Longhorsley Neighbourhood Plan

[Green post-it notes are being sorted into an order. They contain key steps previously identified and the group are putting them in the order they did them]

Me: You might find that some of these steps, you did them all. You might find there’s some missing. You might find there’s some steps you didn’t do. Erm, and that’s absolutely fine, this is just to get us started.

[Muttering about putting out the post-it notes]

Me: you’re not at this stage yet are you? [pointing to the referendum and end-stage post-it notes]

P1: No

P2: No..

P1: We’re just ahead of that [pointing to the pre-submission consultation post-it note]

Me: About here… So do you want to start, maybe just start…putting them in some kind of order. I was going to snake it round maybe, I don’t know, cos’ we’ll have to…we can move them as we go as well

[P1 and P2 starting to arrange the notes]

P1: So I guess the first bit/ is probably the formal application bit isn’t it?

P2: /Form a group

P2: Erm…

P1: Did you form a group before you got the neighbourhood area?

P2: I think we formed the group first. From what I can remember…we started to sort of becoming aware of neighbourhood plans. So I think [AREA] were doing one/ y’know, kind of, one of the first ones

Me: /Yeah. They were one of the first 17 I think cos’…/I remember the ones from the North East from working in it

P1: /Yeah, they were

P2: Well, if I remember rightly…because this is going back about 4 years now…we became aware of this and we started, sort of, in the parish council meetings, sort of, floating the idea, and we decided we would, we should do it and…

P1: Yeah, so, so what, erm, I’ve gathered from previous conversations since I’ve been here is that it all kind of really came to a head at the parish council meeting – the annual one – in May 2013. Does that sound about right?

P2: Yes, that’s right cos…

P1: People in the parish were quite concerned about the various development applications that were going through at the time for [names of places in the parish] and…

P2: Yes, that’s right. So I think that sort of got us started and then I seem to remember we had a meeting…a separate meeting from the erm, the parish council one…and most of the parish councillors were there. I think 2 people decided they wouldn’t be involved or couldn’t be involved

[loud phone ringing]

P2: So I think we decided…the first thing we decided is that we would go ahead and then it, sort of, the group really was the rest of the parish council and we decided to keep at the parish council because it was a group that could work together and, sort of, carry on and from that, one of the girls, one of the parish councillors was doing her PhD in…I think it was management, so she kind of got shoehorned in to being leader of the group. So we started off from there…

Me: So if I put form group there, but I think there’s another step here just about deciding to do a neighbourhood plan and sort of moving ahead. But I think although, you did make those decisions about the group so you did form the group – what about the boundary? Was that…was it just decided that it would be the whole of the parish?

P2: Erm, yes. /Yes.

Me: /Just fairly early on?

P2: Yes fairly early. Yeah, it would be

Me: I’m just going to put that somewhere around there

P2: We did do a consult the community but before that I think we…

Me: We’ve got formal application?

P2: I can’t remember when we did that. What we did do was get involved with {LPA planner}

Me: Ah, yes

P2: And what he did was, he came and gave us a talk

Me: Okay

P2: Which I have the, erm, sheets from in this. And this was from April 2014. And it was an outline on neighbourhood planning – purpose, process, the frontrunners and national experience and sort of how to get what you want. So we got…we had that and I think we also had some information from this one [shows me a guide] which was neighbourhood planning, a simple guide for councillors.

Me: Yes, okay

P2: And then I think I picked something out of one of the magazines about neighbourhood planning. So that was our start, we had a talk with [LPA planner].

Me: So, maybe here then, the talk?

P2: Yep. We had sever…we had quite a few meetings to talk about…from what I remember I don’t think we actually progressed a huge amount because we didn’t really know what we were doing/ and we were trying to follow the things so we had quite a few meetings when we discussed stuff and we weren’t making a long of progress. {LPA planner}would come to some of them and, erm, he was our, I suppose, our, sort of, erm, person with expertise

Me:/ Yep, which is totally normal

P1: Can I leave you for a few minutes. This is your area of expertise anyway but I just need to deal with a little family crisis at the minute?

P2: Yes, of course, I’ll try and muddle on with my memory…

P2: And, erm, so…

Me: So when did you put the formal application in to the council to say we want to do this?

P2: So hopefully it’ll be in [chair’s] minutes cos’ unfortunately I don’t…/but if we put that next perhaps

Me: /Yeah that’s fine, /we can move them around…

P2: /We can always move them around

Me: …cos’ we’ll get them in a rough order and then we’ll talk through the story in more detail and add some of more of these other bits in as well.

P2: we did do…we did a community consultation. We did a big one in the village hall and that would be in the October, or some time around then. Erm, [volunteer] started trying to write, erm…

Me: I think they’re more towards the end, aren’t they? Sorry, I’ll just…it makes sense to put the ones that are. So yeah, the consult the community – I did 3 post-it notes but I’m aware that there’s generally a lot of consultation but we can add more if we need to… Did you do a vision?

P2: I think we had. We also used the, erm, the old parish plan and that was our background document as well. So that might be more building an evidence base…

Me: The other thing that I should say is that we’re presuming this is linear which we know it’s not

P2: No. That’s right

Me: So we can, y’know, if you think well, actually, we did this a few times, we can add steps in , we can draw loops. Might it be easier then if we push the rest to the end and go back to the beginning and just talk through the story…

P2: I was going to say, I might be able to work backwards actually…from referendum, independent examination…

Me: So you’re just about here?

P2: Yes, we’re between these two. We’ve done that one and it’s gone to that one but we’re now tweaking before we get there. So I’ve written the statement…

Me: And you probably did them around the same time, did you?

P2: I’m not sure…/what’s a strategic environmental assessment?

Me: /This was…

P1: /Yeah, we didn’t need to this. We have had a screening…

Me: Right okay…

P2: So that sort of came in down here…

Me: So I’ll write SEA screening and we’ll put that in but I’m aware that not everyone needs one

P1: Yeah, well, /we actually did that…just before there…

P2: /We’re just working backwards to see if we could get some of this sorted

P2: Erm, [finalise policies?] – that would be with [consultant], wouldn’t it? So, we’ve…erm…

Me: We’ve got a ‘draft policy’ somewhere…I think, I think what I’ve found from my research so far…

P2: That must go like that, mustn’t it?

P2: So when did we consult?

P1: So, pre-submission consultation, we’ve just finished – that was end of July. So, based on that, we can now write this.

P2: When did we consult the community? Because there’s been…

P1: Well there’s been quite a number, hasn’t there? So we’ve had 4 lots of, erm, consultations…

Me: So what I’ve found so far in a lot of research, is the beginning bit…the steps don’t change a lot but people struggle with that bit. The end…that’s fairly, well, a lot of this is fairly set. But the middle bit is the big messy pool of lots of things happening

P2: That’s right. We kind of got off to a good start. We were having regular meetings, we had a consultation, [volunteer] drafted something but I think what she drafted was just using the [area] plan and took out their references so it just gave us a structured document to put our own, sort of, stuff in as a guideline. And then, I know {LPA planner} came to at least several of the meetings to, sort of, see how we were getting on. I think we seemed to be going round and round a bit, in circles and not really, sort of, going anywhere. After about 2 years, [volunteer] was getting to the end of doing her PhD so she hadn’t got as much time. Several others of the group had, sort of, fallen by the wayside, if you like. And it ended up, more or less, erm, sort of, stuck, actually. We had a time when we didn’t do anything and we it all just sat there but we kept…well, we were trying to sort out this housing business and then we got that sorted – or not sorted – and then we, sort of, came back to it but luckily [chair] had then come on the council and had the abilities to sort of deal with more of the paperwork side of it. It came down to, sort of, [chair] and I were sticking with it and, erm, and then we really got going from there. Then we also…that’s right…[volunteer], we talked about getting a consultant before you [chair] came on/

P1: /That’s right

P2: because we recognised we didn’t have the ability to write the, or the knowledge, we needed to write/…

Me: /..need to write and how it was worded and things like that

P2: …so we got the consultant, erm, [consultant] Biggers

P1: That would have been middle of 2016, then/ because he was involved in that consultation

P2: /Yes. And I think he thought, at first, he was just, sort of, going to give us some guidelines and we were going to write but we actually, sort of, said “no, we’re employing you to write it because this is what we don’t know how to do”/

Me: /Yeah, so ‘we’ll tell you what we want to include but we don’t know how to write it.

P2: Yeah, and we don’t really know if we’ve got the structure right. So he came on and, erm, we started off with him and, er, we got the funding for him from…that funding that’s available…

Me: Locality?

[All agree]

P2: So we’ve had 2 lots of funding

Me: [consultant], erm…did he…he was involved in…?

P1: Alnwick

Me: Yeah, I was just thinking cos’ I’ve emailed lots of groups that are either finished or near the end/ and I just remember his name was in my head and I was thinking ‘I know that name from somewhere’

P2: /Yeah, Alnwick have finished and just had their referendum

P1: So, in terms of the consultations then...the first one was in October 2014 so that would have been…

P2: /That would be that one [points to 1st consultation]

Me: This one? So was this just after…?

P2: I can’t remember when we did a formal application

P1: So, the formal application for…so, er, was approved [30th?] September 2014 so, yeah, just before…

Me: Yeah, so just after…

P1: And the next one was in March 2015 – that was when you sent out the questionnaire to everybody in the parish

P2: Right, so that would go there [pointing to 2nd consultation]

Me: Can you remember what that one [2st consultation] was roughly consulting about? So was this one [1st consultation], just based on...

P2: That one was more to introduce the idea to the community. We had a thing in the village hall, and we had all, sort of, posters up and thing like that, sort of, anything we’d got. Just to get people started, hoping obviously to get some community involvement which, in this village, doesn’t usually happen very much [laughs]. But, erm, we got that and I think then we decided, based on that, we got some ideas of what people were interested in, we then sent out a questionnaire and we used, er, an app…so we did use digital because one of our…actually, I say that, there’s another group member who’s not here, [volunteer], and we did the, erm, now someone…

P1: It’s consult isn’t it?

P2: Erm, yeah, someone down in London, in Hackney, did something with an app, y’know, you could…there was a little black square thing and you put your phone on it and it took you into the questions for…

P1: It’s called Commonplace

P2: Yes, that’s it

Me: Ah, yes, I know exactly what you mean

P2: So that came up along with the questionnaire one

Me: Can I ask, did you have to be for the…to be able to use Commonplace?

P2: If we did, I think we negotiated a very, very favourable rate because I think they wanted to charge us quite a bit but we explained that actually we’re not a large London borough, we’re only a small village…

Me: This is why I was asking because actually I did go down to London to a neighbourhood planners London conference where they all come together to talk about it and there was a couple of people there who were using it and it seemed like they were paying quite a lot of money. And, the other reason I’m sa…just picking up on it, is, erm, a lot of councils use it and they charge them thousands and thousands of pounds. When, actually, the technology that is needed is/ really, really basic

P1: / Basic, yeah…it’s just a [flow?] system isn’t it?

Me: But we’re actually developing a open-source free tool in the lab which is going to be a big part of the process tool that I develop that would be integrated into it. But, erm, yeah, it was just interesting because, I knew people had used it but I didn’t know anymore more local, up here, had used it

P2: Yes, we used Commonplace. We thought we’d try and get a bit more, sort of, modern, so we used it and we had posters up around the village with the little thing on and we did, erm, get quite a few people and also just encouragement for people just to go on and use it, and we did get quite a few responses. I don’t know if the site is still…

P1: So that was your…that was the 3rd consultation

P2: Oh, that was.

P1: So this one was, erm, was a questionnaire to households to refine the information you got from the first one and decide what really were the issues and objectives. Then they used Commonplace and some flyers around the parish to try and get some more information from people and verify what you thought the findings were

P2: That’s right

Me: So, basically, so, I suppose what else there is…there’s a step in here where you look, you analysed that feedback, erm, I’m just [writing]. And then, this one was to find out more detail and then you’ll have analysed that one, I’m guessing

P1: That’s right

P2: That’s right

P2: Because I think what we were desperate to do, was to try and make sure the community wanted to do this and it wasn’t just the parish council saying ‘this is a good idea’. So we were trying all along to try and get methods of involving the community to get them to say what they wanted to it would be a proper neighbourhood plan because we couldn’t do it otherwise

Me: So you actually ended up doing…quite a lot of consultations in a row to, kind of, build that momentum with the community as well and get them, get them to tell you what they want

P2: That’s right. So people, at least if you said to them about the neighbourhood plan they wouldn’t just look at you blankly, they would have at least heard of it which would be something. Erm, so then…

P1: So we then had…

Me: Vision?

P1: You created a vision. Erm, and some objectives and issues – so you had issues, objectives and vision

Me: Right

P1: Then you consulted back out again. That was in June 2016

Me: And that was consulting…was that consulting on the vision?

