

PLANNING & ENGAGEMENT

Building Trust. Building Infrastructure.

Getting consent through
better engagement.





Introduction

Across the UK, there is an urgent need to replace and rebuild aging infrastructure, creating one of the biggest changes for the energy and infrastructure sectors in generations.

The energy sector is transforming. To meet climate targets, we are replacing older coal and gas power stations with new wind and solar farms, while demand for electricity continues to increase. Meanwhile, the National Grid infrastructure needs significant upgrades to be able to bring energy to where it is needed, while storage capacity is needed to supply energy when it is needed. To meet these future energy needs, virtually every region will see new developments.

At the same time, climate impacts and increased demand are putting more pressure on our aging infrastructure. From reservoirs to airports, there is a growing need to repair and replace the infrastructure we need to support economic

development while ensuring environmental and safety protections. The Government has set a goal to decide 150 nationally significant infrastructure projects during this parliament, and many more developments will come through local planning during this period.

As communities begin to see multiple developments in their areas, cumulative impacts and consultation fatigue can set in. Opposition groups are quick to organise, and the use of AI means misinformation can spread easily and quickly. For a developer, this means that projects often start off on the back foot, and must work harder to build trust, find opportunities for collaboration and create pockets of support.

Therefore, it is increasingly important for developments to engage with local communities and stakeholders in developing their plans through effective communication and engagement strategies.

SEC Newgate is an **insights and research-driven** global strategic communications and advocacy group.

We work at the nexus of business, politics, communities, markets and media to deliver positive outcomes. We are the people you come to with an opportunity to seize or a problem to solve.

Our UK team includes more than 130 consultants, based in London with offices in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Manchester. We are uniquely placed to address the full range of communications challenges your development may face.

Our Planning and Engagement Team will develop the communications and engagement strategy to support your project through development, consent and construction. We draw on experts across our design, digital and research teams to build a better understanding of the local community, local issues, and how to reach them best. Our Public Affairs and Government Relations team is available to help shape policy and deliver regulatory change on key sector issues; whilst our Crisis and Corporate Communication teams can advise on broader corporate, reputation or emerging issues our clients may face.

Planning & Engagement

As leading specialists in consultation and engagement, we have advised on some of the UK's most significant infrastructure developments.



Public Affairs & Government Relations

Our advisers draw on cross-party experience to shape policy and deliver regulatory change with campaigns to reach key stakeholders.



Crisis, Special Situations & Litigation

We provide immediate support and long-term strategic counsel.



Insight, Research & Evaluation

We provide data-driven insights to understand local communities and identify the most effective ways to engage and influence.



Digital Brand & Creative Strategy

We use cutting edge tools to help clients identify opportunities to create digital campaigns to stand out from the crowd.



Design, Visual Identity & Content Creation

Whether developing a brand from scratch, video content for socials, or sprinkling magic dust on a deck, we can help.

