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**Duration:** **1:14:32**  
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**Typist:** **1034**

START AUDIO

[0:01:53]

Respondent: Morning.

Ian: Morning, hi. Can you hear me okay?

Respondent: I can, fine.

Ian: Great, and I can hear you, so that's good. Okay, thank you for agreeing to speak to me first of all, and I'm Ian Johnson. Just before I go into everything, have you got any questions based on stuff I've sent you or...?

Respondent: No, we'll just dive straight in, Ian, that's fine. (Laughter)

Ian: Excellent. Have you been a county councillor long?

Respondent: 2017.

Ian: Oh, right, that's it. I used to woxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxxx x xxxxxxxxxxxxSo I worked in the Communications Office primarily, but I tended to work with a lot of the councillors and go places with them and help them draft things and stuff. And I just couldn't- yes-

Respondent: Couldn't remember me. (Laughter)

Ian: -I just thought- Yes, I couldn't remember you-

Respondent: I wasn't there.

Ian: -but that's good, yes, because [Crosstalk 0:03:00]-

Respondent: So at that time it would have been [ANON] [Crosstalk]-

Ian: In your seat?

Respondent: Hmmhmm.

Ian: Yes, it was Labour-run at the time, and it was either- the leader and deputy leader were [ANON]-

Respondent: [ANON], and [ANON].

Ian: No, [ANON] wasn't at the time. [ANON] at the time was- he had a front-ish role-

Respondent: He was the business chair, wasn't he?

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: Was he the business chair then? I don't [know 0:03:32].

Ian: Yes, he was. Yes, so I didn't spend that much time with him because it's tended to be the front people. Yes, and the first person I ever interviewed as a PhD student, as a researcher, was [ANON COUNCILLOR]. So if this is the last interview I ever do, I've started and finished with a county councillor, so I can't-

But yes. So these questions I'm going to ask are just about your own personal reflections and stuff. Obviously, one of the bigger aims of the project is around thinking about technology. But for me, this is about helping [ANON] put together a report about the whole area.

So I want to interview people starting with people like yourself that are in more central roles, but I want to interview residents of all ages and backgrounds, stuff like that, and just put together a- Because I know [REDACTED ORG NAME] had done surveys and stuff in the past, but the aim of this is just to get a real rich picture of things.

So I've got a list of questions that I'll try and get through, but if we go off on tangents and stuff, or if something comes to your mind that you think is interesting to talk about, then we can just stop off and go off at any angle, yes? Great, right. Well, the first question is, that I'm asking everyone is, how long have you lived or worked in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area?

Respondent: Right. About 35 years, or there- yes, about 35 years or more. For the whole of my life, I haven't been very far out of the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area because before I was in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], I was in Newbiggin-by-the-sea, which is like two miles down the road. But even while I lived there, I was working at the school at [REDACTED PLACE NAME], so that was my place of work.

Ian: Oh, okay. So you do live in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area now, because I know you-

Respondent: I do, yes.

Ian: -represent them, but...Yes, great.

Respondent: So I live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Right, so [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. Excellent. So you know the area quite well. Just your own words, what do you think are the main differences between the four villages?

Respondent: I think the four villages are all totally different individually. As the county councillor, three of them sit within my ward. So that's [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and each of them is different. And then [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is added on as in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area, right? And, obviously, [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and Lint- well, [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as well, the three of them were all pit villages to start with.

The difference between the three now is that [REDACTED PLACE NAME] has had some sort of regeneration and housing built into it, so it's not the old-style pit village that [REDACTED PLACE NAME] still is. Even [REDACTED PLACE NAME] has had a certain amount of new housing, not to the extent of [REDACTED PLACE NAME], but [REDACTED PLACE NAME] hasn't. So that's the difference.

And there will always be [this 0:07:11], they're not set on that model of the pit village. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] isn't, and if you have to be totally blunt about it, I think people would say that [REDACTED PLACE NAME] was the upmarket side of it. (Laughter) And to be perfectly honest, not a lot of people can ever understand why [REDACTED PLACE NAME] was part of the [REDACTED ORG NAME] and the [ \_\_\_ 0:07:33]. It was entirely to make up numbers to get the funding through, I would say.

Ian: Hmmhmm, yes. Great. So the other side of that is, what do you think the villages have in common? What do they share?

Respondent: Well, I think they share a historical thing, and all being pit villages originally. So there is that underlying sense of community there amongst them. And if that waned for a little bit in the past, I think it came back to the forefront during the COVID side of things, the pandemic, where they've all pulled together really well.

Ian: Is that across all four villages would you say people have pulled together?

Respondent: Erm, I think s- yes, I think so, yes.

Ian: So-

Respondent: Of course, the other thing they have is the one church we've got covers all four as well, apart from [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Yes, I actually interviewed the vicar from the church-

Respondent: Right. Was that [ANON]?

Ian: -as part of this. Yes.

Respondent: [Crosstalk 0:08:54].

Ian: Right. So you said, during the pandemic, people have pulled together a bit, you think, you've noticed or felt that. Could you just try and explain to me what that looks like, or give an example of what that pulling together- how that pulling together has happened?

Respondent: Yes, certainly we've had residents' groups come to the forefront to run- to help everybody within that [REDACTED ORG NAME] area, food-parcel-wise, anything to do with the pandemic, to get over the loneliness side of it, that type of thing.

The parish councils were involved in funding organisations to combat the COVID side of things, etc. The one thing that I found really hard was the lack of communication because of the isolation in all sorts of forms.

