

Consultation Phase



Contacting your MP

Contacting your MP is straightforward. You can do it by e-mail or by post. It usually evokes a better response than a phone call.

Go to www.parliament.uk

Then click on the MP's, Lords and Office among the top tabs. From there, you should be able to draw up a list of MP's and find the MP for your area. Each MP has a web site and e-mail address attached. Only 17 MP's do not have an e-mail address listed. If you want to contact a Parliamentary Office directly, you can phone the House of Commons on 020 719 3000.

There are some other considerations to bear in mind. MP's have little time and generally a Friday is a good day to involve them when most, but not all, MP's tend to spend time in their constituencies. You will also need to plan ahead. It takes time to obtain a reply if you plan to involve them in a visit or activity. It is also a good idea to contact prospective parliamentary candidates from other parties.

If you plan to link an MP to any form of publicity, make them aware of it first and contact the media separately from their parliamentary office. Make sure that you are able to fully brief your MP with the key facts.

One of the best places to go for help in writing to MP's is *My Society*

Find out more at <http://www.mysociety.org/>

My Society is a democratic activist group recognised by Government departments. It acts as a one stop shop. By completing one form, they will write on your behalf to all your district and county councillors, the Member of Parliament and Member of European Parliament.

Consulting publicly

These consultations are best held with the seller, leaser (normally a local authority or school) and the potential new owner in attendance with the plans on view for people to see. The Department for Communities and Local Government's Strategy, Real People, Real Power states: *'Within the third sector, we recognise and celebrate the role of individual active citizens, social entrepreneurs, campaigners, volunteers and political activists'*. An active role by the community in helping to shape the future of swimming pools is therefore positively encouraged by Government.

Why consult in the first place? The two main reasons are that it helps to engage



with future users and that it helps to plan and deliver an improved customer service at the pool in the future. You will have a better feel for what customers will want. Not only does consultation alert you to potential difficulties at an early stage but it helps to build a working partnership between new owners and future pool users.

The Home Office document '*An introductory guide: How to consult with users*' gives a few headline tips that are useful to bear in mind:

- Consult early
- Don't ask for views if you can't and won't do anything with them
- Learn from others
- Use more than one method of consultation
- Be flexible
- Don't just consult your users- ask others too
- Be sensitive- encourage people to give honest views
- Publicise your consultation
- Report back
- Evaluate

Networking with similar groups

In the case of trusts, you may want to contact Sporta (Social enterprises within culture and leisure) through the contact form below

http://www.sporta.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=c_contactForm.showContactForm or by phoning them on 01603 814233 to find out the contacts of one or two trusts near to you

or alternatively you can go to the Development Trusts Association who can give you details of community enterprises at info@dta.org.uk

or contact the Social Enterprise Coalition <http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk/> which exists to represent social enterprises trading as business for social and environmental purposes

Petitioning opportunities

One way of petitioning is by utilising the Government e-petitions web site. The purpose of the web site is to allow the public to petition direct to the Prime Minister. To give some idea of the range of petitioning, at the time of writing, there are 173 petitions within the Leisure and Culture segment.

See <http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/> for details.

It is relatively easy to set up a petition on the web site but you will have to ensure that there are no matching petitions already in existence.



In Scotland, petitions on issues of public concern are seen by a public standing committee.

The Government have now made it the duty of all local authorities (not independent schools, foundation schools or academies) to respond to petitions, including electronic petitions which have a relationship either to local authority services or functions, particularly those that relate to the public. This also applies to services where a local authority has joint responsibility for a service. If you therefore have a genuine concern about a swimming pool and you wish to petition, having accounted for all the factors such as evidence and needs analysis, condition survey and an effective business plan, you have every right to expect a reasoned response.

The Department for Communities and Local Government's Strategy, *Real people, real power* speaks positively about petitions in relation to buildings for community ownership as encouraging participatory budgeting or a local referendum. If 5% of a local population sign a petition then there is an automatic requirement for the council to debate the issue. These factors should be borne in mind but you should avoid a frivolous petition or a line of thinking that would ultimately be difficult to substantiate.

Your core rights as a citizen

You can find out more about your core rights as a citizen at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planning/planningpolicyimplementation/planningobligations/modelplanningobligation/>

There are many different scenarios. For instance, local authorities can decide on a part divestment of their pool property portfolio. They are sometimes able to fund new pools based on the asset release of other local authority properties. Another option is that a new pool becomes part of a wider development or co-located facilities paid by the private and/or public sector. A further option is the cross funding of projects and contra arrangement or local authority owned land release schemes with the private sector. In other cases, developers are asked to make a contribution towards other areas of the community, known as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

Find out more at

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6313/1897278.pdf

Any of these opportunities can lead to the option to close a pool in another part of the local authority area based on the view that there is sufficient pool provision within that local authority. The Department for Communities and Local Government has been trying to support individuals and communities to take part in the planning system through *Planning Aid*, the target being local and regional plans and hard to reach groups. More importantly the Department has set aside £4 million over 3 years to local planning authorities in England in order to promote community participation in planning.