P1: Yes. So, all three. So it was just checking back again that the issues, the objectives and the vision, because obviously the vision came out of the objectives, were correct

Me: Okay.

[Me writing on post-it notes]

Me: I know some of these look really basic what I’m writing down but there is a method in my madness

P2: No, no. Actually it’s quite good because I’m starting to remember a bit more

Me: Well, that’s what I thought. I thought we’ll just focus on getting it in order and then we’ll go back through and, we’ll jot some of the things you’ve already said, we’ll jot down, but I think it’s good to just jog your memories a bit and get into that, kind of, frame of mind.

P1: And that’s about the time I came on board and we had that initial workshop with [consultant] where, erm, we also involved {LPA planner} in that, where we kind of said ‘right, okay, so this is what we’re hearing in terms of what the issues, objectives and vision are and what we going to do with’. So we started thinking about what that would mean in terms of a plan and what kind of things might go in the plan and so on.

Me: Yeah, so…I’m just trying to think what I can call that – y’know for shorthand?

P1: We did go…What we did was, we created a briefing note which outlined the proposed scope of the plan

Me: And that was developed through the workshop?

P1: Yeah

Me: I’m going to just…I’ll jot down ‘create briefing note’ and we can jot down that bit…

[writing on post-it notes]

P1: And I guess there was 2 reasons for doing that. The first was, as Penny said, time had gone by a fair bit and so the community had maybe gone a bit cold on it – maybe they were still thinking about it, maybe they weren’t, nobody knows. And the other was it just felt wrong to dive from having that outline objectives and vision straight into some heavy drafting of policies and the detail of the neighbourhood plan. So what we decided to do was to create this briefing document which essentially had all of the, kind of, key ideas and shapes of the policies in it and go back out to community and say ‘right, okay, before we actually produce the plan, this is the kind of stuff that have so far been exampled. You’ve told us a lot that you’re worried about transport issues and safety of pedestrians moving around the village so we will have something on that, what do you of that?’. Erm, ‘we’ve talked a lot about local green spaces so we think that the list of local green spaces is ‘this’, what do you think about that?’. So it was, kind of, instead of just diving into it just check back on some of the things that will become more detailed in the policies.

Me: So, I’ll put ‘consult on the briefing note’ [writing on post-it notes]

P2: I think it was also to, sort of, try and say to people ‘look, this hasn’t gone away, we haven’t forgotten about it, we’re still working on it and that what we did before wasn’t, sort of, wasted’. You know, ‘we’re working on it’. And, sort of, get people to realise this was a definite thing that we could go ahead and do.

Me: So there’ll have been another analysis there [writing on post-it notes]

P1: Yeah, cos’ we got quite a lot of feedback from that one cos’ we had…Whenever we talk about briefing notes and things, we should always, sort of, say that the way they go out to the community is through the parish newsletter which goes to pretty much every household..

Me: Everyone, so then everyone can, sort of…

P1: So that’s in 2 forms. So it’s in paper form and also it’s online as well. So people were able to give feedback to questionnaires online but also on paper and then we had a couple of drop-in sessions as well, in the church hall, where people could come in and actually talk to us a bit more about it and used that to get some more feedback.

Me: So what about, erm, just thinking about the evidence base side of things, so, this one, this post-it note is very ambiguous and I’m very aware of that but it’s very ambiguous in the guidance so that’s why it’s here. Erm, but, but it’s thinking about, sort of…whether you needed evidence…whether you needed evidence to back up what you wanted to do or what you were trying to say and whether that evidence existed, either you know housing assessments that the local authority/ have already done or whether you needed new evidence that you then got somebody to develop, or whatever. Did that come in anywhere along here or was that more towards…

P2: /Oh, yes, we did a lot of that

P1: I guess there’s 2 parts to it. There was a thread that was running parallel with this [consultations, analysis etc.] that kept touching back into this which was [volunteer], who we mentioned before, who produces the website and the parish magazine, had produced what he came to call a housing technical report. And the reason he had produced that was we were in pretty heavy dialogue with [LOCAL AUTHORITY] about the various development applications in the village and as usual, as you know, there was lots of confusion about what was in what SHLAA and what wasn’t in what 5 Year Land Supply report, and so on and so forth. So [volunteer] is really good, he’s got a very analytical mind, /he’s really good at taking that stuff and churning it through and actually producing something that everybody can understand which also becomes a kind of factual base…

Me: /That’s really good

Me: Yeah, like actually this is what things say…

P2: So that’s what we used

Me: So that was parallel with everything?

P1: Yeah

Me: Okay, so I’m gonna write that separately…what did you say it was called?

P1: It was a housing technical report

[writing on post-it notes]

Me: And I’m gonna just, kind of, stick it at the beginning…but I’ll make a note of…

P2: So in some ways we kind of had another consultant didn’t we?

P1: Yeah

P2: But an unpaid one [laughs] because he…

Me: But that’s brilliant though because a lot of groups really don’t have that /and really struggle with that

P2: / I don’t think we could have done without him because he took all this…because with the Core Strategy here and everything’s been so up in the air for so many years. It’s really quite difficult when you’re doing this because you feel like you’re standing on sliding mud aren’t you? Every time you try and do something, /what’s happened up at [LOCAL AUTHORITY]?

Me: /Things change

P2: So, erm, he was able to take the Core Strategy, break it down for us. He took the housing down. And that was used and every time we needed something he would produce or update the figures.

Me: That’s brilliant. So was it mainly around housing or did that also include things around the infrastructure that the housing would impact on? Was there any of that?

P1: Yeah, so that’s really where I said it comes in 2 parts. There was that running right the way through but the other bit is those 2 things sit hand in glove – draft policies and build evidence. Because what you find, or what I found, is you start getting in to start thinking about policy, you then realise what you’ve got to evidence because otherwise you know, you…if you approach it from, kind of, what is all the evidence we might gather? And you start looking at…

Me: How long’s a piece of string?

[laughing]

P1: Yeah, exactly, you could just go on forever for no good reason.

P2: I’ve got a letter here from [clerk], who is our parish clerk, wrote to the council about the capacity of the school. That was in February 2016. [P2 muttering about lots of letters]

Me: So did you start…you started in 2014 then?

P1: Yeah

Me: That’s…I mean you’re saying that’s a long time ago but in neighbourhood planning terms that’s quick for some of the groups, really.

P2: Well I think when we have been very active with it, we’ve actually really got on with it. It’s just we had that bit of a gap because we lost our leader a bit, er, that it all kind of just stopped but the ideas have still been there.

Me: The group that I’ve been working with in [area] have been trying to get started since January so…[laughing]…and we’re still not there. But, that’s also a bit more complicated because its an urban area so we have to create a forum which is just a whole challenge in itself which I think parish and towns...I mean it’s still not easy to get started but you have that slight, erm, sort, of, you’re that slight step ahead just by having at least some structure there.

P2: Do you want…? [hands a copy of a parish newsletter to me]

Me: What I didn’t do is I didn’t look too much into it beforehand but then I’ll see what you’s recommend me looking at and then we’ll talk about it and I can always go away and have a look.

P2: That’s the one that comes up, that was to sort of say when we’d got started again, ‘look, we’re back’.

Me: So was this the briefing note or was this just, like an, update?

P1: I think that’s this one, isn’t it?

[pointing to a different place in the process]

P2: Erm, it says February 2017

P1: Yeah, so it’s this one [pointing to the pre-submission consultation area]

Me: Ah okay, brilliant. I’ll have a look at that. So you did the draft policies, you built the evidence base and I’m guessing that was like, you were stuck in that looping round a little bit. Was there any other key steps between the draft and the final? Did you do any more consultation or did you…?

P1: Yeah. So we had, erm, in June/July, as we got into the consultation period for the pre-submission thing, we sent out the usual flyers and what have you. I think it was [consultant]’s ideas actually – one of the best ideas he’s had, I think, was that we have a village day in July and we know from the past that they get something like 400 people through the gate. So, to be able to get face to face with that number of people or potentially was a really good thing to do so we actually set up a little stall and we got people to, you know, enter a draw and, you know, anything to get them to come over to talk to us. So we got quite a lot of feedback from that…

P2: Over 60 I think, wasn’t it?

Me: That’s brilliant. So that, was that consultation, kind of, on the draft but it was also/…this

P1: /Yeah, it was part of this [pre-submission]

Me: So finalise policies, I mean, I don’t know, it might be that you don’t think this is a step necessarily or do you? I don’t know. Or this could be a finalise the draft policies to the point where you want to go out because at one point, you know, you’ll have a draft that’s not ready to go out and you’ll be doing this and this and this [point to previous steps before finalise policies] and then you’ll get to a point where you’ve got this final draft…

P1: Yeah, I suppose…

P2: You did that with [consultant] didn’t you? Because that’s when you went on holiday in May…

P1: Yeah, I think this happens about 3 times because you do it in order to the pre-submission consultation thing because you kind of hope that’s going to be it. And then, as you find out, 2 days after the end of the submission consultation I have to add, erm, our friend in planning at [LOCAL AUTHORITY] didn’t like the policies

Me: Oh…

P1: Yeah, they’d been involved in consulting on all the way through…yeah

Me: Oh my word, okay…

P1: In detail and had reviewed a number of iterations of this, in detail and commented on it, in detail, and we suddenly got 18 pages of changes.

P2: And we’d had the other chap here as well, that [LPA planner]. He’d been coming here…

P1: Yeah. So we’d had {LPA planner} coming to the steering groups and when he wasn’t there we had [LPA planner] to the steering groups and we still ended up with… So what I’ve just finished yesterday, erm, that [consultant]’s still got to go through and top and tail with his stuff, is another revision of all the policies.

Me: Right. So you’re kind of, at the minute, probably in this loop with the…[pointing to pre-submission consultation and finalise policies]. So, what I’ll do…this one…this…because you didn’t need an assessment, this step isn’t as important but it was sometime around here that they did the screening and you didn’t need it but you’re stuck in this loop.

P1: Yeah

P2: Write the basic conditions statement…? Write the statement of consultation?

P1: Yeah, so these two are submitted along with the final document when we do that so I’ve started to draft them so…

Me: Yeah, I mean the fact that you’ve got all of this [pointing to all the previous steps and consultations], though, makes that [writing the statements] a lot easier because I have worked with groups where they’ve got lots of minutes but then I think they’ve found this quite hard to pull together cos’ they’re not quite sure who they spoke to and when and that kind of thing so that’s brilliant that you’ve kept a record.

P1: Yeah so we’ve kept a record, erm, I’ve got more spreadsheets than you can shake a stick at…/we’ve got everybody we’ve talked to, a bit of feedback, the analysis, the results that we sent back out. So it’s just a case of, for this one [statement of consultation], it’s just a case of pulling that together.

Me: /That’s good though!

P2: But I think the other thing is that a lot of it is…it became clearer as we went on. So as you did one step and you could kind of think ‘oh, hang on a minute, that’s what that’s supposed to be’ then you could…it did…it was almost like you couldn’t stand at the beginning and see a clear pathway but as you fought your way through, you could see a bit of space…

Me: Yeah you could see the path emerge…

P2: Yeah. It was like that at the beginning, well, really, until you [P1] and [consultant] came on board.

Me: Okay, so what, do you mind if we now go back to the beginning and we’ll jot down some of the things that you might have already mentioned but we might talk about bits in more detail. Erm, and we can start…if there’s a particular steps where you spent money or you, erm, there was, like…well, I’m aware, that especially [county], the planners are attending meetings regularly, but I suppose, this is if they give you any significant bit of advice or if they were particularly involved in bits of it. If there’s loads of them, that’s fine, we can just put multiple on and, again, if you used any consultants anywhere and we can start to jot these down. And I’ve…what I’ll do, I’ll give those ones to you and I’ll give you a pen, er, so I’ll put these down here and we’ll start at the top and we’ll go from the beginning. So what I’ve done, just because it’s so long, I’ve prepared, for me, just some questions that I can prompt just so that I don’t forget anything because I was aware that I would not be able to sit and question you about the whole process [laughing]. So, getting started, you said that there was…it was tricky, getting started, erm, and you said that there was a parish council meeting where you started talking about it and then there was a separate meeting. So, shall we just go back to that? So, the decision to do a neighbourhood plan really came…was that in the parish council meeting?

P2: Erm… I think it was in the meeting we had separately.

Me: Separately

P2: I think we pulled together everybody to say let’s go through what we think this involved because nobody had any idea really. And that’s when we got, erm…I think we had an initial meeting just to decide, just to talk about it – would we go ahead with it or not and then we decided we would and we separated it off from the parish council meetings because it’s such a bit thing and it would have taken over. [laughing] So we separated it out to say, initially, it was most of the parish council.

