**File:** **P6\_interview**  
**Duration:** **1:16:02**  
**Date:** **30/09/2021**  
**Typist:** **839**

START AUDIO

Ian: Okay, I think we’re recording now. Oh, it says recording pending.

Respondent: Recording has started, I’ve got that on mine, yes.

Ian: Okay, yes, everyone must have to give permission, it takes a while. Okay, great. Now that we’re recording, yes, just to say, because you didn’t send the email confirmation, you can send that through afterwards as well but…

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes, just can you say that you understand the nature of the project and that we’re recording this conversation and that you’ve got the opportunity to ask questions at any time and also the opportunity to stop what we’re doing and ask me to delete your contribution. I can do that any time.

Respondent: Yes, I’m happy with that Ian. My name is [ \_\_\_ 00:00:48] and I’m happy. I’ve read the requirements and the conditions that Ian sent me and I’m happy for this to be recorded and used in accordance with that email.

Ian: Perfect, ex[REDACTED ORG NAME]ent. Okay, so I’ve told you a little bit about the project. I’ll just get straight into some questions and it’ll, hopefully, just make sense as we go. First off, which village do you live in and how long have you lived there?

Respondent: I live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and I’ve been living here for 10 years.

Ian: Ex[REDACTED ORG NAME]ent. In your own words, what are the main differences between the four villages?

Respondent: The main differences, what, between [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME], and [REDACTED PLACE NAME]?

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: I think the biggest difference, probably, is that [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is an odd village in that it’s… At certain times of the year, it’s dominated by tourists. The number of caravans… There are two caravan parks in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It’s something like 10 to 1 in terms of the number of caravans versus the number of dwellings in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. That’s probably the biggest difference in terms of the people in [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Obviously [REDACTED PLACE NAME]- I lived in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as a kid, I was raised in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] was very much based on the mining community. It has changed significantly, I think, since the mines closed. [REDACTED PLACE NAME], the same. [REDACTED PLACE NAME], very similar although I think [REDACTED PLACE NAME] attracted more of a more diverse population because it became almost like a commuter place. Cheaper housing, probably, than Morpeth and you’d get into Newcastle and Morpeth quite easily. I think there was a different demographic of people living in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], certainly compared with [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

[REDACTED PLACE NAME], it’s a small community. Generally, I think that the sort of… It’s not a young community. I think most people are, I would guess, 40s/50s/60s. You know, that sort of age group, maybe even older.

Ian: You said you were raised in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Is it [RIVER] not [RIVER], it’s [RIVER] isn't it?

Respondent: [RIVER], it’s [RIVER]. The River [RIVER].

Ian: I know.

Respondent: It’s [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: I keep getting told, you know, and it doesn’t stick. My excuse is my sister is called [ANON] and it’s spelled the same way. I think my vocal memory just goes to it. [REDACTED PLACE NAME]-

Respondent: I mean there’re loads of people call it… I’ve heard it [REDACTED PLACE NAME], you know, there’s all kinds of stuff. There is a [ANON PLACE NAME] in [ANON PLACE NAME].

Ian: Yes, but spelled [REDACTED SPELLING]?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: I used to work for Northumberland Council when I was younger. There’re a lot of place names that, once you hear locals say it compared to how it’s written on the page, you’re like, “Oh wow.”

Respondent: Yes, yes. (Laughter)

Ian: You said you were brought up in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], so have you always lived in this area all the way through or did you move away and come back?

Respondent: I moved away when I was… I did a craft apprenticeship, engineering craft apprenticeship, at Blyth Power Station. Blyth Power Station was on the decline. I ended up moving very reluctantly, I didn’t want to move. I tried my best to get back as well, but couldn’t so I ended up… I moved to [ANON PLACE] and I worked in a place called [ANON PLACE NAME] Power Station for 35 years. Then we decided, when I decided to leave [ANON PLACE NAME], that we would move back to the North East. We bought the house in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] 10 years ago and then transitioned back when I ended up finishing work in 2014.

Ian: Great. Thanks for explaining that, I just wondered if you’d lived here through all the way because [Crosstalk 00:05:27]-

Respondent: No, I’ve been more time in [ANON PLACE]. It’s getting now where the balance is now about 50/50 because I’ve been back in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] for coming on 10 years but, yes, a lot of years in [ANON PLACE]. Both my kids were born in [ANON PLACE] so…

Ian: Great. I hope they’ve got really interesting accents then if they’re-

Respondent: Yes, yes, strong [ANON PLACE] accents.

Ian: I always like it when children have different accents from their parents because they’ve gone to school and had influence and stuff. I just always think that’s a lovely thing. Alright then. What, if anything, do you think the four villages have in common?

Respondent: I suppose it’s that, I mean it’s a bit crass to say it but I think it’s that… I think there’s definitely that sort of working class thread through them, I would definitely say. Even in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], I think most of people are not well off. There’s definitely a working class thread through all the villages, although I think that is changing. If you go back to when I was a kid, it was extremely strong when the mines were operating. I think, now, it’s changing but I think that’s probably… I would describe all four villages as predominantly working class, working class people not people with a lot of money.

I think that the Northumbrian thing in all of them- That’s what attracted me back to the area, that kind of… You know, you just feel as if- I always felt as if, “I’m a Northumbrian.” I was born in Newbiggin and lived in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] for 15 years, raised in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] pretty much, then moved back to Newbiggin for a short period, and then moved away. I always felt as if I belonged in Northumbria, that’s why we moved back. I think a lot of people feel that. If you live in the area, you know, I think you feel an affinity with it.