Ian: Yes, and obviously that's a big part of what we're trying to look at as well. So you say 'residents' groups', did various resident groups form and then start acting, or were there existing resident groups that were-

Respondent: No, we had one in particular that was formed during this time, and that was started by a young lass from [REDACTED PLACE NAME] who was furloughed from her work, so they set up that. They combined with organisations which we already had in place, such as [REDACTED ORG NAME] and [NON ORG]. I don't know if you are having anything to do with [ANON], if you're interviewing [ANON]?

Ian: I've met her in the past, yes. Okay, how did these new resident groups etc. communicate? Because obviously-

Respondent: Facebook, predominantly.

Respondent: -they couldn't get together in the- Right, Facebook. And is that Facebook, like pages and groups?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes. Okay, we'll probably talk a bit about them a bit more later, these Facebook groups, because I think they've been a key interesting thing that happened, haven't they?

You briefly touched on it when asked how long you lived there, but how would you describe your role in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area?

Respondent: As a county councillor?

Ian: Anything, as a resident, as a councillor, as [REDACTED ORG NAME], just how do you see yourself [as a 0:11:39]-

Respondent: Well, I think they're all more or less the same, and that's to try and get the best of any investment we can into the area, to promote the groups that we've got, and to tackle the- what is it? We are a deprived area, so it's uplifting things as far as well-being and personal well-being, all that sort of thing. We have very little facilities, I think, within the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area as such.

Ian: So I guess your big aim in your role is around tackling social issues and things like that. Like, I know the role of a county councillor, and I know what [ANON] and other people in [REDACTED ORG NAME] do, but what does that look like on a- I guess, a week-by-week basis or something like that? What kinds of things do you do? If I said, what are your- the normal activities that you do in that space?

Respondent: As the county councillor?

Ian: Yes, as any of the roles.

Respondent: I would say a lot of time at the minute is taken up with anti-social behaviour and complaints and stuff about that, trying to tackle that. It's anti-social behaviour, its vehicle anti-social behaviour, and what comes off as a total lack of respect for other people's property in a lot of cases.

This morning before I spoke to you, I was on to someone because the bridge that we've got over the dean across the river into the allotments, somebody has removed, shall we say, I'll not say 'nicked', removed six of the iron metal bars that provide the guards down the side.

So it just leaves an open space for somebody, some little toddler or a little dog to fall through. Now, what they want them for, I don't know, but it's just like, I don't know.

Ian: And is that your county councillor role that you described there? Yes. And what about your role with [REDACTED ORG NAME], is that different, or...?

Respondent: No, I think they're all mixed, and the [REDACTED ORG NAME] aim is to get the best we possibly can for the whole four villages, which is different in all four, I would assume. But [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] are quite similar, I think, in that respect. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is really isolated and cut off, the bus services and stuff like that are poor.

Ian: Yes. Okay. I want to just move on to a different kind of topic now. Do you consider the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area to be rural?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes, rural. Okay, what makes it rural?

Respondent: The fact that we're not within that much easy reach of a big town, and the transport is poor, the infrastructure between places is poor. So a lot of our residents are dependent on their own cars if they've got them. If you're stuck to public transport, then it is poor. But we haven't got the connections to the big infrastructure, to towns and stuff like that.

Ian: So people are dependent on their own cars. Is-

Respondent: They are to a certain extent, yes.

Ian: And that would be different from people, say, living in somewhere like the south east towns like Morpeth and Cramlington and Blythe who-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -have got bus services and things like that.

Respondent: Hmmhmm.

Ian: So if you feel part of a rural area, what does that mean you as someone who lives in a rural area?

Respondent: Well, I wouldn't like to be in anything but in rural area, I wouldn't like to be in a big built-up area or anything like that. I mentioned [REDACTED PLACE NAME] before, now they've had new housing developments in there. They're on the last phase now of the last 200 [ \_\_\_ 0:16:39] been 400.

Now, it hasn't gone down all that well with people who were there to start with. They think it's just total over development, it's added to the congestion on the roads, what they perceive as speeding and that sort of thing. So we don't always want to be- they're perceiving this over-development if you're coming in this area and doing that sort of thing.

Ian: And do you think that's about the rural-ness? So do you think these 400 houses stuck on the side of a village, does that make it lose its rural identity? Or do you think it challenges that rural identity for people?

Respondent: I think it challenges it, and it's just the fact that we haven't got the infrastructure to deal with it. Like you say, people perceive the extra cars, the extra- everything that is to do with these developments has just been a bit too much and not able to cope with it, but...

Ian: Okay, so in a very kind of similar vein, because you've touched on, I think, as councillor, you'll always be inclined to talk about constituents and people, but how does living in a rural area affect you, if at all?

Respondent: I don't think it does affect me because it's what I've always been used to. I just know that I wouldn't want to live in anything but a rural area because I don't like big, built up- There is no way on God's Earth that I would be happy in somewhere like London or anything like that.

But it does affect- yes, your choices are limited as to shopping etc. Between the villages, we've got very few shops, so you've got to be able to travel to the nearest town to shop which is Ashington or Morpeth, depending on which way you go. Don't know, everything else- I don't know, I'm quite happy with everything else the way it is, to be perfectly honest.

Ian: Yes. I think, yes, it's interesting when you say part of rural for you is having to leave where you live to get shopping and things like that. Is there anything else like that? I'm not looking for negative things here, I guess I'm looking just to get a picture of how people experience living in a rural area.

So when you say you wouldn't live anywhere else, obviously, you really like and you're used to and you choose to live in a rural area. So what is it about rural areas that draw you to them and make you want to live there?