Me: So, do you mind if I jot things down? It might just be easier than you jotting things down cos’ you’re thinking about what you’re going to say and what you did.

[Break to open biscuits and make more tea]

Me: So you had a parish council meetings at first, then a separate neighbourhood planning meeting.

P2: And at that point we decided we would go ahead and do a neighbourhood plan. And then I think we decided to have another meeting where we got {LPA planner} to come and tell us about what actually that meant.

Me: So, really, all of these [beginning post-its] are all actually in one big lump which is fine because that’s often the case especially in parish and town areas. So I’m just going to cluster these together a bit more and then we can, kind of, jot this down. So, really, at this point, the key outcomes were in this meeting deciding we’re going to do this?

P2: Yeah, we’re going to go for it

Me: And what kind of…what kinds of things led you to that conclusion, if you remember?

P2: I think it was the, erm, community concerns about housing that had come up at the annual parish council meeting and also the fact that we were aware that neighbourhood plans that they could be valuable and although none of us really knew what it was about, we thought we ought to go ahead. So then we tried to learn about what it was all about and, erm, as I say, [volunteer] got sidelined in to being Chair so she actually organised…we had quite a lot of meeting to talk about it

Me: So in terms of…so you had a meeting where you decided you were going ahead but you had multiple meetings after that as well, erm, so there was decisions made about, sort of, roles – so like, the Chair, erm…

P2: I mean, yes, but it was a pretty loose structure. We just had the Chair and the rest of us to help. I’m trying to think what we did now…

Me: What about, in terms of…obviously you’re aware about neighbourhood planning but you, erm…it was kind of like you were going to learn as you go along. Was there anything…was it mainly when {LPA planner} came to speak about it that you kind of learned the most and then, what else…was it the CPRE…was it…

P2: Erm, yeah, so that was when he came so we had a formal talk with him. We used this on as well…

Me: Yeah, so which one is that again? Is the CPRE one? I can’t remember now. ‘A simple guide for councillors’ – yes, I know which one that is, that’s fine. I’ve looked at them all that many times, I should recognise them

P2: Then we had our parish plan to sort of work on which was 10 years before which had been, I suppose it might have been a bit of a, erm, things to decide what people…hopes and wishes really, actions. It was a kind of a mixture really of an action plan and we used that as the basis.

Me: At what point did you get in touch with the local authority?

P2: Fairly early on. Yeah, fairly early on because, yeah, I got, it might have been our chairman that knew about {LPA planner} and it made have been when he was involved with Alnwick and I think [area] were one of the early ones as well. And he, erm, so we thought we ought to get…find out what was going on from him to start with. So he was involved from quite early one because I think he came from probably about the second meeting on. He was involved almost as a member of the committee, if you like, that would keep us on the right track as we went along and, if he couldn’t, we used to relay the minutes back to him to sort of…

Me: …Keep him in the loop…okay. So you made early contact with [LOCAL AUTHORITY]… Now, I’m just thinking about what needs to happen…what needed to happen for the group to get from deciding to do a neighbourhood plan to this stage, the formal application. So, obviously we’ve got the things at the beginning, that first step of deciding to do it, early contact with [county] Council and then, sort of, deciding on some roles, even though that was, sort of, more loose. Then you had the talk by {LPA planner} but I suppose before this, another key outcome (might not be the right word) but that you did look at this parish plan and you had some of the CPRE guidance. Was there anything else? Like decisions that had to me made or things that you had to do to get to the stage where you put in a formal application.

P2: I think, erm… I think at the various meetings we were going over what things we could include, erm, how to do it and I think it just got to the stage where we thought well ‘this is the next step’ to keep going.

Me: At this point, before this consultation, was there anything…so before the formal application, where you made the wider community aware…or was it very much about the smaller group getting to this point?

P2: I think it was that smaller group, yes. Because we talked a lot about how to get the community involved and that was the basis of a couple of the meetings is how we would do this consultation because we were very aware that we had to. That was the whole point of it, consulting the community, so we put a lot of effort into this initial…and we thought rather than doing a couple of wishy-washy things, we’d do one big thing that would get everybody involved and at least know what it was all about. We got reasonable amount of people through but, again, it’s a push…

Me: So, at this point, sort of, at this rough point, was there anything where you had, erm, kind of, a plan…did you make any kind of plan of what you would do going forward? I mean, I’m aware that you just said that the path became clear as you went through. Was there any attempts to try and, kind of, plan it out or was…were you just like ‘okay, we’ll take it one step at a time’?

P2: I think it was one step at a time and I think the first, sort of, bit where we actually put something down was, as I say, [volunteer] used the [area] plan, just actually to have something there. It’s like any plan, isn’t it? The worst bit is getting the first bit down so we thought if we just used, she just used, more or less, that, taking out their references, trying to fill in things that were appropriate to us. But it was just a framework that we could start with.

Me: Okay…[inaudible mumbling as I write on post-it notes].

P2: Now we did…we did spend a little bit of money when we did that one. I don’t think we hired the hall, but we, erm, I think we had to get the paperwork, sort of, printing done and costs like that so I think that was the first time we spent money

Me: Okay, do you want to just grab a money sticker then? Don’t feel precious about this piece of paper, stick things on, scribble things, do whatever – I’m just jotting things down as we go which is sometimes helpful when I do that while we talk

[Pause to make tea]

P1: Did you consult anybody when you set up the group to start with?

P2: Well, I think {LPA planner} was always involved right from early on because neighbourhood plans were so new and hardly anyone had done one, I think he was involved right from, erm, right from the start. So he probably comes in here as well [sticking a LA sticker earlier on]

Me: Okay, great, so I’m just going to jot down {LPA planner}E cos’ I actually know him from various work [muttering as I write]. It’ll all be anonymised but, erm, yeah. So, actually, I’m just going to take a step back based on…cos’ I’m forgetting I’ve got this here as well…so the people that were part of the working group, so the group that were going to form the basis of everything, that was mainly, er, /parish councillors?

P2: /Parish councillors

P2: There was about five of us I think plus {LPA planner} as the, kind of, outside consultant.

[muttering as I write…]

Me: Then the boundary, was kind of more obvious because it was just the parish boundary?

P2: Yes, yes, that’s right.

Me: Right, okay

P2: Yeah, it’s pretty easy when you do a small parish

Me: Yeah, I mean, yeah, in [area], that’s one of the issues we’re having, we need a forum but we also need to decide where to draw the boundary which is not that easy to decide. So at the formal application, as a parish you don’t have to submit a huge amount, you just need the boundary, the group and that’s about it isn’t it?

P1: Yeah

P2: I think so. I don’t remember this being a big ordeal at the time

Me: Yeah, that’s fine. Then there’s a consultation…well, there’s this consultation [pointing to the 1st parish run consultation] which I get the impression it was once you’d been, sort of, approved as a neighbourhood planning group. The local authority, in between this, have to do a consultation, did you have any…was there much involvement in that?

P1: There’s nothing appears in any of the minutes

Me: So, it was just very, kind of, bog standard, the way that they would do other consultations

P2: Yes, yeah, I don’t remember anything else

Me: Okay, I’m just going to add that in as a step though [LA consultation]

P2: I don’t remember anything about that actually

P1: Well, there’s certainly nothing in the, erm, files. So they must have done it without involving you guys?

P2: Yeah…

Me: Yeah, well it’s…I think the local authority has the responsibility to do that just like some of the end parts. And it’s one of these, kind of, formal consultation for six weeks or whatever and then the local authority and they have targets to how long they have to get back, like, I think, they’ve only got…I can’t remember how many weeks but they’ve only got so many weeks to do that consultation and then to respond to the group to give them the response. I think…it’s different…basically a lot of this depends on the local authority and how different local authorities do it…and, from what I know, I think, I think it’s kind of just, they’re very pro-neighbourhood planning, they’re very…well, I was going to say supportive, but I’ll find out form you’s whether they’ve been supportive or not because supportive of neighbourhood planning in general is very different to supportive of individual neighbourhood plans. So, I think they, kind of, just deal with that and just do it…

P2: I think because we’d had {LPA planner}involved all along, that would have just gone through at the time, I think

Me: Yeah, I’m actually just going to make a note of that…[muttering while I write]

P2: He was…It was a funny thing with him. He was quite keen for us to do it, well, you know, sort of making sure, different things that were involved with it but other times, we’d sort of think…we’d look to him for some help but he’d sort of throw it back at us. It wasn’t always that easy a pathway, shall we say. Which I think is shown up at the end.

Me: Yeah, that’s something I want to talk about actually. It’s not necessarily going to be jotted on here…but, yeah, because obviously the local authority have this duty to support but was, is it very clear what they…what they do, do for you and what they don’t do, or is it just very…?

P2: I think he did make it quite clear, erm….what he could do and what he couldn’t do. I seem to remember that cos’ we’d say things and he’d say ‘oh no, can’t’…and I think he felt it was more to, sort of, sit there and guide us, see that we’re on the right track and say ‘well you can’t do that’. But I do remember there was some frustration about how it worked with him. Sometimes we’d think…well, sometimes he’d say or do something or suggest something then, a bit like this [post pre-submission comments] so we should have known [laughing], when we did it, it was like ‘no, that wasn’t right’. Actually, I do remember it wasn’t…we did get a bit frustrated after a while thinking ‘what are we actually doing here’ because that didn’t help, it added to the confusion actually of what…of what the pathway was

P1: I think it’s sometimes difficult to draw that boundary, looking at it from where he sits, to say, on the one hand, ‘I want to help and guide you’ but on the other hand, it’s the neighbourhood plan. It’s not, kind of, the council’s plan. Erm, but the funny thing about where we’ve ended up is it almost feels like that’s getting turned on its head because when you get to the point where you are submitting it to the county council, um, it’s now opened up to a number of other groups who haven’t directly been involved, I mean, hopefully, indirectly they’ve been involved cos’ they are advising the planning time about what they will want…

Me: Is this, sort of, the statutory consultees, type of thing…?

P1: Yeah. So now you get a sudden wave of input into [LPA planner]’s team and he becomes the filter on that and it seems like, it’s not…it’s a pretty open filter so most of its just come straight through. And the other thing is that, I guess, and maybe this is us being a bit naïve and may be a learning point for others, um, is, I’d never thought about the plan as being something that somebody in [LPA planner]’s team has to have as a working tool each day meaning…I mean, I did think about the fact they’ve got to use it but I didn’t think about the fact they would have a view about how it needed to be structured and look, beyond the feedback that we got from {LPA planner}and it’s quite clear that a lot of the changes we’ve made to policy, so, for example, we’ve gone from something like, it’s probably about 18 policies, we’ve gone to 24 policies and that’s because we’ve had to split out some policies…

Me: …to make them absolutely crystal clear…

P1: …yeah, and we’ve had to renumber everything right through the document and put it hyperlinks, so they can pick it up and they can go ‘right, we need to think about…how this fits within the development policies’. Right, okay, boomf, go down and look at the development policy and it has to be that’s an application within a settlement boundary so we want the policy thats about development in the settlement boundary, we don’t want one that’s about development that includes how you handle it in the settlement boundary, in the open countryside and in greenbelt. We want those three things pulled out and separated out. So, erm, it’s funny because at some points [LPA planner]’s been, like, erm, you’d give him a draft of the document and I’d sit down with him and there’d be changes on almost every page – detailed changes – and so you’d go through that process, end up thinking ‘great, actually, by the time you get to the end point’, and we were about to submit to [LOCAL AUTHORITY], ‘that bit should be smooth as silk’. So we got quite a, you know/…[sharp exhale of shock]

P2: /Got a real shock…

P1: …shock when we got to all of that stuff coming back. But that’s definitely one thing that if, you know, I was sat down next week talking to somebody who was just starting it, I would say ‘well, one, be aware that even if you’ve got somebody from the council sitting next to you in steering groups and reviewing documentations, that’s one person and you will get other county council input from elsewhere’. That’s one thing. And, two, think about the fact, and maybe even involve someone from within [LPA planner]’s team rather than {LPA planner}himself, think about the fact that somebody’s got to use this as a working document and they will want changes. And, you know, 18 pages of changes, you would think ‘well, we must have been really wrong about the policies and the approach’. It hasn’t changed. So the approach, the policies, the objectives, haven’t changed. What’s changed is the structure of the whole thing.

Me: So actually it would have been helpful to know that sooner, either through…just though {LPA planner}working with you over that time or to have had something, if it was possible to have something more at the beginning that gave you a bit more guidance about how things needed to be structured?

