

# Draft Local Plan Consultation and Engagement Strategy

## June 2026

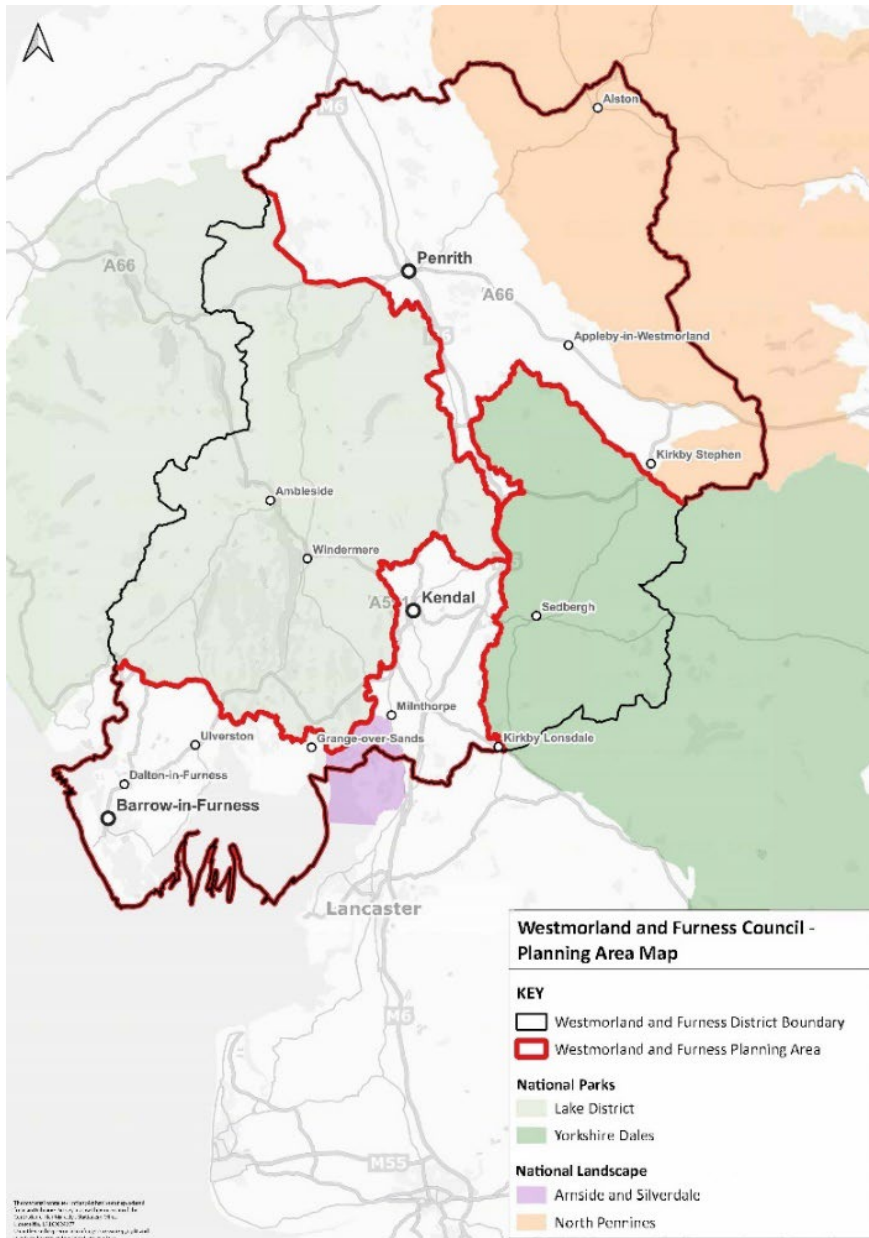


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# 1.0 Introduction

Westmorland and Furness Council is the Local Planning Authority for the district outside the Lake District & Yorkshire Dales National Parks. Whilst this is only half of the district by area, it contains 85% of our population.



The new Local Plan needs to plan to accommodate approximately 26,000 homes for the lifetime of the Plan (by 2045) to meet Central Government targets.

The new Local Plan will set out the Council's vision for how the Westmorland and Furness planning area will change over the plan period (to 2045) and how that vision will be delivered.

This includes:

- How much development and how it will be distributed across the area;
- Which sites are allocated for development and when they will come forward;
- What environmental and heritage assets are safeguarded and enhanced;
- Policies containing requirements for new development;
- How the necessary infrastructure to support development will be delivered.

It is critical stakeholders including business, infrastructure and utilities providers, government agencies, community and environmental groups and the third sector are engaged in the development of the new Local Plan.

