**[area name] Neighbourhood Plan**

P3: We record all our committee meetings so we’re used to that

Me: That’s aright then, good

P3: And it picks up, even the mumbled words, doesn’t it?

P4: It picks up a lot!

[laughing]

Me: So what I did was, I started with, these are just the steps that have been highlighted through guidance documents, erm, quite high level steps. What I thought was, rather than starting with a blank piece of paper, we could put these in order of what happened in [area name], identify if there’s any missing or if there’s some steps that you didn’t go through…there’s one that I don’t think is here actually, about strategic environmental assessments and those type of things…not everyone does them. So what I thought was, we’ll just put them in order first, then go back to the beginning and talk through the story adding the detail. The aim is to go into as much detail as you can remember but don’t worry if you don’t remember things, that’s fine.

P3: Would you like to do this in a period of 6 or 7 weeks?!

[laughing]

P4: Can you remember it all?

[laughing]

P3: It’s engrained…

P4: Is it engrained?!

[laughing]

Me: So, then the other thing I’ve got is just some stickers so we don’t have to write every single thing down. So, for example, I’ve got local government stickers so if there was a specific, erm, time when you had some significant input or advice or whatever from county authority level, we can just stick a sticker on so I can see that.

P3: Can we put those stickers on upside down if it was unhelpful?

[laughing]

Me: You can, absolutely! But we are going to talk about that as well so don’t worry. And, if you used a consultant at any point, just stick that on, and if you can remember what that was for. If you spent money, so, y’know, the one earlier on, it was mainly at the consultation stages, it’s not necessarily…I don’t need to know amounts and things like that, it’s just generally did you spend any money while you were going through that? If you can remember what you spend money on, not the amount or anything, we can write that down as well. One of the key things, which I’ll be doing as we go, but you can also jot things down on these, is what I’m really interested in is what I said where, how did you get from that step to that step? What needed to be done to get from that step to that step? And I’m going to stick these around all of this. Does that all make sense?

P3: It will do.

P4: Yes, as we go along

Me: Yeah I thought I’d give a quick overview then we can just dive in and then it all becomes a bit clearer as we go through so that’s fine. Erm, so yeah, just feel free to start putting these in order.

P4: So, where did we start? I must admit, I wasn’t involved at the very beginning of it, I wasn’t even at the town council.

Me: That’s fine. I think this morning one of them had been involved all the way through and one of them had been involved mainly at the end

[quiet – putting post-it notes in order and mumbling amongst themselves]

Me: If there’s something you think isn’t represented by a post-it, then we can write it on one of these as well.

P4: Yeah. Well if we put these on first then we can add.

Me: Yeah we can go back through.

P3: Well I’ve got my notes!

P4: He’s prepared. [laughing]

[quiet – putting post-it notes in order and mumbling amongst themselves]

P3: I’m just cracking on with this

P4: Yeah, go ahead [chair] because you’ve got a better memory than me.

[quiet – putting post-it notes in order and mumbling amongst themselves]

Me: That’s another thing, it might not necessarily have been linear, you might have been stuck in a loop, you might have done things at the same time. It doesn’t have to be as linear as it looks, if you know what I mean.

P4: We were stuck in something, anyway!

Me: If you need extra consultation stickers, we can make more. I think I did extra for the group this morning.

[quiet – putting post-it notes in order and mumbling amongst themselves]

Me: This is what I want to try and get it because it’s never just as straightforward as this linear process.

P3: That’s it, roughly. So we formed the group, decided the boundary, decided the formal application…

P4: That was the launch wasn’t it?

P3: That was the launch, yeah. Yeah, we had the launch. Then from that, we formed the topic groups, formed the evidence base, created the vision…

P4: Was that the issues and/ options?

P3: /Issues and options

P3: Issues and options and we had another one of those… And then we started drafting the policies and consulting community. Actually, no…

P4: Did we?

P3: Well, erm…it wasn’t the community, we were talking to individual groups. For example, we talked to a lot of flood people for the flood policy and talked to a lot of housing people for the housing policy.

P4: But that’s it, we set up different groups didn’t we? We set up topic groups

P3: Yeah, but even when we came to draft the policies, we were talking to local people.

Me: This is good. I say that because I haven’t got a group yet that have had topic groups and I know that’s a popular way to do it.

P3: Okay. Then we did the pre-submission draft and pre-submission consultation and then we finalised and we got a couple of consultants to put somewhere round here. We submitted to independent examination then referendum.

P4: So where did the topic groups come into it? Was it between when we set up the topic groups and…we didn’t have those…at the launch because were asking for volunteers then

P3: The launch generated the initial volunteer base and then those volunteers divided up into topic groups and those topic groups built the evidence base and, at the same time, they, the steering group created the vision. And then…

P4: So really, under there, we should have that that was the launch then we had the topic groups

P3: Can we play with these?

Me: Yeah, play with them. Feel free and what we’ll do is we’ll go back to the beginning and start from the very beginning and talk through it all and continue to add things when needs be

[quiet – writing on post-its]

P4: Topic groups and cross-cutting themes. That what we had wasn’t it?

P3: Yeah…

P4: I remember cross-cutting coming into it! [laughing]

P3: There was definite cross-cutting [laughing]

[quiet – writing on post-its]

P3: Now, we had some workshops too…

P4: We did. We had one for the vision.

P3: Yeah

Me: Would that be, sort of, alongside that?

P4: That was a workshop to create the vision wasn’t it?

P3: We got, whatshisname….[academic advisor]…

Me: Haylock

P3: Haylock, yes.

P4: Yes, that’s the man!

[quiet – writing on post-its]

P4: That’s the issues and options consultation

[quiet – writing on post-its]

Me: Shall we go to the beginning or is there more….?

P4: Hang on

P3: Hang on

P4: We did a health check

Me: Now that’s interesting. I’ll be interested in talking to you about that based on things I’ve been talking about this morning.

P3: Er, is that about it?

P4: I think it is.

P3: We’ll probably throw some bits in

Me: Yeah, we can add stuff as we go. So what I’m going to do is I’m just going to space them out a bit more just so we’ve got room to stick things around.

P3: I could put the dates on as well at some stage. I’ve got it all here. About 6 months after the neighbourhood plan was adopted I had to give a talk at a CPRE regional event saying this is what we did then the CPRE actually used our neighbourhood plan is a case model.