P1: Yeah

P2: Yeah

Me: Okay. What about things like…so obviously you’ve mentioned…this housing technical report, obviously, was, kind of, done in parallel and it was important for the neighbourhood plan but also for the housing development that was going on. How helpful were the council in relation to talking to you about the policies that they had, the core strategy and the evidence that existed? Was that helpful or was that confusing?

P1: We’ve had lots of meetings. And it’s a funny situation really, because whilst the neighbourhood plan’s been evolving, we’ve had a lot of development discussion in the village at every level. So we’ve had umpteen meetings. In fact, that’s how I got involved really because I started by getting involved in that and then got involved in the council [parish] and then took on the neighbourhood plan. But we were meeting with all the various teams in [LOCAL AUTHORITY], people from the core strategy team, people who were putting together the five year land supply, people who were helping to find the parish boundary…erm, the settlement boundary, rather, and so on. So we, erm, we had a lot of discussion with them and it was all very helpful and what it ended up with was the likes of [volunteer] being a bit of a consultant to the council because they would put out a new version of something like the five year land supply plan, [volunteer] would go through it…[whoosh noise]…in detail because he’d already been through all the previous versions and he’s just looking for changes and he’d give them feedback and quite often, help them get it right, basically [laughing]

Me: Yeah, it sounds really, like it’s been really beneficial to have that expertise within the group because a lot of people would have to rely on consultants for that kind of support about the evidence so that seems to have been really, really good.

P2: Yeah, I think his support a) in the technical side but also with the newsletter so whenever we’ve wanted a consultation or something like that, he’s produced that, sort of, document and, erm, we also have breaking news which is email things which is pointed to when something’s happening in the village so everybody gets reminders when the meetings were on and things. So the whole lot, erm… Actually, the other thing I did remember, just a sort of point from right from the beginning, is that we chose the logo which was the tree, which was significant in the village but we had a logo and that took a little while – took a couple of meetings thinking about that one, I think, and coming up with that one and the tree shape [laughing]

Me: Ah okay, yeah. Actually, something I’ve not mentioned is…erm, what am I trying to ask…[laughing]…at what point did you set up any, kind of, online presence? So a website for the neighbourhood planning group or Facebook groups or anything that you might have done. Did you do any of that?

P2: Erm, no, did we? We didn’t do Facebook or anything like that

P1: Erm, yeah, it was bit patchy to begin with so some stuff was going on the parish council’s website but that site was being moved to the new one as well…

Me: Yeah, I’ve noticed that all the parish and town council websites have all moved…

P1: Yeah, they’ve come together in one hosting place, yeah. So some of that was going on. What we found was that the thing that most people in the community engaged with, because one of the things we should say with the technology bit is, erm, you would very quickly find in a little community like this and given the age distribution that you’ve got, it’s really hard to get anyone to engage with anything electronic. So whenever we did anything electronic, we also had to do it paper as well. But the one thing that most people engage with is the parish magazine and, therefore, briefing notes sent out as part of that… So getting them paper and online. So what we ended up doing was, most of the things that people would normally stick on their neighbourhood planning website, actually sit on the, erm, the tree website, as we call it – the parish magazine website. The plan is that when we get to the end of all this and it’s made, we shift all of the, kind of, key documents and evidence onto the parish council website

Me: Right, yeah, okay, that’s great. But it’s good that you knew what would work because a lot of people don’t so, but it sounds like you did know the way to reach people really.

P2: That’s right because Commonplace was just a way of trying something different.

Me: How did it work? Did that…was it not…?

P1: Well, I wasn’t sure at the time but looking at the results, it was almost superficial wasn’t it?

P2: Hmm, yeah, you could go on and you could, you know, put a dot on and comment and we did get comments and we did take those on board but, again, it was just a few people who were doing it and were probably interested anyway. We didn’t get the younger people but it just…we never got anything from anybody under, sort of, 25 probably I should think.

Me: Yeah, cos’ I think that’s one of the things that I’m interested in is…because every community is different so it isn’t about having, you know, ‘this is exactly what you should do and how you should do it’ and I think, you know, what the tool, this online guidance thing – I don’t know exactly quite what it’s going to look like yet – but it will have suggestions for ways to engage communities digitally but also offline cos’ what I haven’t actually so far is, although we’re all doing this digital civics PhD, we’re not, like, ‘everything has to be digital’. That’s not what it’s about. It’s about where digital could help or /where does it fit and how does that work? So, yeah, it’s interesting to hear when you have tried the digital methods, whether it has worked for the community or not. It sounds like not so much here

P1: /Where it fits…

P2: Not really. We always thought ‘well, at least we can show we’ve tried’ and, erm, but it didn’t work enough to want to carry on doing anything. I mean villages like this work on talking and talking mainly and the newsletter. That’s how it works

Me: Yeah, I mean it is totally different for different areas. The work in [area]…I think a lot of that will be, I think there’ll be a lot of Facebook type of stuff and that kind of thing. I’m going to be working with young people doing video stuff and that kind of stuff erm, but, I worked with [area] as well, last year as part of the MRes, and for them it was a mixture but obviously that’s a much bigger place so it just…you can never…there’s just not a one size fits all solution, basically

P1: Yeah

P2: No, that’s right

Me: So, erm, I kind of detoured a little bit but we’ll go back to this. So this one was the initial consultation just to kind of make everybody aware of the, just kind of get some interest, is that about right?

P2: Yes, yeah, that’s right.

Me: So what kind of…what things did you do there? What events or what…?

P2: We used…we used the village hall, we hired the main hall and we, erm, had boards up with probably pictures of the settlement boundaries and, um, I’m trying to think…

Me: Kind of like an exhibition type of thing?

[general agreement]

P1: Yes, like one of those brown paper fair things? I wasn’t even there but I’ve seen all the adverts and things and what they’d done is, because the initial discussion about what areas people are likely to have an interest, issue, focus on or whatever, is they created a number of boards and on each of the boards they asked a couple of pertinent questions about, you know, ‘how do you feel about this?’, ‘what about this idea?’, and so on and literally they had people use post-its or whatever to capture stuff on each of those boards. Then took all that away and analysed it.

Me: Great. Was that the main thing with that one? Was that…mainly just that event?

[nodding]

P1: [laughing] I’m nodding...but I wasn’t actually here

P2: Yeah, I was actually away when it was on [laughing]. I do know we had it for 2 days and we did try to make sure people were there, sort of, afternoon or evening or to make sure there was a maximum time people would get there. It was our big push to try and say ‘look, you’ve raised these concerns at the annual meeting, we are going to now…this is a neighbourhood plan. This is what we want to do. This is going ahead. What do you think? What are you concerned about’.

Me: Okay, so I just want to jot that down as well about you had it at different times did you say? Like, you had people…

P2: Um, yes, we had people over 2 days. I’m pretty certain it was 2 days and there were people there in the evening and, um, and in the daytime so people could drop in and just have a look.

[writing on sheet]

Me: I just like to jot these things down cos’ not everybody does think about stuff like that. It seems really obvious but not everybody does actually, sort of, do that… So to do that, just thinking about the, sort of, money side of it. So, you had to hire the main hall, did that cost? I don’t need amounts or anything, it’s just to get an idea…

P2: Yeah, so, I think…No, we wouldn’t have paid for the main hall because it’s a village hall so the parish council doesn’t get charged. I think it was more to do with just the printing of paperwork for the thing.

Me: And who did the boards? Who made them?

P2: Well, we, we…forget where we go the boards from but I think, um, I’m trying to think…[volunteer] did…sort of, leading it. I’m trying to think…[area] might have been involved?

P1: Marty might have been involved?

P2: Marty might have been involved, yeah…

Me: But it was the group themselves that designed all of the materials?

P1: Yeah

P2: Yes, yeah, that’s right

P2: Marty probably was involved, actually because he was good at that sort of thing

P1: Yeah

Me: So, at this point, once you’d had sort of had this formal application, you made the decision that you needed to go out and tell people what was going on and get some feedback. Okay.

P2: Yeah, because thought there was no point in going on if there was absolutely no interest. Though we could see there was value in the neighbourhood plan, we had to make sure the village knew there was value in the neighbourhood plan as well.

Me: And then to actually make the consultation event happen, you had to, sort of, bring together, so you had to create the materials, erm, and just sort of set dates and decide logistics, just sort of logistical things.

P2: Yeah, people just helped put all the stuff up, take it down again, man the hall…

Me: Yeah, erm…and then, really, all of it was done by the group?

P2: Yeah

P1: Was there a formal steering group by then? Because I know there was a point at which they formalised it, did terms of reference…

P2: That might have been about then, yeah…or a bit before that because I think [volunteer] would have put that bit together

Me: Would this have been before the formal application then when you, kind of, had the terms of reference or after?

P2: I think it was at the same time, I would think…

Me: Okay…[muttering about writing on the sheets]. And all of that was done in-house, by the group?

P2: Yep. Everything has always been done by us.

Me: It’s rare to see that actually [laughing]. Okay, so then, you did the events and you analysed the feedback. How did you do that? What needed to happen? Was it easy? Was it difficult? Was it…

P2: I’m trying to think now… Somebody must have sat down and written it down and assumed Marty did that because he’d got…

P1: That might be how I’ve got his name in my head

P2: Yes. There’s somebody who’s not, well, not on the parish council. I suspect he might have helped, perhaps might have helped with the analysing the feedback. Somebody did…I’m trying to remember…I’m pretty certain somebody did pull it together as a document but then we had a meeting

P1: [volunteer] produced the final document

P2: Yeah, [volunteer] produced the final document. So, again, parish councillors, possibly [volunteer], helped pull it together and [volunteer] finalised it.

Me: So a final report if you like. Obviously you might not know this but do you know if any of the people who were involved in that, did they find it challenging or was it quite a straight forward task for the people to do? If you don’t know, that’s fine also.

P2: I’m not quite sure but I don’t think it was overly challenging. I mean, I think it took some work but the same basic concerns come out in the village so there wasn’t lots of varied things, it was just the same as we’ve had again

P1: In fact, I think that’s something you find even in the most recent consultations – it is the same stuff that people are concerned about which is reassuring at one level but then on another level, one of our concerns was we didn’t want, and one of the reasons we’ve pushed really quickly through this year, is we didn’t want to overload people with consultation. You have to consult people but at the same time if they just see what, to them, just looks like the same stuff coming back all the time – ‘are you still sure about this?’, ‘is this what you really want?’, - then you can actually turn people off.

Me: Absolutely

P2: Because they don’t understand the process so they don’t understand, you know, that we have to do a lot of it and they just lose interest really

Me: Sticking with this consultation and feedback, the consultation was that just advertised through the parish council newsletter?

P2: Yes. It was through the village newsletter and also posters on the various noticeboards around.

Me: Ah yes, you did say that

P1: And that happened at every stage, we used the same vehicles didn’t we?

P2: Yeah…

Me: Was there any…was it just quite open or did you get in touch with anyone in particular? You know, was there any groups in the area, or anything like that, or was it just open?

P2: Open. It was a drop-in basically.

P1: Did you involve the likes of [Cansdale?] at that point?

P2: No, I don’t remember. I would have remembered him [laughing]

Me: it sounds like the consultation side of it, you’ve been, the groups been very, kind of, fine with doing it and organising it. Is that fair to say do you think?

P2: Yeah, we’ve tried really hard to involve the community

Me: So you didn’t find it particularly difficult to, kind of, come up with…you know, to decide when to consult or anything?

P2: I don’t think so. I mean this one came up fairly early. It might have been {LPA planner} prompting us as well, you know, that we had to get an initial one. And, also, at the beginning, unless you do that, you’ve not really got a basis to move forward on because it’s just us talking about it. I do remember there were quite a lot of meetings about that and it was talking a lot about that we had to get this…it had to be good effort to really grab people’s attention and let them know what we were doing and, erm…

Me: Yeah, to kind of make it so you could have the impact you would want it to have…

P1: It’s also been one of [LPA planner]’s hot button things as well, wasn’t it? All the way through, he’s saying you know ‘I’ve just been dealing with such and such a neighbourhood plan and it’s failed at examination because there’s no evidence that they’d either…that they’d consulted with the community or, if they had consulted with the community, there’s no evidence that they’d done anything about it’.

Me: Yeah, it is a really important step which is why when I’ve been doing this with…well, when I set this out myself, but when I did this with the planners, it’s kind of like consultation is just featured all the way through but it’s interesting to see how different groups have done it because everyone has done it differently still but they’ve still done it continuously but it’s, you know, it’s been different for each group. Just on the analysis, do you know, and you might not know this, do you know if they used any particular tools to analyse the feedback or was it literally just going through it and trying to make sense of it themselves?

P2: I think it they were just summarising

P1: Yeah, judging from the output I’ve seen it was just that

Me: With that, obviously, you said earlier that you’d analysed the feedback and you’d got this final report then what happened? I know here you said you went back out to consultation to, kind of, refine it in more detail. Was there anything in between those steps? Obviously, I’m guessing you had meetings about it and things like that?