Ian: Absolutely, yes. How would you describe your role in the community at the moment?

Respondent: I suppose I’m kind of involved. I would say I’m an activist on issues that interest me but I don’t… Because I still- I think I mentioned earlier that I retired but I ended up going back to work. Until recently I had two jobs actually, I was a… I’ve just finished a three-year term as a non-exec director with the NHS. That’s just finished but I’m still working part-time on a project in Wales, a project to covert a power station. I haven’t got as much time as I thought I would have. I really wanted to get more involved in parish council and that kind of stuff. I think it’s-

Ian: Sorry, it’s my dog.

Respondent: (Laughter) It’s alright, ours does the same.

Ian: He’s only this big as well, you wouldn’t think.

Respondent: Yes, I’m probably not as active as I thought I would be but I… I think it was about 2015, something like that. I set up this Facebook group. Essentially, I set it up because I kind of felt- I mean I was starting to use Facebook quite a lot, just to keep in touch with family. I looked at some of the other groups that villages had set up and thought, “This looks, really, like something that can bring communities together and help people who are coming into the village, maybe, for visits to understand the history of the village.”

That’s why I set the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times Facebook group up. It’s grown steadily, I think there’re just over 2,000 members now. There’re about, I would say there’re probably about, 300 or 400 that are fairly active, 100 to 200 that are active almost daily. You know, interacting and just talking about things, sharing photographs of the beach and [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

The other thing- Just to give you an example, there was a planning application to expand the caravan park in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Towers. I basically led a group of people for a joint objection into Northumberland County Council. I, essentially, procured that support through the Facebook group from local people in the village and people who live fairly close and cared about the fact that potentially there were even more caravans and more people going to arrive in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] which was…

On busy days it’s crazy, I think people… Certainly residents, most residents I would say, come to the end of their tether. Large expansions of the caravan sites, I think, will be- Well are being resisted. I agree with it, so I led that protest with an objection letter that I think, in the end, there was about 80 people signing onto.

That’s what I do. As I say, I think… I have considered joining the parish council but I haven’t got time to do it and do it properly. That’s one of the key things- I occasionally go to parish council meetings, not very often these days but I have in the past. I always felt that engagement between the parish council and the community, the resident community, was… They weren’t trying, basically, to understand what residents wanted from their parish council. I did my best to influence that from outside.

I thought setting the Facebook group up would help to just encourage communication. Since then, actually, there’s been a major change of people, in the last three or four months, on the parish council.

They’ve just set up their own Facebook page. That doesn’t allow people to actually send communications in and debate, I don’t think, adequately but it’s a start. It’s good progress from where we were, which was basically… You know, there were a group of parish councillors who said, “If you don’t come to the meetings that means you don’t care.” (Laughter)

Ian: Yes?

Respondent: Yes, which is like, a bit, kind of a dinosaur’s attitude.

Ian: Yes. Do you think the parish council’s Facebook group addresses that problem in any way then?

Respondent: It’s not a group, it’s a page. I think the way it’s set up… It’s new. You know, I want to be fair to them because I know them and I keep in touch with them. I know the woman who is actually leading the Facebook communication side of it, she keeps in touch with me because she knows I run the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times group and she knows I understand Facebook quite well.

It’s a page. I think, for some reason, they decided to do that rather than to set up a group. I think the page doesn’t allow anybody to post anything, so it’s a one-way communication which is never going to be as effective as a group.

Of course, I’ve learned a lot about the dynamic of a Facebook group. You know, you’ve got to be quite strict, and I am, about the rules. I just will not allow negative and abusive, antagonistic, discussion and behaviour. I have to use my judgement as to where I think people are just behaving like trolls. Basically, you know, I cut it off. Most of those people, after a discussion, end up leaving or get kicked out. I think you’ve got to have that.

I think that challenge, for a parish council, is obviously different. There are legal issues around parish council communications as well, I’m guessing. I haven’t read guidance, I haven’t read any government guidance on it but I’m sure there is some somewhere. I don’t understand exactly why they’ve done that. I certainly would’ve set up a group and I would’ve tried to manage, tried to encourage, two-way communications between residents and the parish council. They don’t seem to have done that as step one. I think, maybe, this is just… It’s sort of walk before you run probably, I hope it is anyway.

Ian: You’ve said loads of interesting things I want to come back to actually. I’m going to just abandon my list of questions. Going back to… I don’t really use Facebook so I’m not really aware of the differences between pages and groups. Clearly, from what you’ve said, groups a bit more open, a bit more…

Respondent: Yes, two-way.

Ian: Two-way, great. Yours is a group?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: You talked about moderating. First of all, is that your job, are you the sole person that moderates that group?

Respondent: Yes, I am. The reason I’ve done that… No one has ever come to me and said, “I’d be happy to help.” I know that people would be happy to help, and I know some people- I just feel like, when you’re using- When a degree of judgement is needed, it’s best done by one person because I think…

I think I could probably count the number of people that I’ve had to remove from the group on one hand. There’re over 2,000 members. You know, it’s probably 5 or 6. It’s got to the point where what I normally do is engage with them, privately, on Facebook Messenger and explain why I’ve removed a post and explain that it’s not in accordance with the group rules that are clearly stated.

