

Introduction

Eco2 Ltd contracted Mistral to carry out a full community consultation regarding its plans to build a biomass energy plant on the site of the former British Sugar facility on the outskirts of Brigg in North Lincolnshire. The Brigg Renewable Energy Plant proposal is for a 40 megawatt electricity-generating facility, powered by the combustion of mainly straw, supplied by farmers in the local area.

Objective

The objectives were to ensure that the local community, including decision-makers, received the facts first-hand; to engage with the community, including the local media, to support allies and to counter any negative perceptions that might influence the planning committee; and to ensure that support was captured and opposition put into context.

Strategy

Pre-consultation communication

Mistral conducted an extensive site visit to the local towns and village in the vicinity of the development site, to determine a range of conduits for publicising information about the proposals and the accompanying public exhibitions. Mistral then prepared an extensive political and community audit to identify appropriate statutory, strategic and community stakeholders, including relevant councils and officers, and business and community groups to receive personalised invitations to the exhibitions and for further engagement. Mistral additionally prepared a project fact file and Q&A document for the proposal.

Publicity

Mistral developed, produced and distributed a consultation newsletter to 5,700 households in the local area, including a reply-paid questionnaire. This questionnaire was also available online at a dedicated consultation website. Mistral publicised the public exhibitions with advertising in local press and posters displayed in the local area, and embarked on a programme of local media relations to ensure that as many people as possible were aware of the proposals, and the consultation and public exhibition. Mistral additionally issued 120 personal invitations on behalf of Eco2 to the exhibition, including district, ward, town and parish councillors.

Public exhibition and ongoing dialogue

Mistral facilitated the public exhibitions, including logging visitors and encouraging them to fill out an exhibition questionnaire, and provided support staff to help answer questions, based on the Q&A document previously prepared. Mistral then made all the information from the public exhibition available online, creating a virtual tour of the exhibition panels. A second newsletter was distributed among the community, giving the results of the public exhibition and offering further clarification on issues identified during this initial consultation. Mistral additionally facilitated presentations to local groups, including the regional Chamber of Commerce and a town council, and set up meetings for the developer with the constituency MP. During this time, Mistral also liaised with local stakeholders and provided an online query management system through the consultation website.

All this activity was supported by a proactive and reactive press office. Mistral then prepared a Statement of Community Involvement to accompany the planning application.

Results

Over 150 people attended the exhibition over the two days, with good representation from the local town and village councillors, including the chair of the planning committee, the editor of the council newsletter, two mayors and chairmen of the council; representatives from the district council including ward councillors, and the constituency MP.

At the time of writing the SCI, a total of 90 consultation responses had been received; a mixture of questionnaires collected from visitors to the exhibition, pre-paid reply slips from the leaflets and online responses through the project website. Overall, the feedback received from the consultation shows support for the Brigg Renewable Energy Plant, and identified traffic as a key issue for the proposal, later addressed by the developer as the proposal progressed through planning. No planning decision has as yet been made on the proposal.

