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What research should I carry out?

Introduction

Planning is about how we plan for, and make decisions about, the future of our cities, towns and countryside. Planning has a long history, even thousands of years ago people will have discussed where to build homes and shelters!

Over the centuries, a more formal way of making these decisions was set up. So when we want to build a new house or someone wants to develop a new shopping centre, your local planning authority is responsible for deciding whether it should go ahead. 'Local planning authority' usually means the district or borough council, not the parish or town council.

Without a planning system, everyone could construct buildings anywhere, or use land in any way they wanted, no matter what effect this would have on other people who live or work in their area.

Why should I spend my time on research?

As with any campaign, knowing your enemy and the battleground can be decisive. By carefully planning your research, you can gain a comparative advantage. This is why I always recommend my clients to undertake a political and stakeholder audit.

These audits help to answer some of the essential questions as you begin to plan an effective communication strategy. Every campaign is different and unique. While certain basic principles can be applied to each campaign, it is important to have a complete understanding of the particular situation and the conditions in which your campaign will be waged. At some point in almost every campaign, someone says, "it is different here" or "you're not taking into account our particular situation."

Research is where you start and where you take into account the differences and peculiarities of each campaign. It is here that you have the chance to demonstrate just how different your situation really is.

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But am I not just wasting time I could spend campaigning?

The answer is simply NO! The time you spend on your research will be invaluable in ensuring that you are not wasting valuable time on people who can't influence the outcome or be able to apply the right sort of pressure.

Set aside a few hours for you and your campaign team to do a comprehensive analysis of the political landscape in which your campaign will be operating. This is key research that developers will be undertaking to ensure they know the local area and the local movers and shakers. It is key to knowing how, where and when pressure or influence can be brought to bear and on whom.

Developers will be contacting local politicians, planning committee members, local schools, clubs and businesses to harness their support. They will also look to send out information for residents in the post. As a legal requirement, they will be hosting at least one public exhibition where they will be looking to build public support for their plans. They are being proactive and you have to be too!

While you are spending hours and hours, days and days, months and months, thinking about, worrying about, doing something about this campaign, decision makers will give you only limited time and attention. You must not waste it. Your goal is to tie your campaign to their number 1 priority. *How are they going to get re-elected at the next election?*

But how will it help me and my campaign?

The key to success lies in your preliminary research into the key decision makers. It is no good spending time lobbying someone who has no influence in the decision making process. Use your political and stakeholder audit to identify the members of the planning committee, your own local councillors and Member of Parliament. Take the time to identify those that will be coming up for re-election soon. These are ultimately your easiest targets as they will be keen to pander to public opinion in the hope this will help them when the time comes for re-election.

Effective research can also help you target your message. Targeting your message is important for two reasons. First, you want to conserve those precious campaign resources of time, money and people, and

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second, you want to develop a message that will best persuade those Committee Members you still need to vote for you.

Ok I am convinced, so where do I start?

Start by defining your desired outcomes. It is important to list a number of primary and secondary goals. By having intermediary goals such as a number of objectors or of councillors who support your position, you will be able to judge the progress of your campaign. This will help motivate those around you.

As you are reading this, it is safe to assume you would like to see a planning application refused by a planning authority. This is outcome 1.

Outcome 1 is only achievable if you succeed in attaining a number of secondary objectives. These should include:

- Outcome 2 is to get members of the community to support and actively back your position.
- Outcome 3 is to get your information presented clearly to decision makers.

How do I reach elected officials?

The first step in developing a winning strategy must begin with a realistic assessment of the political landscape in which you will be running. It is true that you can never know everything about your locally elected representatives but compiling what you know will help you tailor your message more effectively. Who are your district councillors, your county councillors and your Member of Parliament?

By using your time wisely and setting clear priorities, you will be able to compile the kind of information you need to develop a good strategy and be prepared for most events in the coming campaign. There are a number of factors that should be understood as completely as possible as you prepare to write a campaign plan:

- Who are the key decision makers?
- When are they up for re-election?
- What political parties are they from?
- How have they responded to previous applications?

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- How can I get in touch with them?
- Have they been involved in any previous campaigns that you can learn from?

What about the planning committee?

It is important to determine the rules on the planning Committee that will be deciding your future. Much of the basic strategy depends on this information.