We’ve only got two rules, one is, ‘No selling.’ The other one is that things should be positive in nature and contributions must not be abusive or attack individuals or opinions aggressively and antagonistically. That’s a difficult judgement to make because you’ll judge it differently to me, I’m sure. Everyone judges that differently. That’s one of the reasons why I’ve always kind of… It’s not a massive job. If it was one of these groups that has 10,000/20,000 members I’d probably end up packing the bloody thing in, to be honest with you. You know, it’s at a point where I kind of…

There are one or two people, actually, that are quite helpful and will highlight when someone breaks a rule. There’re probably three or four people who are quite active and they understand the rules and they’ll report something to me and then I’ll read it, generally I agree with them so the post gets removed and the individuals get informed that it’s not in accordance with the rules because it’s just too negative.

Ian: Okay. So these three or four people, is that something you’ve made a pre-arrangement with people and said, “Could you look out?” or did that just happen?

Respondent: It just happened. What I have always done, and I do it fairly regularly in the group, particularly when there’s a post…

About three weeks ago there was a post that got really out of hand. There were people really being negative and awful to each other. I explained. I removed the whole post, all the comments and threads and everything, and I explained why I’d done it to the group just in a short summary of why I did it. I also had a discussion with the person who raised the initial post as well, via Facebook Messenger.

What I always do, whenever- Again, I’ve probably only done this about, maybe, four or five times. Had to explain, “This post has been taken down, this is why. I just want to remind everybody about the rules. This is about positive, we’re not having negative, antagonistic, behaviour within this group because it’s depressing.” I always say to people, “I need group member’s help to report anything that they feel doesn’t comply with the rules.” Since doing that, people are reporting posts. So it’s kind of using the community, the group community, to police itself with me as the final arbiter.

Ian: Yes. In terms of being like a group admin, you’re the sole admin?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Yes, okay. Just going back to that, it’s fairly clear from what you’ve said so far and from your rules but, what sort of posts would you class as…? First of all, what sort of posts…? I think you’ve made it pretty clear but just reiterate, what sorts of posts would you just remove altogether?

Respondent: I think a post which, if you like, cascades into… I mean generally… The last post that I removed, I think, related to the parking problem in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. Everyone blames one another. I don’t know if you know [REDACTED PLACE NAME] but there’s a café called the Drift Café in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It’s right on the coast road, it’s a narrow road, and it’s very popular. People will park, it’s not far from the carpark, the car parking in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is completely inadequate so it’s ridiculous. It’s something that we’ve raised through parish council, we’d like to try to get something done about that.

Someone raised a post complaining about parking. Then it just cascades into, just, one negative comment after another. That’s the kind of thing that I don’t want to… I think one of the reasons- In my explanation as to why I removed that post, I said, “These are all issues that have been debated again and again, I’ve allowed that debate to happen in the past but it’s just repeating the same old stuff and negative. It ends up where people just get swamped by it and…” Yes, so that was an example of a post that I took down.

An example was that someone recently put on a comment about the Drift Café and attacked the owner with a comment, so that came straight off. You know, it called him an arrogant B. That kind of completely unfounded attack, I won’t allow anything like that.

Ian: So that’s kind of like personal attacks on individuals, complaints- Not just complaints but complaints that are bringing back up the same complex issues, like parking, again and again.

Respondent: I think the other thing, as well, is the rules… The objective of the group is to share positive educational experiences that make people happy. I can send you the rules that we’ve written or that I’ve written.

Ian: Okay, that would be great.

Respondent: Essentially it’s… What I didn’t want to do is create a complaints noticeboard, I was not interested in that. What I wanted to do was to let everyone know about the positive things that [REDACTED PLACE NAME] represented and that… So that’s another reason why issues that are just whinges and complaints can just come out, I won’t have them in there because it’s got to be positive, educational, reinforcing. Make people happy, that’s the objective.

Ian: Okay, thanks for that. Yes, if you could send me the rules because I don’t access Facebook so…

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: If I was on Facebook would I be able to see your group or is it a private group?

Respondent: You’d have to ask to join.

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: Yes, it’s private.

Ian: Okay. Okay, we’re going to go back to that then. The stuff that’s clear cut, within your rules, you will just remove them. Then you’ve told me your process after you remove something. It seems fair and all the rest of it.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Are there any posts that, they’re not bad enough to remove but there is something that you personally would like to see less of? If that makes sense?

Respondent: Well I try not to do that but I think, I wouldn’t say- I mean I think if they meet that general philosophy of positive, educational, make people happy, it stays on regardless of what the topic is. Yes, so I wouldn’t take anything off unless it was not aligned with the group philosophy.

Ian: Yes. Sorry to ask it again but-

Respondent: You’re alright.

Ian: So the stuff that- You’re saying that’s not being removed because it’s following the rules, within that is there any spectrum of stuff that you think is really, really, good stuff and stuff that you would happily see less of? I guess that’s what I’m saying.

Respondent: No, no, I don’t. I mean I think there are lots of photographs- No, I don’t think there’s anything like that at all.

Ian: So if it passes-?

Respondent: Anything that’s positive, if it’s positive it’s good, it should be encouraged.

Ian: Yes, that’s fine. So it’s either…? If it’s not following the rules it’s gone, everything else on there is doing what your initial idea and philosophy was so it’s all good, yes?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: Right, so just going back to joining, so if someone asks to join the group have you got certain criteria for that?

Respondent: They must agree to the rules. To be honest, it’s something that I’ve adhered to strictly recently. Essentially, if people agree to the rules then I will allow them to come on. The other thing that I do look at… The people who request to become members, I do look at that… When the request comes in you can obviously click and look at their Facebook profile and you can see what kind of material and what kind of behaviours they’re exhibiting on their own Facebook wall in their own account. If that is available to me I will look at it and see whether or not I can see evidence of abusive behaviour, swearing, that kind of thing.