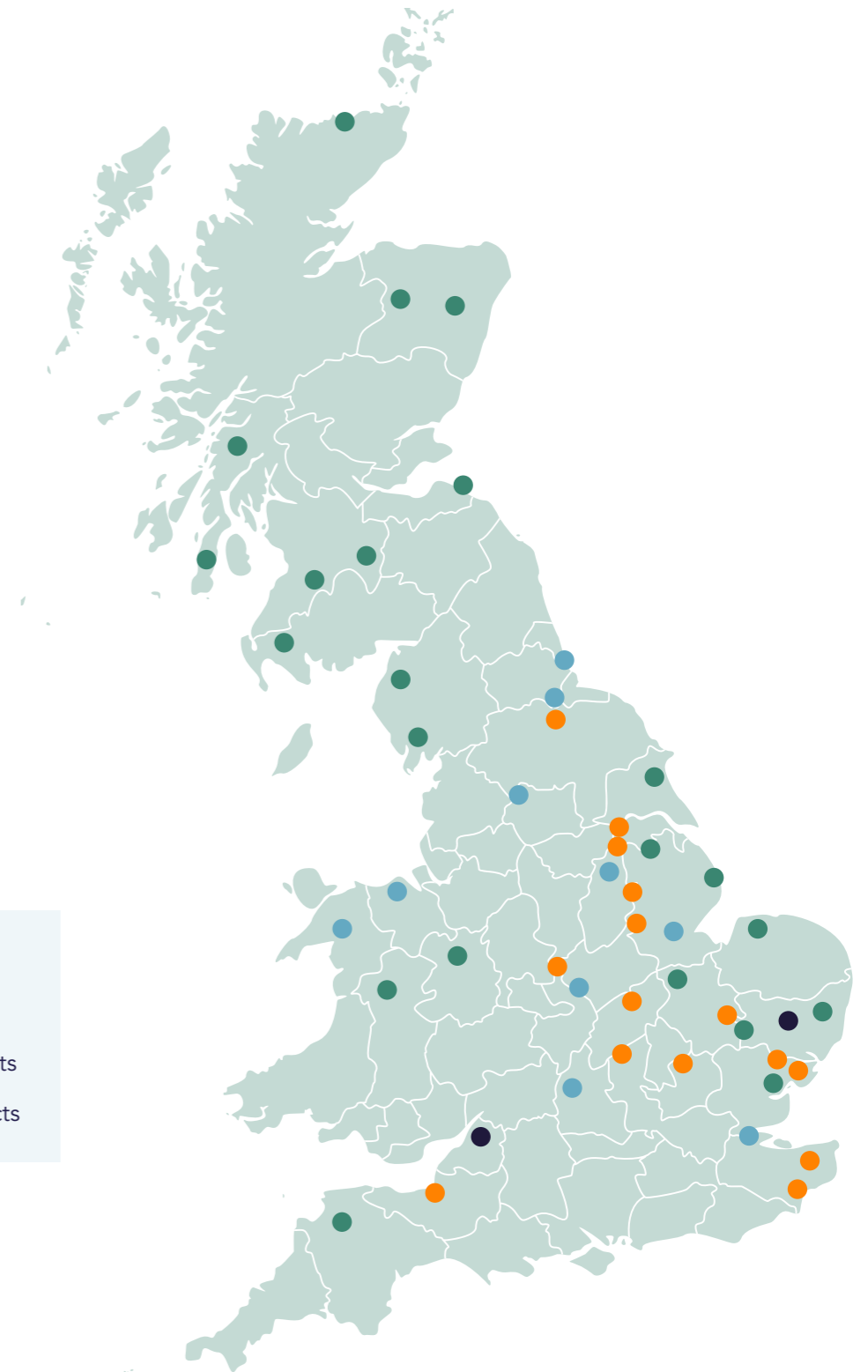




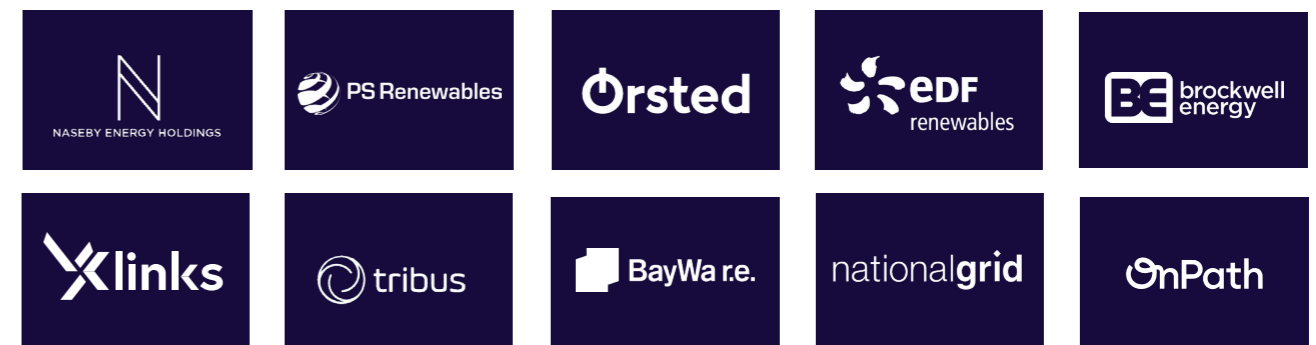
Our planning and engagement team

As a mix of former councillors, political enthusiasts, industry and public affairs specialists, we understand the complex web of grass roots connections and how to navigate complex local dynamics and make sure your message lands, whatever the case you are seeking to make.