- Is it a majority decision or unanimous?
- Can you speak at Committee? and for how long?
- When do Members have to abstain?
- How can you lobby them?
- What can developers not do?

All this information is key to ensuring you are playing within the rules and forcing the developers to do the same. Once you have determined the basic rules of the committee, you should start to gather as much information on the committee members as possible. How large are their electorates? How geographically close are they to the planning application? How big are their majorities? What was turnout like? When are they up for re-election? What are the main issues they campaign on?

These factors may affect their decision and I can't stress this enough: *You need to understand the political landscape in which you will be operating.* You must also understand how the planning committee get their information. What are the local media outlets? Who are the reporters and what are their deadlines? How will the campaign be covered and how does the press view the various parties? To develop a comprehensive media strategy, it is important to have as much information on the media as possible.

When will the planning application be submitted? Decided?

Having a clear deadline to work to will motivate you and your team. It will also help you establish a timeline for actions. There will be increased need for public debate and action as the decision process draws to its conclusion. Knowing when that is will allow you to plan more effective actions.

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How am I going to reach decision makers and the general public?

Once you have decided who you want to target, you need to decide what you will say to persuade them to support you. This is your campaign message. It tells the decision makers why you are campaigning and why they should choose your arguments over those of the developers. Sounds simple, doesn't it? Well, once again, it is deceptively complicated.

It is no good coming up with convincing arguments if no one can hear or see your messages. You have to get them out to decision makers and the general public. Developing a clear strategy for each decision maker will make it easier to track your campaigns progress. I recommend creating a series of timelines against which you can check actions as you complete them.

Use your 'home' advantage. As local residents, you and your campaign committee should know a large number of local clubs and activities, public notice boards, shops, pubs and other places where the community congregates. List of all these and come up with a strategy for broadcasting your message at each site.

Using the media to broadcast your message is a great way of achieving your goal of informing people on your campaign and the reasons why you think the planning application should be rejected. Compile a list of all local media outlets and a communication strategy for each. It is no good approaching a media outlet without having a plan. If you use the media to get your campaign message out, you will need good relations with the reporters, a compelling reason for them to tell your story, as well as an easily understood point to your message. In order to devise your plan you need to research the media outlets.

Planning Committee members expect a larger number of objectors than supporters. It is accepted wisdom that people are more likely to get involve in things they oppose than support. Don't let the developers use that argument! It's a numbers game and put simply, you have to outscore the developers by around 3 to 1 to have a chance of showing popular opposition to a scheme

How will I prove my claims?

Making bold and irrational statements without having the necessary evidence to back it up will not help your campaign. You are trading on credibility. Politicians do not want to associate with unsubstantiated

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claims. Do your research, whether that may be an ad-hoc traffic survey, contacting the planning officer, reading the Local Development Framework Plan or the reports from statutory consultees responses. Presenting the argument in a clear and structured way will win you more points than a passionate imploring speech. You may find that hiring a professional planning service may be worthwhile as understanding the Local Development Framework can be quite tricky.

What should my organisation look like?

Getting the right people in the right jobs is key to success in any enterprise and your campaign should be no different. Discuss with your supporters their skills. At a minimum, you will need a chairman, a financial director, a media Spokesman and an events organiser.

I recommend organisational structures that are anti-authoritarian, or “bottom-up”. Leaders almost always emerge, on the basis of such characteristics as charisma, commitment, available time, talent, experience, or the conviction, confidence, and perceived authority.

Creating Communication Strategies

The ultimate goal of your campaign is to see a planning application rejected. What you need to do here is determine what must be done to achieve that victory.

Doing the research is good, but how you use it is key. Use your research to develop a clear communication strategy with a timeline for each target group. These should include the planning committee, your local elected representatives and the media. Too often campaigns forget to calculate how many votes will be needed to guarantee victory and determining where these votes will come from. Study the planning committee and remember everything you do is designed to influence them.

Campaigns spend their precious resources of time, money and people trying to talk to the whole population instead of the much fewer decision makers they need to win. Reduce the number of people you target with your communication to a much more manageable size.