Swearing, I won’t allow that because it’s a family site. I expect people… You know, if youngsters wanted to come on and read something about the Pele Tower or the beach they should be able to do it as long as they’re supervised properly.

That’s the way I handle, if you like, that judgement as to who should be allowed in or not. They’ve got to agree to the rules. Then if there’s clearly evidence in their Facebook profile that they’re not the kind of people that I think are of a like-mind to the rest of the group then I don’t allow them in.

Ian: Do you take into account geographical-? Have people got to have lived in the village or be former residents?

Respondent: No. I had kind of… Generally, that’s the kind of people that are in the group, people who’ve got a link to it somehow. There’s a guy from Australia who used to live in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], so it’s that kind of thing. Recently there were a few people from America, actually, who asked to join the group. They made some quite positive contributions. They were just interested in understanding. I don’t know whether they were coming to the area as visitors and were just researching it and seeing what the area was like. I wouldn’t put any geographical constraints on it.

When I first set off with the group, I think, my objective was to try to get… It was local people. I think once you start to get people interested who are visiting… I suppose it’s recognising that, while I might not like the number of tourists in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], it’s a beautiful place and people are entitled to come and visit it. I think to try to help them enjoy that visit, wherever they’re coming from, is a good objective. That’s the reason why…

There’re lots of caravans, holiday homes. People will join the group before coming for a week’s holiday, and they’ll read a little bit about the Pele Tower and a little bit about the beach and… We have got quite a lot of historic information in some of the photo albums that I’ve set up in the group.

Ian: That’s interesting. So it almost becomes a bit of, I wouldn’t say a tourist guide but it’s certainly, tourist information?

Respondent: Yes. Like I said, I think, after about… Probably, I don’t know, three or four months into running the group I kind of had to make that decision. Do I want to restrict it to residents or do I want to…? Residents and local people, when I mean local I mean like 10/15 mile radius, that kind of thing. I decided that I shouldn’t do that, I shouldn’t really… I didn’t want to do that, I wanted to try to help people enjoy and understand more about [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and Northumberland.

Ian: Yes. I’m always interested in… I know Facebook, one of the things people complain about it and whatever is the order of information and stuff.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: You’ve just mentioned, there, you create albums. I guess that’s one way of organising, I guess, a chaotic amount of information.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Are there any other ways that you try to organise? Also, is it hard to organise, do Facebook just keep things in a chronological way or do they move things around based on how many people interact with them, how does that work?

Respondent: Facebook don’t do anything to it, it’s completely… There’s a framework but it’s completely down to you to use that framework. They’ve added quite novel features like mentoring and learning. If you’ve got a group member, for example, who wants to mentor people, let’s say they’re an accomplished artist or photographer and they just want to share that skill and take people out for… Or a birdwatcher, whatever. You can actually set up little subgroups and you can flag up mentors that have got specific knowledge and skills. That’s not something that we’ve done in our group but it’s possible.

I think if someone came to me and said, “I’d like to do that, I’d like to make myself known to the group as a resource knowledgeable in these areas.” I’d be more than happy to do that.

It doesn’t really… They don’t change things around, they don’t kind of… Not like dictated by the number of clicks and… You set it up and that’s how it stays. You know, so it’s fairly up- You know, it’s up to me how I set it up.

Ian: Okay. I guess, when I hear people complain, they’re talking about just their own Facebook page and how all their friends post and stuff. That gets, kind of, shuffled about. I guess, within a group, that’s not- It doesn’t affect groups. Groups are just a bit more controlled by admins, just the order of things.

Respondent: Essentially, yes, I think the… What appears on your… I think they call it a wall, Facebook wall, which is essentially your main page. It is completely… You know, it seems arbitrary sometimes. Unless you’re quite structured in terms of limiting what appears on your wall, it ends up being a right mess.

To be honest, on Facebook I don’t have many friends at all on Facebook, personal friends. I tend to stick to- For example, I don’t have any… I actually have three or four now, since I left work. I always used to disconnect Facebook from anybody that I worked with and I would always use LinkedIn for work. I’d use Facebook for, if you like, proper friends rather than Facebook friends, which is like basically… For some people it’s like, “Well make it as big a number as you can regardless.” I think my philosophy was, “That’s about family.” I’m highly restrictive on what people can see of me on Facebook other than family and genuine friends. Like I say, I used LinkedIn for work.

I can understand why people would be frustrated by how the wall appears, what appears on it, because unless… If you’ve got a massive number of friends it’ll be all over the place. You won’t know what the hell is going on because the things that they like appear. They have lots of clicks, they appear. You think, “Well I’m not interested in that, why is that on there?”

You’ve got to structure and you’ve got to use the- All the tools are there but, of course, people don’t get into the nitty-gritty of the settings and set things up to make it an effective communication device for themselves, they just… Most people are fairly passive, I would guess, and just, whatever Facebook settings are on there that’s what they take. Yes.

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: On the Facebook group, essentially, the way it’s structured, on the main page it comes up in chronological order. If someone puts a post in it comes up first, if someone makes a comment that comes to the top.

The other thing that I use quite a lot is this feature called announcements. Announcements can actually be put at the top of the page. For example, that post that I made explaining why I’d removed one of the posts, that went in as an announcement so that when people came to the group that was the first thing they saw and they had a quick read. I leave that for a couple of days and take it off, then it goes into the normal cycle. I use that but only sparingly, I don’t sort of… Yes, I very rarely use it, only when there’s clearly some value in doing it, yes.