We work across the UK, providing strategic communications and stakeholder engagement to support energy and infrastructure developments. We have advised on more than 30 Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and local planning applications in more than 90% of local authorities.



- BESS projects
- Nuclear projects
- Solar farm projects
- Wind farm projects



Our key research findings

Insight underpins everything we do. Before we approach a new project or proposal, we conduct both desktop and on the ground research to better understand local demographics, public sentiments and political context. This can include pulse surveys to understand sentiment across larger populations, in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and focus groups to test key messaging.

While most individuals support renewable energy in general, there is a cognitive switch when they learn about a proposed development near them. There is a significant knowledge gap when it comes to renewables, which can be exploited by opposition groups. There is also a deep mistrust of developers, which makes it more difficult to engage with communities and stakeholders.

LOCAL RESIDENTS

78%

of local area residents support the transition to renewables.

75%

positive about solar farms.

But there is a wide knowledge gap...

13%

feel knowledgeable about solar farms.

ACCEPTABILITY



It is **acceptable** to develop solar farms in my local area
 It is **unacceptable** to develop solar farms in my local area

LOCAL RESIDENTS

53%

felt developers do not have communities' best interest at heart

42%

of people who said they planned to vote Reform also support the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy

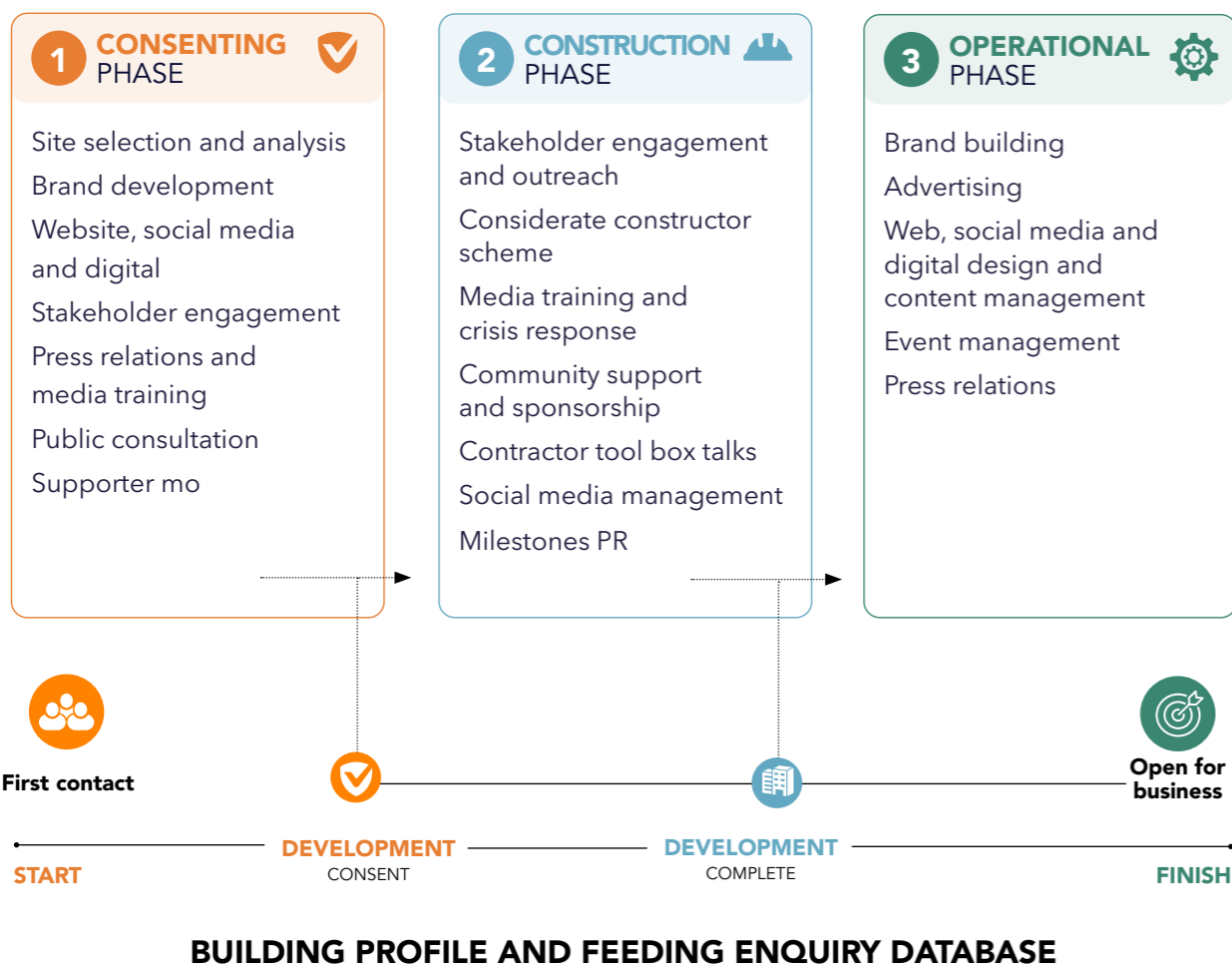
73%

felt positively towards onshore wind

Our approach

We support our clients' projects through all stages of development, from early site selection and political engagement, through consultation, consent, and construction and operations.

Strategic communications at every stage.



Though the requirement to consult on NSIPs has gone away, the purpose of consultation and engagement for projects at both the national and local levels remains the same: **consultation can improve outcomes for applicants, stakeholders and communities.**

Good consultation and good design go hand-in-hand. They not only help inform local communities and stakeholders about proposed developments around them, but also find opportunities for individuals to shape and improve those proposals. Consultation should identify key issues and develop solutions to mitigate them, ultimately de-risking applications and improving their consentability.



- Consultation can **generate feedback** to improve a project
- Consultation can **reduce challenges** to a project
- Consultation can **de-risk** projects
- Consultation is **expected** and there are **reputational consequences** to not doing it

CASE STUDY:

Using targeted engagement with local residents for a large-scale solar development, Springwell Solar Farm.



BRIEF:

We were tasked with developing and delivering a communications and engagement strategy for a solar NSIP in Lincolnshire. With a significant number of residential properties in close proximity to the site, we identified this stakeholder group as being potentially most impacted and therefore most likely to be central to the potential opposition group.

SOLUTION:

Our engagement strategy was crafted to consider near neighbours as a distinct stakeholder group, with multiple opportunities for engagement both inside and outside of formal consultation periods. This involved door knocking and a meeting prior to the scheme launch, followed by dedicated home visits during the first consultation period and follow-up meetings after consultation to explain how the project had been updated in response to their feedback. By building relationships through repeated contact, we were able to secure specific feedback that could be embedded in the project design, further developing trust by showing meaningful change.

OUTCOME:

To date, opposition to the project has remained at a low level and generally non-specific. Most of the near neighbours did not submit feedback or engage in the examination process, while some have expressed soft support for the development and the process. In addition, this approach helped to secure buy-in from local authority members and officers for our approach to consultation and engagement. Springwell was consented earlier this year, and is now the largest consented solar farm in the UK.

“By building relationships through repeated contact, we were able to secure specific feedback that could be embedded in the project design, further developing trust by showing meaningful change.”

CASE STUDY:

Delivering one of the first onshore wind farms in England.

BRIEF:

Just after the lifting of the onshore wind ban in England, we were appointed to provide consultation and engagement for a new wind farm. While public sentiment is generally supportive of onshore wind, the increased height of new developments meant that potential visual impacts would be greater, and local opposition could be higher than anticipated.

SOLUTION:

Initial outreach included door-knocking and direct meetings with near neighbours, followed by broader engagement through public exhibitions and community meetings.

This sequence of engagement allowed for a proper briefings programme with decision makers and has slowed near neighbours mobilising broader opposition in the nearby towns.

Maintaining dialogue with stakeholders and adjusting messaging between consultation phases to show how the project has progressed has ensured transparency and responsiveness.

OUTCOME:

The comprehensive, phased approach effectively balanced localised engagement with near neighbours with wider advocacy building in the nearby towns. The tailored communication strategy ensured broad community awareness, positive stakeholder relations, and informed public dialogue.

Following the first round of consultation, 52% of respondents support the use of onshore wind, and 54% of respondents support the principle of a new wind farm locally.

The project has since been submitted to local planning and received minimal opposition.

