

REIMAGINING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN RENEWABLE ENERGY

Dynami**c**X



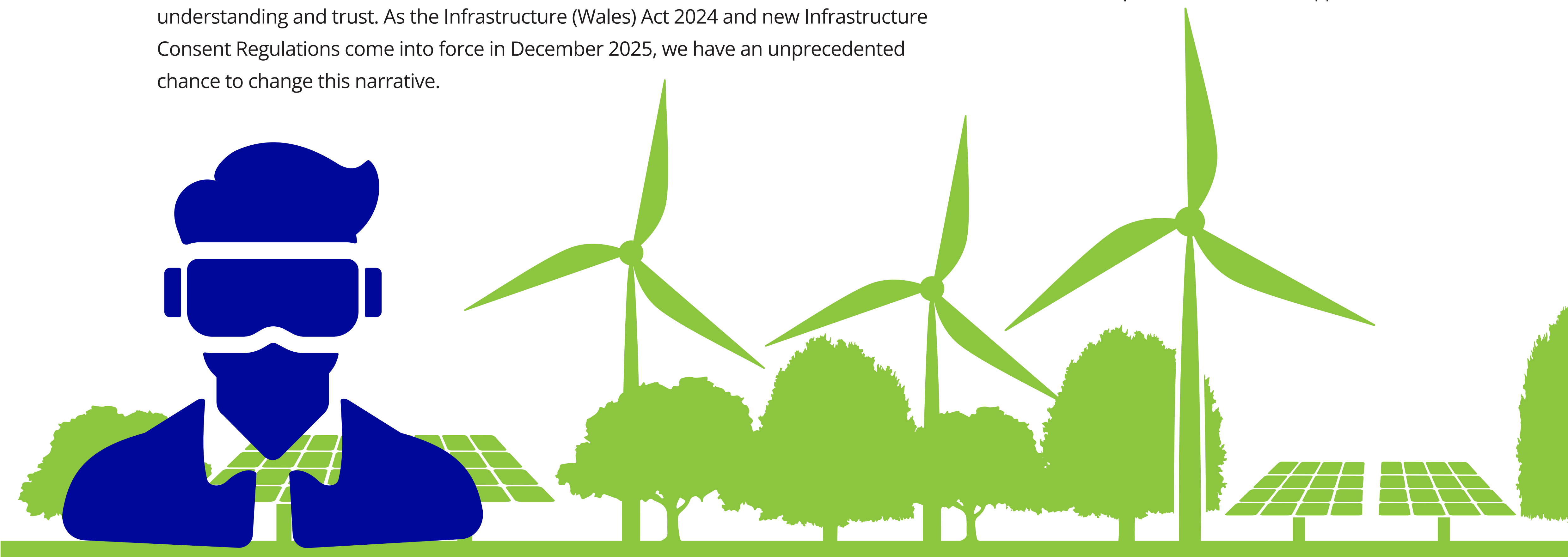
A Visualisation-Led Perspective

The renewable energy sector in the UK is entering a pivotal phase. With the national target of achieving net zero emissions by 2050, the deployment of large-scale renewable energy projects is accelerating. Strategic Infrastructure Projects (SIPs) and Developments of National Significance (DNS) are central to this transformation, but they also present unique challenges in terms of planning, regulation, and community acceptance.

Historically, public consultation has often been seen as a procedural step, necessary to secure planning permission but rarely used as an opportunity to build genuine understanding and trust. As the Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 and new Infrastructure Consent Regulations come into force in December 2025, we have an unprecedented chance to change this narrative.

How can immersive visualisation transform your community engagement from a **project risk** into your **greatest asset**?

This white paper sets out a vision for how visualisation technologies, combined with thoughtful engagement strategies, can bridge the gap between technical proposals and community understanding. It draws on recent research, sector insights, and first-hand experience to outline a practical and scalable approach.