Me: Brilliant. What I should say is what I haven’t done, I haven’t done lots of research into this neighbourhood plan and I’ve done that on purpose. I wanted to come without knowing…reading lots of things beforehand so I could hear it all from you and then, obviously, I can have a look into it. I really wanted to, like, start from a blank slate almost so I’ve purposely done that. So, if we start up here. I’ll give you all these [stickers] and you can be sticking things on as we go. So, getting started, why did you do a neighbourhood, how did it start?

P3: Okay, er, we’re under tremendous development pressure. We didn’t have a local plan in place and we didn’t have, sort, of, we sort of had vague saved policies, so it was needed. Erm, and, tremendous housing development pressure around [area name], um, and we looked at the area, and for a functionary, we needed to have [area name] and the 4 surrounding parishes so a 5 parish neighbourhood plan, actually covers…erm…I’ve got it here somewhere…

Me: …I’m going to add in, deciding to do a neighbourhood plan, because around that I can write about the development pressure…

P3: …urm, and you can also put in, er, that we got onto the, I think it was the 5th wave of the pathfinder and that sort of triggered us to do it. I think we got in with about 1 day or 2 days before that deadline.

Me: So what…were people aware of neighbourhood planning and that sort of made you decide that could be a good route to go down or…?

P3: Erm…we had 1 or 2 people within the 5 parishes who knew about it and said ‘this is what we need to do’ and we all said ‘what could we do about the development pressure?’. We were all getting worried about the delays of the core strategy development. And then it sort it…it happened. That was in November 2011. That pathfinder wave was November 2011.

Me: So I was working on of the first wave frontrunners at that time so I was working down at North Shields

P3: So that’s when we put in the bid. We actually formed the group – the next stage – in May 2012.

Me: Okay, so, forming the group…So you got accepted as one the pathfinder areas, then what did you do to then form the group? So if we’re thinking about some of these [key outcomes], what would go in between there?

P3: Okay, we wrote to the 4 neighbouring parishes and said we’re going to do this, do you want to be on board.

P4: I didn’t join you until then…[laughing]

Me: So you contacted the local, surrounding ar…

P3: Contacted the other 4 parishes, yeah

Me: My writing is getting messier and messier as the day goes on…[laughing]

P3: Well when you have a doctorate you’ve got to have totally illegible writing [laughing] it’s part of the…

Me: So contacted the surrounding parishes to form that, sort of…

P3: …To form that initial group, yeah

Me: Okay, that’s fine then.

P3: Can we start using these stickers yet?! [laughing]

P4: Little kid! [laughing]

Me: We can add things as we go…

P3: We did have the county council helping us with the initial bid even though they didn’t particularly want us to do it and so…

Me: So they weren’t overly keen?

P3: No…they were keen but we weren’t there priority area

Me: Because [area] had the first wave

P3: [area], [area]…were the county council backed ones and I think…Alnwick. We popped up and they said ‘oh do you really want to do it?’. This is before they realised they were getting loads of money and they really ought to have lots of people so they came on board.

Me: Okay, so they came on board.

P3: Then we spent a lot of time in that group trying to work out how…because different parish and town councils have different codes of conduct and all that sort of thing, and we were working out how we could operate with all 5 parishes and it be covered by codes of conduct and all that legal thing.

P4: Setting up terms of reference and things like that

P3: Terms of reference and people were saying well…

P4: And we had members on it as well didn’t we? To start with.

P3: …will the meetings have to be held in public? Can we have non-councillors on the steering group? Because it’s a code of conduct thing…we had lots of very conflicting advice from all sorts of people there.

Me: So how did you eventually come to a decision about what the right way to go forward was? Or was it just a consensus?

P3: We just did what was necessary and crossed our fingers [laughing]

Me: Okay, that’s fine! That’s generally what happens in a lot of cases!

P3: But we were looking, even then, we were aware when it came to the, erm, the submission and the examination the developers and their agents would be trying to pick holes and they could have picked holes in the way that the group was formed.

Me: So you were aware of that right from the very beginning?

P3: Oh, yeah, because some of us had had dealings with… [laughing]

Me: So what about who formed the group? So was the membership of that group solely made up from the parishes that were involved?

P3: Initially. Initially, when it was set up, it was [area name] Town Council as the lead body and the other 4 parishes represented on that group and until we came to the launch really and set up the topic groups and, at the stage where we formed the topic groups, before and after the launch, because we had in mind where we were going with that, we brought in the leaders of the topic groups to sit on the steering group.

P4: When did Ian come in to it?

P3: Er, he came into it, erm, round about the launch time

P4: Ah, right

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P4: There was some other members in the beginning though. Wasn’t the chamber on it to start with?

P3: Eeeeeerm,

P4: Or was it just members to start with?

P3: It was just members to start with

Me: Okay, so in terms of the boundary, I’m guessing that was…was it the group then the boundary determined or were they kind of done in parallel?

P3: Well…once we had the group, we had the…we knew we had to have all 5 parishes involved to get a functional area but whether we needed the whole of all the parishes, we didn’t quite decide. The boundary was in parallel but slightly behind if you see what I mean?

Me: Yeah, okay…

P3: And the boundary was approved in July 2012.

Me: So when you say approved, does that mean just by the group or in terms of the formal application?

P3: Approved in terms of the formal application. It was submitted in June and approved in July. And we still hadn’t really gone public by this stage. I mean, it was in the background that we were doing something but if you’d have asked somebody on the street, they wouldn’t have known.

P4: They would have had no idea

Me: Okay.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: And the most important thing we did then was we chose the logo and the logo was…that was the thing…just the…

P4: The colour was actually based on the trousers I was wearing [laughing]

P3: Because we had to have a non-political colour so we had to choose. But basically, it’s the parishes and the area we covered.

Me: So was that logo done before this?

P3: That logo was done in the run up to /the launch

P4: /The launch

P3: Logo and branding, I think you can say.

P4: Yes, that’s what we called it at the time

P3: But we didn’t go to any expensive consultants for the branding

P4: No

Me: So basically up until this point really, it was just this group until the official launch?

P3: Yep

Me: Can you remember how many you started with in that initial group?

P3: Erm, it’s going to be…4, 5, 6…probably about 10

P4: Yeah, I would say about 10

P3: About 4 or 5 from the town council and 1 or 2 from each of the other councils

P4: Yeah

Me: And at that point was it really just about getting to the formal application stage? It wasn’t thinking about, kind of, the different roles that people would take on in the group? Or did you think about it from the beginning?

P3: Erm, that group…it wasn’t so much roles but that group helped formulate the initial ideas of what sort of topic areas and topics would be covered.

Me: Right, okay.