Respondent: Well, it's the fact that they're not quite as overpowering, or old buildings, etc. You've got the open space, which I think during the pandemic, that proved to be the real eye-opener. We certainly found out the importance of that. And yes, it's the natural side of things, I suppose.

Ian: Yes, I think the pandemic is really interesting in terms of making people appreciate things that they probably took for granted. And I guess having that open space on your doorstep was a huge-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -part of that. So if we start talking about the pandemic then, how has your civic or personal activities changed during the pandemic? So the way you do your civic duties or the way you interact with family or friends, ho-

Respondent: Obviously, a lot of that changed, and the face-to-face meetings were out the window, so very reliant on the digital side of things. And I was quite amazed at how easily people adapted to it to be perfectly honest.

Ian: Hmmhmm. And I could probably guess what you mean when you say technology, like the one we're using now-

Respondent: [Yes 0:21:16].

Ian: -but any others?

Respondent: Erm, no, I don't think so. I don't know, it's really curtailed civic things, like you say, because you haven't been able to do them, and there haven’t been any public meetings or anything like that. As they're coming back into being, I'm not quite sure what the general feeling is about them. Some people welcome them, others don't, and I think it'll take a while to get back to any sort of normal.

And like I said, here, where we haven't got the public amenities, possibly, that other people have, then it's hard to get. Our parish councils met online throughout this pandemic. Now to go back to that meeting, we haven't got a massive place to have these meetings in.

So we're very wary that we've got a small space to come back to this, and people are a bit wary of it, I think

Ian: Hmmhmm. I think I know what you mean, but just to be clear, so it's not that more people are taking part online, it's just that the same amount of people that were happy being squashed in a room probably feel less comfortable, yes?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Hmmhmm. So okay, what do you think then do you miss most about the way things were before everything moved online or before the pandemic? What are the real key things that you think are missing that we couldn't replicate?

Respondent: Well, that was just the general of getting out and about mixing with people in the community, I suppose.

Ian: Yes. Not in a formal way like weekly meetings-

Respondent: No.

Ian: -but just-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -bumping into people. And with your role as a councillor, do you think, do you feel- is it about you being visible and present-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -that kind of thing? Is that what you're talking about?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes. Are there any aspects then of the way things are changed, so online meetings and other things, of any things that you think you would keep going forward, even when we don't necessarily need them?

Respondent: I'm not adverse to keeping some sort of digital meetings for things that have not got to be public because it saves on the transport, it saves on time. I think the danger is that we'll try to put too much in and possibly mixing them up now is going to be even worse. But certainly, I think you could get a lot more in [with the 0:24:12] digital, and so a nice mixture of the two.

Ian: Of face-to-face meetings-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian:: -and of online meetings.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Are you aware of any other activities? Like, are you part of any other groups or classes or anything that have changed during the pandemic?

Respondent: No. I am a sort of honorary member of the [Derby and Jordan 0:24:43] Club and that sort of thing. So the activities that the elderly people have done, I think, have changed, and they've really been wary of coming- they just haven't been able to meet. Now whether that starts up again, I don't know.

Ian: Hmmhmm. That particular group, it's not that they've converted and used online, they've just ceased their activities.

Respondent: No, they haven't really taken on the online bit at all. They've rang round each other and stuff like that, but actual getting together and activities has just gone out of the window as far as I'm aware.

Ian: Hmmhmm, that's a shame. Do you think once people get more comfortable going out and stuff that will pick up again? Or do you think maybe things are lost?

Respondent: I don't know. I think they'll just have to take it slowl- I think they will, but whether it comes back to the same format as what it was before, I just don't know, to be honest.

Ian: Hmmhmm. So these different technologies- well, you've only mentioned Zoom so far, but, for example, Nina mentioned the use of Facebook - well, you mentioned Facebook groups as well - and WhatsApp. So do you use any of these kinds of technologies to keep up date or to find out what's happening around the villages? Ha-

Respondent: Yes, I do have a Facebook page, something that was new to me, but we're told at the time of the election we'll have to embrace Facebook because you couldn't do any other sort of campaigning.

And I do dip into the community pages that are on- We have like a '[REDACTED PLACE NAME] Community' page and a '[REDACTED PLACE NAME] Village People', that sort of thing, I'll dip into them. I've got to say, I don't participate in them, but I do look at them to see what's going on.

Ian: Hmmhmm. Are there any other ways you communicate with people or other people in the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area? I don't just mean families and friends and saying hi, but any other technologies that are used, social media and messaging services and stuff?

Respondent: Not really, other than the usual email, that sort of thing, and Zoom, Teams, whatever we've got to do.

Ian: So in your councillor role, for example, if somebody got these complaints, or reporting the damage to the bridge from yesterday etc., is that an email usually?

Respondent: Normally it's telephone or- not so much email, I do get a few emails. Other things are starting to come in by Facebook messages, which I've got to say, I didn't like, I'd rather they did it by phone. So it's a variety of things, even as much as people just stop me in the street.

Ian: Facebook messages is that- so you have a Facebook page-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -and people message you on that page, is that-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: I'm not a Facebook user, so I'm not-

Respondent: No, I'm not-

Ian: -that great at-

Respondent: What they tend to do is send it by private messenger, is that right? They just send a message to me.

Ian: Yes, so they'll go onto your Facebook page, and they'll send you a direct message.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Or you get phone calls, and people will stop you in the street as well-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -which is- is that still happening during the pandemic, or did that bit go?