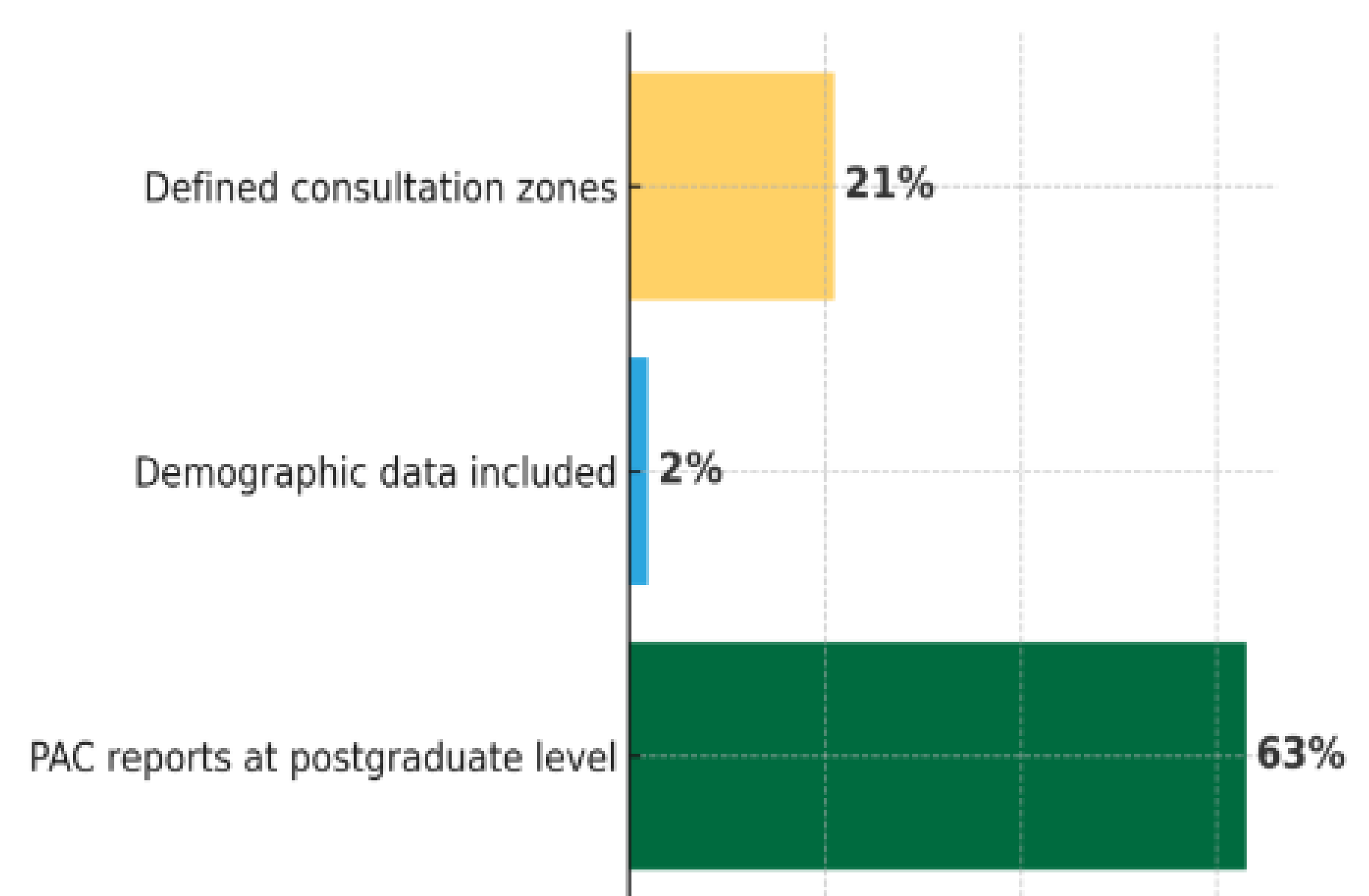


UNDERSTANDING THE GROUND REALITY

The Grasshopper Research report on DNS Consultation Engagement (July 2025) provides a candid assessment of current practice:

- 63% of PAC reports were written at a postgraduate reading level.
- Less than 2% of projects reported demographic data on participants.
- Only 21% clearly defined consultation zones.
- Many projects lacked newsletters or in-person engagement altogether.

Ground Reality - Key Consultation Statistics



Complementing these findings, discussions with **REGEN, Burges Salmon, and Savills** have surfaced additional concerns:

- Early engagement, although recognised as best practice in England, is not consistently adopted in Wales.
- Non-statutory responses from community groups are underrepresented in PAC reports.
- Public events are often formal and inaccessible, deterring meaningful participation.
- Misinformation, once established, is difficult to counteract without proactive and accessible fact-checking.