P3: Because we know that if we go into a consultation with just a blank sheet of paper, nobody goes in…so they provided the sort of Aunt Sally topic things for people

P4: That’s right because we had the things on the wall – housing, didn’t we? And we had all the topics on the wall didn’t we? I remember that now, yeah.

P3: Yeah

Me: So, I was just trying to work out the timings, because I remember…with you being one of the pathfinders and because we’d started right at the beginning, the regulations weren’t out so the fish quay neighbourhood plan that we started working on never ended up being a neighbourhood plan because the regulations didn’t come out until months and months and months and months after we’d done that which would have meant we would have had to go back and do some of this formal stuff. But, I’m guessing they were in by then? Or were they just…

P3: Some of them were in and when we come to after the launch, we brought in a consultant which we’ll talk about later, and the consultant kept saying ‘you’re going to have to re-track and update this’ because the regulations were coming out while we were doing…

Me: Yeah because I’m just thinking, I started in June 2011 which was when Fish Quay started and I worked there for 14 months and it was just towards the end of me working there that the regulations started to come out.

P3: Yeah so what we had was the regulations were in the process of coming out all the way through the thing so we did have to take them into account and have to keep changing things which was annoying.

Me: I mean yeah, I remember what it was like for us because the group actually…we said if you want this to be a proper plan we can go back and we’ll have to retrace some steps and have to redo some bits and pieces and do some of the formal stuff and I think they were so worn out by the whole process they said it’s fine, it’ll just be a supplementary planning document which is a shame but I could totally understand.

P3: For example, the regulations…you talked about sustainability appraisals, the detailed regulations came out about here in the process and said they had to be continued through the whole process so we had to do some retrofitting [laughing]

Me: So once you’ve got this, it’s been approved in July 2012 and you go to the launch, what did you do in between that? So you’ve already said you’ve done the logo and the branding.

P3: Yeah, we identified what we thought were going to be the main topics that people wanted to deal with, then we brought in some people that were involved in those topics. For example, the development trust because they had more expertise in the local economy than any of the rest, the chamber of trade for similar reasons. So, we brought more people…some of the…we brought some of the key organisations in ahead of the public launch.

Me: And was that into the actual group, forming the group?

P3: Yeah. Well we invited them to attend the thing and then they, if they felt it was relevant then they joined the group. Erm, but not in a formal way until after the launch. Then the launch which was in October 2012 basically we had, I think, 5 or 6 topics – housing, environment, transport, heritage, economy, education…

P4: Infrastructure

P3: That came later

P4: That came later didn’t it? Because we had the students as well didn’t we?

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So the launch, what did you…?

P3: Okay, so we had blank sheets of paper all round the wall and maps of the area

Me: Was it like an exhibition type thing or drop in type event or…?

P3: It was a drop in type of thing

P4: But we had a day thing which was a drop in event but we had a proper night time event didn’t we?

P3: Yeah, but it was a drop in with ongoing discussion

P4: Yeah

P3: So, basically, we had all the topics then we had post-it notes and we had people writing…

P4: We had like this…we had these on the walls

P3: And people were writing things and putting on what they thought for which topics they came under and some of them were sort of, other issues and things

P4: That’s when the students got involved because they came to the launch that night. So we had some students from Newcastle Uni

P3: So we had planning aid coming in and they were keen to…and they helped us throughout with engaging the hard to reach people

Me: Right, so then, I’m going to make…So this was just before the launch and into the launch?

P3: They started then and the carried right the way through until…through all the stages of consultation

P4: Students…

P3: Students from planning aid wasn’t it?

Me: I think it might have been coordinated through planning aid and I say that just as someone who worked with planning aid and students…

P4: I can’t remember…I just remember it was Newcastle Uni students. The tutor was a woman called Zac or something was she?

Me: Zann

P4: Zann, that was her!

Me: Yeah, Zann, I trained at Newcastle so I know all of the staff

P3: There were 2 separate groups – there was the planning aid group and then we got the group, I think Zann’s group went off and did a study

P4: They did the infrastructure

P3: So, there’s…there’s a planning aid group and a Newcastle University group – 2 separate groups there. We had lots of help.

P4: We did.

P3: The difficult thing was trying to make sure the help was helpful

Me: Yeah, I can well believe it. So the students carried on their involvement. So planning aid were around more the harder to reach groups, is that right?

P4: Yeah

Me: So, in terms of arranging the events, was that all done by the group themselves?

P3: That was all done by the group and the town council staff.

P4: Town council, yeah

Me: Okay

P3: And we also had…did we set up…did we set up the website as well? We set up our website before that didn’t we? Because the launch went on the website.

P4: Yes. Yeah we did, you’re right

Me: Okay, and who did the website?

P3: Erm, that was done by the IT company that, at the time, ran the town council…so it was an add on to the town council website and with the CMS systems and everything which you learned very rapidly

P4: Yeah, mhm [laughing]

Me: Just because some of what I want to capture is the process but some of it’s more, like, the mundane things like who organised what and how did you arrange things.

P3: Yeah. But it was done, um, the mundane things, part of the long process of setting up the group was who’s going to pay the costs and, so we came to the conclusion that whenever we worked out a budget and we were going on how much we think this is going to cost us in the coming year, we then did a per capita distribution across the 5 parishes to see what proportion they all contributed.

Me: So the money to do the plan came from the areas kind of thing?

P3: Yeah, it came from the town and parish councils budgets

P4: And it was the town council that provided the administration for the plan as well. The town council…it was me.

P3: Yeah

Me: Okay, so then…

P3: And out of that launch event we got, erm, 500 volunteers…

Me: Wow

P3: Well, the launch event and through the website because we…

Me: Wow, 500…

P3: Yeah

Me: That is incredible

P3: Well when…well 500 volunteers of which 150 to 200 got involved in the topic groups.

Me: So this was kind of, the launch was this is what we’re doing, give us your comments but also an invitation to get more involved?

P4: Yeah

P3: Well, it wasn’t even this is what we’re doing it was what do you think needs to be done and out of that some things we said we can deal with just as day to day town council issues, some of it can be referred to the county council because it’s not planning and some of it was planning issues that would go in the plan and it was we need to write a town plan after we do a neighbourhood plan.

Me: Yeah, brilliant.

P3: So we didn’t say to anybody ‘no, we can’t take this on because it’s not neighbourhood plan material’, we just said ‘give us everything you’ve got’.

