From site selection to consent: Building support for data centre projects



SECNewgate
Insight. Communications. Advocacy.



Data centre development: the communications challenge

The UK's economy and public services are becoming ever more digital. From banking and healthcare to communications, entertainment, cloud storage and artificial intelligence, data centres already underpin much of modern life. Yet despite their growing importance, they remain poorly understood.

Research undertaken by SEC Newgate UK highlights this gap. Almost nine in ten UK adults report knowing little or nothing about data centres, despite relying daily on the services they support. Low levels of public understanding create a risk that perceptions are shaped by concerns rather than knowledge, despite our evidence showing that attitudes become more positive when people are given clear information about the purpose and benefits of data centres. While 83% agree it is critical that the UK has capacity to store and process data domestically, concerns remain around energy use, water demand, artificial intelligence, security and local impact.

As demand for digital capacity continues to grow, a new generation of data centre developments is coming forward at much greater scale. This is making data centres more visible to communities, policymakers and the media, creating a significant challenge to the sector: how to make nationally important development acceptable at the local level.



83%

agree it is critical that the UK has capacity to store and process data domestically

9/10

Almost nine in ten UK adults report knowing little or nothing about data centres



Click here to download our research
'Does Not Compute: What the UK public really thinks about data centres'.



How we can help

Clear, credible and locally grounded communications can help bridge the gap between national need and local understanding - strengthening the case for development, reducing planning risk and building confidence in the sector.

At SEC Newgate, our approach is designed to **de-risk projects from the outset**. We help clients understand local sentiment, anticipate concerns, identify opportunities for support and communicate complex issues in a way that is accessible, transparent and trusted.

In an environment where misinformation can quickly shape perceptions, **good communication is essential to building confidence and securing consent**. Our research found that when people are provided with clear, neutral information about what data centres do and why they are needed, positive sentiment increases from 35% to 61%, while the perceived importance of building more data centres rises from 54% to 73%.

That is why early, evidence-led communications matter. We help clients explain the role data centres play in national resilience, economic growth and everyday digital life, while also addressing the issues that matter most to local communities - including power, water, design, construction impacts, employment, security and community benefit.

Our specialist planning and engagement team sits within an **award-winning integrated communications consultancy**, drawing on **expertise in research, digital, design, public affairs, corporate reputation and media**. This enables us to **support data centre projects across every stage of delivery** – from initial site selection and narrative development through to consultation, consent, construction and operation.

With more than five years' experience advising on data centre development, we have supported projects across England, Scotland and Wales, including edge, cloud, hyperscale and AI-focused facilities. This experience gives us a **deep understanding of the opportunities, concerns and communications challenges** that shape the sector at both local and national level.

Many of the world's leading data centre developers and operators are active internationally, across multiple markets. Through SEC Newgate's international network, we bring insight from conversations taking place across Europe and beyond, helping clients understand emerging policy developments, community expectations and communications challenges affecting the wider digital infrastructure sector. As a strategic partner of the Data Centre Alliance, we remain closely connected to the issues, policy developments and industry trends shaping the future of digital infrastructure.

WHAT OUR RESEARCH FOUND

Clear information changes perceptions

When people are provided with clear, neutral information about what data centres do and why they are needed, positive sentiment increases.

Before
35%

After
61%

Increase in positive sentiment
+26%

Our specialists are here to help you build understanding, protect reputation and secure consent.



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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.

Strategy & Corporate Communications

We advise organisations through their growth cycle, from individuals and start-ups to global leaders.

Design, Visual Identity & Content Creation

Studio is our home for creative content with an award-winning team including former journalists, copywriters and designers.

With headquarters in London and offices across the UK - including Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff and Manchester, SEC Newgate can provide the national and local insight our clients need and the resource to deliver.

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