Respondent: No, it- well, around me own very near locality, yes, if I pop into to the shops or something like that, the Co-op or something like that, or people do even knock on your front door. (Laughter)

Ian: Hmmhmm, yes, because you're of course-

Respondent: [Crosstalk 0:29:06]-

Ian: Local people will just know because they know-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -but you do have to list your address-

Respondent: That's right, yes.

Ian: -and stuff, don't you, when you run. So you said the- I guess it was the local Labour Party or whatever, during the last bit of campaign, they pushed you to get a Facebook page.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: And did you have one before then?

Respondent: No. I've always, always steered clear of it because when I worked at the school, I was a union rep, and most of the disciplinary things I ever got involved in was to do with Facebook and misuse of it, so I never ever had one.

Ian: Hmmhmm, interesting. So you have one now, that was more your responsibility as a councillor and to do party things. And you said you use it- you don't use the account to- but with your account, you'll have a look at the local Facebook groups. Is there anything else you use it for now or is that about it?

Respondent: Now, it's just for anything related to council information, that sort of thing.

Ian: Right. So your Facebook is purely a work thing?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes, so it's just for professional things. You use it so people can get in touch with you and campaigning stuff, things like that.

Respondent: Hmmhmm.

Ian: Okay, great. So that would have been, what, 2017- no, when-

Respondent: No, just last year.

Ian: Yes, sorry, my data all over the place. Yes, okay, Right, okay. So - sorry, I'm getting stuck on my words - these local groups, like you said, the '[RECACTED]' and the '[REDCATED]' or whatever, do you ever post on these groups-

Respondent: No.

Ian: -even in that professional way about campaigning or anything?

Respondent: No.

Ian: No. So these are all groups and pages, so if you- when I say 'you', I just mean 'if one', if I were to- I've signed into a Facebook account, and I went and looked on these pages, people wouldn't know that I was there, was it? You just can go and observe and read what's happening.

Respondent: Hmmhmm.

Ian: It would only be if I liked something or commented that my presence would be known.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes. Okay. And what are the most important community places or spaces for the villages? That can include Facebook groups or things in the real world. What do you think are the most important places?

Respondent: Certainly, the Facebook groups for each of the villages have a good up-take, they've got a good membership, and that's the way of getting information around at the moment. What I don't like about them, and why I don't get involved in them is that the comments will usually lead to a real- I don't know, sometimes it can be very- go down the wrong road, that sort of thing.

And when I look at them to look at what's going on in the community, what I don't like is the fact that everybody can complain about something in these comments, but they don't report them to where they should be reported to.

Ian: Hmmhmm. What would be an example of that, that you can think of?

Respondent: Well, anti-social behaviour again, anything. Burglaries are something where they'll not report them to the police, but they're just asking everybody else for information, etc. So it channels things away from the- moves things away from the proper channels sometimes.

Ian: Hmmhmm, that's interesting. Is this just like resident to resident?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: So I can understand that example you gave of people saying, “My house got burgled. Did anyone hear anything or say anything?” But you say people complaining about things, is that still resident to resident? Or is that sometimes when organisations might post things or different groups might-

Respondent: No, it's usually resident to resident.

Ian: Okay. So people complain about various sorts of anti-social behaviour or whatever on there.

Respondent: Yes-

Ian: And what would be-

Respondent: - or think, “Oh, the village is just a tip. It's a total tip, there is dog mess everywhere,” and that would be a whole chain of complaints. But I don't know, you just get a bit despondent sometimes when people have all these complaints to make, but they won't go to the right channels to report them.

Ian: Hmmhmm. What would be the proper channels for reporting this kind of stuff?

Respondent: Well, certainly online to NCC if it's anti-social behaviour or anything to do with council matters, potholes, everything. Getting people to actually report something is really difficult, and they'll complain about the state of things, but then when you organise litter picks and stuff like that, then maybe six people turn up.

Ian: Hmmhmm. There are a couple of things I think I want to go back to. So the council have set up an official channel, "Please report stuff here," which very few people use, but people are doing it on the local Facebook groups. So do you think if the council had the resources, what they should do is get a list of all these local Facebook groups and get-

Respondent: Yes, I don't know-

Ian: -someone to sit and go through them?

Respondent: - if it's- It's weird because I sat in a meeting last week with a gentleman called [ANON], who's the new head of digital delivery for the council, and it looks as if they're looking to review all this sort of website and how people report stuff and all this, that, and the other. So that's a fundamental review going on there all about digital and whatever.

But I tell you what I did pick up was that they were quite happy to do ICT support to third parties and stuff, service level agreements, digital well-being, that they would come out and do stuff. Now it doesn't seem to come down to us. He was talking about sessions for digital skills. and that's something that [REDACTED ORG NAME] is looking at as well. So I always have the idea that we're all doing the same thing, but coming in different directions.

Ian: Hmmhmm. Yes, I think that's a common perception from all over the country that people have. So they're doing this review into digital because they've got a new head of digital delivery. If they came to ask you what they should do, what would you say?

Respondent: I really don't know, I wouldn't have the answer to it. The meeting was with parish councils, and one parish councillor said, “Well, can we not link the two where somebody can use the parish website to report stuff, and it'll be linked in automatically?” And that was a possibility. And I thought, “Well, I don't think that many people actually get on and look at a parish website either.”

I don't know what the easy way to be able to report something is, whether they could do it through a Facebook page or what, I don't know.

Ian: So do you think if the council made a Facebook page and said- rather than it just being for this village, or this town, “This is a big, huge Facebook page for all of the county. Everyone come and do what you've been doing in your little groups in here.” Do you think that would work?