“Maintaining dialogue with stakeholders and adjusting messaging between consultation phases to show how the project has progressed has ensured transparency and responsiveness.”

CASE STUDY:

Delivering a pipeline of solar developments for Brockwell Energy.



BRIEF:

SEC Newgate was appointed to support Brockwell Energy with pre-planning engagement and consultation on a portfolio of four battery energy storage and two solar farms across the UK. Due to tight grid connection deadlines, these applications had to be brought forward simultaneously. All applications were to be decided locally through the Town and Country Planning Act process, including one project in Wales that was subject to Welsh legislation on statutory pre-engagement. This increased the importance of early engagement with local political stakeholders, heightening their awareness of battery storage technology.

SOLUTION:

With timescales restricting opportunities for in-person public exhibitions, we developed a programme of political engagement and public webinars, promoted via physical leaflets and supported by project web pages. Many of the sites were in areas with several existing planning applications for energy infrastructure schemes, heightening the potential of opposition from established campaign groups.

OUTCOME:

Potential opposition was managed carefully through engagement with local political representatives and relevant groups. This supported positive working relationships across all local authority areas and opened dialogue between the client and stakeholders, which addressed local concerns and provide information on the plans.

“The consultation and engagement programme enabled the submission of multiple planning applications within the grid connection deadlines.”

CASE STUDY:

Helping Hinkley Point C foster strong community relations.



BRIEF:

We have provided EDF with community engagement support for the Hinkley Point C new nuclear build in Somerset since 2008.

SOLUTION:

We are responsible for managing relations with the local community on Hinkley Point C, the UK's biggest infrastructure project and the largest construction site in Europe.

This has included leading on the consultation in support of the initial DCO application, supporting the delivery of further consultation processes, and managing communications with key stakeholders through the construction process.

OUTCOME:

We designed and implemented a multi-stage consultation process covering the construction of two new nuclear reactors on the main site and associated developments. This was the first consultation conducted on a DCO under the Planning Act 2008. Our approach helped generate thousands of responses, which fed into an analysis of more than 10,000 issues as part of the consultation. The DCO for Hinkley Point C was granted in 2013.

We have worked with EDF continuously since planning was approved, providing community engagement support on the project throughout the construction process. This involves running three regular stakeholder forums which are attended by the local MP, council representatives and other local interest groups, managing all enquiries submitted to the project, as well as providing wider political, stakeholder and resident relations advice.

A large part of our work involves supporting education, skills and supply chain opportunities, engaging with key political figures in the South West, including local MPs and government ministers, and supporting the external relations team with high-profile visits.

“Our approach helped generate thousands of responses, which fed into an analysis of more than 10,000 issues as part of the consultation.”

THE SUNDAY TIMES

BEST PLACES TO WORK 2026

2025/2024/2023

BEST ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN PUBLIC SECTOR

PURPOSE AWARDS 2026

WINNER

CONSULTANCY CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR

PRCA PUBLIC AFFAIRS AWARDS 2026

WINNER

CONSULTANCY OF THE YEAR

EDIE NET-ZERO AWARDS 2026

SHORTLISTED

PR AGENCY OF THE YEAR

HEADLINE MONEY AWARDS 2026

SHORTLISTED

GLOBAL AGENCY OF THE YEAR

PROVOKE MEDIA GLOBAL SABRE AWARDS 2025 & 2023

WINNER

ADVISOR OF THE YEAR

THE VARIETY PROPS AWARDS 2025

WINNER

RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF THE YEAR

EDIE NET-ZERO AWARDS 2025

SHORTLISTED

BEST CAMPAIGN REAL ESTATE & CONSTRUCTION

PROVOKE SABRE EMEA AWARDS 2024

SHORTLISTED

PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONSULTANCY OF THE YEAR

PROVOKE MEDIA EMEA AWARDS 2024

WINNER

CONSULTANCY OF THE YEAR

EDIE NET-ZERO AWARDS 2023

WINNER

PLANNING CAMPAIGN OF THE YEAR

PRCA PUBLIC AFFAIRS AWARDS 2020

WINNER

Contact us

If you have any questions about strategic communications and engagement and improving Consentability for energy and infrastructure developments contact:

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secnewgate.co.uk