Establishing what you want to say, to whom and when will go a long way to making your campaign more effective. By timing your press releases, your letters and your events right, you can increase their effectiveness and really target the decision makers. The developers are hiring experts to do this for them!

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Worksheet 1: Timeline

Creating a sample timeline is an excellent way to help you visualise your campaign and plan its communication activities. As an exercise, I would like you to fill out a timeline for your campaign from beginning to the end. In doing so, you should consider the following rules:

1. You should start your communication planning from Submission day and work backwards. The campaign begins officially when the planning application gets submitted. You will have to decide what needs to be accomplished before the campaign begins in order to win? How many posters will you have to put up? How many brochures will you have to have distributed? How many doors should you and your supporters have knocked on? Who should sit on your committee? What research needs to be done? How are you going to divide the tasks up between your fellow supporters? Are you going to get professional advice from a company like PlanAct?
2. Now plan forward from the submission deadline. As we have seen most applications take 13 weeks to be determined. What activities do you need to undertake? Who is going to lead on what? How much time can each person spare during that time? Have committee members got holidays planned? What order do you want your events in? Are there any reasons for not having an event on a specific day (Big sporting event? Etc...)
2. All of your communication activities should be quantifiable. You communication goals should not include "establishing good media relations" because such a goal does not mean anything in real terms. How many events will you hold? How many press releases will you send out? You should quantify everything for two reasons:
 - A. Quantifiable goals will help you measure the progress of your campaign. If by submission day your team has got 100 supporters, is that good or bad? If your goal is 200, it's good; if your goal is 6,000, it's bad. If you have not set a quantifiable goal, you have no idea.
 - B. Quantifiable goals will help your budgeting process. You cannot reasonable compare the relative costs and benefits of brochures vs. posters vs. radio ads unless you know how many of each you are talking about.

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3. For each goal, plan the activities that will be required to reach that goal. If you plan to put up 50 posters by week 3, by what date should you take your poster design to the printer? Who should put up 50 posters?
4. Do not forget to plan for the resources you will need to accomplish each activity. As you look at your timeline, figure out for each week how many people and how much money you will need for the activities planned for that week. Where will the resources come from?

How to set up an effective campaign organisation?

You are not going to successfully oppose a major planning application alone. You will be relying heavily on the people around you. So don't *decide* to campaign alone, but involve those people in the decision who will be working on your campaign.

Speak to the people in your community to inform them on the issue. This can be done through a petition, letters and leaflets, community notice boards, Resident Associations and Community Groups.

Keep a track of all people who support your position. Ask them for their names, addresses and phone numbers, as you will need these later. Keep of track of people who support the development too. Mobilising support early doors will set your campaign up for success. You may also discover that neighbours have skills, energy and resources they may wish to contribute to your cause.

Spread your net wide as heritage, environmental and social groups may also be interested in supporting your campaign.

Involve the media! Local media are always looking for local news stories. Tell them about your organisation. Sell the plucky small local group taking on the big developer. Make sure to include contact details. This will let local people and locally elected representatives know that a protest group is being formed.

Where do I start?

The first thing a prospective campaign leader usually does is to host a small gathering in their home or local venue to pitch the idea and see

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what kind of support might be available. It's very important to get the right people at this meeting. Don't just invite your friends. Invite those people who will be critical of the idea. Do try and invite someone who has managed a campaign before.

What are you listening for?

- People at your exploratory committee meeting should ask you very tough questions, be very impressed with your answers, and express their enthusiasm about your campaign without hesitation. Having some information on what is being proposed and its potential impact on your community is vital. Being honest is even more so! Don't get carried away and succumb to that dreaded natural reaction to exaggerate. You are going to be asking people to give up their time and maybe also some money to your efforts, so show them that your campaign is serious and necessary.

What you will more likely hear:

- The people in the room like you. If they've come to the meeting, it's because they care enough about you to give a little of their time. They don't want to hurt your feelings. So when they voice concerns, assume that their reservations are even bigger than they say. Listen for hesitation and doubt in people's voices.

What you might also hear:

- People will feel flattered to have been invited to this kind of "inner circle" meeting. People like to feel important. Some people will advise you to campaign because it will make them feel important to be part of your campaign. The kind of support you want is the kind that comes from a shared commitment to the goals of the campaign, not someone's glory – not yours, and not anyone else on your campaign.