This strategy aims to clearly communicate with residents, key stakeholders and members about the process to develop the Local Plan. It details the opportunities to comment, be involved and help to shape the emerging plan. We invite our communities to participate as we develop the Local Plan.

## 1.1 Key Messages

- The Local Plan is about the future and future generations
- It's about people and communities and it's about all of us working together
- This is our first Local Plan for Westmorland and Furness – it is an opportunity to shape the place we live
- The Local Plan will set out how many homes need to be built to meet demand and it allocates sites for housing and other developments, such as new employment sites to support jobs.
- It also contains policies that make our area a better place to live, looking at challenges including
  - how our town centres can manage and adapt
  - how new development might respond to the climate crisis
  - how we can reduce flood risk
  - how we can support healthy, happy lives



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- how we can improve education opportunities and transport provision

## 2.0 Engagement

### 2.1 What is engagement?

Engagement refers to the ongoing and regular process of involving communities and residents in the planning, development and delivery of public services that affect their lives.

### 2.2 Why engagement matters

Effective engagement helps ensure that decisions are informed by the views and experiences of local people, businesses, partners and stakeholders, and supports transparency and accountability in the Council's decision-making.

Maintaining regular communication is essential to help both the public and stakeholders gain an understanding of the Local Plan and to help shape the future of our area.

It provides the public with a voice to shape where development occurs, ensuring local needs and environmental considerations are addressed.

### 2.3 Principles for Good Engagement

- Engage at an early stage – before decisions are made
- Make information understandable and accessible
- Treat people as citizens not consumers
- Listen to young people – guided by the Lundy principles
- Honesty and transparency – be clear about what's been decided, why and what's possible
- Reaching out to specific groups – proactively include people whose voices are often missed
- Accountability and feedback – be honest about what's been done and what hasn't and commit to learning and improving
- Engagement methods – make it fun, creative, inclusive and well publicised
- Routine dialogue with communities – ongoing not one-off
- Bringing people together – from different ages and background
- Who engages matters – facilitate engagement through trusted, reliable people



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## 3.0 Consultation

### 3.1 What is consultation?

Consultation is a specific kind of engagement with legal requirements and formal processes. Consultations have a clear remit, start and end points and there is clear scope for people to influence decisions. Consultation is part of a formal decision-making process. It is usually time limited, subject to law and guidance and failure to follow specific principles or conducting a consultation incorrectly may lead to legal challenge.

We have a statutory obligation to consult on the Local Plan. It is a formal process over a set period of time (usually 6-12 weeks) where the Council invites residents, businesses and stakeholders to share their views of emerging planning policies and future development strategies.

### 3.2 Consultation Principles

Any consultation should be carried out in accordance with the four Gunning Principles - they are referred to as a legal basis for judicial review decisions – they state that a consultation should:

1. Be undertaken at a formative stage in the decision-making process when the options are still open.
2. Provide enough detail to allow respondents to the consultation to provide informed feedback on the matters in question.
3. Allow reasonable time for responses to the consultation to be made.
4. Demonstrate that conscientious consideration has been given to the consultation feedback by decision makers
- 5.

### 3.3 What consultation & engagement has already happened?

In 2024 we launched the Early Conversation consultation to help inform the direction of the new Local Plan. We asked for the thoughts of local residents and stakeholders on a range of topics. We asked people to think about not just the here and now, but what is best for the future of the area – the things that their family will want from future development.

We have also launched two Calls for Sites (2024 and 2026) and a further public consultation on the Design Code.

Details of all of these consultations can be found in Appendix 1.



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### 3.4 How we will engage

The methods we use for this engagement will be very important, with different formats being appropriate at different times and with different audiences. We will seek to adopt innovative approaches to engagement using digital technology and forward thinking methods for capturing the feedback we receive. The team will ensure, with support from the corporate Communications & Engagement Team, the most appropriate methods are used at each stage of the process, including:

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Website updates
- Email updates
  - Press releases
- Social Media

Plain English will be used and visual and engaging content will be created and co-produced to a high standard.

Each stage of engagement for the Local Plan will have a Mini Communications Plan produced which will set out in more detail the engagement tools which will be used.

The categories of engagement, tools or methods and the purpose are outlined in Appendix 3. This list is not exhaustive and will be kept under review throughout the programme.

### 3.5 What insight do we already have?

Before we approach stakeholders, we will consider the information we already have access to across the Council.

Have communities already been asked these questions? Is someone else already looking at this issue? Would it be better to contribute to their work instead?

By collaborating with colleagues across other teams, we will share insight and aim to avoid engagement 'fatigue' whilst making sure we have a broad range of views.