P2: Yes, we’ll have had meetings about it…

P1: That was at the point at which you put the questionnaire together so I know from minutes I’ve seen that your meetings, you know, was focused on the right questions to ask and how could you ask them and that’s when you got Commonplace involved as well because you decided that…

P2: Yeah, um, yeah, I think this counted as the sort of the big advert if you like. Then we had to get some meat on the bones so that’s when we took from there, ‘we’ve got this, lets refine it, let’s make sure we’ve got it right’

[silence while writing]

Me: So this one was to…

P2: That was the questionnaire…

Me: Yeah, the questionnaire…

P2: And Commonplace…

Me: And Commonplace…

P1: And it was billed as refining the data

[Muttering as I write]

Me: So at this stage did you go into more detail about, I don’t know, say, at that stage it was like ‘oh green spaces came up’, so at this stage you would ask more questions about green spaces and just kind of dig in more detail?

P2: Yes, I think it was

P1: Yeah, so an example that I remember was, erm, was transport, again was one of the big issues so the questionnaire went into the detail of, you know, well, ‘who uses the transport?’, ‘how often do you use it?’, ‘would you use, if there was a different service, was use that?’ kind of thing

P2: Cos’ we just needed something to produce some actual ways forward. Something to actually focus on, something to write…well, to start the pre-policy idea really

Me: So I’m guessing at this point, you spent a bit more money on printing? Oh, and on Commonplace?

P2: Yes, I think we did spend some money on Commonplace, but I don’t think it was a lot because [volunteer] negotiated quite well to say that we were only a small group and I think it might have been mentioned that they could use us as a, kind, of an example to other groups to say ‘well, this is how they did it’

Me: Yeah, it’s a big…yeah, its big challenge this kind of thing. It’s something that we’re really interested in as a lab because the lab as a whole…as I said before there’s actually 120 of us in total and there’s 33 of us on digital civics, and there’s all these other people that do digital civics type of work, erm, and we’ve been working with [area]City Council with some of the consultation stuff that they’re doing – one about the blue house roundabout and one about the future of the parks in the city. But, yeah, through the work that we’ve been doing with them that’s how we discovered that Commonplace is used by a lot of councils and by a lot of different people and they charge, like, in some cases, it’s hundreds of thousands of pounds and basically all it is, is a map tool and, it is just, like, really…if local authorities want to be able to do that stuff, there’s no reason at all they have to be using their very limited money that they have on something that is so easy to do so we’re actually, like I said, we’re in the process of…actually the tool’s there, ready to use but what we’re just making it a little bit more, erm…we’re making more of it so rather than just being able to drop pins, people are able to take a photo of things and upload it or a short video… So just like, building a more expanded version…

P2: I think I’ve got a figure of somewhere like £150 to £200 in my mind but I may be completely wrong but I’m certain we wouldn’t have spent anymore because we didn’t have the money and we didn’t have any grant then for anything…we hadn’t applied for any money for anything at that point I don’t think.

Me: I knew some neighbourhood planning groups had used Commonplace but mainly in London just from going down to London for that conference and I was aware that they’d negotiated the price. But, the guy, I remember talking to him and I can’t remember what area of London he was from but they were, kind of…I don’t even think they’d done this, they were still here [very early] but I think they’d decided to do some kind of consultation but more as an advert like what you did here but they just did it earlier on and they’d negotiated with Commonplace but I think their issue is that they’d paid for, like, say, a month or whatever and it was quite a lot of money and then the month was up and it was like ‘that’s that, then’ and that was the issue they’d had with it. One of my colleagues I’m working with in [area], he’s particularly interested in this kind of stuff and, actually, interested in this kind of thing that [volunteer] was doing but obviously [volunteer] just did it because he’s good at that but there’s a lot of groups that aren’t so he’s looking at how we can, sort of, display data both in terms of this kind of data and consultation data and be able to collect more data and what that means. There’s quite a lot of people working on that side at the moment so it’s interesting. Okay, so, this one was refining the data that was already collected using questionnaires and Commonplace, you spent a bit of money on Commonplace and a bit of money on printing, erm, that about covers that one. Again, was the feedback, kind of…

P2: I would imagine it would have been the same.

Me: So, then, at this point…you said earlier and I did jot it down…you said it was a vision…

P1: Issues, objectives and vision. So the cascade. So what are the issues? If you’re going to handle those issues, what are the objectives that you’ve got in order to do that? And looking at all those objectives as a whole, what does that say in terms of what a vision statement might be?

Me: So to do that…that was obviously based on that consultation and that consultation. So how was this created? Was this just created by the group? What did you do to go about pulling that together?

P1: That’s before me, again

P2: It would only have been the group, it’s only ever been the group.

Me: So can you remember, how it came about that you would do this? Was it advice from {LPA planner}?

P2: I’m sure there would have been some input from {LPA planner}as well, yeah

P1: Was [consultant] on board by then?

P2: [consultant]…when did [consultant]? No, [consultant]’s fairly recent isn’t he? When did [consultant] start?

P1: The reason I’m asking that is, the next stage after that was the questionnaire to check that and I know that [consultant] was involved at that stage, /the questionnaire, because in the file there’s a version of that flyer and the questions from [volunteer] and one from [consultant].

P2: /He might have been. [consultant] might have been

P2: Yes, so [consultant], the consultant might have. Because I think that was when we started moving forward from the community having some ideas bit and actually getting it into a plan, if you like

Me: So was [consultant] involved…?

P2: All of this bit

P1: Yeah, all of this bit

Me: Up to maybe…?

P1: He’s still involved

P2: Still involved

Me: Oh, right, okay, I’m just maybe going to do that…[drawing]

P2: We’ve just got the second lot of funding to pay him so…

Me: So you got the consultant involved. Can you remember what…how you went about creating a vision? Just because I’ve spoken to other groups and they’ve kind of…been at a point where they’ve got to pull a vision together and they’re like ‘I don’t know what a vision is..’

P2: I can’t remember…I don’t remember that bit at all. Actually, whether I was even involved in that bit, I don’t think…That’s when [consultant] stepped in and, sort of, guided us…

Me: So that was consulting on the vision? So, at this point, what did you do for this consultation?

P1: So there was a flyer went out and, as part of that, there was a questionnaire which said, essentially ‘this is the list of issues, this is the list of objectives, this is the vision’ and then it asked people to state whether they would support that or not in each case and, if they wanted to, whether that was a support or a not support, did they have comments. That was one of the first things I looked at when I came on board because as part of that workshop, that was one of the big impacts basically, um, and there was quite a lot of feedback but most of it was to say ‘you’ve got it right’ which is very encouraging. The objectives and vision, people were happy with. There were maybe a handful, less than 6 I would have said, where people said ‘you’ve missed a bit’, you know, ‘I think that bit about transport should include this aspect as well’ or ‘I think that bit about housing should have mentioned this’, that kind of thing. But nobody was saying ‘you’ve completely got this wrong’, so it was refining and it really was refining rather than changing

Me: I remember when we were talking before you said, I can’t remember who, but you said at this point you decided to do this because you felt it was a big gap to go from this straight to policy but also to let people know that you were still doing things. So was there a gap at some point?

P2: Was that that document there? Was that the one that came out for that? [referring to the document they gave me earlier]

Me: Yeah, so that said February 2017.

P1: Yeah

P2: Yeah

P1: So this one, was way back in June of the previous year…this one here. It was back in June 2016 and so there was quite a big gap to there until September/October time when we had the workshop to try and galvanize the thing and keep it up again, basically.

P2: And that’s why we put ‘what’s been happening’ to sort of say to people ‘it hasn’t completely gone away but there’s…we’ve been trying to sort it out a bit’ and get ourselves going

Me: So what did you do for the consultation on the briefing note? It was sent out, sort of, like the newsletter?

P1: Yeah, so it goes out as a supplement and through almost all of these there’d be a questionnaire on the back – the last 2 pages – where people could actually say…well, first of all we’re interested in whether they’re a resident or not or if they had another interest so it might be a that they’re not a resident but they’ve got a business here or they’re a developer or whatever and then just kind of a rag[sic?] thing do you fully support it, partly support it or if you’ve got a comment or you don’t support it at all and you object to it and capture any comments – that’s why there’s a couple of sheets so if people want to write. Then we’d have little boxes around in the village shop, the hairdresser and the pub that people would drop these into and then we’d put them into a prize draw and it was just another little incentive

P2: Yeah we had lots of incentives…[laughing]

P1: And then we also, obviously there’s the online version of that, the same form that you collect online and that’s when we had the drop-in sessions in the church as well

Me: Ah, so here there was also drop-ins and you had incentives… Is that the one where you did the village day?

P1: That’s right.

Me: Okay, there’s so many consultations, I’m just remembering them all…

P1: Yeah, yeah, that’s why quite early…well, particularly me, I was quite worried that we were overdoing it and unless we actually kept a pace people were just going to go ‘you just keep coming back every 6 months or a year, you’ve obviously been doing nothing’

Me: In all of the consultations, did you get quite good responses? Or was it…did it vary?

P2: I think the trouble is that most people are quite happy with it so, therefore, they would not respond…

Me: Yeah, I was going to say, people don’t respond when they support it, it’s only when they’ve got something to say

P2: That’s right. So it was only the ones that wanted to say something that would come up. There were a couple of positive comments and there are some in the village who have their own agendas so they tend to come up with their ideas or issues. There is a significant amount of people in the village who I think have got still no idea what this is all about but as long as everything seems to be happy in the village, they’ll just carry on with it.

Me: Yeah, they’re just not hugely bothered about engaging with it, they’re just quite happy to…

P2: Yeah…

P1: And like in most communities, there are, there’s a core of, I would say, about 50 people who take an interest all the time. So [volunteer] would not just produced the housing technical report but he would keep putting stuff out through, what we call, breaking news so the emails that go to people, saying ‘there’s a new version of the core strategy, here’s a summary of it’, when you go to the website ‘this is what it means for us’, or ‘oh that planning application that went to appeal, this is what’s happening with it and this is the reasons why’. The same people would take in interest in that would take an interest in this because the two are linked

P2: It’s sort of like a triangle really. You’ve got that core at the beginning, the small number, sort of, a bit underneath that are interested in what’s going on but felt that everything was covered and then you’ve got another bit at the bottom which is ‘as long as everything seems to be aright then we’re not worried, we don’t want to read all that stuff’.

Me: Then you analysed the feedback, I’m not going to go through that…I’m aware that sometimes we’re repeating stuff so the analysing I’m guessing was just similar to the last ones. So this bit, draft policies, build evidence – so a lot of this at the minute has been fairly linear until I’m guessing you get to here where you go round in a circle and you do a few drafts and you do some more evidence? So I’m going to just do that [drawing looped arrows]

P1: So, essentially, the way we handled that was that we split, and Penny referred to it right at the start, when [consultant] first came on board as a consultant, he had an idea, and I don’t know why because his brief didn’t say this, he had this idea that he was going to be, kind of, consulting and guiding but not actually hands on. So, one of the things I did [laughing] was sat him down right at the beginning and said ‘now we’ve got to produce the plan, I’m quite happy with input from people like Penny and [volunteer] and people to do the wordsmithing but when it comes to the policies, you know, I can tell you what policies I think we need because what’s come out of all these consultations, but I can’t tell you what a sensible housing policy might look like’ and so in all cases, most of the text, we drafted in the team, most of the policies [consultant] produced and, in all cases, we kept pushing that round both the steering group and, every month, we’d check back with the parish council to make sure that they were happy with where we were going as well.

Me: So the text that you created within the group, is that…the, sort of, information in the plan that isn’t policy? Or is that what you gave to [consultant] to turn into policy?

P1: So that sits around the policy

Me: Great. Just thinking, as well then, based on what you’ve said there but also the consultant involvement more broadly, when you got [consultant] involved, what did you want him to do? So you wanted him to do the, sort of, the translation side of it so you could say ‘this is what we want but we don’t know what policy will look like’?

P2: We actually wanted him to do most of it

Me: Yeah, so you wanted that..

P2: That’s why…that’s where we got stuck. We’d done all this bit but we didn’t know how to translate that into a neighbourhood plan so therefore there was some discussion and we got names and, sort of, asked around to find who was a consultant and we got [consultant]. But we actually, as I say, wanted him to do it basically. By this time, the group had also changed because some of the other parish councillors because they had other things or whatever, had sort of drifted away from it so when we restarted again there was [chair] and myself and [clerk], our parish clerk, and [volunteer], really, had, sort of, become the group. So the group had focused down.

