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# REFLECTIVE NOTES

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## MEETING: Friday 12<sup>th</sup> August

- I arrive at the meeting 30 minutes late because of traffic and the meeting was already halfway through the topic group reports which included an update about filming but I had missed out on that.
- The meeting was small with Chair and W plus four members of the steering group, probably due to holiday season in August.
- There was a discussion underway about the findings from the tourism working group and the identified need for high quality hotels in the area. They were talking about using the land across the river where there needs to be some new development to regenerate the area.
- The Chair was quite keen to position new development on that side of the river and was quite forceful in his opinion (at Spittal)
- No one from the transport group was present at the meeting but The Chair updated the group that he has received a lot of information from the group but all of it was focused on sustainable transport with no consideration of car use, lorries and heavy goods vehicles.
- P3 asked what consultation they had done or were planning to do and was quite hostile in his opinion, also stating he was keeping an eye on that group. The Chair explained the group had consulted with walking and cycling groups in Berwick and it was said with an undertone which clearly communicated that he felt this was a biased approach
- P3 continued to express concerns about the group's approach to which The Chair suggested that he was more than welcome to go along to one of their meetings. P3 said he wanted to but the group hadn't got back to him about when they were meeting.
- I said that I had also subtly tried to get the group to think about car use during the filming workshops and that I had made it clear that in the film they can't focus it entirely to sustainability.
- There was also no one from the employment and skills group present and The Chair expressed his concern that this group had only met once despite it being one of the key groups in the area.
- At this point in the meeting, Planning officer came in, and joined into the discussion
- The Chair continued to explain that there had already been a lot of good work done by NCC in relation to employment and that it wouldn't need too much extra evidence, it would be just about bringing all the information together for the neighbourhood plan. He saw employment as one of the key opportunities and key issues in the area
- He went on to talk about the land that was currently identified for employment, what should be deallocated and what could be allocated. At this point a conflict of opinion arose between Planning officer and The Chair. Planning officer expressed concern at the idea of allocating any land for employment when the county evidence is suggesting the deallocation of a lot of the land currently identified. The Chair's point was that a lot of it isn't needed but the land that is needed is required for SME industrial units. The conflict continued with The Chair presuming Planning officer did not understand his point and Planning officer being quite forthright about his opinion. This interaction drew to a close with Planning officer suggesting it's fine providing they find evidence to support their policies

- No one was at the meeting from the natural environment group but The Chair explained that the group had a lot of information that they were compiling. He also explained that the group were not doing much else at this stage because they felt that the proposals and policies from other groups should come forward first to see what impact on the natural environment would be. One of the group members said "So they're just going to say no to all of our policies then" in a humorous tone which set the group were laughing.
- Once the laughter had died down, The Chair suggested that he wasn't happy with this approach by the natural environment group as they should still be able to formulate some ideas of what they would like to do or what they would like to protect without having policies from others.
- There was no one there to represent the youth working group either and The Chair expressed concerns that the group had not been meeting and that the chair, Gregor, was not doing his job. There was discussion about Gregor and whether he should be kicked out of the role of chair, which they asked Planning officer for advice. He clearly expressed that he keeps out of the politics of the working groups.
- P3 said that P10 had been working a lot on the group and he had spoken to Beehive who were aware of it and things had been happening. The Chair still expressed concerns that they weren't doing enough and that Gregor should be doing more as the chair.
- W said she thought Gregor might be upset as she had emailed and asked if he wanted to give it up because of his busy schedule and the fact that he lives and works in Edinburgh to which Gregor may have taken offence.
- In his defence, The Chair and P6 both said he was a great guy with a lot of qualities to which P3 added that he would never do anything to intentionally sabotage the group.
- I spoke up about working with P10 as part of the filming explaining that the group had met once, that I knew P10 had done a lot of work contacting people and places. I also said that the group seemed keen to work but that holidays and schedules may have gotten in the way
- P6 pointed out that if they had met and were doing work, then there should be no concern. She also pointed out that the built environment group had only met once and were all of doing various bits of work and there should be no questioning of people's capabilities unless it's clear no work has been done at all.
- The resolution was to leave it until the next steering group and use the addition of the consultants' time working with the working groups to kick start all groups and help with their tasks.
- With that there was discussion about the consultants that had submitted a quote for consideration. There were three candidates with one known by many members of the steering group. There was discussion about the first, with two members already voting in favour of him. P5 (not present at the meeting) had worked with him before, and P6, both felt that because he had worked with Alnwick he would know about the process and prevent Berwick from making the same mistakes that Alnwick made. Planning officer pointed out that Alnwick didn't fail but needed to do some considerable amendments.
- Because P5 had worked with her before, in more of a planning role, and many of the group knew him or knew of him, P1 pointed out that if he was a planner then Alnwick shouldn't have failed their neighbourhood plan. The Chair also pointed out that they had asked him 3 times for a breakdown of the costs and what he would do for the money but he had not got back to them, Based on all of this, the group removed him as a possibility.