### 3.6 Who will we engage with

- Residents
- Elected Members/Parishes
- Stakeholders
- Interest Groups
- Statutory Consultees



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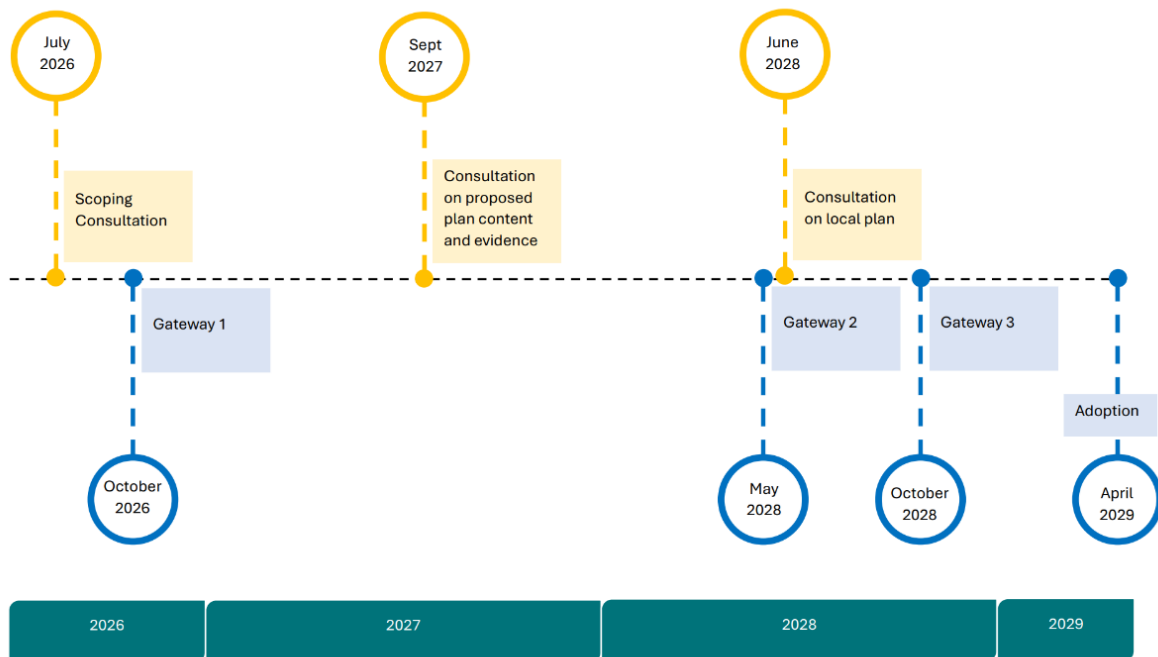
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- Neighbouring Authorities

We will target under-represented groups, including young people, families, care experienced, armed forces and those from rural communities and differing socio economic backgrounds.

## 4.0 When will we engage

Engagement activity will be ongoing throughout the plan; however statutory consultation will be undertaken at specific periods as detailed in the timeline below:



The Local Plan timetable is a live document that will be updated regularly throughout the plan-making process. The full detailed version can be found on the Local Plan website [www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/localplan)

Specific Consultation activities and timeframes are outlined in Appendix 1.

## Appendix 1a - Local Plan Consultation Activity Timeline Overview

Updates here: [www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk/localplan)

Start	Document	Location	Consultation	Adoption	Individual Communications Plan
July/Aug 2026	Scoping Consultation	Westmorland & Furness wide	Scoping Consultation	N/A	Yes
July/Aug 2026	Call for Sites (third)	Westmorland & Furness wide	Public Consultation	N/A	As above
May 2027	Consultation	Westmorland & Furness wide	Public consultation on proposed plan content and evidence	N/A	Yes
June 2028	Consultation	Westmorland & Furness wide	Public consultation on proposed local plan  Consult on conformity with spatial development strategy if applicable		August 2029 adoption of Local Plan

## Appendix 1b - Previous Consultations – now closed

Start	Document	Location	Consultation	Adoption	Individual Communications Plan
February 2024 CLOSED	Marina Village SPD	Barrow	Early Engagement (Feb 2024)  Public Consultation (May/June 2024)	Cabinet 10 <sup>th</sup> September 2024	Yes
Spring 2024 CLOSED	Early Engagement on Local Plan	Westmorland & Furness wide		N/A	Yes
Spring 2024 CLOSED	Design Code	Westmorland & Furness wide	Public Consultation	March 2026	Yes
February 2024 CLOSED	Strategic Flood Risk Assessment Level 1	Westmorland & Furness wide		March 2026	Yes
September 2024 CLOSED	Call for Sites	Westmorland & Furness wide	Public Consultation	N/A	
December 2025 CLOSED	Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment	Westmorland & Furness wide	Stakeholder Consultation	N?A	No