Ian: You use Facebook with, just, close friends and family as a personal Facebook account.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: If you do an announcement in your group, for example, does that come up as the group speaking or is that you as-?

Respondent: That’s me. That’s another decision that I consciously made. You can hide behind the group name and admin but I don’t do that. When I make a post it comes up as [ \_\_\_ 00:38:40].

Ian: Right. The people who are members of the Life and Times group aren’t necessarily your friends on Facebook, they’re just members of the group you set up?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Great. That makes sense then. You said you didn’t really use Facebook to keep in touch with colleagues. You could, I guess, just become friends with everyone in the group if you wanted, I’m sure they’d all like to be your friend as you basically run it, but you keep it to the strict smaller group as your personal thing?

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: Could you talk about the reasons or the rationale behind that?

Respondent: I think because I don’t want to be sharing… I want to be able to share things like photographs of family and photographs of my granddaughter. I wouldn’t want to do that unless I fully understood who I was sharing it with and I knew those individuals. If it was any Tom, Dick, or Harry who I happened to meet on Facebook then there’re all kinds of hazards involved with sharing pictures of personal, personal, stuff. That’s the reason. Essentially it’s that, it’s privacy, it’s trying to have a degree of privacy within that Facebook structure.

Ian: Yes, personal privacy.

Respondent: Yes, yes, family privacy, personal privacy.

Ian: Is that privacy just from other people, potential strangers, and stuff like that?

Respondent: Yes. Yes, because like I say, there’re over 2,000 members on the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times group and I probably only know about 2% of them.

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: You know, I know them well, I probably only know 20 or 30 of them really well to stop and talk to in the street.

Ian: Yes. This is really helpful for me to understand how Facebook groups work actually.

Respondent: Yes, yes.

Ian: Great, that’s interesting, thank you. Let’s think about the different sorts of… So let’s get my thoughts straight. One of your things is about not selling?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: So you want people to share memories, pictures, I guess it’s like a… From what I can understand, from what you’ve said so far, it’s got a bit of a historical kind of angle to it, would that be fair?

Respondent: Yes. That’s the sort of… Life and Times, the life bit is like what’s happening today and tomorrow around [REDACTED PLACE NAME], the times is what’s happened in the past. That’s where the name comes from. Yes, so it’s about history and sharing that. It’s about what’s happening today and tomorrow that we might all enjoy doing together.

Ian: Good, so it is kind of events?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: So there’s an event on at the town hall or there’s a whatever, you know.

Respondent: I’ve been a member of other groups outside of this, I’ve been mentioning groups in Ashington and Newbiggin remembering, Newbiggin Remembered, Ashington Remembered.

It was ridiculous, in my view, the way they were being run because people were sharing information that was current and that was encouraging people to share experiences that are happening today and tomorrow. Then they’d be removed because it’s, “Well that’s not history so that doesn’t belong on this group.” which was like, for me… I, kind of, learned from those groups that, for me, that’s just far too restrictive. The only restrictions I really apply to the group and the posts is the behaviours and the aggression and that kind of side of it.

Ian: Yes. So people can put events up, things that are happening that other people might be interested in?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Would that be restricted to the local area, I guess?

Respondent: Yes, generally, but that’s not because I remove posts from outside. For example, some people have put things up for Widdrington, [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. I’m quite happy, that’s all within sort of… For me, that’s all within the local area. I haven’t got a problem with that. You tend not to… People don’t tend to post things for Newcastle, Whitley Bay, I don’t see anything in those areas. I would never publicise something like that myself. It’s kind of self- It seems to be self-controlling, I think, because of the people, I think, who are members, they’re all either local people or they’re people who are holidaying in the area.

Ian: Yes. I was just interested in where the line is between selling and promoting an event. What kind of events, just to give us an idea, do you get?

Respondent: I tell you what I… I, kind of, use the… For selling, I always think about entertainment and enjoyment. If an event… For example, there’s a restaurant. They don’t do it very often but occasionally they put a post on, the Drift Café, the Plough Inn will put a post on occasion, the Widdrington Inn will put a post on publicising their Sunday lunches, that’s fine because for me that’s about enjoyment and entertainment. Dining out, for me, is primarily about entertainment rather than just sustenance. It’s not just pure selling of food, it’s entertainment and it’s people getting together and socialising. That kind of thing, I’m happy to see on the site, I’m happy to leave those on.

If someone comes on and says, “I’m a plasterer and I’m looking for some plastering business.” that comes off. There’re plenty of other sites… The reason that I do that, Ian, is there’re lots and lots of other sites for doing that, lots of other groups. I’ll always say, “If you want to set up a local [REDACTED PLACE NAME] selling group then do it, get on with it because it’s easy to do. Get up and get on with it.” People have done that in Ashington, [REDACTED PLACE NAME], there’re selling sites in all the local villages.

To be honest, we don’t get that. We very rarely get that kind of selling, people seem to have got the message. I think, again, probably count the number of posts I’ve taken down on one hand.

Ian: I’m aware of I guess, across the four villages, about 10 to 15 groups that are probably the bigger ones. There’re probably many, many, more. Are you a member of any of the other groups?

Respondent: Yes, lots of them, yes, most of the… I think there’re two in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], there’re a couple in Newbiggin. I’m not sure there’re any in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] actually. There’s one that was set up just after COVID hit that I’m a member of, I was actually… I think I’m still an admin on that although I’m not active. [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME], [REDACTED PLACE NAME] support group, that’s a good group. I think it’s… I’m trying to think of the name, [Gisha 00:47:55]. Gisha \_\_\_, she’s the admin.