At the ground level, these shortcomings manifest in communities as:

- Confusion over technical content.
- Perceptions that consultation is a formality rather than a dialogue.
- A lack of trust in both the process and the outcomes.



The Need for Change

We propose shifting from a compliance-driven mindset to one rooted in connection. True engagement is not achieved by ticking boxes; it requires delivering information in forms that resonate, inform, and invite discussion.

“We really need to understand the need for the energy transition as a whole. We need to spend more time and effort talking to ordinary consumers about the need for the transition and explaining their role in it ...why it's important , and getting their buy-in. Because unless they’ve bought in, they will not be interested in the solutions. You cannot try and push a solution on somebody who doesn't know they've got a problem.”

Bean Beanland

Director for Growth and External Affairs, Heat Pump Federation



ALSO...

As “*The Diary of a CEO*” points out, our beliefs are shaped by the evidence we choose to trust, whether or not that evidence is objectively true. We tend to accept information that aligns with our experiences and biases and reject information that doesn’t. This is why presenting facts alone often fails to change opinions.

The book cites striking examples: **there are still 300,000 Americans who believe the Earth is flat**; 21% of adults in a recent survey said they believe Santa Claus is real; and a notable proportion believe in Bigfoot or mythical lake monsters. The underlying truth is that belief is not just about data, it’s about trust, perception, and lived experience.

The author makes a critical observation: “Seeing is believing ,but only if you trust the source.”

This directly applies to renewable energy engagement. Communities will not be persuaded by technical reports or legal requirements alone, they need to see and experience projects in ways that feel credible, relatable, and rooted in sources they trust.

PROBLEM & SOLUTION FRAMING

Changing community attitudes towards renewable energy is not simply a matter of providing more data, it's about influencing specific, high-impact actions. As outlined in Influencer Training:

In this context, vital behaviours might include:

- Encouraging residents to attend a first consultation event.
- Prompting them to interact with an online map rather than relying on hearsay.
- Motivating schools to include renewable energy in their curriculum.

“The ultimate goal of influence is to change behaviour... focus on vital behaviours, the smallest number of behaviours that create the greatest change.”

By identifying these key actions early, consultation teams can design engagement that specifically encourages them. This targeted approach is far more effective than broadly “raising awareness,” which often fails to translate into participation or support.

OPPORTUNITIES IN REGULATORY CHANGE

The Infrastructure (Wales) Act 2024 creates a timely opening for this approach. With mandatory **42-day pre-application consultation periods, bilingual communication requirements, dedicated project websites, and clearer non-technical summaries**, there is now a framework that supports more focused, impactful engagement.

This alignment of regulatory expectation and behavioural insight allows developers to:

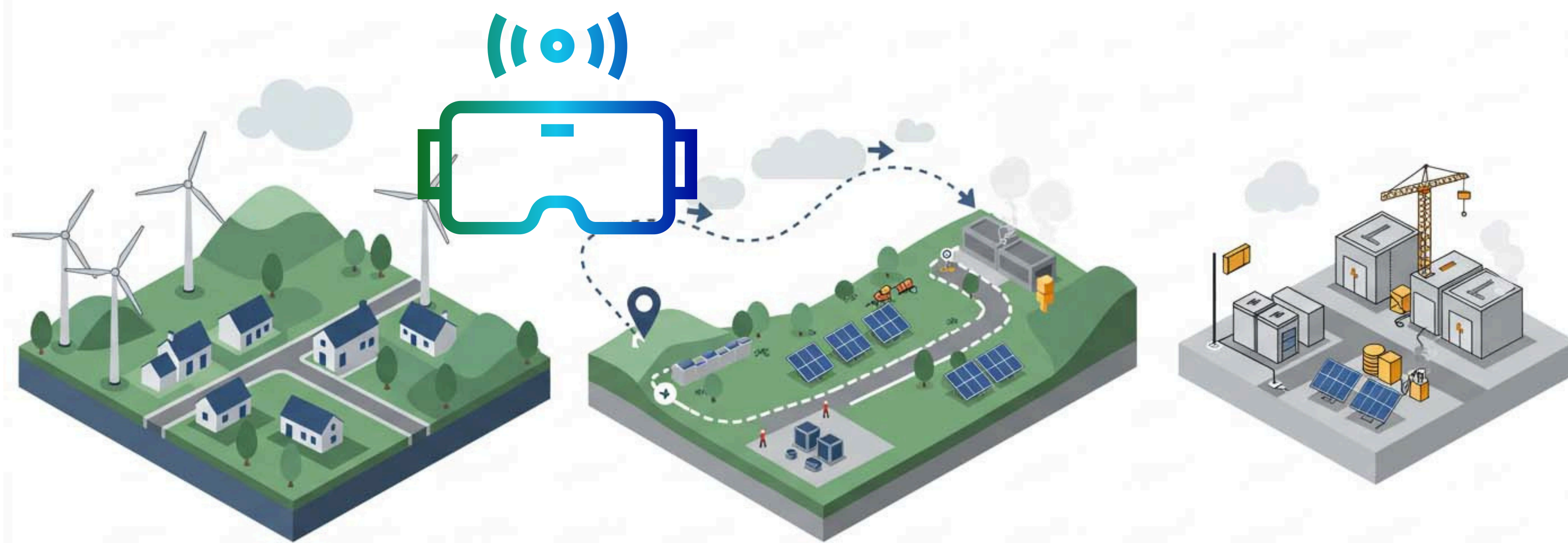
- Build tools and content that encourage specific, vital behaviours at the right moments.
- Use trusted, relatable visualisation methods to counter misinformation before it spreads.
- Meet statutory requirements while also strengthening public trust.

By marrying behavioural science with immersive visualisation, consultation becomes more than a legal obligation, it becomes a genuine opportunity to involve communities in shaping the future of energy.

A **FOUR-PILLAR** **ENGAGEMENT** **ECOSYSTEM**



1.Immersive Project Visualisation



3D Models and Cinematic Flythroughs:

Detailed, photorealistic representations of proposed projects enable viewers to see the development in its real-world context. Cinematic flythroughs can simulate walking through a village affected by a wind farm, or viewing a battery storage site from a nearby

Animated Planning Sequences:

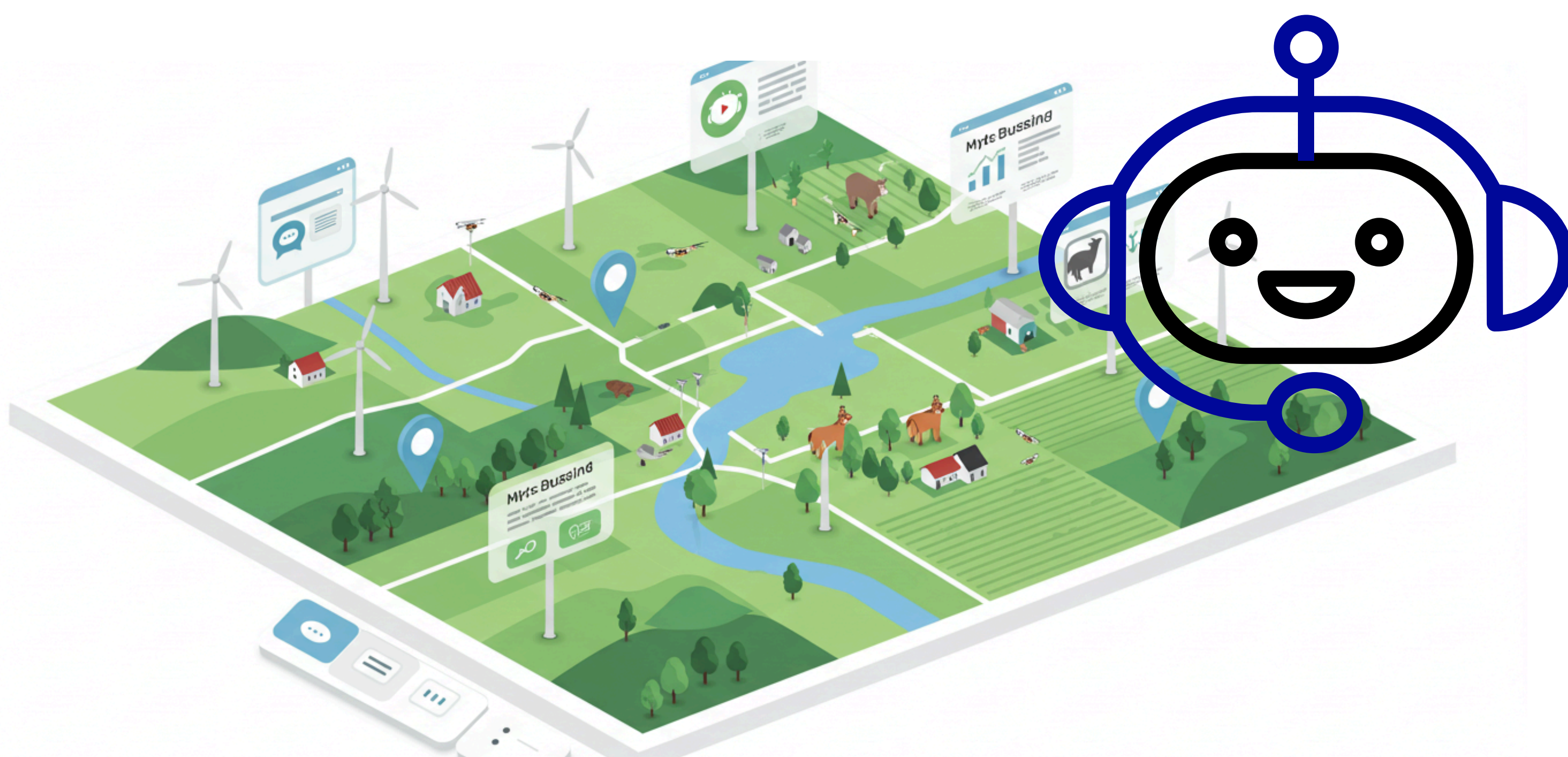
Step-by-step animations explain construction timelines, transport routes, and phasing. This is invaluable for addressing concerns about disruption during the build phase.