- The decision was then between JL and JA. JL had quoted a price plus expenses which included the cost of a B&B which didn't go down well with the group and Planning officer was also visibly surprised
- The final candidate JA had contacted the group late having heard they were looking for a consultant and asked to submit a late proposal. She was the most expensive and no one knew of her. The Chair asked for Planning officer's opinion and he revealed that she was his old boss. The group tried to quiz Planning officer for more information about why she left. He revealed she'd left to go to GVA which the group thought was a bad move and they had bad opinions about GVA. Planning officer also said she stayed there 6 months then left to set up her own consultancy. The group tried to pry about why she had left but Planning officer wouldn't give up that information. He did say that she was Head of Planning and Policy Development and she had been the planner responsible for writing the core strategy
- The group began to laugh once again with a very negative view of the Core Strategy believing it didn't provide anything for anywhere north of Ashington and Blyth. To this, Planning officer responded that it was the county council's document. This was said with a subtle undertone. Every time a comment about the document was made, he repeated the phrase, clearly with hidden meaning. Eventually, The Chair picked up the hidden message asking if the document had been guided by county councillors rather than the planners. Planning officer laughed but said he would not go on any minutes saying anything – clearly this confirmed the suggestion.
- The Chair realised that with this new information, that the policy contained within the core strategy was, in fact, very good, but that the downfall of it was not down to JA.
- The group favoured JA in a vote to become the consultant of choice for the group.
- From there, the group moved on to talk about the vision and objectives which had been approved by the town council the previous week. Planning officer said he had not seen the latest version and he looked over what they had done and was clearly not overly impressed.
- He made it crystal clear that it was too long. The Chair agreed but said every time he tried to edit the words out, others would add more words in and this was the first time everyone had agreed on the document.
- The Chair also said that thus far he had had no support for going out to consultation about the vision and objectives. Planning officer, again, made it very clear to the group that they should consult.
- Planning officer explained that consultation should be done at all key stages and suggested that I could help with that to which I agreed.
- The word formal consultation was what was causing problems with many members of the steering group asking if he meant things like organising town hall meetings like they did before.
- I explained that formal and informal didn't matter. That they could do consultation whatever way they wanted. I suggested that something like a town hall meeting might not be appropriate for this kind of consultation but that they could, for example, put it in the press and online, with an option for people write in as well and this would be enough.
- The group were pacified and okay to do that. The Chair suggested leaving the consultation open throughout because of the previous discussion about the vision and objectives being a living document. Planning officer strongly advised against that because of the difficulty down the line if they received comments that could not be taken into account. It was decided it would go ahead with a deadline

- There was discussion about general communication to the masses mainly being through the newspapers. The Chair and W also said they had received comments asking what was happening. P1 felt a consultation would be a good way to update the public.
  - I thought about a newsletter that could be regularly sent out about the progress?
  - It was suggested that a leaflet drop could be done to all households with the vision and objectives on as part of the consultation. Planning officer offered that his team would be able to design a leaflet for them but that it would not fit all of the text on because of its length.
  - Planning officer also offered to put together a project plan with the key stages on, including consultation.
  - The Chair asked how the filming was coming along with the intent that a film could be used during the consultation as a teaser of what was to come in the near future
  - I then updated the group about the filming explaining about the bug in the iPhone version of the app and that two groups had lost their footage. I offered my time to help those groups and told P6 that I was meeting P7 on Monday to film the footage with an Android phone that I could leave with them. P3 said that between him and P2, they would sort out recapturing their shots.
  - I explained the next step of the process. I told the group that they next couple of weeks, I would have to focus on writing my dissertation but that I was keen to continue working with the groups to produce the first edit and continue working on the films.
  - I explained there was no way that all 7 groups would have a film ready to share in time for this consultation coming up but that I could see if one group would be willing to have something ready for then.
  - Before concluding the meeting, Planning officer asked if the group would be willing to work with their neighbours, East Ord, to get a housing assessment done by AECOM.
  - The Chair explained the group had approached the key people in the area to work together but that they were not keen and that there had been some politics between the two areas that Berwick didn't understand. Planning officer said he would suggest it at their meeting later in the week.
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- After the meeting, I chatted with Planning officer who was asking about my work and how I was getting on. I told him I was working with Kingston Park and he started to laugh. He had spoken to JLu, the consultant for Kingston Park and other neighbourhood planning areas, and she had explained that it was a nightmare. I seconded that and explained that JLu and I had come to a resolution.
  - Planning officer jokingly asked if I would like to work with East Ord and the other parishes – I asked why? He said so that he didn't have to and I said I was looking to work with other groups. This was all said in a humorous way but ended with Planning officer considering that I wanted to work with other groups.
  - I asked if it would be possible to meet up with him or someone in his team to chat through some ideas for the PhD and to talk about other neighbourhood planning groups as I wanted planners' input too. He was more than happy to do that.