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Start	Document	Location	Consultation	Adoption	Individual Communications Plan
November 2025 CLOSED	Conservation Area Assessment and Management Plan	Barrow and Penrith	Public Consultation (November 2025)	March / April 2026	Yes
December 2025 CLOSED	Call for Sites	Westmorland & Furness wide	Public Consultation	N/A	Yes

## Appendix 2 Stakeholders

Overview	Stakeholders	Methods of engagement
<b>Strategic Decision Makers and Consultees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council</li> <li>• Cabinet</li> <li>• Elected Members &amp; Portfolio Holder</li> <li>• Local Plan Members Steering Group</li> <li>• Corporate Management Team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee Reports</li> <li>• Briefings</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Workshops</li> </ul>

### Internal Decision Makers

To prepare the new Local Plan the planning policy team will require the support and input from a range of W&F Directorates. This will help to prepare the plan, but it also offers you the opportunity to shape the plan and to maximise the benefits to your services and align with corporate strategy and policy.

Engagement will be needed throughout the process but will take different forms. Co-operation on evidence base strategic direction, priorities and direction setting will be early on in the process. Processes around site evaluation selection will follow. From that will follow the development of mitigations and issues around infrastructure and at the end will be the testing of the plan through the examination process.

- **Thriving Places** - Inclusive and Green Growth; Sustainable Transport & Highways; Climate & Natural Environment; Waste & Environment Services
- **Assistant Chief Executive** - Policy and Performance; Communication
- **Thriving Communities** - Public Health; Community Infrastructure; Housing: Safe and Stronger Communities
- **Children's Services**
- **Adult Services**
- **Health and Social Care**
- **Enabler Services** – Legal; ICT; Customer & Digital
- **Resources** - Corporate Assets & Capital Delivery; Finance; Commissioning & Procurement

- Briefings
- Meetings
- Workshops
- Update emails
- Presentations



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Overview	Stakeholders	Methods of engagement
<p>The timing and scale of inputs will differ from service to service and we propose to meet key leads individually to refine what the needs are likely to be.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Customer Service Teams</b> – who manage incoming enquiries</li> </ul>	



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<p><b>Statutory consultees - 'specific'</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Coal Authority</li> <li>• The Environment Agency</li> <li>• Historic England</li> <li>• Marine Management Organisation</li> <li>• Natural England</li> <li>• Network Rail Infrastructure Limited</li> <li>• National Highways</li> <li>• A relevant authority (including LPA, town/parish councils, county councils, policing authority) any part of whose area is in or adjoins the local planning authority's area</li> <li>• Relevant telecommunications companies</li> <li>• Primary Care Trust or successor body</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data / information gathering</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Update emails</li> <li>• Statutory Consultation Letter</li> <li>• Digital Platforms</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>
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Overview	Stakeholders	Methods of engagement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant electricity and gas companies</li> <li>• United Utilities (Water and sewerage)</li> <li>• Homes England</li> </ul>	
<b>Statutory consultees - 'general'</b>	<p>Within the Local Planning Authority area, include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary groups</li> <li>• Town and Parish Councils</li> <li>• Bodies that represent interests of different racial, ethnic or national groups (equality groups)</li> <li>• Religious organisations</li> <li>• Bodies that represent the interests of disabled persons</li> <li>• Bodies representing the interests of persons carrying on business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Update emails</li> <li>• Statutory Consultation Letter</li> <li>• Digital Platforms</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>



<p><b>Consultees</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning consultants / agents / architects</li> <li>• Housebuilding Industry</li> <li>• Housing Associations</li> <li>• Business Interests</li> <li>• Landowners / development interest</li> <li>• Community / Interest Groups</li> <li>• Other infrastructure providers:</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Utilities</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Emergency Services</li> <li>• Other bodies / organisations</li> <li>• MPs</li> <li>• Specific users identified by EIA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Update emails</li> <li>• Statutory Consultation Letter</li> <li>• Drop-in events</li> <li>• Digital Platforms</li> <li>• Media</li> </ul>
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### Appendix 3a Engagement Tools - Raising the Profile

Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
(i) Branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tagline, logo &amp; USP to be developed and used on all material across every medium including documentation, digital platforms, website, banners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide an eye-catching, easily identifiable and meaningful identity aimed at attracting attention and conveying the purpose of a Local Plan in a succinct, positive and engaging manner.</li> </ul>