Ian: Yes.

Respondent: That’s a good group. That sprang up out of Gisha’s wish to try to support people in COVID, that’s why it was created.

Ian: Yes, I’m aware of that one. Are there any other groups that you think are particularly good at doing something, I guess, different to what your group does or any things that you, I guess, have learned from those groups or learned about what not to do from those groups?

Respondent: Well just the point I made earlier about that- I don’t think there should be this distinction between history and current events. I’m guessing that the reason that people have introduced that kind of split is because the admin… If you’ve got a site with 25,000 people on it, with a lot of traffic, then obviously it’s not something that one person could keep an eye on. Maybe it was, kind of, with that in mind, to just try to restrict the activity and maybe make the job a little bit more manageable in terms of administering it. I don’t know.

Ian: Do you think the fact that you can mix events with history is to do with the contained size of the group or, I guess, size of the area really?

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: As you say, it’s not heavily populated.

Respondent: Yes, I would say so.

Ian: Do you think it would be difficult to do a group like yours, say, that was in, let’s say, Newcastle or Morpeth?

Respondent: Yes, I think so. If you started to get 10,000 or 20,000 people then you’ve got 10 times the amount of traffic, potentially, that I’m seeing. You know, I wouldn’t be able to do it. You’d have to… Again, it’s entirely achievable, you could bring in more admin people. Then you’ve got this kind of challenge of, “Well how do you get the leadership and ethos of the group to be consistent when you’ve got a larger number of admin people?” Yes, that’s a big challenge.

Ian: Yes. I guess the way it works in big platforms is having a 600 page policy that everyone has to read.

Respondent: Yes, exactly, yes. We’ve got two rules which are three or four sentences each, well a couple of sentences each. That’s how you do it, I’m guessing. It just becomes an administrative nightmare. You’d end up having to…

Actually communicating and ensuring that, as a team administering the group, the team… The way I would want to do it, you’d have to have regular Teams calls or Zoom meetings and discussion about, “Why did you do this on that post? Why did you do this or that?” You know, so you’re sharing experiences on how you’re actually administering the group, then everyone is on the same page and doing the same thing. That’s almost a bloody full-time job, I ain’t going to do that. Like I said, that’s the reason I’m the only admin on this group. It’s not something I’ve got time to do. I’ve no wish to do it either, to be honest.

Ian: For example, the support group you mentioned covers three villages.

Respondent: Yes.

Ian: Do you think a group like yours could be stretched to cover three or four villages, how do you think that would scale?

Respondent: Yes, you could do it but it’s… To be honest, I suppose if you look at what Gisha’s created it’s not dissimilar. Gisha has not… She hasn’t got strict rules about what people can and can’t post, it’s primarily about providing information. It was primarily about providing information, who you could turn to for support during COVID. There was kind of a…

We did the same thing actually. When COVID kicked off, I did exactly the same thing. I created a new page which was a subpage of the [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times group that was dedicated to COVID support. I was posting information, government links, QRLs, all kinds of stuff to just make sure that people knew what the rules were, where they could go to read the rules.

Gisha did exactly the same thing with her group, we kind of worked together. Like I say, that’s one of the reasons why I became an admin because what Gisha tried to do, she tried to get someone in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], someone in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], someone in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and someone in- I think she lives in [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. She had at least one person in each of the villages trying to help because one of the things she was doing was she was coordinating feet on the ground actually delivering food and… That’s something that we, we, we… We had a group.

What I did was I put a request out to the residents of [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to say, “Would anybody like to volunteer to be available to go and get medications for people, go to the shops for people?” We ended up with a small group of people, about 12 people, and we carved up the post codes in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] between us and then shared that information with mobile phone numbers. Everybody was happy for their mobile number to be shared in the group. Anybody who wanted help, and lived in the specific post code, rang that mobile number or put something on the Facebook group. Just put a post in if you need some help and we’ll find you.

Ian: Great, so that kind of community effort during COVID was instigated but also kind of maintained through the Facebook group?

Respondent: Yes. What we did was we recognised that not everyone was on Facebook. Within a month, we had a flyer. Every resident in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] was delivered a flyer. Everybody was given, essentially, just a little one-pager. On the bottom it had all the post codes, the names of the people who were volunteers to help with anything they wanted, and phone numbers. That was in order to cover people who weren’t on Facebook, obviously there’re lots of people who are not on Facebook.

Ian: So you just reiterated the information? You organised a group of people through Facebook and then people could access that service, let’s call it, through Facebook. Then you also popped a flyer through everyone’s door with, “For your area, here’s a mobile number to ring if you want someone to…”

Respondent: I just, basically, listed them all. What I said was, on the flyer I said, “Start with the person on your post code, if you don’t get a response then ring me.”

Ian: Do you think that the group changed its function for a while to respond to the pandemic?

Respondent: Well the group was used as a vehicle for that. I don’t think the function of the group… I suppose it did. It was used as a vehicle to help during COVID, definitely, yes.

Ian: You said you created a kind of subgroup, a sub-thread or group, to put out links to information and stuff as well.

Respondent: Yes. What I did was I put a post into the Facebook [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times saying, “I’ve created a new page, everything that relates to COVID will go on that page.” What I was conscious of was that a lot of the Facebook groups were being swamped by COVID stuff. What I wanted to do was to give people the option to say, “Look, I’m not interested in COVID, I just want to continue to enjoy the photographs and the stories and the information that’s coming up on [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times.” If you wanted just that you could get that. I very rarely posted anything about COVID on the main group page, I always used the subpage so there was a clear division.

