared to 13% who said the developer and 7% a community group. A relatively few people couldn’t remember who undertook the consultation. (Appendix 1, Table 1 1a).

What could be improved about consultation? For non-planning consultation, ‘better feedback’ was the most required improvement (37%). This pattern was even stronger for those consulted on planning applications with nearly 62% requesting better feedback (of those who didn’t get any feedback - this figure was 82%) (Appendix 1, Tables 7a and 14a)

Does the form of consultation make a difference? It is hard to say on such small numbers but it appears that whether you feel you were listened to is broken down by form of consultation. Those that were consulted by questionnaire and public meeting were more likely to feel ‘listened to’ than those consulted by other forms of consultation. (Appendix 1, Tables 7c and 14c)

## 3.0 About local politicians

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### 3.1 Knowledge of and contact with local politicians

Just under a third (31%) of respondents said that they would be able to name a local politician and a further quarter said that they would recognise the name if they saw it.

Slightly more women said that they would be able to name or recognise the name of a local politician than men (49% vs. 56%) and there was a clear pattern related to age with more respondents over 65 being able to name a politician (40%) than those aged 18-44 (23%) and 46-64 (37%) (Appendix 1, Tables 15a & b).

Just under a fifth of respondents (18%) had had official contact with a local politician. Those aged over 65 were the most likely age group to have had contact (22% compared to 15% of those aged 18-44).

The most popular reason for contacting a councillor was 'a community issue' (63%); followed by 'a personal issue' (29%) with 'a complaint about the council' accounting for less than 1 in 10 (8%).

Those in social classes DE were most likely to approach their councillor about a 'personal issue' (45% compared to 23% AB and 32% C1C2), whilst those in AB were the most likely to say 'a community issue' (69% compared to 41% DE and 61% C1C2). Women were also more likely than men to say 'a community issue' (67% vs. 58%). Also, those aged 18-44 were the most likely to say 'a personal issue' than other age groups (43% vs. 19 and 20%). (Appendix 1, Tables 17a & b).

When asked how much the contact had helped them 70% of respondents said that it had helped (31% said 'a great deal' and 39% 'a fair amount'). The type of issue didn't appear to be related to the respondent's view on whether the contact had helped or not (Appendix 1, Tables 18a, b & c).

When asking those who had not had contact with their local councillor - the majority said 'no need' (81%); with 5% saying 'I don't know who they are' and another 5% saying 'don't think they would be helpful'. (Appendix 1, Table 19a).

### 3.2 Communication with local politicians

Nearly two-thirds of those interviewed felt that their local councillor did keep in touch with people (even if they weren't able to name them!) (Appendix 1, Table 20a).

Just over half of respondents said that they would like to hear more from their local councillor (55%) but those in social classes DE were more likely than others to say no (22% vs. 15% AB and 18% C1C2) as were men (22% men compared with 15% women) (Appendix 1, Tables 21a & b).

### 3.3 Willingness to stand as a local politician

The majority of respondents said that they would not consider standing as a local councillor themselves (89%). Although, men were more likely to say 'yes' or 'maybe' than women (15% vs. 7%). (Appendix 1, Tables 22a & b).

When asked to give the main reason for not wanting to stand the most popular answer was 'too busy' followed by 'too old' (17%) and 'not interested in politics' (15%).

Being 'too old' was clearly linked to those aged over 65, whilst those aged under 44 were the most likely age group to say 'too busy' (52% compared to 45% of 45-64 year olds and 11% of those aged over 64) and 'not interested in politics' (20% compared to 16% 45-64 year olds and 5% of those aged over 64). Those in social classes DE were most likely to say 'no interest in politics' (21% vs. 11% AB and 15% C1C2).



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