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Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
(ii) Digital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council website, including W&amp;F landing page, newsfeed and dedicated Local Plan pages</li> <li>• Social media – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram</li> <li>• Innovative digital techniques including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ GIS for information &amp; interaction</li> <li>○ 3D modelling</li> <li>○ Virtual reality</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Online workshops / briefings</li> <li>• Videos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that a broad range of digital platforms are used to ensure that we are reaching across population demographics</li> <li>• To explore innovative digital techniques to make engagement meaningful, attractive and interesting</li> <li>• The ability to provide instant news and messaging to residents with no cost associated.</li> </ul>



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<p>(iii) Physical</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Roadshows</b> including corporate &amp; Local Plan banners</li> <li>• <b>Drop-in events</b> and other community-focussed meetings (using traditional and innovative engagement tools)</li> <li>• <b>In person workshops</b> with key stakeholders</li> <li>• <b>Deposit</b> promotional/consultation material including documents, posters, flyers etc in local libraries, parish noticeboards, public noticeboards as appropriate</li> <li>• <b>Local Plan Citizen Panel</b> (via Community Power platform)</li> <li>• <b>Youth Parliament</b></li> <li>• <b>Focus groups</b> to target specific areas of interest or particular groups of people – e.g. community groups, environmental groups, young people (schools), parish councils etc</li> <li>• Interactive event material – digital and physical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To reach out to a broad population demographic as well as stakeholder groups</li> <li>• To ensure that those who are not able / choose not to access information online have the opportunity to engage via more traditional methods.</li> </ul>
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Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of advertising and promotional material</li> </ul>	
(iv) Corporate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Piggybacking on other communications &amp; engagement events with corporate/partner organisations</li> <li>• Member briefings and workshops</li> <li>• Internal briefings &amp; internal newsfeed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that opportunities to promote our engagement on the back of existing / other engagement activities are not missed.</li> </ul>

### Appendix 3b Engagement Tools - Raising the Profile

Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
(i) Consultation Platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online <b>questionnaires</b> via <b>PlaceMaker</b></li> <li>• Paper questionnaires (discouraged but still available)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that consultations are managed in a way that is cost effective and administratively efficient while still available to groups that are unable to access digital formats for whatever reason.</li> </ul>



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Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
(ii) Consultation launch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launched via:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ email</li> <li>○ letter</li> <li>○ text (if we develop ESB database)</li> <li>○ social media</li> <li>○ website</li> <li>○ Council newsletters</li> <li>○ parish newsletters</li> <li>○ wider media (via press releases)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure as wide a reach as possible that consultation is open, including times for making a response and methods for doing so</li> </ul>
(iii) Events & publicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Drop-in events</b> across the district (using traditional and innovative engagement tools)</li> <li>• <b>Publicity</b> via digital and traditional methods (see above)</li> <li>• <b>Virtual consultation</b> rooms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To give communities the opportunity to meet officers, ask questions, learn more about the Local Plan and how to engage, raise issues of concern, promote ideas. Also provides Council with greater incite to local issues.</li> </ul>



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## Appendix 3c Engagement Tools - Capturing and analysing data

Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
(i) Capturing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing consultee contact data via public events, consultations and online sign up for those who want to join our mailing list while maintaining an up-to-date consultation database to capture statutory consultees</li> <li>• Capturing feedback via online questionnaire portal (e.g. Citizen Space), paper questionnaires, feedback from social media platforms, public events and workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that we capture data for statutory consultees and those who want to be consulted</li> <li>• To ensure that we capture feedback from a broad range of mediums</li> </ul>
(ii) Analysing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analytical software tools to analyse and report on consultation feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promote efficiency in handling large amounts of data</li> </ul>



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Engagement Categories	Engagement Tools	Purpose
(i) Capturing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing consultee contact data via public events, consultations and online sign up for those who want to join our mailing list while maintaining an up-to-date consultation database to capture statutory consultees</li> <li>• Capturing feedback via online questionnaire portal (e.g. Citizen Space), paper questionnaires, feedback from social media platforms, public events and workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that we capture data for statutory consultees and those who want to be consulted</li> <li>• To ensure that we capture feedback from a broad range of mediums</li> </ul>
(iii) Reviewing consultation procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing demographic data on who we are engaging with, who we are failing to engage with, who we need to engage with</li> <li>• Considering how we can improve our engagement strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure that we are consulting with those who want to be consulted while ensuring that we also engage with harder to reach groups</li> <li>• To learn from mistakes and consider how we can do things better</li> </ul>



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