People that wanted COVID information could get it, because there was a link on the group, but those that didn’t, didn’t click on it, just continued to enjoy seeing the photographs and the rest of it that comes through normally on [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Life and Times.

Ian: Great. Did you think that kind of like an important thing to do, just to have something that was separate from all the stress and…?

Respondent: Yes, exactly, that’s why I did it. I thought it was best to have… People just wanted to try to focus on thinking about positive things and try to keep their life much as normal dropped into the Facebook group occasionally, they’d see what they normally would see rather than be swamped by stuff relating to COVID.

Ian: You said this group by Gisha was set up as a direct… It didn’t adapt from another group or anything, it was set up as a direct Facebook group for COVID response?

Respondent: Yes, it was brand new, yes.

Ian: You said something like, “It used to be that kind of focus.” Has that group changed?

Respondent: Yes. It’s now, sort of, morphed into more of a general support group, I think. Obviously COVID emergency, if you like, the urgency of needing to support people locally has clearly, not entirely disappeared but has, pretty much disappeared. It’s still there and it still appears to be active. I mean things like… She did a photograph competition for kids. So she’s trying to keep the group, to make it interesting to people. I think she changed the name actually, she dropped… When it first was created it was COVID support, it’s not just support I think.

Ian: Yes. It’d be good to speak to one of the admins of that group actually.

Respondent: There’s a guy called Philip Hood who is a very… He’s a good guy. He’s an admin on the group and he’s very active, intelligent guy. Gisha as well, she’s great.

Ian: I’ll ask [ANON] if she can put me in touch- I think she said Gisha is interminably very, very, busy so she’s quite hard to pin down but, yes, I’ll follow that up because… What I want to speak to, in particular, is people that have run successful, either online or offline, things, seeing what we can learn from that. Also, what the kinds of challenges would be to making something… I don’t think you can necessarily take something that’s got a specific purpose in a specific context and just say, “That worked, let’s do a bigger one of them.” I’m trying to get into the intricacies of these.

Respondent: I think that is a real key point, Ian, because I think that… I always think that small is beautiful really. Small is effective when it comes to communication and groups. I think, once things start to get big they just become a nightmare to administer.

I think, even in places like Newcastle, there are sub-communities within Newcastle. There’s Byker, there’s Wallsend, there’s… You can identify areas, I think, where you could… A smaller model, a tighter community model could be created where… I think that’s more effective and it’s more manageable because you end up with people like me, who haven’t got that much time and don’t want to spend that much time. It’s manageable. I live in the community, I understand it quite well. I think that’s how I… I think the size of the [REDACTED ORG NAME]s, if you want to call them, is critical. You can’t just create a massive [REDACTED ORG NAME] around Newcastle and create a group, that would be… It would never succeed in my view.

Ian: On that kind of note then, are you…? You said you’re a member of some of the other groups, is that because you feel like you need… Not you need to but you feel interested in what’s going on in the other villages?

Respondent: Yes, yes, definitely, simple as that, I just… Yes, I just like to know what’s going on and what people are concerned about, care about, yes.

Ian: Do you think there’re good reasons for people from, say, [REDACTED PLACE NAME] or [REDACTED PLACE NAME] to be members of your group? If that history is, kind of, mega-local history…

Respondent: There’re lots of people from [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. There’re actually more people from [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] than there are from [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Is that just because of the sizes of the villages?

Respondent: Yes, exactly. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is probably a population of about, I don’t know what it’ll be, 250, 200. I bet it’s not much more than that. So you end up… Yes, there’re more people from Morpeth, Ashington, [REDACTED PLACE NAME] and places like that then there are from [REDACTED PLACE NAME].

Ian: Yes. If we were to say we can take all the posts from your group, some other groups in the area, and put that all together as a big amalgamation, would that be useful to anyone or why would that not be useful?

Respondent: It wouldn’t be useful to me because I think… You know, you can access it as it is now and there’s a sensible subdivision now with the villages. I suppose it’s a bit like…

You know, there’re these historical groups called Ashington Remembered, Newbiggin Remembered, and [REDACTED PLACE NAME] Remembered. You could say, “Why don’t all those three groups just join together?” I think that they’re best left as they are because they’re easy enough to access. If you’re more interested in Newbiggin, which I generally am, I would visit the Newbiggin one more often than Ashington probably. [REDACTED PLACE NAME] is not very active. Yes, I would say, “What’s the benefit in doing that?” I don’t see any really.

Ian: Yes. Going back to the people that aren’t on Facebook then, so… Well actually, let’s take a step back again. You said, very early on, the main thing you wanted to do with this Facebook group was bring people together. What do you think are the main benefits, what do people get from being part of, not just yours but, local Facebook groups like yours?

Respondent: Clearly there’s the online interaction. I mean there are some people- Actually there’s a poor guy who has just recently died, a guy called Lawrence Wakefield who lived in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as a kid. Actually he lived in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] up until the point at which he died, very recently. He was fantastic, he used to tell some really good stories. He lived in Fisher Row on the seafront of [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as a kid. You can imagine, as a kid, he was all over the blooming place, up and down the Pele Tower and… He knew [REDACTED PLACE NAME] like the back of his hand. I think a guy like that, that’s the kind of… Him sharing those experiences-

He wasn’t mobile, Lawrence. He used to come to [REDACTED PLACE NAME] very occasionally, I saw him. He wasn’t well, he wasn’t mobile. One thing he always said he wanted to do was he wanted to go on the beach and have a plodge but he could never do it because he wasn’t mobile enough. I always used to think about, “Well how the hell can we make that happen?”