Me: That’s something that I am interested in as part of my research. I think sometimes I take it for granted because when I talk about neighbourhood planning that is looking at the neighbourhood which includes non-planning things. I just use that definition in my head and I assume that everybody else does but they don’t…

P3: Yeah a lot of people think it’s just planning and say we can’t do that in a neighbourhood plan because it’s not…

Me: Yeah, so what I’d like to do with the tool that…whatever it ends up looking like and however it ends up going, is to build that in. Because actually the regulations say that the group should be set up for the purpose of benefitting the social, environmental…like, the whole neighbourhood and you can’t do that if you just look at planning issues.

P3: The most useful thing I think that a digital tool was…you had to build a database didn’t you?

P4: Yeah

P3: Of all the volunteers, what they’re interested in, how they’ve been contacted, what their feedback is. If you had a template database for that, that would be good.

P4: Yeah, because you even need that for DPA, for data protection and whatnot because obviously you’re taking people’s details and you’re using it and whatnot. If you had to prove it what you were using it for and whatnot so if you had to prove you were just using it for that…

Me: Yeah, that’s a really good point

P4: That would be really good

P3: As I say 500 volunteers, 150 to 200 in the topic groups but the others wanted to be kept informed so we were sending emails and newsletters and…

P4: Yeah, we used mailchimp for a while didn’t we? We were sending out mail shots and things on there as well.

P3: Yeah, so everything that was happening and also we kept putting the topic group meetings and things, everything was going on the website and alerting people that it’s on the website so people… It kept people involved, kept people…live

Me: Brilliant, so how often did you do the mail outs and things? Was that quite regularly or just at key stages?

P4: Yeah.

Me: Just when there was some news

P4: Yeah it was like a newsletter

P3: About monthly

Me: Okay, erm, so then, in terms of…just thinking about…the couple of things…I’ll start with the local authority. You said here that the local authority were involved, was there any other local authority involvement around any of this stuff?

P3: The local authority were regularly sending observers along to the steering group and were at the steering group right the way through, even when it got boring.

P4: Yeah there was 1 or 2 of them usually at a meeting

P3: They were present at the launch but didn’t…

Me: But they were just there?

P3: Yeah, they were just there. And a lot of them, the people involved actually lived in the planning area so they were there as…

Me: With 2 hats on almost as well

P4: As residents, yeah

Me: The bit about the local authority you can’t exactly map but I thought it would also be helpful to know, obviously the local authority have a duty to support, and whether you felt that they were supportive. Were they helpful? Was it…

P3: We were supported and the key…they were having problems of their own with core strategy and we were running…and when we come onto the evidence base, we had the core strategy evidence base and they very helpful in sharing the evidence base across but they couldn’t…because that evidence base hadn’t been through examination, it hadn’t been tested, it was only…it wasn’t as valuable as an adopted core strategy. Until they got the Gladman high court case which came in about here, they weren’t sort of saying get your plan submitted. At this stage they were saying do get it going but it’ll have to be submitted after the core strategy has been adopted.

Me: Okay, great. And then, you mentioned about planning aid engaging with the harder to reach groups…so did they do that kind of activity for the launch as well? Or was that more later on?

P3: No that was more later on. The launch was merely to let the people who want to let of their steam, let of their steam and we turned that steam into something [laughing]

P4: I like how you described that [laughing]

Me: So the students as well, you said they were involved from about here and were at the launch but they did work on infrastructure did you say?

P4: Yeah

P3: Well, they…Zann’s group…we had those topic groups and when we came to look at the topic groups and see how they fitted together we had…we identified and we got a couple of project management type people who were on the council so they were keen to do project management diagrams and things. But basically, they said we’ve got 2 drivers – we’ve got housing and economy as the drivers. We got 2 contextual things – environment and heritage. And then we got 2 cross-cutting themes – infrastructure and transport. And education came in somewhere, I don’t know where

P4: That came in a bit…

P3: I’m not quite sure. There were a lot of people that wanted to talk about education because the education system…and it wasn’t really a planning issue, but they wanted to form a topic group and do something around that so we let them. So they went off and did that. But the infrastructure…

P4: Sports and leisure as well wasn’t there…

P3: Sports and leisure was identified as an additional topic group that people wanted to deal with so we basically created all these. But then the infrastructure, nobody really wanted…we identified it as a need but nobody really wanted to do it then Zann turned up with her group and said ‘have you got anything for us?’ so we got them. We said can you do an infrastructure study so these students came in and did an infrastructure study for [area name] which, given that they didn’t know the town, they didn’t the north east, some of them…there was some very posh people

P4: All 3 of them were really posh! [laughing]

Me: Was that undergrad or postgrad?

P3: They were last year undergrad.

Me: Because I think I remember that happening because at that point I’ll have been back for 5th year

P3: We had 3 very posh southern…

P4: [student 1], [student 2] and [student 3]

Me: [student 1] Shepherd? And [student 2] Litherland? That was my year, so it’ll have been…

P4: And [student 3]…somebody?

Me: Oh…I can’t remember his name. South African I think?

P3: But... Yeah.

Me: Yeah he’s South African but from Cambridge

P4: Ah god [laughing] He was a well spoken gentleman. Let’s just put it that way,

P3: But they produced a reasonable report given that they didn’t know the culture of the north east, let alone [area name]

P4: Yeah they didn’t know the area

Me: Absolutely. Yeah I though that was my year because when you kept saying it I was thinking ‘I’m sure some of my…other people that I was on a course with were doing something in [area name]’ but it wasn’t until you said [student 1], [student 2] and [student 3] and I thought ‘oh there can’t be that many people called [student 1] and [student 2] that work together in planning’.

[all laughing]

Me: So, you did the launch and then I’m guessing you had to analyse that in some way?

P3: Well, we analysed that pretty quickly. So that [the launch] was in the October, by the beginning of December we had the topic groups formed.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So how…the analysis side – was that an issue? Did the group do that? Was it quite easy or difficult?

P3: Well…when we say analyse…what we did, we took all the post-it notes, all the comments and we sorted it out into topics and we took out the ones that weren’t neighbourhood planning and then we gave all the post-it notes to the topics groups to then say this is you’re starting point.

Me: So the topic groups here, were formed based on the launch…

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So you had….

P3: it was housing, environment, heritage, economy, education, sport and leisure

P4: I think it was just housing, environment, heritage and economy and maybe transport with the topic groups because we didn’t the cross-cutting themes…

P3: No, no…erm…we brought in…Hang on, what have you got there? Housing, environment, heritage, economy and education were the initial 5.

P4: Was education? I thought education…maybe because it came in later

P3: [academic advisor] whatshisname…

P4: I just remember him being very late in it

P3: No, he just didn’t turn up to meetings [laughing]

Me: So you had those 5 to start with, is that right?