Respondent: I don't know, I really don't know.

Ian: I guess the council do have a presence on Facebook.

Respondent: Yes, they do.

Ian: And again, do you know what happens? Do you ever visit those pages or get reports from people about what happens on those pages?

Respondent: No. I think you can spend half your life looking at all these Facebook pages, you know what I mean?

Ian: Hmmhmm. When I was there, actually, that was when the website was getting- it'll probably happen every kind of 10 years, but that was when the website was getting completely restructured and rebuilt. And we were going, “The council needs to be on Twitter, the council needs to be on Facebook.” But I might go and have a look at those things and see how they are used.

Respondent: Yes. The NCC website I don't think is particularly user friendly, and that's obviously what they're looking at now, and that's from somebody that uses it quite a bit, I suppose, so yes.

Ian: So we've talked about the fact that you try and keep up to date with what's happening in the area. and I've asked you how you find out what's going on in the area. Is there any information that you get from all these different sources, are there any that you can trust more than others? Or do you see all information across these things as equal?

Respondent: I see it all as equal.

Ian: Hmmhmm. So you said that there is a lot of complaining in the Facebook groups, and people complaining in channels that aren't the proper channels. Is there any other stuff you see there that you think isn't useful or appropriate for the local groups?

Respondent: No, I don't think so, but like I say, I don't delve into them in any great detail. I'll look in to see what's happening, I don't tend to go through all the comments and things that things will give rise to. I don't want to be there, basically.

Ian: Hmmhmm, I'll come back to that. But what do you think is like a really good use of these local groups? What sort of stuff do you think is the real positive and good thing about these groups?

Respondent: Well, that was the giving of information, sending people- or just that community information, certainly during the pandemic. And I think people are more likely to use a residents' group, rather than go on to a parish council website or something like that. They just don't do it. So that was a way of getting information out about the meals on wheels and stuff that was going on in the villages, that sort of thing.

Ian: Hmmhmm, yes. So when you said community information, is-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -that what you mean? So things that are happening that people might want to know about, like events or activities or services.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes. And is that a big part of these groups, or is it more the other stuff that you think is less appropriate for the Facebook groups?

Respondent: No, I think it is a big part of them.

Ian: Hmmhmm. And what else happens? So you've got this real, what you described as positive stuff, people saying, “This service is happening,” “This event is happening,” and then at the other end, you've got people complaining about things. What other stuff happens in between that on these groups, from your experience?

Respondent: A lot of buying and selling.

Ian: Okay. All right, yes, okay.

Respondent: Yes. They use it as a swap shop type of thing, I suppose.

Ian: So if we were thinking about if we could start again and make a local online thing, do you think the buying and selling stuff would be an important part of that, or something that-

Respondent: it seems to be-

Ian: -could happen elsewhere?

Respondent: -in these local pages. But I think there is always the danger that they take over what the page is predominantly there for. Quite a few of the local groups have put warnings on saying, “You can only advertise a business once a week,” or something like that, that type of thing. So I think trying to separate them, maybe? I don't know.

Ian: Yes, no, that's really interesting. [So you think 0:43:37] some of the people that run the groups think that people who are trying to buy and sell things is sometimes a misuse of-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -of the group. And why do you think people choose to do that? Rather than just from their own profile say, “I'm selling whatever, a kids' bike-”

Respondent: I don't know.

Ian: -they'll- yes. So when you do see useful information from this group, so you have a look in the group, and you'll see that the food delivery thing is happening. What do you do if you see something, useful information like that? Do you take any actions?

Respondent: Well, yes, it would depend what I found. If I find something that that that needs council intervention sort of thing, then I can actually go have a walk around and see what it is people are chattering about on there, and approach it that way. I don't know, it's just a 'keep up with local events and what's going on' really,

Ian: Have you ever saw something on one of the Facebook groups and thought, “I need to share that somewhere else or tell other people?” Or have you ever passed on information in any way?

Respondent: I tend to pass on stuff which [REDACTED ORG NAME] Big Local will be doing or [NON ORG] groups or council- the alerts from the council, I'll share that sort of thing, any informative type of stuff.

Ian: Hmm, that you share into the groups. But is there anything that you'll see in one of the groups, something that is informative or whatever, but it isn't run through you, is there any time you'll see something and think, “Oh, I'll share that somewhere else by calling someone or emailing someone or sharing it in a different group?” Do you ever kind of take something-

Respondent: No.

Ian: -and share it elsewhere? No.

Respondent: No, not really, other than putting the likes of [REDACTED ORG NAME]- if they've got a post about a community event or something, then I will share that to my page, that type of thing, but that's as far as that goes.

Ian: Yes, I think that's what I was asking about. Yes, great. And you said you decide if something's useful and worth sharing based on if it's like informative. What makes you see something and go, “Oh, that's something I need to share that's informative”? Could you just explain a little bit about that?

Respondent: Well, if it's something that the community needs to be aware of. Next week, for instance, we've got some kids events planned and stuff, so I'll do that, just to remind people that they're on. And if there are surgeries, then that sort of thing goes on, or anything that is going on at the local library or anything like that, that you can promote, that type of thing.

Ian: Hmmhmm. How would you characterise all of those things? Are they all community activities, I guess? Is that-

Respondent: Yes. I'll probably post something about the bridge that I was on about before just saying to people, “Well, just please be aware, these bits are missing, so keep a little toddler on a tight rein if you're walking across there,” that type of thing.

Ian: And you would do that as an informative thing, just saying, “By the way-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: -”I know about this thing, and just be careful.”