That’s one of the things, actually, there’s a bit of a bee in my bonnet about, improving disabled access to the beach at [REDACTED PLACE NAME]. It’s terrible and there needs to be some investment to do that. That’s why, because people like Lawrence… You know, the poor bugger has died and he hasn’t been able to go out and get on the sand at [REDACTED PLACE NAME] before he died. That’s heart-wrenching for me because he shared all his stories. He’s humorous, you know, a great guy.

Without that Facebook group, no one would’ve heard Lawrence’s stories. No one would’ve heard them because he’s not out and about very often engaging with people face to face. He used to love engaging with people on Facebook.

Ian: So, I guess, people that are isolated, people that are isolated because of one reason or another to feel part…?

Respondent: Yes, I think that’s the main… That’s the real positive I’ve taken from creating the group, people like Lawrence- He’s the best example I can think of. He’s always been appreciative of the group being set up.

There’s a woman that lived in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], she lives in France now. She’s a regular reader and contributor of… She lived in [REDACTED PLACE NAME] as a kid until she left when she was in her 20s, I think. She lives in France, rarely comes over, but she gets an opportunity to engage with people around the area. She feels like she’s one of them.

There’s another guy in Australia exactly the same, he does exactly the same thing, he loves it.

Ian: You’ve mentioned, during the COVID thing, you recognised that some people aren’t on Facebook, so post things through the doors for example. Are there any other ways that you sometimes will try to share some of the stuff that’s happening in the group to people that aren’t on Facebook, either through things like WhatsApp or through other, in the real world, things or…? Not just you but other people perhaps.

Respondent: I haven’t done that. There’s a WhatsApp group in [REDACTED PLACE NAME], I’m not part of it. I was invited to become part of it but I didn’t join it, essentially, because I felt that… Well probably the time constraint was one of the main reasons. It certainly would be possible to be more interactive across the platforms, definitely could do that, but that would just mean more work for me. I don’t want that, thanks. That’s the reason why I’ve kind of just said, “Look, if you… Most people seem to use… Facebook seems to be the most popular platform, let’s use that and try to do a good job of that.” which is what I try to do.

Ian: Yes, yes, I mean I don’t think it’s anybody’s responsibility to do that, it’s just something I’m interested and wondering what people have done.

Are there some people in the area that, I guess, don’t have access to internet or just don’t have access to hardware, or is it just not interested in…?

Respondent: You know, I don’t know the answer to that question Ian. I look around my own family. I look at my dad, he’s 83 and he’s got an iPad. I look at my wife’s mother, she’s 85, she’s got an iPad but she doesn’t use it for Facebook, she reads her newspapers on it, believe it, now rather than getting the newspaper delivered. There are some people, like my wife’s mother, who just… I think she’d struggle. She’d struggle with the complexity of using the device to access what she wants. My dad struggles with that quite a bit but he does occasionally come on Facebook and look at stuff, but not very often.

I’m guessing that a lot of people, a lot of younger people have bought- I mean I bought my dad his iPad, you know. A lot of people have tried to do that, to encourage their older relatives to become more connected. I don’t know whether that’s just… I think that’s probably reasonably common nowadays, for people to try to do that within their families. I’m just guessing, Ian, to be honest.

Ian: Yes, yes, no, that’s fine, it’s just things I’m interested in people’s reflections on really. I was on this call before you joined but I think we’ve probably been over an hour now.

I just want to finish with one question that I’ve asked people. If you were to think of an online space like a Facebook group or…? This will be a more simple question for you to think of because you’ve obviously already thought about this with being a group admin. If you were to think of an online space for a community, like a Facebook group but not necessarily a Facebook group, what three qualities - I don’t mean like technical qualities necessarily, I mean just values and qualities from the real world - do you think are the three most important to think about?

Respondent: I think it’s got to be positive in nature, educational, and collaborative. I think they’re probably the three words I would say, educational, positive, and collaborative.

Ian: Yes, ex[REDACTED ORG NAME]ent. I just always think it’s a… I like asking that at the very end, when people have been talking about things, because I think… Yes, I mean you could probably get people together and write a list of 100 things but I just think it’s good to try to capture what’s important to people I guess.

Respondent: If you’re achieving a positive space then you must… By virtue of achieving that objective, you’re applying a level of control as well. That’s my experience anyway. If you don’t apply a level of control, as I’ve described to you earlier, then things become… Then whingers take over, basically, because whingers and trolls seem to be quite prevalent, I think, on Facebook.

Ian: Yes. So keeping a positive space takes a lot of work?

Respondent: You’ve got to keep it positive. I think setting out the clear objectives so that everyone understands, “If you’re going to come into this group, this is how you’re expected to behave. If you don’t behave like that, you won’t be in the group.”

Ian: Yes, great. Well I don’t have any more questions, do you have any questions for me?

Respondent: I haven’t, I haven’t. That’s been a good, enjoyable, discussion. I hope I’ve been helpful. If you need to speak to me again, just ring me.

Ian: Yes, I mean I just- Yes, thanks for your time and thanks for just being so honest and open with your questions. It’ll probably take me a while to take it all in and stuff but it’s been really interesting for me, thanks very much.

Respondent: You’re welcome. I’ll send you those rules over now.

Ian: Yes, that would be great. I would just like to see how you worded them and stuff, that would be ex[REDACTED ORG NAME]ent, yes.

Respondent: Alright then.

Ian: Great, I’ll stop recording.

END AUDIO

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