P3: Yeah

Me: And then what about the others, like sport and leisure, did they add later?

P3: Erm, yeah… where they came in… they came in about here [pointing to later in map]. I think the…and as part of the infrastructure study was going on as part of the…

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: To get the topic groups set up, so you had 500 volunteers – so how did you then sort them out? Because 500 is quite a lot! [laughing]

P3: We just said…

P4: We asked them /what they were interested in? Do you want to be involved in it or do you just want to hear about it was the questions and if you wanted to be involved, what did you want to be involved in…what actual topic.

P3: /What are they interested in?

P3: So you had some people that were involved in housing and environment, some people just involved in heritage, some people involved in… And as they went on, they settled themselves up. The really dedicated people…

P4: …stuck at it

P3: There was also quite a lot of friction in the housing group because there were different opinions as to what the housing group should be addressing

P4: Yes.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P4: We’ve missed out consultant as well. You need to stick a sticker…

Me: So when was that? We can just keep going backwards and forwards as well. So at that stage what was the consultant doing?

P3: No we brought in a, sort of, long term consultant – someone who was going to be in there a few hours a week nominally just to keep us right in terms of planning, in terms of regulations.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So they were there just as kind of an advisor?

P3: Yes, as an advisor right the way through the process

P4: To the end. Yeah

Me: In terms of the topic groups, how did the topic groups end up working? I’m guessing they all maybe worked a little bit differently but…

P3: They all worked very differently. You had a topic group leader who was either self-appointed or emerged from the group who set the agendas and arranged the meetings. They were meeting either every fortnight or every month depending on the particular interests. Then they were split up into little work groups to go off and find out about affordable housing, go off and find out about flood issues, go off and find out about… within those groups. So they were all basically building the evidence base.

Me: So they were almost doing different tasks. Do you think all the groups worked fairly similarly or were they very different?

P3: They worked differently because they basically responded to the personalities of the people involved. The housing group was a combination of people who were keen on affordable housing and self-build and things like that and the much larger proportion of NIMBYs who were concerned about the housing pressure development. The transport people were mix…evolved…but a mixture of the people who were interested in sustainable transport and people who were concerned about car congestion and car parking and things. So, it’s a mix. All through that the chairs from the topic groups were on the steering group and so they were the conduit between the topics groups reporting back to the steering group which were meeting monthly to say this is what we’re doing, this is the issues we’ve got, can you help us with this.

Me: Obviously you had quite a lot of volunteers, were the topic groups quite big then?

P3: They ranged from about 5 to 30.

P4: The housing one was quite big,

P3: The housing one was about 35 which is the biggest

Me: Right, okay. That’s quite a lot of people!

P4: With different views…

P3: So a lot of the work was trying to keep people on track and trying to keep the focus going. Especially the education one. The education one kept going off on horrendous tangents

P4: Yes! [laughing]

P3: And the topic chair didn’t come to any of the steering group meetings.

Me: So did you try and keep people on track through liaising with the chairs?

P3: Yeah

Me: So the chairs would come to the group, report and then they would have to go back and report back?

P3: The pressure was put on the chairs to keep everything running

P4: To try and keep order

Me: So what was the aim? What was the aim of the topic groups? What did you want to get out of it? What was like the end point for the topic group?

P3: It was to identify the issues and the evidence base behind those issues because we were working towards an issues and options consultation – we knew that.

Me: Right, okay.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: I think creating a vision came after the issues and options…

P4: I think it might have done.

P3: I’m going to swap these 2 round.

Me: So the topic issues, some of them I’m guessing will have come from the launch where people have put in comments? But then did the groups themselves do any more consultation or anything like that? Or was it mainly about gathering existing evidence?

P3: It was gathering… They didn’t have any formal…further formal consultation

P4: No, I think it was…

P3: But they…all their findings and their meetings were reported on the website and we were getting an ongoing stream of volunteers coming through saying ‘I see you’ve got people talking about housing’ or ‘you’ve got people talking about the environment, can I get involved?’. We were having people join in the process

P4: There’s notes from all the meetings as well

P3: And also, as part of the evidence base, they were actually talking to more people to gain evidence and then those people were saying ‘ooo that’s interesting’

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So when they were talking to people about the evidence, was that like…the council, for example? Or was it other people as well?

P3: It was everything from other people to council to Northumberland Water to Environment Agency to…

Me: So almost like the statutory consultees that you have later on?

P3: Yeah. The only people that they didn’t talk to at that stage, because the housing topic group were frit, were the developers and landowners. We knew at some stage we had to talk the developers but not at that point.

Me: Yeah, okay, so that needed a bit more careful manoeuvring?

P3: Yeah we need to know where we were coming from.

Me: Building the evidence base, this one [pointing to label], does that really just relate to the topic groups then or was there anything else done by the steering group overseeing it that contributed to that?

P3: Yeah. The steering group was just, erm, holding a whip over the topics groups. What we wanted the topic groups to put right in the end were tech[chair]al…what we basically call tech[chair]al papers.

Me: So that was another thing you wanted right at the end to move to that bit you needed the tech[chair]al papers. So did that take quite a long time?

P3: Erm, yeah. The launch was October 2012 and the issues and options consultation, that one, was October 2013.

Me: Okay, so it took about a year

P3: I’ve got create the vision there but we did start on the vision before, but the actual agreeing the wording of the vision alone took 16 months so that was done by the steering group and it took 16 months changing…

Me: Wow, okay. So did that start way back? Did that start…

P3: Yeah but it was informed by the process.

Me: So it would just be updated as you go along?

P3: Yeah and people were saying they don’t like that word and did we agree that word

Me: So when did you say that was finalised?

P3: The vision was…probably finalised…in or around about…probably March 2014

Me: I’m just going to put an arrow to show…

P3: But it took 16 months. I’ve got it in my notes.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: And to get from here [topic groups] to there [issues and options consultation]… We had these tech[chair]al report and then because they were somewhat silo thinking, we created, and this is critical, an editorial group which drafted…combined them all into an 85 page document. So it was basically an 85 page summary document [laughing]

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: An 85 page summary document [laughing].

P3: And then a 12 page leaflet which went out to all 8000 households

P4: Yeah, within the plan area

P3: This is where we started spending money on…

Me: So at this stage, what did that consist of? What did that consultation consist of?

P3: Okay. The 12 page leaflet to all households, the 85 page document downloadable online and provided printed off at the town council at cost to anyone who wanted and also provided in all the libraries and doctors surgeries and what have you. We also had on the…was it on the website? We had…somewhere we had an online poll of what people thought. Basically what we were saying is ‘have we got the issues right?’