Bilingual Voiceovers:

Delivering these experiences in both Welsh and English ensures inclusivity and compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.

The result is a shared visual reference point that reduces misunderstandings and supports informed feedback.

2.Interactive Digital Map



Embedded Videos and Myth-Busting Pop-Ups:

Short explainers and FAQs provide clear, evidence-based responses to common questions, such as noise levels, wildlife impact, or property values.

AI Chatbot Assistant:

Available in Welsh and English, the chatbot can answer questions 24/7, ensuring misinformation is addressed quickly and accurately.

By turning a static map into an interactive experience, this tool empowers communities to explore the proposal at their own pace and according to their own interests.

3. Feedback & Participation Tools



Embedded Surveys:

Integrated into maps and flythroughs, these surveys collect context-aware feedback, increasing the relevance and quality of responses.

QR Codes in the Physical Environment:

Placed on signage, leaflets, and community boards, QR codes link to AR experiences showing how the project will look from specific locations.

AI-Assisted Feedback Interface:

Allows residents to submit questions or concerns and receive immediate, myth-busting answers. This reduces the risk of misinformation taking hold and builds trust in the process.

Data Dashboards:

Provide consultation teams with real-time insights into engagement trends, helping them adapt strategies on the fly.

4. In-Person & School Engagement Support



VR/MR Stations:

Set up at consultation events, these stations give people a tangible sense of the project's scale and presence.

Interactive Learning Modules for Schools:

Aligning with the Welsh curriculum, these resources explain renewable energy concepts in an age-appropriate, engaging way. Pupils often share what they learn at home, indirectly increasing adult engagement.

Printed Visual Packs:

For community boards, libraries, and village halls, ensuring that offline audiences remain informed.

This pillar not only engages the current generation but also fosters a culture of understanding and acceptance among future decision-makers.

WHY THIS MATTERS

An engagement strategy built on these four pillars can:

- Reduce objections by clarifying misunderstandings early.
- Improve the quality of feedback for planning submissions.
- Build lasting trust between developers and communities.
- Many projects lacked newsletters or in-person engagement altogether.



We invite developers, consultation agencies, and policymakers to explore pilot projects that integrate these approaches. By working together, we can transform consultation from a statutory hurdle into a meaningful dialogue that benefits all stakeholder