For further information, try <http://www.planningaid.rtpi.org.uk/>

There are opportunities to get involved in this whole process and the government have been encouraging the empowerment of communities in this process. The Urban Forum has published a *Handy Guide to Planning* which seeks to inform people on planning processes. For further details, click here

http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/files/ufpublic/handy_guide_to_planning_2006_06.pdf

As an individual you may feel that you are at a disadvantage in any decision making process because you lack the core information required in order to come to appropriate decisions. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives people in England and Wales the general right to information held by public authorities including local councils and Government agencies unless they have good reason to keep it confidential. These bodies will retain the copyright to any information provided. In order to find out where to obtain this information, it is best to start with the local authority.

The Information Commissioner's Office is an independent UK body set up to hold information rights in the public interest. It promotes openness by public bodies and seeks to uphold data privacy for individuals. It can help individuals access information from a public body. The Commissioner's Office can also help people understand the Freedom of Information Act and underlines that public authorities are obliged to provide public access to official information.

Find out more at

<http://www.ico.gov.uk/>

Your community rights

Every individual case is different. Potential pool closure can become an issue when run by trusts and community enterprises as much as with pools run by the public sector. This situation may develop because an important grant is about to be cut. The Local Grants Forum is a partnership of national voluntary organisations campaigning to protect the use of grants to support local third sector organisations. They produce a guide, published by the NAVCA, which contains advice on how to convince local councillors that it is important to continue to fund organisations that carry out activities in the community

Find out more by clicking here

http://www.urbanforum.org.uk/files/defendinglocalgrants_200903.pdf



Local ombudsman

In order to follow up on an issue in England, find out more by clicking here

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20071104143750/direct.gov.uk/en/dl1/directories/dg_10010834

The Ombudsman in Wales examines whether people have been treated unfairly, inconsiderately, or have received a bad service by the public body providing it.

For more, click here

<http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk/>

Similarly, the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is the final stage for making a complaint about public services in Scotland.

For more information, click here,

<http://www.spsso.org.uk/>

You may want to find out more about the whole process. If so, click here,

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint/>

In the case of local authorities, the authority must have had the opportunity to try to sort out the complaint before any of the ombudsmen can consider it and this means that there will be a number of stages you need to go through first. All of these stages will need to have been completed before you can move to the next step- that of the ombudsman.

If you have a complaint, you should make it first to the local authority. Find out from the council the correct procedure for doing this. If you find that you are not getting anywhere, you should contact a local councillor to ask for help.

If the pool is owned by a school, your first point of query should be the school governors.

Contacting your local councillor

The Direct Gov web site is very useful for finding out all sorts of local details. There are over 20,000 councillors across 410 local authorities. Find out more at

<http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/AdvancedSearch/Searchresults/index.htm?fullText=local+councillors>

There are a number of ways to contact your councillors- either via your local authority, through the councillor's advice surgery or, better still, by e-mailing them.

You can find out about surgeries, councillor's declarations of interest and the like through



<http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRRedirect/index.jsp?LGSL=358&LGIL=8&ServiceName=Find%20out%20about%20your%20local%20councillors>

Generally the full council is responsible for making all executive decisions but most councils break this down into smaller committees that have authority and executive power divested in them. Sometimes council officers will be delegated with much of this work. Although you will not normally be allowed to speak, there is an opportunity to attend council meetings and to listen. Councils publish agendas and meeting papers at least 5 working days before meetings and publish minutes afterwards, which you can request. Whilst minutes can be withheld and the public excluded from meetings, this may happen only in very limited situations.

One way to influence decision making is to become a councillor yourself. To find out more about this, go to

<http://www.beacouncillor.org.uk/>

If you decide that it would be a benefit to become a councillor yourself, there are more details at the Electoral Commission's website.

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Governmentcitizensandrights/UKgovernment/Localgovernment/DG_073312

It is possible to obtain a list of local councillors and, if you want to write to them, to obtain a list of the e-mail addresses of councillors through the Direct Gov web site. The links to this information will vary from council to council but a good start point is to go to 'Local authority service- find out about your local councillors' at the top of the page:

<http://local.direct.gov.uk/LDGRRedirect/MapLocationSearch.do?LGSL=358&LGIL=8&auth=558&map=9-x>

Contacting the local media

Here is some further information on dealing with the local media.

Appointing a spokesperson

If you represent an organisation, it is important that you appoint one spokesperson and that that person is available 24 hours a day to answer calls and e-mails in relation to the on-going story. The spokesperson needs to be well briefed and to fully understand all the issues likely to impact on the situation. Ideally it should be someone with a bearing that would carry some gravitas.

He or she should know what they want to say before contacting the media.



Creating a clear message

Above all, be clear about what you stand for. The approach to the media should be agreed with the head person in your organisation and everyone should be briefed on the subject matter. Messages should be clear and to the point. The points made need to be demonstrably true.

Try to respond to any questions as quickly as possible. Continue to be clear and deliver on any promises made to the media. If any other agencies are employed in your campaign, they also need to be briefed and to respond with common messages. You need to recognise that generally there are no surprises and that media demands and responses can usually be predicted. If something goes wrong, it is useful to have planned and know who does what in the situation.

Social marketing

In addition to the more traditional media outlets, spreading the word through social websites and via new telephone technology cannot be ignored as a medium. If younger people are to be involved with a project, it is essential to embrace these technologies. Blogs and the networking sites should be harnessed at an early stage.