P4: Yes, because we used SurveyMonkey for it.

P3: So we used a SurveyMonkey poll. So we also did hard copy things for people.

Me: So did you have a questionnaire that people could fill in as well then?

P3: We had a…these yes/no, a lot of these important things…and then a, the critical thing, a write your text bits to what you think about these things. That was paper and SurveyMonkey so the paper responses were typed by the town council staff into the SurveyMonkey so it was all combined which then went into a huge spreadsheet database of all the, sort of, quantitative scores and all the qualitative comments

Me: So did that come from SurveyMonkey? Because you can get various different things on SurveyMonkey, so then once they were all in there, you could essentially get all the quantitative stuff.

P4: Yeah

P3: Yeah. Then we had a member of the editorial team group who was very keen on that sort of thing and kept producing pie charts and things.

Me: Great, it’s always good when you’ve got somebody with a particular interest. Like [area] this morning were talking about a guy in their group who had a really good…just had a bit of a knack for and enjoyed looking at all tech[chair]al evidence and things.

P3: We had 1 or 2 of those

Me: Yeah! I said, that’s incredible because there are 1 or 2 groups that I’ve worked with where none of them have had that experience and they’ve had to get consultants in to look at the evidence and make sense of it. So it’s always good when you’ve got somebody that’s keen…

P3: Well, up to a certain point. There’s keen then there’s obsessive [laughing]

Me: So was there any events or anything or was it mainly all just through this?

P3: We did have a…did we have an event?

P4: We had an event for that one as well, yes.

P3: Yeah, we had an event. In fact we had an event in the town hall. We also had a separate event in Pegswood.

P4: I was going to say and [area] as well

P3: And one in [area], one in [area]…No [area] decided they could share ours.

P4: And [area] didn’t have one.

P3: [area] didn’t. So we had local events and we also went out to the high school. This is the Planning Aid people. We went to some of the other schools. Was it at this stage…no it was at the next stage we went to the high school and they did their own poll wasn’t it?

P4: Did they not do like a world café or something like that at that point? Or was that further on?

P3: I can’t remember. We went KEVI twice and one of the times the high school did their own poll of students and one of the times they did a sort of world café. I think this time they did their own survey in the school because we were still talking about issues and sort of saying…’have we got the issues right’, ‘have we got the questions right?’, ‘are these the questions we need to resolve?’. That’s basically what we were trying to do…And that got in, that got in about 900 responses.

P4: Yeah, aha

Me: That’s a lot of responses

P3: It was, wasn’t it?

P4: Yeah, it was [laughing]. I wasn’t doing the administration then though

P3: Who was?

P4: [admin]

P3: Oh yeah, that’s right

P4: [admin] had come in then

Me: Okay so were you quite happy with that response?

P3: Yes!

Me: I mean I’d imagine you would be

P4: Yeah

Me: So we’ve got the vision, you said that was developed over 16 months…

P4: Did we have 3 workshops for that vision? 3 workshops with [academic advisor]

P3: This was in the January 2014, we had 2 workshops for starting the vision process and then we had another workshop on the town centre…

P4: Yeah, that’s right

P3: …but that was a bit later. But that was vision not writing the vision – two different things

Me: So this workshop with [academic advisor]…what was that?

P3: it was in the town hall. It was people sat round and, sort of, a bit like this, of what do you think but slightly more focused with the issues and options. More a what are you trying to achieve rather than what are you trying to resolve. He put it very smoothly didn’t he?

P4: He did, yeah.

Me: I think [academic advisor] did some stuff with Fish Quay as well, from memory. I think [academic advisor] did and I think [planning advisor] did through planning Aid.

P4: That’s who did…

P3: Yeah, [planning advisor] was the one

Me: With Planning Aid. He’s now at the council as well so, yeah. So then, where we at? Do you think so far we’ve captured everything up to that point?

P3: I think so, yeah.

Me: Okay, great.

P3: We then created the plan preparation group.

Me: Okay…

P4: We liked our groups! [laughing]

Me: Well, the thing is you kind of needed it with that many people involved.

P3: Yeah!

Me: This is probably…out of all the neighbourhood plans I’ve ever worked with, I’ve never known as many people to be involved actually in the plan preparation and volunteers and that kind of thing. It’s brilliant but I can imagine, logistically quite…

P4: …a nightmare! [laughing]

Me: …quite challenging [laughing]

P3: Okay, so plan preparation group were 8 key volunteers. They came out of the editorial group but they were some…a couple of extras. But they were 8 key people and that was December 2013.

Me: So that was 8 key people from…where did you say they were from?

P4: Editorial group

P3: They were from the editorial group and some were a couple of others who just wanted to get involved. They were meeting pretty much…

P4: They were meeting a lot

P3: Well…in the final stages they were meeting weekly but they were…it was intensive. It was very intensive.

Me: In terms of…

P3: And our consultant from back here was involved in that plan preparation group.

Me: So were they involved all the way through or was there involvement kind of…?

P3: No, they were involved all the way through then they got themselves involved in that plan preparation group.

Me: In terms of, you did this, you had the analysis…so, what did you do… So this really is what you did in response to that?

P3: So the plan preparation group basically did a first pass analysis of the responses and then, the word we used was, we commissioned the topic groups to pick up the responses.

Me: So you had the quantitative stuff you got through SurveyMonkey but once this was created, they went through the more detailed comments?

P3: Yeah.

Me: And did an analysis of that…

P3: All the text stuff and there was a lot of it.

P4: There certainly was.

Me: Well I can imagine if there was 900! So they did a first analysis of that, and what did you say they did with that?

P3: They referred them back to the topic groups and said ‘can you look at your evidence base to address the issues that have been…the responses to the issues?’. Really, tweaking and refining the questions that the policies that were going to be in the plan were to resolve. Yep. I was the, er, chair of the plan preparation group when I used to have hair [laughing]

Me: So they were then liaising with the topic groups, the topic groups were then looking at what evidence they had and seeing what information they had that matched almost with the comments…? Is that…?

P3: Yeah…

Me: Just checking my understanding as we go

P3: And about that time, as I said the regulations were developing, the regulations on, er, SEA’s were coming up and so our consultants were saying ‘we really need to make sure we’ve got an audit trail for the SEA’. So he was saying ‘make sure you’ve got an audit trail with everything you do’ which means we had to demonstrate where all the ideas were coming from and where they were going and why they were adopted and why they weren’t adopted and all that sort of stuff. And that was probably the toughest thing to do because we couldn’t just…

Me: Go back, yeah that’s tough. So what was, kind of, the final…what was the point at which you moved to the next step? So you’ve got here that they were working with the topic groups looking at the evidence, you had the stuff around the SEA, but what was…was the next step to draft the policies?