Me: Yeah, so was there anything else before you got to the policy stage and these stages…he did the workshop…was that something in particular where it was something you particularly wanted [consultant] to help with…do you know what I mean?

P1: Yeah…it’s quite…I think that’s where this whole thing started to take its new shape, if you like, in that [consultant] came to the workshop and he had, erm, a set process that he’d used elsewhere and, I think he thought that, erm, he would be able to get the group, and by this time we were trying to get the wider group to get the other parish councillors involved, that he’d be able to get the group to sit for several hours and go away for a few hours of educational something and go away and do something and come back. So I think he thought he was going to train the parish councillors in how to write policy and how to write some, erm…and, so, we just diffused[sic?] of that idea very quickly [laughing]. Erm, and what we said was, ‘look’, because of my background writing a document like this is not difficult and there’s so many examples out there, good examples of plans that are already made to choose from to help you to just think about what might or might not go in there, that drafting the main thing is not hard. But, again, where we really needed his expertise, you know…he was never going to train the chairman of the parish council on how to write a policy, basically. His input was to write the policy and then check back with us through the review to make sure that in writing the policy he hadn’t lost what we were trying to do.

Me: So I’ve jotted that down there for what you wanted the consultant to do and I’ve said that at the policy stage, the group were mainly creating the text that would sit around the policies and then [consultant] was liaising with you’s to create the policies there. What about the evidence there then? How did that work with the, kind of, was that, kind of, you would think ‘right okay, we’re going to look at, I don’t know, housing, erm, well housing was a bad one to use cos’ you had that…I don’t know, I can’t think….

P1: Actually, it’s not a bad one… So one of the places in the plan where you’ll find one of the longest lists of evidence is actually the housing thing. So housing technical report is important to the parish and to the way that we produce the plan cos’ it’s, erm, it’s shaped our thinking. Without digressing for too long, one of the things that becomes very clear when you look at the numbers is that we’re part of the CDA within [county]. As a percentage of what the CDA needs to grow by in the plan time, the five year plan time, we’re actually completely disproportionate. So we should have had, like, a 4% growth, we’ve actually got a 32% growth. So it’s that kind of thing, you know, the housing technical report was very good at, kind of, shaping that thinking but then we couldn’t hope to go to examination just on a locally produced document. So then you’ve got the various SHLA, SHMAA, 5 Year Report, blah, blah, blah, and all that stuff to sit as the evidence behind it.

Me: So, in terms of all of that, were the local authority helpful in giving you that information or did you have to do it yourself?

P1: I just searched for it. Most of its not difficult to find and particularly if, again, if you look at other plans, you know, so a mate of mine project managed, erm, a neighbourhood plan down in Rotherwick in Hampshire which is a little village not too dissimilar to this, erm, and his plan had only just been made at the point that we were starting out on the drafting. So I’d use his plan and the Almouth plan to look at what kind of evidence did you find…and then think what would be the local equivalent? Because of the national standards of what councils have to produce, it’s not that difficult.

P2: I think that’s a common thread right from the beginning. We’ve always looked to see what somebody else has done.

Me: That’s really good as well because I don’t necessarily think that’s common, erm, and I think in a lot of cases, a lot of groups that I’ve worked with have relied very much on...what the local authority tells them. So if you’ve got a planner attending the meetings, they can tell you about other plans in that county or that local authority boundary but I think there’s a lot cases where…well, I suppose it depends how supportive the local authority is and how forthcoming they are with actually providing support, and I think that’s going to be a big challenge for us in [area] because the local authority is not particularly on board. I mean, they can’t be against it but they’re not going to be helpful

P1: Yes

P2: They’re not going to be proactive

Me: They definitely won’t be helpful and I think that’s going to be a bit of a challenge. And, again, because of the area, finding other urban areas that have done neighbourhood plans is going to be more difficult. I think it’s about two thirds nationally are more rural areas and only a third is urban and I would imagine most of that third would be in London which is a whole context in itself.

P1: Yeah

P2: It’s a completely different world isn’t it?

Me: Yeah, so I think it’s really good that you’ve done that because I don’t think a lot of groups do do that.

P2: So I think because of the timing, we came on when it was very new so, therefore, you had to look around to see what was…what everybody else was doing – or the few that were around. But now there’s a huge groundswell, particularly up here, there’s hardly a village that isn’t producing a neighbourhood plan so, yeah, we were able to use that and I think {LPA planner}also contributed to that. He would tell us how the others were getting on, like [area], and as [chair] said, [consultant] would put that in too - ‘that’s this is what’s happening in other places, this is what you’ve got to watch out for’.

Me: I mean I’ve worked with various groups in [county]. I mean, I think various groups have had issues in, you know, some of the, erm, sort of, the relationship between the council in terms of, sort of, just, you know, like what you were saying before about getting feedback and the structure and that kind of thing but, on the whole, I do feel like [county] do at least have that team who can actually, at least, attend meetings and provide that support. Again, I was working with a group in [area]and, as far as I’m aware, at the minute there is not one person in the council that’s available to attend neighbourhood planning meetings. What it does mean is that when I’m looking at something like this where I’m looking at the support I’m having to factor in that depending on where you are in the country depends on the level of the support you would get. Just in terms of the policies, are they all quite, erm, general policies? As in about topics like green spaces or housing or whatever or was there anything specifically…did you decide to do anything around specific sites or was it more just around…?

P1: Right. So the only sites that are in the policy are the two of the permitted sites so there’s a [inaudible location] site which has a permitted development of 55 houses and there’s another on the east road for another 12 called Normandy Terrace. So because of what I was saying before about, you know, we…permitted development – there’s nothing we can do about it in terms of neighbourhood planning so they have to go in there. So what we’ve been…I guess part of the key strategy for this is that we want to make sure that within the settlement boundary that any further development is what you’d call windfall sites. There aren’t any other SHLAA sites available so there’s no reason why we shouldn’t or wouldn’t take that approach anyway but because of the amount of growth that’s been in the village or planned to be in the village, so that’s been our approach really. So in terms of sites, there’s the two…

Me: …Which were kind of already set out anyway…

P1: Yeah. And the plan itself talks about a couple of other sites that, erm, are the ones that actually involved us with the council over the last 18 months that were rejected at every level including appeal level. So, erm, that’s the only sites that are mentioned.

Me: Okay.

P2: We were quite strong on getting our settlement boundary tight and getting that into place right from the…from this, sort of, second phase of talking…

Me: Okay, so, the SEA screening, you didn’t need one…

[Pause to sort out lunch]

P2: [chair] knows more about this last bit anyway really

Me: This is where we’re at anyway so we can talk about these last three little bits. I say little, they’re not exactly little, but, erm, you know what I mean. The only other thing after that, what I was going to do was just get you both to stick some stickers on the bits that you thought were the most challenging and where, for one reason or another, you found it to be particularly difficult. One of the other things I want to get out of this, as well as mapping the process, is identifying the areas / that groups do need more support with and if there’s anything we can do, digitally or not necessarily digitally, erm, where there’s more support definitely needed at that point, erm, so that’s just the last little bit as well.

P2: /The sticking points

P2: Well, I can tell you right away that the first bit was very difficult because we didn’t know what we were doing [laughing]

Me: We’ll use red, the traditional colour of…

P2: Yes, and I think that sets the tone for the whole thing

Me: Was it all this sort of ‘chunk’? [beginning]

P2: Yes, once I think we’d formed the group, yeah, that’s it. It was sort of ‘what are we doing’

Me: Yeah ‘what is this?!’

P2: What we had was quite limited, as we say, just sort of had the odd articles, I think I found another one.

Me: Did you use any of the Locality guidance or not?

P2: That was the other one we had…

Me: The LGA. Right.

P2: Again, I don’t think…it was hard translating what you’re reading when we had no real idea what was involved and what we were actually going to do.

Me: Because I think that goes back to a little bit about what I was saying at the beginning about, you know, it’ll have ‘this is the process’ – is that really the process? You know, is that how it works on the ground? For example, I worked in [area] and, at probably at one point around this area, where you did the briefing note actually, they split into topic groups. Obviously it’s a much bigger area so it’s going to be a much bigger plan and that kind of thing but, I don’t think I’ve yet really read any guidance that gives you some advice on if you want to split up into, like, looking at specific things, how you go about that…

P2: …What {LPA planner}actually included in his talk…

Me: …There’s little bits and pieces but I just find that it’s quite bitty.

P2: Yeah, because even when we got this bit which was to, sort of, give us an idea, I mean that was just very generic things – restriction on things that you can’t do. I think he wanted to make it very clear that this is not so you can say no to housing, erm, right from the word go and then that was the quick plan preparation process – that’s what we got – and then we went in to what other people were doing. So…

Me: Yeah, so I think with the process thing, just as an example, you know, when I’m saying this tool will hopefully simplify it but not so much that you lose the detail and that kind of thing, when you look at the process that [LPA planner]’s set out there, really, that just says what the guidance says, what the regulations say. They are the things that you absolutely have to do but all the bits in between you can do however the group thinks it’s appropriate to do but I think the trouble with some of the, like, the Locality guidance or whatever it might be, erm, don’t leave much room for manoeuvre

P2: No

Me: And I think there should be room for manoeuvre because I think it’s different for everybody

P2: I think it comes back to the same old problem of if you know what you’re talking about everything seems so simple and you actually, because you know so much about what you’re talking about, you can’t get yourself back to that stage of what /it was like when you didn’t know anything

Me: /Remembering what it was like

P2: We’re all people with other things to do. I mean, that was the thing with the other parish council people that sort of drifted away, because we’ve all got jobs on the parish council so, you know, when you’re out on the moor trying to sort out where the birch is growing, you haven’t got a lot of time to think about doing all this sort of thing or something like that. I think we did go to a planning meeting but that was to teach you about how planning all works but that was kind of related to that bit but, erm, that was…I don’t think we had a lot of other information really.

[Stopping for food and tea]

P2: And I think you are, sort of, very dependent on what sort of expertise you’ve got within your area. I mean we were very lucky that we had this chap, Marty, before and [chair] are very similar, are able to digest the information, put it down into writing. [volunteer] is…I don’t know what we would have done without him. Erm, the rest of us are just a variety of backgrounds, you know, and not used to dealing with the authorities and things.

Me: I think what was interesting…so when I did the workshop with the planners back in January…because really what I was interested in was working with the groups but for various reasons to do with PhD timescales, it just worked out better to, erm, it just worked out easier to meet with them first because I had to…well, I had my progression review and I had to write my literature review and all of those things. But it was actually quite interesting because from their perspective the people that were in that group in January, and as I say there was a a mixture of local authority planners who had a specific interest in, sort of, engagement side of things and were quite pro neighbourhood planning or were planning aid volunteers at one point or another, and they placed a massive emphasis on this bit at the beginning. They said that a lot of groups don’t get much support at this stage to get it right, to form a group, to decide a boundary, to decide it’s the right thing to do…you know, all of those things and actually, a lot of people don’t get a lot of support at that stage which means…and it’s not always the case, but in some cases, and one in particularly springs to mind for me, means that they’ve set themselves up to fail actually, because this hasn’t been thought through enough. That’s particularly the case when there isn’t much local government support. Erm, but this bit…in the tool I’m going to develop, this beginning bit is going to be quite a bit part of the tool

P2: I was going to say when you form a group, you actually want to look at who you want in the group, who can actually take it forward because if you don’t… We would have actually fallen by the wayside eventually.

Me: Absolutely. But yeah, it was interesting that they’d said that. I haven’t…you know, when I’m doing these workshops I’m not really telling that first because I want to see what the groups think but it just seems to be a pattern and also just from my experience of working with groups especially at the minute with [area].

P2: You’ve got to have people who actually understand what they’re going to be doing and that you’re going to be in it for… And I think also if the process was a bit more clear so that people actually knew that they were, this is going to take 2 years or whatever. Yes, I think if people had a better idea of what they were doing, why they were doing and how long it was going to take approximately so that you knew you were going to be having meetings, you would need to be doing this, perhaps forming the strengths in the groups so that you can say ‘you’re good at writing up’ or ‘you’re good at advertising’ or something like that. It’d be much clearer.

Me: Yeah, and I think with, erm, with some of the work that…so I went to an event in Durham actually, a Locality event, and they were saying that even if people don’t…if there’s people with specific skills that don’t want to be part of the group having them, kind of, as, like, affiliates almost to say ‘well, you know when we’re at this stage, it would be really good if you could just help us with this little bit’ and just approaching, trying not to just dive straight in with whoever’s around the table but to actually think about it a little bit more

P2: Yes, you actually want quite a small group because if you’ve got too many people…

Me: Which is the challenge with the forums because you’ve got to have 21 members. Erm, but I think that, erm, you don’t have 21 active members. You have 21 people, you have a core group of max 6-8 with the other 21 almost being those affiliates.