Respondent: Hmmhmm.

Ian: Would you ever do something a bit more of a question, like say, “I've noticed this damage on the bridge, does anyone know what happened?” Would you ever go that way?

Respondent: I don't know. In a roundabout way, yes. We've had it before where there has been damaged to the bus shelters, so, “Why are people doing this? Do you realise this is costing more money?” And then if you put it in that respect, then people sometimes come back to you with some information.

Ian: Great, okay. So you've [talked 0:48:42] a little bit how you use the Facebook pages and your own Facebook page. What about the- those two [REDACTED PLACE NAME] groups, are they the only two- the local groups that you-

Respondent: There are two [REDACTED PLACE NAME] ones, and an [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] one, I think. Obviously, I have other groups that aren't connected to the communities that I'll look at occasionally, obviously, Labour group (Laughter) and that type of thing, and the council Facebook page, yes.

Ian: Hmmhmm. We've talked about- sorry, I'm just checking my questions because we're doing [ \_\_\_ 0:49:35]- Yes, oh, you said that the Facebook groups have got a real good, like you said, a real good uptake, so each of the groups are widely used. Do you think they are representative of the villages?

Respondent: I think they probably have a much wider membership, because if you look at them, they can have thousands of followers where there just typically aren’t that many people in each village. If it was purely and truly '[REDACTED PLACE NAME] Community', then there wouldn't be that many people in it, so it obviously stretches further.

Ian: Who would you think these extra people are? So say that 500 people live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and there are 700 people on the group, would those other 200 people be people that used to live there or...?

Respondent: Could possibly be, or otherwise its people - and this is where the advertising bit of that, I think, comes in - in the local area, not typically [REDACTED PLACE NAME], but in the local surrounding area that's got businesses maybe, then then they're in there and promoting those occasionally as well.

Ian: Hmmhmm. All right, so what sort of businesses? Is that like-

Respondent: We get adverts coming on for cafes in the area, restaurants, pubs, anything really, yes.

Ian: Hmmhmm, yes, okay. Do they get a lot of interaction? So say a restaurant is not even in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], it might be- where would that typically be? In one of the other three-

Respondent: Oh, we do get some-

Ian: -villages, or...?

Respondent: -restaurant- Quite regularly, there is one comes up which is in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] for Sunday lunches, and The Plough, the pub in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. But it will go as far as- there is also one regularly comes up from Guide Post, Bedlington, that area.

And I think it expanded when people were doing the delivery rather than people having to go and sit in them, when the businesses were closed.

Ian: Hmm. Is it worth it a pub in Guide Post advertising in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]? Would people go to that pub or...?

Respondent: Well, it's not a pub, it's a cafe, but what they're really pushing is still the delivery side of things. To be honest, they'd have to go somewhere because there isn't a cafe or a restaurant in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], so you've got to travel out of it.

Ian: Yes. Well, maybe if they were doing deliveries that might have been really popular then, and people might have-

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: I've lost my trail of thought, sorry. So businesses will promote stuff they're doing in the groups. Apart from that, is it all people that live in the area, or do you think there are other people from other areas?

Respondent: I think there has got to be people from other areas. Like you say, it might be that's moved away or that don't live too far away. I'm not sure.

Ian: And that would just be-

Respondent: Because certainly, they have greater number of followers than what would actually be living in the village itself.

Ian: Hmmhmm. So that's dealt with who is in the group. Who do you think is not in the group who actually do live in the villages? Do you think everyone is?

Respondent: No, I don't think everybody is at all. I think possibly a lot of the more elderly people wouldn't be in it. And I don't know about the younger side of things because I'm led to believe, and I don't know if it's true, that Facebook was losing in its grip, and they're going to other things, so I don't know. I don't think everybody has access to Facebook at all.

Ian: And is that always, do you think, just a choice or a- because everyone in those areas is got connection to broadband and stuff these days, haven't they?

Respondent: Well, I haven't had it for three weeks, (Laughter) so you are lucky that I’m here this morning. I've still got no flaming phone. But I don't know, quite a lot of the elderly people, I think, won't use it at all.

Ian: Hmmhmm. Like the head of digital at the council said, do you think that's something about just if they learnt the skills, they might? Or do you think that's just something where people are more reluctant?

Respondent: I don't know, I think it's the learning of the skills for a start, but I think it's also equipment and actually owning something like that. People might own a mobile phone, it might not necessarily be a smartphone or anything up to that capability.

Ian: Hmmhmm. But say we created a service that was- say we could say, those things that you find and you think they're important and you share them on your Facebook page, do you think if these people who have not smartphones but just mobile phones, got sent stuff by text message, that might be a useful thing?

Respondent: Yes, hmmhmm.

Ian: What do you think about text messages? Because especially during the pandemic, there has been a lot of kind of scams and things that are fake. If you get a text message-

Respondent: [I don't know 0:56:16].

Ian: -off someone you don't know, do you trust it, or do you-

Respondent: No.

Ian: -like me, think, “No, no, no.”

Respondent: No, I just delete it. (Laughter)

Ian: Yes. Can I just go back to what you- you only joined Facebook a year ago because you felt like you had to for your job, fair enough. And you did say that you didn't- one of the reasons you would have never got a Facebook account is because of your role in the teaching union.

Could you talk a bit more about your- I guess, at some point, it seemed everyone around us were getting Facebook accounts. What has kept you away from Facebook?

Respondent: I never really had any interest in be perfectly honest. And like I said, at school, people were regularly hauled over the coals for putting what was seen as disrespectful comments and stuff on that the school would pick up on, bringing them into disrepute, that sort of thing. And it's just hard to control those comments that go on like that.