Who comes to the meeting?

- If someone doesn't come to the meeting, it's probably safe to say they don't think your campaign is worth their while. But don't assume that if people come they *do* support you. Good attendance at an exploratory committee meeting is not the same as support.

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The final word

- Before they leave, *ask* people if they think this is an important issue. Ask for a yes or no answer. Also, ask if they are willing to make a significant commitment to your campaign mainly in time but also possibly financially.

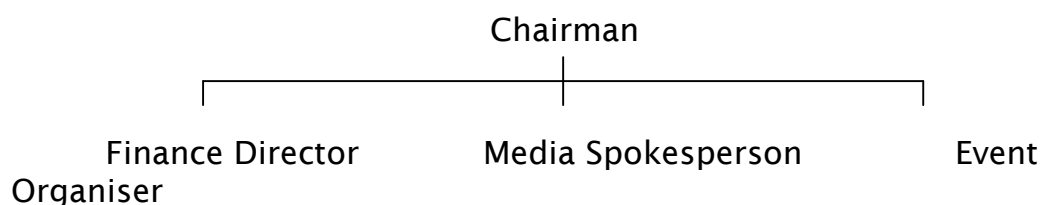
What to expect from people

- As a rough rule of thumb, only about half of the people that commit to something will actually come through. This is true for your close friends and advisors too. Things happen in people's lives, and people that you are counting on *will* drop off the campaign. Make sure you aren't relying to too few people to get this big job done.

So we have decided to fight this planning application, what now?

Getting the right people in the right jobs is key to success in any enterprise and your campaign should be no different. Discuss with your supporters their skills. At a minimum, you will need a chairman, a financial director, a media Spokesman and an events organiser.

I recommend organisational structures that are anti-authoritarian, or "bottom-up". Leaders almost always emerge, on the basis of such characteristics as charisma, commitment, available time, talent, experience, or the conviction, confidence, and perceived authority. A typical organisation should look like this:



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Accountability structures are essential. By having this structure, you are establishing clear lines of communications but also responsibility.

The Committee's role is to keep fellow residents and objectors informed of the decisions they have taken and of the work the group is undertaking. But accountability is a two-way street. It's very difficult for a representative to keep members informed about the issues if the members themselves are not engaged. Members need to keep informed about what's going on, and to communicate their wishes about these things to the representative.

Chairman

Once the Chairman's been elected, it's her/his job to oversee the campaign. A great Chairman is someone who works well under pressure, who knows how to delegate responsibility, and who can keep focused on the goal in the face of interminable distractions. Therefore the role of the chairman is to run the campaign. This must be someone in which the committee has complete confidence. After all, this should be the most important thing in both of their lives for the relatively short period of time that the campaign will last. In a sense, the chairman is the heart and the brain of the campaign. A good campaign needs both to be effective but they have very distinct roles to play.

Too often a chairman wants to micromanage his or her own campaign. They either do not choose a committee or choose someone they think they can manipulate. In either case they end up spending too much time making decisions that should be left to someone else, which takes time from their main job, meeting decision makers and potential supporters and donors.

A chairman must also deal with or otherwise supervise those who will deal with the press, the money, the other methods of voter contact and everything else planned (and unplanned) during the campaign.

The Finance Director

The Finance Director of the campaign is legally responsible for any financial irregularities. S/He is also responsible for making sure that campaign finance reports are filed correctly and on time, which can be extremely challenging. But because the Finance Directors name appears on all pieces of campaign

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literature, some campaigns would rather have a well-known person than someone who knows how to do these things as treasurer.

Media Spokesperson

This is the person to send out press releases to local media, welcome media to your events, and keep up with what the media are saying about the campaign. Their job is also to develop media strategies and oversee their implementation.

Event Organiser

This person does the follow up with pledges, events, and house parties. This person recruits volunteers to do phone calls, door knocking and literature dropping, and makes sure enough volunteers show up for each activity. Their role will also involve creating and managing events to highlight the campaign.

Volunteers

In addition to these formal roles, you will need a lot of hands to do the grunt work. But remember, this is a volunteer organisation and people will be contributing their time and their enthusiasm to the campaign without getting paid. The most important thing a chairman does is to motivate those around you.