P3: Pffft….you’re rushing ahead! [laughing]. The topic groups provided these revised tech[chair]al reports.

Me: Right

P3: Let’s not rush into this!

[laughing]

P3: We can put in one of these stickers now because the local authority, who were still struggling with their core strategy, started showing their evidence base more extensively and said ‘now you’ve got some serious issues you’re identifying, let’s match our evidence base from the core strategy with that’. So they started showing the evidence base. [long pause] Then, I’m just trying to work out the sequence of things here…At some stage the plan preparation group started taking these tech[chair]al reports and preparing the…drafting the policies and preparing the submission draft plan.

Me: Right, so then, we do get on to drafting policies but it might be that this was a bit of a loop – was this a bit of a loop? Or not?

P3: Erm…

Me: So based on all of that, they would then start to draft some policies…

P3: I don’t know. I think the topic groups basically wore themselves out and disappeared.

P4: Yeah, I was going to say the topic groups went

P3: So, yeah there wasn’t a loop…there wasn’t anyone to feed back to. There was still the website and there was still the general database of volunteers and so things were…

Me: So you were still getting comments but not as much?

P3: Yeah, but the topic groups had worn themselves out by then/

Me: So was it the plan preparation group that…?

P3: …Drafted the policies. Yes. Oh, and as part of this process in here as well, this is when the…no, it was…er…was it drafting policies? It was round about here…and yeah there’s a bit of a loop…the housing group in particular were talking to the developers at this stage so this is where that came.

Me: So…sorry, was it the plan preparation group drafting the policies based on the stuff the topic groups revised?

P3: Based on those…but as part of the revised tech[chair]al reports, they were talking to a lot of other agencies including the developers this time.

P4: And landowners

P3: And the draft policies were bounced off the tech[chair]al agencies such as the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trust and…erm…the local authority to some extent.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So the things that were bounced off the…sorry. What was bounced off the…? Was that the revised tech[chair]al reports?

P3: The revised tech[chair]al reports and the draft policies were bounced off the various agencies and the various expert organisations because at the time the Environment Agency were putting up flood defences so they were quite keen to.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: Are we going to get 2 sheets of paper, do you think, if we keep going? [laughing]

Me: So at the draft policy stage, so the draft policies were also, kind of, given to those expert agencies and shared with them. So what else was happening with the draft policies?

P3: We also had the SEA was in full swing so the draft policies were being tested on the SEA. Now, what happened there was…you can put another local authority sticker and a money sticker on this. The local authority were employing consultants to do the SEA on the core strategy as they went through and they were using the same people to do SEA’s on all the neighbourhood plans as they were popping up as just an add on. So it wasn’t a fully fledged extra piece of work, it was just an add on and they actually paid for it out of their own money.

Me: So I’ll stick this on here, but I’m guessing it didn’t just start here. It’d been going…it’d been started probably from around here…because here was when the consultant kind of said…

P3: Yeah, but it is mostly when the policy drafting started.

Me: Okay.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So the SEA, did the local authority take a bit more control over that or did the group have any involvement in it?

P3: The group…we had a couple of mini workshops with the Environment Agency and the Wildlife Trust and those people as part of that SEA process, and the plan preparation group were involved in that but the actual people talking to the consultants who were writing the SEA was the local authority and our consultant who could speak both languages. None of the rest of us knew what the hell the SEA was doing.

Me: Especially since it had only just been made clear that it was going to have to be part of the process but even now, now that this has been around a while, people are still a bit like ‘what?!’

P3: There was a lot of confusion in the plan preparation group saying we’ve already made these decisions, why are they second guessing our decisions. They felt they had been through...especially the housing bit…because they did a really intensive study on the best sites for housing within the town and then they felt the SEA was second-guessing them so there was quite a lot of friction going on.

Me: So the one thing I didn’t note down was the conversations with the developers at this point.

P3: That was the housing topic group at that stage.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: That was quite amusing. We decided, as you have to do with your PhD, that we had to have…that we had to treat all the developers the same…ask them the same questions…we couldn’t…

P4: Did we have a drop in session or something?

P3: No, we had a big workshop and we invited all the developers, in the town hall, and we about 7 or 8 developers which was lot of people. And none of them would open their mouths in front of their competitors. So it was a total failure, they just sat there and we told them what we were doing. So then we had to have groups of people doing one-to-one interviews with them all and try to keep it consistent and they were just promoting their own particular sites. They were trying to say ‘how does your proposed development contribute to achieving the vision and the objectives of the neighbourhood plan?’ and they said ‘our site is perfect for use’.

Me: Of course they did! At the SEA stage there needs to be a consultant sticker?

P3: It was the local authority’s consultant.

Me: So this was a very complicated bit. I mean it all was but this seems like a really big part of it.

P3: It was intensive, yes. Have you got a copy of the end product?

P4: No [laughing]

Me: So then, lets…

P3: Oh, and then…at this stage, very fortuitously, we were talking about, was it December 2014…the high court judgement, the Gladman high court judgement that said you could have a neighbourhood plan without a core strategy came in. The suddenly the local authority said ‘get your thing out there’ because they were suffering from developer pressure too and they wanted planning policies too to support them

Me: To support their position as well.

P3: So they suddenly started…so we got 2 of the county council planners attending the plan preparation group from them on and helping draft our policies.

Me: That was December 2014 did you say?

P3: That was December 2014.

Me: So we were at December 2013 when the plan prep group was created, erm, so…

P3: So that all took about a year.

Me: So was the next step, after all this kind of stuff was done, to consult the community in terms of…with the draft policies? Wait no, that was part of that with the specialist groups…

P3: So then it’s the pre-submission draft – you’ll be glad to hear. But then, before the pre-submission draft… [P3 writing Gladman case on process map]

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: Yeah, because that was a big step in the process really. Because until then, really you never really knew what to do.

P3: Well, they were saying that you would still have to wait until after the core strategy

Me: Which would have just been ludicrous really

P3: So then, supported us…hang on was that? That was probably back there. Just trying to think when…because…

Me: Well that decision was about December 2014 did you say, this one?

P3: I’m not sure, hang on.

Me: That’s okay.