I don't think people realise how open it is and what people can actually see or whatever, I don't know. I've got no qualms with it as an information thing etc., but I'm not comfortable with most of it, I've got to be honest.

Ian: Yes. So your presence on Facebook, like you've said, is just a professional thing. It's the councillor, and you really limit it about- So yes, how much of yourself do you share on Facebook? How would you describe that? If I went and found your Facebook page- haven't got a Facebook account, so I can't, but would I see much of like you or is that a real careful image?

Respondent: It's a real careful image, you wouldn't see much of me at all. Probably a little bit during the election time, but other than that, no. And I find it quite time consuming just to keep up with it, to be honest. You've got to make a commitment to doing it, and you've got to have something interesting to put on it. You can't make a post just for the sake of making a post, so-

Ian: Yes. Obviously, some people use Facebook even if it is just for their job, but are really, really active. Apart from the fact that you said it's real hard work just thinking about what to write, are there any other reasons why you aren't as active on Facebook and treat it just as a professional rather than a personal thing?

Respondent: No, I think that's just a personal [ \_\_\_ 0:59:46] thing, the way I've been brought up to look at it. I never saw the need for it, to be perfectly honest. But typically in the minority, because I think most people will be looking at it now, but I don't know. What would the aim of this thing be within [REDACTED ORG NAME]? Is it a way to get information out to people, or is there a better way to do it? I don't know.

Ian: Yes, exactly. This is why I'm asking these questions, I think. It's interesting to think about what people's motivations would be for posting things, what people's motivations would be if they had to get an account, yes. So yes, that's why I'm asking these questions, I think, to get at that picture.

So I'm especially interested in people that are very new to Facebook and use it in a very limited way, because I think if we can find out why people are really reluctant to use Facebook, we might, if we are going to do something new, not hit the same problems again.

So what is it about Facebook, as opposed to- say if [REDACTED ORG NAME] made a website, and it had loads of local information on it, stuff like that, and you didn't need to sign into it, you could just go have a look, that would- obviously, you'd be comfortable using that.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: So what is it about Facebook that you're less comfortable about using? If that's [Crosstalk 1:01:41]. (Laughter)

Respondent: I just don't have an understanding of why people are so reliant on it in a personal sense, not the information gathering sense, that thing that's out there to give you information, but to have these friends that you chat to and stuff like that, it just doesn't compute for me. I'd rather get on the phone and speak to them more, or meet them some other way, and I think it's privacy as well.

Ian: Yes, privacy. What's your understanding of that, of like privacy and Facebook? Just because obviously, people say- I might not have an understanding of what you mean when you say privacy, because it means different things to different people. So what are your concerns about privacy on Facebook, I guess, is the question?

Respondent: Just how much data is shared and where it's shared, if you have personal data once you've got that account.

Ian: And when you say your data is shared, what sort of data, do you think, and who is it shared with? Just briefly.

Respondent: Well, it can be anything from- you can tell by going on it and all these adverts you get on for different sorts of shops. So-

Ian: Yes, so it's the information to companies.

Respondent: -they're targeting the- Yes.

Ian: So I guess from what you said, you don't think it's worth it, because a lot of people that use Facebook know that their personal data is sold to companies. And they might think, “That's fine, I'm comfortable with that, it's worth it.” So I guess you're just saying, it's not worth it for you.

Respondent: Well, I'm very wary of it, put it that way.

Ian: Yes, good. We've been an hour now, but I just have a couple more questions if you have the time. Is that all right?

Respondent: Yes, fine.

Ian: And these ones that are a bit more just blue sky-y, I guess, but...If we were to start a whole new online space for the [REDACTED ORG NAME] area, what qualities and functions would it have?

Respondent: Well, I think it has to be informative, it has to point people in the right direction, if they need any help, for instance, where do you go for this, where do you get this, etc.? And I'll tell you one thing that comes to mind recently where- and we're talking about Facebook here, we don't have a post office in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] or [REDACTED PLACE NAME], they both closed.

What we have got is a mobile post office which comes into the villages on a Thursday afternoon, I think. Now, for a while, during the pandemic, there was a real sort of upheaval with this. It wasn't turning up, it was turning up at different times, etc. And there is absolutely no way you can get that information out to the people who use it. I would ring the manager and put something on Facebook, but people just don't particularly see it.

And it's predominantly the elderly, again, that would use that service. Some people don't even know that service exists because I've seen- when I posted an update on the times that it was coming into the village, they didn't even know about it to start with.

So it's a total lack of one place to get that information. And I don't know how you would do that, to bring everybody in. I don't know.

Ian: Hmmhmm, so what-

Respondent: There was one week when I rang the post office. They said, “Oh, well, the times have changed.” I said, “Well, nobody knows,” “Well, it’s on the website. But [well 1:06:10], who goes on the Post Office website? Nobody.

And of course, as soon as everybody found out the times had changed, they changed them back because the original driver was back from being sick. So it was just a real, real mess with the times of that, that you can't get out to people.

And it's like- I wouldn't say urgent, it's not life threatening, but- although it could be, but the likes of that where it's can[REDACTED ORG NAME]ed at the last minute, or if a bus is can[REDACTED ORG NAME]ed even, something to stop people standing at bus stops, waiting for three hours for something that's not coming. You need a, I don't know, like ticky tacky going around the village. (Laughter)

Ian: Yes, that's interesting, because when we're talking about what information is important before, obviously, you talked about events and activities, but there you've talked about things like the times buses are turning up-

Respondent: Yes, something that crops-

Ian: -if buses are late.