P2: That’s right then you can just call upon them

Me: Yeah, but you have to have that 21 to start with.

P2: That’s right. I think it does eventually, like we have, it’s come down to just the 2 of us really and [clerk] sort of adds input. Because [clerk] was involved in the [area] one. She used to be the town clerk at [area]

Me: Ah right, okay. Well, I’m meeting with [area] at 2.30 to do this.

P2: But she’s now our clerk so she’s been valuable as well. She knew, sort of, she could add in.

[Pause for lunch]

Me: So we have managed to actually fill this sheet pretty well

P2: It’s amazing when you start and you think ‘what we going to say?’ but when you break it down. I think it’s a really good idea too.

Me: Yeah so it’s just these last few bits

P2: Yeah, we’re doing well

Me: Did you know much about this going on, the SEA screening? How did it come about?

P1: It features a lot in all the documentation that you come across, looking at other plans and looking at what the process needs to be and so on. SEA screening is a really big thing.

Me: So it wasn’t sort of sprung on you at all?

P1: It wasn’t but, er, although it wasn’t sprung on us, the timing of it when it needed to happen was never clear and so when we had the workshop back in September/October last year, erm, because it was my first involvement with the group and I was trying to get up to speed, I’d done quite a lot of reading up and wrote up a load of questions that I wanted to ask. I remember one of the questions I asked {LPA planner}was ‘are we going to need an SEA screening?’. And you talk about the new boy on the block and feeling naïve because the answer was pretty much ‘well, of course not because the sites are permitted, they’ve already been through, so of course you don’t need one’. And then, as we got through the drafting of the plan, erm, {LPA planner}started to mention SEA screening more and more and one day I eventually said ‘are you trying to tell me we should have already been doing this?’ and ‘well, yeah, you should have already been talking to somebody about getting screened’. And I said / ‘well, I’m not going to let it delay us, [LPA planner], we’re going to crack on and we’re going to put out the plan for pre-submission consultation’ and he said ‘well, there is a risk, hopefully it’s a small risk because the sites are permitted that they’ll come back and say that you do need an SEA’. And I said ‘fine, if we get part way through the consultation and they come back and they say that needs to happen then we’ll either take a decision to stop the consultation until it’s happened or we’ll let it happen in parallel and we’ll catch it up at the other side of it or whatever’. And, again, there’s no clear thing in the process that says ‘you have to have that before you can complete this stage’ [pre-submission consultation]. You certainly need to have it before this stage where you put…this stage [submission]. So we agreed that’s the way that we would do it and the way it came out, of course, we don’t need an SEA. However, at the same time, we asked the team that look after the habitat screening to do a habitat screening and as of time now, we still haven’t had a response. And [LPA planner] is just…

P2: /It’s this message thing again

Me: And does all of that get put on to you to chase all of that up or are the local authority quite proactive in the SEA screening and the other screenings or was it left to you?

P1: I think it’s up to the individuals to push for it and to just sort of…

Me: See, that’s interesting because I…I’ve never…I’ve not, erm, I’ve not had a lot of experience with this element of the process. It’s probably one of the only bits of the process that I’ve not had a lot of, erm, involvement in. But my understanding of this from the regulations and things is that it’s absolutely the local authority’s responsibility which means that really, the groups shouldn’t have to think too much about it. Like, you know, the local authority should be proactive in that

P2: Our experience is that we’ve had to push for everything to chase people up and that it’s actually very hard with people at [LOCAL AUTHORITY] to get people to reply and there’s been, just among parish councils meetings with the [LOCAL AUTHORITY], is that communication is actually very poor and that what happens quite often is you send an email or a letter in, that person might have changed jobs or gone on holiday for 6 weeks or something but nobody else picks up their mail so things just go on and on and on and often you never get an answer or, like a lot of these things, we’ve had to push to get somebody to come and sort it. I suspect what hasn’t happened, because of the council changes recently and they’re still trying to, sort of, sort themselves out which is probably not helping either.

Me: Yeah, because I mean…

P2: Individually they’re very nice. If you have to talk to someone you’re absolutely fine but to actually get the right person because they just seem to keep changing jobs all the time as well.

Me: Yeah, I mean it is a fairly changeable field at the minute [laughing]

P1: And they will say that, for things like the SEA screening and habitat screening, that we have to fire the pistol to start it because we have to have the documentation to a certain level in order for them to say ‘we understand what you’re trying to do and, therefore, we can now screen’.

Me: I mean it is really interesting that that’s kind of the way it works…

P2: I suspect it would be easier for them and for us if there was more of a framework where we each knew our bit was and that they would actually reply when they needed to and we could get that bit sorted and we could move on. It would be easier for them than having us chasing them all the time or trying to chase somebody, you know, than somebody doesn’t know what that’s about and cos’, this other chap that’s been coming, he’s had to kind of pick it up hasn’t he?

P1: [LPA planner], yeah

Me: So I was just saying I know [LPA planner] quite well but from before he worked at [county]. He probably said this but he ran planning aid, the north east branch of planning aid for years and years, and originally when neighbourhood planning first came around, planning aid were one of the people who would support neighbourhood planning groups er, which isn’t the case anymore, now it’s mainly locality and aecom, I think. So he’s got a lot of experience but he was never in a council environment until, I mean he worked in the council years ago, but until recently he’s on the other side almost cos he would almost be more like what I would do because he was in a different role but now he’s obviously on the other side of it. I’ve not spoken to him recently. I’ve just had an email from the group actually and I’ll be meeting them again and [LPA planner] will be there and Jonathan Nicholson – I don’t know if you’ve come across him? I don’t think he particularly works in neighbourhood planning but he’s a planning officer at the council but he’s like, the chair of the planning aid north east task group, so I’ll be meeting with them to talk through the work I’ve been doing but erm, yeah, it’s just interesting. Because really, they’ve got this duty to support and they determine what that means for them. It seems like they’re quite involved at different points but really, when you get to this point, there’s a lot more local authority involvement because really you get to a point where there’s not a lot more you can do anymore and you just hand it over and you just wait and see, and I thought that, that process would have been a bit smoother but it doesn’t…and really that process starts with this kind of stuff and it doesn’t seem like that really is all that smooth.

P1: And one of the kind of the big rocks that got thrown in the pond with the last feedback on the pre-submission draft is, erm, now I don’t know if this is {LPA planner} or [LPA planner]’s team or came it came from elsewhere in the council but it all comes back through {LPA planner} so it’s {LPA planner}who’s seeming to tell us this, erm, they said that they’ve, because they’ve withdrawn the core strategy, they’ve withdrawn all the evidence base for the core strategy. So literally, / if you go on the [LOCAL AUTHORITY] website, and you look for something like the Green Infrastructure Strategy, it’s not there anymore. There’s just something that comes up and says it’s been withdrawn. Erm, now, as a result of that, things like the housing policy, which obviously referred out to things like/ the 5 year housing land supply… We very carefully, haven’t relied on the core strategy for anything because we always felt that we would be there before the Core Strategy given its history. So we refer to the existing local plans but we also say ‘when the Core Strategy comes along, this is what we expect the greenbelt to look like’ but in the meantime our policy is this… So, the plan looks forward in terms of what’s going to be there to make sure we’re not going to do something now that we’re going to have to undo in 2 years time but at the same time it’s based, the evidence base, is the existing evidence base. So the feedback from [LPA planner] and team was ‘oh well, you can’t use any of this evidence anymore’, like the 5 year land supply, ‘what you should do is just put in some numbers. So you should just say, between the period of 2017 and 2031, we propose in this policy we will build circa 77 houses’. Now, I know, and I know nothing about examination, that the examiner will throw that straight out because it’s not based on anything. Anybody could sit down and say 77, 110…

Me: /Oh, my word.

Me: /That evidence…things you’ve been looking at back here

Me: …Yeah, that’s exactly what you’re told to avoid doing

P1: Exactly. So one of the observations of [LOCAL AUTHORITY] that we’re going to push back on, because obviously things like the 5 year land supply report is nothing to do with the Core Strategy. It’s a document that has to be there anyway

Me: Yeah, that’s what I was thinking. I was thinking, that doesn’t….I don’t…that doesn’t seem to make sense as to why you would pull all that evidence because it’s not the evidence…the evidence is just evidence, it’s factual…

P2: It’s what you do with it…

P1: And it changes over time. So the next 5 year land supply will look different from the last one. That’s the whole point of.

Me: So really that’s…so they’re the kinds of things that you’re in the process of negotiating now so that you can actually still move forward and get your plan submitted but still with the evidence…

P1: Yeah. And, of course, if that fails…if that negotiation fails, and then we’re completely stuffed. We can’t go anywhere.

Me: Wow. That’s…intense. That’s a huge challenge. I really just don’t understand why they would take all the evidence away. I suppose if they’re going to be edit…you know, changing the Core Strategy then they’re going to be re-doing the evidence to support whatever changes are made but surely that evidence that exists now is still valid evidence in general. Even if they do an updated housing supply…

P1: So the Conservatives have said, amongst other things, that they don’t believe the figures in the report because they don’t think the population will be as its been forecast and, therefore, the housing need won’t be as it is in that report. That’s fine and, in fact, in terms of this, it just gets better and better because it’s a bigger and bigger proportion that we’ve already got and, therefore, we should have less going forward. So beyond permitted development, there isn’t anymore we need to do. So from that point of view, it’s fine. However, what they’ll say is ‘the core strategy has been withdrawn because of this evidence base that its used is not seen to be correct therefore, you should have used…’. One of the reasons that’s tosh is that we’ve already got a number of ‘made’ plans in the county that have used the same evidence base. So what…so all the planning in the county is no longer based on any firm evidence? I don’t think so.

P2: And they’ve already done it once haven’t they? Even before the council changed, they got so far, which is how we ended up getting this development, and they started already pulling back saying ‘we’ve got it wrong basically, we’re asking for too much’. So they rejigged the figures which is when [volunteer] did a load of things so we could understand that and then that’s what we’ve based it on, the second one.

Me: So in terms of these kinds of things that have come up at this stage, how did you’s…as a group were you quite comfortable with all of these negotiations or was it quite a challenge to start getting your head around?

[laughter]

Me: Because you’ve just talked about like that like you know exactly what’s going on. Is that…

P2: This is the calm after the storm

P1: I was going to say…you should have seen me when I read through the…if [LPA planner] or any of his team had been in the same room as me, it would not have been good.

[laughter]

Me: But do you find it easy to get your head around all of these negotiations and all of these different things going on or has that been quite a challenge?

P1: I think, erm, my background means that it’s not difficult for me to get my head around it

P2: We’ve got used to /all this, sort of, constant changing. Like I say, it’s like walking on mud, you’re trying to keep your b[volunteer]ce and you just get used to it in the end and there’s no point getting…after, you know…yes, initially you get very upset about it but…

P1: /Yeah, you get used to it…[laughing]

P1: And you get supportive emails from Penny saying ‘calm down’

[laughter]

P1: It’s aright! [laughing]

P2: Breathe! Stiff drink [laughing]. I mean, yeah I’ve got a background in the NHS so this goes on all the time in the NHS so you kind of just regroup. You have to keep going and just pick your battle zones and where you can when and that’s what we’re doing.

Me: Well, that sounds like the big challenge you’ve got coming up then!

P1: It does!

Me: So just to finish this little bit then, this pre-submission consultation, is this village day one that you did?

P1: Yeah

Me: Okay, I’m just going to jot some stuff down

P1: Well, it’s…well, the village day one happened within that so that’s…that covers the 6 week period from middle of June to the end of July.

P2: By that stage, this had gone out…

Me: So that was the draft, okay.

P2: Fully printed draft and also online, there’s room for the questionnaire, the same as we’ve done before.

Me: And this was within this pre-submission consultation?

P2: Yes. So that people should have been aware of this when we had the village day.

Me: Then you had the village day…

P1: That’s July 15th.

Me: And at the village day you said that you did…you had a stall, and you had various, like, incentives and you were just chatting to people and then there was questionnaires – was that right?

P2: We had the questionnaires…in fact we actively went out and sought people’s opinions because people wouldn’t walk up to the stall quite often, again, unless they’ve got a definite agenda which was what happened. But most of the time, we, sort of…there was about the 3 or 4 of us, /wasn’t there? And we just went out and, sort of, you know, said ‘do you know about this?’

P1: /Yeah

Me: Was there anything else in particular that you did with the pre-submission consultation, in that 6 weeks?

P1: Well, just the usual stuff that we have to do. So we sent letters out and emails out to all the statutory bodies, um, and to other interested groups. So, at various stages through these consultations, particularly the last 2 or 3, we’ve also been out to people like local developers. There was a guy who’s name I mentioned before, Cansdale – he has some land that was one of the pieces of land that got refused development so we’ve made a point of making sure that he’s aware of this and has an opportunity to feed back. What we don’t want, clearly, is to get to examination stage and somebody like that come along and say ‘well, I wasn’t consulted on that, I didn’t know anything about that’

Me: And as a key stakeholder, they’re going to…have some sway

P1: Yeah

Me: Because I think that has happened around the country in various places where, but maybe not with more local, erm, builders, but there’s been quite a lot of examples where national housebuilders, who’ve owned key sites but who don’t necessarily engage in the process, then challenge the plans at the end. Thankfully, there’s a book came out in January, erm, it’s like, written by, erm, I think they’re all professors, 3 of them, because there’s not that many people doing research on neighbourhood planning, which is kind of good for me in a way but also bad…[laughter]

P1: …because you don’t have other people’s stuff to look at…

Me: Yeah. But they did a book and it was helpful in setting the scene for where we’re at with neighbourhood planning but there was quite a lot of things mentioned in there around legal cases where housebuilders had challenged neighbourhood plans. What was quite positive, and I don’t know how representative this is of the general…how things are going in more general terms, but it was definitely true of the specific case studies that they were talking about in the book, that these concerns were thrown out. A lot of the developers were saying the groups are anti-development but actually they weren’t anti-development, they were just anti-mass-housebuilder development and they wanted development that was suitable and appropriate which is not necessarily your /bog-standard…

P2: /Your 200 houses…

Me: Which was interesting. So you’ve done all the things that regulations require and that kind of thing, okay. Then really, so you were saying this is a bit of a loop – so you’ll finalise the policies to go for pre-submission consultation but then…have you been in a loop here?

P1: Not really, it’s been a bit more linear than that. So as a result of the consultation, we’ve now got a refined set of policies. Our plan is to get that document to [LPA planner] and his team on Monday and we’ve got a meeting with them 2 days later where we’re hoping that whole thing about the 18 page thing can be put to bed. And we can say ‘look, this is where we are’.

Me: So did you get the 18 page response from the council as part of, during this consultation?

P1: 2 days after it finished [laughing]. I got an email on the last day saying ‘oh, we’re going to be a bit late with this, is it ok?’. And, of course, it is okay because it’s pointless… I could have said ‘no, you’ve missed the consultation period’ but then all that would happen is we just get all the same comments here [examination].

P2: And the few comments we’d got from this pre-consultation, we were, sort of, adding in anyway to refine what we’d got.

P1: And the statutory bodies, other than [LOCAL AUTHORITY], we got some useful feedback from Natural England and they made 2 or 3 suggestions for tweaks to the policies, same with Northumbrian Water, same with Historic England.

Me: So you got…because that was the other thing, is, erm, I wasn’t sure how many of the statutory bodies did actually reply.

P1: Not very many

Me: But the ones you did get were useful?

P1: Yep. So we had, um, they were all positive in some way, shape or form, but several of them, so the ones I mentioned, also said ‘well you could do this or you could add this’ to strengthen it.

Me: That’s good though

P1: Yeah it is

P2: Yeah, it’s helpful

P1: Yeah, it’s very helpful

Me: Yeah. So, looking forward, obviously the biggest thing is just get all of the 18 page thing and evidence side of it sorted but, sort of, providing all of that works out, which I’m sure it will, have you thought about this end of it yet? Or is it just kind of one step at a time?

P2: We’re up to here aren’t we really? [writing consultation and basic condition statements]

Me: Yeah, because you said you’d started that

P1: I’m busy writing the documents now

Me: So these are being written. So, you’re kind of here [writing consultation and basic condition statements] but you’re also kind of here [finalising policies]?

P1: Yeah

P2: Yeah

Me: Okay

P2: We thought we would be further ahead but we will get there

P1: And, there’s one more step, and actually I’d be interested in your view on this actually. Quite late on in all of this, probably just before we finalised this document, [LPA planner] started talking about a health check – why didn’t we get a health check.

Me: Yeah, I’ve heard about this

P1: And the reasons that [LPA planner] and [LPA planner] came up with for why health checks are a good idea were largely around the fact that the examiner will check it against his checklist basically. So these are the conditions and these are the rules and this is what’s in the plan, can I marry these up – tick, tick, tick. Fine. Whereas the health check would actually flag up things like, when you come to implement that policy in real life it won’t work because of x, y and z. Yep. And so they were quite insistent on the health check. Given we could get funding for it, I said we’d do it provided that, again, it didn’t slow the timetable down. You can see how driven I am by the timetable! [laughing]

Me: Well, yeah, but when you get so close to the end you just want to keep momentum and get to the end…

P2: And get to the end, that’s right!

P1: So I said ‘you know, if it’s going to add some real value, fine. And if we can get funding for it, fine.’. Because we’re not going to go back to parish council and ask for additional funding for something I don’t really believe is going to make a massive difference. So, we got that sorted out so there is some funding for it, it is going to happen. The guy’s going to do it at the end of this month, which given it’s supposed to take about 2 or 3 days, that’s fine. So it should fit within the timetable.

Me: Yeah, and I suppose that also gives you a bit of a deadline for the council to resolve their issues around the evidence

P1: Yeah, it does, because we’ll be giving that version to the… But what’s really interesting, and this is the bit I wanted to get your feedback on, is, so when we go to the people that arrange that health check and the person who’s going to do the health check to find out what we’re paying for…guess what? We’re paying for somebody to do what I think we’ve just had [LOCAL AUTHORITY] do and what we’ve been doing which is make sure that when it goes to the independent examiner, that all the boxes get ticked. In other words, it’s another check that looks just like that one.

Me: Yeah, my understanding of the basic health check isn’t that it looks at whether the policies would work because…yeah, my understanding wasn’t that. My understanding was that it would flag up if you weren’t going to tick any of those boxes at independent examination. It wasn’t…that’s my understanding and I might be wrong but I think it is just… It means if you have got…y’know, if there’s something in the basic conditions that you don’t meet for whatever reason or it’s a bit…or it could be made clearer, you have an opportunity to do that before the independent examination. But actually, my understanding about once it goes to independent examination is they come back and say ‘yes, it’d fine with no changes’ or ‘it’s fine but you just need to tweak this to strengthen this, this and this’, which you have a chance to do before the referendum and it’s the local authority’s responsibility to do that not yours, which means that… Well, I suppose, if you do the health check you’re going to have to make those changes before it’s submitted – I don’t know what you would prefer. [laughing]. But do you know what I mean?

P2: It seems to be duplication doesn’t it?

Me: It does. And I didn’t think that, I didn’t think that the health check was ‘this policy won’t work because of x, y and z’ because I don’t think anybody can really fully predict that and, if the policies weren’t going to achieve what you want them to achieve, the council should have told you that already.

P1: So that brings me to...this is the…[laughing] maybe you should stop the recording, just kidding, it’s fine. I’ve been thinking about why they would be so insistent that we should have a health check and the only valid reason I can come up with is if we have the health check, they can do less checking.

Me: That could be true.

P1: Because somebody independently is checking it, they don’t have to work so hard at it. So it’s effectively moving some work and some costs out of [LOCAL AUTHORITY] into a nationally funded pool.

Me: It might be, it might be.

P1: That’s the only reason I can come up with

Me: It might be because basically once you give them…once you’ve got a final policy it’s kind of out of your hands really and they take on the responsibility of all of this [pointing to the end stages], including, like I say, at independent examination, if they come back with comments, they have to make them. So if they’re asking you to get a health check and you need to make to changes, it’ll be your responsibility to do that. Those changes that are suggested will have probably just be the same changes that would be suggested there [independent examination] but there [independent examination] the local authority would have to do them whereas you would do them… I suppose there’s pros and cons to both in that, yeah, it might just be the local authority trying to kind of push back some work toward you. On the other hand, it means you’re still in control a little bit more. I don’t know…

P1: And I’m quite comfortable with that. So as a, something we didn’t mention, erm, in this feedback that we got, I obviously went back to [LPA planner] and said that I was disappointed because I felt like we’d involved them and the team right the way through in detail so to get that level of change that late felt disappointing, to say the least. And he came back and said, ‘oh well, what we’ll do is, I’m about to go on holiday, but [LPA planner] will redraft it, redraft the plan so it now takes account of all these comments’. Now, I didn’t say this to [LPA planner] but for me, that’s completely inappropriate.

Me: I agree

P1: It’s a neighbourhood plan, not the council’s plan.

P2: That’s right

P1: What I said to [LPA planner] was ‘no, that’s fine, we were going to crack on with it and we’ll make sure we had a good next draft before we sat down with them again’. Which is what we’re doing.

Me: I know, I think there’s a really…I think the local authority side of it, it’s really interesting because you don’t know how much of it is strategic in that they push back bits of work and take bits of work depending on what suits them or how much of it is purely about resources, how much of it about them thinking that it just might be nice thing to offer or is it, is it not? It’s quite… I wouldn’t say it’s a good idea for them to redraft it

P1: No

P2: Definitely

P1: I mean, I’ve had… So for example, if I’d said yes to that, they would have redrafted the housing policy to take out any reference to the evidence base that we’ve still referred to and they would have just put in some numbers.

Me: Which is then going to cause problems at the independent examination or at the health check which they’re then suggesting that you do.

P2: So they’re not being very helpful

Me: I do get the impression that even the local authorities that are quite, erm, pro neighbourhood planning and are quite supportive, that once it gets to this bit it just seems like a minefield. And I don’t if it’s just genuinely that complicated or whether it’s just that they don’t know what to do. I know…I mean I know neighbourhood planning has been around a while now, but really in the grand scheme of the planning system, it’s still new and you think, you know, there’s now more adopted neighbourhood plans in the country than there are local plans and you think ‘oh yeah that’s loads’ but when you break it down to local authority area, it’s still only handful here and a handful there, some have got none. So, yeah, it’s just…it’s just crazy that at this point, after all the work you’ve put in that this is the bit that seems to be…

P1: And it should be that difficult

Me: Difficult. It shouldn’t be. This is the bit that’s more set in stone because this is the bit the regulations…this is the regulations. This is how…it just doesn’t seem to make sense. So that’s a shame. But you’ll get there.

P1: Well, you know, we’ll get there

P2: We’ll push through it

P1: We’ll keep going and push through it

P2: We’ve done all this work

P1: It’d be interesting actually to see, when we get to the end, if there are any other lessons learned.

Me: Yeah, definitely

P1: Which we will feed back to you

Me: Brilliant. Is there anything that you haven’t mentioned or that I haven’t prompted about, or anything…I don’t know, just to make sure we’ve covered everything…

P2: I can’t think of anything else

Me: I think we’ve been pretty comprehensive in mapping it out. We’ll just...I know you’ve already done this partly, but I was just saying while you were getting the lunch, the only other thing that I was wanting to do was use these red dots to stick on the process where you think has been the most challenging parts. It doesn’t have to just be one, it could be multiple, whether that’s because the group struggled, whether that’s because of the local authority, whether it’s external reasons, whether it’s because group changes meant the project stalled and you think that was a big problem…whatever it might. Anything where you think that it’s difficult, it’s particularly challenging, just stick a red dot on.

P2: I said I’ve put one on the beginning because we didn’t have a clue what we were doing. I think the bit where we stalled in the middle was also a red dot.

Me: This was 2016 and that was 2017, so was it somewhere around here?

P1: Yeah, it’s in the middle of that.

Me: And that was really just about that gap, was it because of changes in the group and things like that?

P2: Yeah, it was because of changes in the groups but also we kind of, lost the momentum and we needed the consultant to take it forward and the last couple of meetings we were just saying we need someone to help us now. We’ve done we think we can do but we now need more

Me: Yeah, that’s right.

P2: I think, perhaps, a red sticker round here.

[laughing]

P1: Yep!

Me: Definitely. Do you think this is a fair representation of your journey so far?

P2: Yeah. It’s been interesting actually. You remember more when you start doing this.

P1: I think the other…as you can tell, I’m very for neighbourhood plans in general, but I think one of the side benefits of them that isn’t obvious from this because it happens somewhere else, is that, the parish councillors have become more educated about planning and so when we get planning applications in, which obviously we do all the time, they look at them in a different light. Eventually we’ll be looking at them through this lens as well but even without that detail in front of you, you do tend to look at a planning application and think about it in the context of such and such, should we really be letting that go?

P2: We’re a bit more savvy now aren’t we?

P1: Yeah, we’re a bit more savvy.

Me: That’s obviously a really good outcome and I think it’s something that people just say ‘yeah, yeah, people get more knowledge of this’, but it’s actually really useful, especially in a parish scenario. It’s more difficult to have those benefits in urban areas because they don’t have the same responsibilities and structures in place.