Respondent: -up unexpected, or if there is a- an accident shuts the road somewhere and you can't get out that way, something to just to warn people to go a different route, that type of thing. But how do you make that information accessible to everybody is- I don't know.

Ian: Yes, I think we talk about those as wicked problems, problems people have been trying to solve for many years and nobody's got close to. So when you said a thing of going around the village, is that-

Respondent: I think some bus stations have them, these- bus stops, when you have a-

Ian: Like a public screen?

Respondent: Yes. On a simple example, we used to have one in the reception area of the school where notices would be put on for people to read as they same in the main door.

Ian: About the school?

Respondent: Yes. So it's finding somewhere publicly accessible, I suppose.

Ian: Yes, that's what I like about these questions, just get people to think what- even if you can't think how it would happen, what would be a good solution? And so just to follow up on that, if we had a ticker screen or a big screen that is accessible to everyone, where would that be?

Respondent: Oh, God knows, (Laughter) I have no idea. Well, down to a lack of public buildings, because of that. You can see where [REDACTED PLACE NAME] have a village hall, so that's....But we've got old-fashioned notice boards that people don't read either, so you drag a horse to water, I suppose. Where would it be? I don't know.

Ian: Yes, that's great. Well, that has been really interesting for me, so thank you. Have you got any questions about anything we spoke about or anything more to say?

Respondent: No, just that is always my worry with anything digital and that different organisations are working to the same thing, but coming from different areas. And I think there is always the chance that we're just doubling up on things, do you know what I mean?

Ian: Hmmhmm. And what's the solution to that? I know communication in a-

Respondent: Like their communication, yes-

Ian: -very general sense.

Respondent: - between them.

Ian: Hmmhmm. Excellent. Can I just ask as well, just at the end, is there anyone else that you think would be a good person to speak to that I could- to do this kind of interview with? Is there anyone that comes to mind that you think would be interesting to get those perspectives, different perspectives from?

Respondent: Within any of the villages, or...?

Ian: Yes, all, across four villages, yes.

Respondent: Yes, so who are you-

Ian: [ \_\_\_ 1:10:35] [ANON].

Respondent: -speaking to at the minute?

Ian: [ANON] has organised [ANON], [ANON] Johnson, you and someone else.

Respondent: I think-

Ian: But all people from the partnership. So people that aren't on the partnership, perhaps.

Respondent: Yes, I was going to say, somebody who has absolutely nothing to do with [REDACTED ORG NAME] probably. I don't know, just a random member of the public.

Ian: How do I speak to random members of the public?

Respondent: I don't know, if we could get somebody that would answer them, then I'm quite happy to sit on a Zoom session in order to facilitate that for you if, if that would be of any help.

Ian: Yes, okay, I'll speak to [ANON], actually, and see what her thoughts are because I do want to speak to people that aren't the active people doing things. I want to speak to people that are just- [are 1:11:33] maybe the people that sell kids' bikes-

Respondent: Joe Bloggs.

Ian: -on the Facebook page and things like that. But I do not want to go into the Facebook pages and go, “Does anyone want to speak to me?” because I don't think that's the right approach.

Respondent: No, erm...

Ian: I'll speak to [ANON] and see what she thinks., but thanks for offering to support that in some way.

Respondent: I've had a lot of Facebook interaction with a lady in the village. We had a big problem with planning for sheds, this just erupted. There were 80-odd people in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] got enforcement orders for sheds in the front gardens. It took off on Facebook like wildfire. So that was something that I was looking at constantly.

And the people commented and stuff on that situation on there, so there are a few residents that will put stuff out there on Facebook, but...

Ian: Yes, I think I'll need to scratch my head a bit and have a think about the best way to try and speak to some people, because these are- yes, we need to speak to a range of people, really, to get the right picture. But some people are easier to arrange speaking to than others.

Respondent: Well, yes. And certainly, going back to the thing that I said before was the elderly, where this impacted on them a lot, and they don't tend to use the Facebook, I don't think. I think they probably do more now because they've maybe had to just to keep in touch with their own family and relations, that type of thing, but-

Ian: Yes, I was wondering there might be the benefit of trying to do stuff on Zoom with some people and doing some people in groups rather than one-to-one.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: I guess there are some big spaces at [NON ORG] where we could set people socially distanced and do a focus group kind of thing. But yes, I'll speak to [ANON] about setting stuff like that up because people sometimes feel more comfortable speaking in a group. Or if groups are happening, if older people are having coffee mornings and stuff like that, I could show up at the end of one of them and try and speak to people as a group maybe.

But I'll have a think, but if you do think of anything like that, and you can just send me a quick email and-

Respondent: Yes, no bother.

Ian: -even if it's just something where you haven't put me in touch, but you just say, “Maybe try these people,” and I'll follow up myself. If you think of anything like that, just any people that I might easily miss, especially, just send me an email, and I'll do my best to speak to as many people as possible.

Respondent: Okay.

Ian: Well, thanks again for your time and-

Respondent: All right.

Ian: -for answering the questions-

Respondent: Well, I hope they weren't all daft answers-

Ian: -I really appreciate it.

Respondent: -but there we go. (Laughter)

Ian: None of them were. All right, thank you very much-

Respondent: Okay, cheers.

Ian: -and have a great day.

Respondent: Right, cheers, Ian.

Ian: All right.

Respondent: Thanks then, bye.

Ian: Thanks. bye.

END AUDIO

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