[long pause]

P3: Because we actually had this consultation start in January 2015 and it didn’t take us…no we…that…I’m not sure…anyway, whenever that happened…

Me: I think, to be honest, because when we’re talking about all of this step, although we know that started in 2013, all of this seems to be a bit…

P3: It was all happening

Me: It was happening and bit, like…all a bit…it’s not easy to say when…

P3: So just consider that as all merged into one but just consider that at some stage that changed their position.

Me: So that pre-submission consultation was January 2015?

P3: January to March 2015

Me: So, basically what we can say that from December 2013 up until then, all of this was happening.

P3: Yeah, there was flexibility…

P4: What consultation did we have there?

P3: It was the specialist groups and the experts

P4: Right

P3: I don’t know whether you call the Wildlife Trust a community group or experts or… but we were talking to them

Me: I’ve written the various expert agencies so I think that covers it. So, then, what do I need do I need to write on one of these that will go here that allowed us to get to this stage? [key outcomes]

P3: Erm…

Me: So at that point you had a pre-submission draft?

P3: Okay, yeah, so we prepared the pre-submission draft and we had, as before, it was online or on request. There was a 16 page leaflet went to all households and included the proposals map, the SEA report and the evidence base. So they were all there for people to see where everything came from. And again, we did it by SurveyMonkey so there was opportunity for both for hard copy submission and SurveyMonkey submission so we got a lot of text comments policy by policy

Me: So that’s pretty much similar to this. What about events…did you do events at this point?

P3: Er…yep

P4: Is that when the kids had the world café?

P3: We had the world café at the high school. We had 1 or 2 events in the town hall?

P4: Yeah

P3: 2 events in the town hall. We had an event in Pegswood, we had an event in [area].

P4: We had an event up at St James’ Community Centre as well…it wasn’t at the town hall.

P3: The community centre, yep.

Me: And was this…the high school where Planning Aid were involved?

P4: No…

P3: No, we did that ourselves. And we, I think…were Planning Aid involved at Stobhill at this stage?

P4: Yes they might have been.

P3: Stobhill is the LSOA, sort of, index of multiple deprivation, poor part of [area name] so they were targeted by Planning Aid and they also supported Pegswood parish council running their events

P4: Yes, that’s right

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: And we also had a stall on the market place which was very successful.

P4: We did.

P3: Which I think both steering group and the plan preparation group really enjoyed because they’d come out of their cubby holes and actually talking to people and it really got people…people really got enthusiastic about it.

P4: We did that a couple of times didn’t we?

P3: Yeah I think so

Me: Was it quite easy through this process…well, easy might not be the right word…at what point were the group comfortable with going from this, kind of, drafting policies, checking with people, redrafting, at what point did they feel okay to then go to that final draft almost? Or did that happen quite naturally?

P3: It was after that…that was at the point at which everybody said ‘yeah let’s go with it’. They could see the way forward because both the plan preparation group and the steering group were saying ‘what is the point in going on, the core strategy is getting nowhere, it’s not going to be adopted, we’ve got at least 2 years until we can possibly submit it’ and then we had that [Gladman case] and they said ‘right, we can get it done’. So it was…that event [Gladman case] was the turning point.

Me: But the group also felt ready that the policies were in a place where they were comfortable having that draft as well?

P3: Mmmm, yes, I think. I think there were things…there were conflicts about whether the housing number we put in was a ceiling or a floor or all that sort of thing. And some of the people who came in to stop developers said the policy has got to say at least 1700, and they said…well, we’ve got a red carpet here so the blood doesn’t show [laughing] but it was getting on that way. But, there was conflict between…a lot of people wanted to show how we’d got to this point rather than actually having something that said that…then they said we don’t want planning speak, we want, sort of, stuff that people could understand. It wasn’t the content, it wasn’t the actual policies, it was the style that was the main point of contention that people…some of us were saying this is going to be the nearly final plan, it needs to be robust in planning speak, planning speak needs to be ‘just so’ and there were other people saying we need language that ordinary people can understand, and other people were saying we need to explain how we got here from the issues and options. For a lot of the population they’d seen the issues and options then this was going to come up, where did it come from and they felt the need to explain so it was a hybrid document.

Me: So the comments you got back at this point…did that mean a lot of changes? Or not? Did you need to make a lot of changes?

P4: How many responses did we get back?

P3: We got a lot of responses and, for the first time, we were getting responses back from the developers because they’d suddenly realised…and the statutory consultees. Of the county council, only the planning department responded. We were expecting from assets because we were saying things about what they could do with the county hall site which we knew they wouldn’t like but they didn’t even read the thing.

Me: Okay, well that’s interesting!

P3: And so we had to manage the responses to that with an audit trail. We had to say ‘we’ve read this response, we’ve have written a res…an outcome from the response’. We couldn’t just say ‘that’s rubbish, disregard that’. So we spent a lot of time drawing of schedules of responses and things just because we were so…because coming out of that we were writing…not only modifying the submission draft or creating the submission draft, we were also writing the basic conditions statements, refining SEA, refining the evidence base and it all had to be lined up and retrofitted, if you see.

Me: Yeah, absolutely. So in terms of…we’ve got there the basic conditions statement and the consultation statement…

[rearranging post-it notes]

P3: Before we get to that, county council suddenly said ‘we think you ought to have a health check’ so we went to a consultant.

Me: Okay

P3: And they found some money of their own didn’t they?

P4: Yes

P3: So we got the health check provided by the county council and with some money because they paid for it themselves. So basically we had the…pre-submission draft slightly modified so… So we modified the pre-submission draft plan and we wrote all these bits and pieces as well.

Me: So you wrote them as well in between…

P3: Yeah

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P3: And we had different people in the plan preparation group take the responsibility for the different documents which meant they could just get on with it and not be bothered and everyone said ‘yeah, yeah, you’re doing a grand job, get on with it’.

Me: So then, the health check?

P3: Basically, we had the revised plan, we submitted it to this woman…

P4: Rosemary somebody-or-other

P3: She was a neighbourhood plan examiner and said ‘if you were examining this, what would you say about it?’ and so she came back with a fairly detailed thing saying this is what you need to do, this is what I would be looking for.

Me: So then to finalise the policies, really, that…

P3: And on the basis of that we finalised the policies.

Me: So that’s just modified based on the health check.

P3: And we were rushing things a bit because we had been forewarned by the local authority that there were some major planning applications coming forward that would drive a coach and horses through the neighbourhood plan so we really needed to get the thing submitted. So this finished in March [pre-submission consultation]. That we did in April to May. The redrafting and the health check was April/May. And, sort of, up to final policies. That was quite a busy time, do you remember?

P4: Yes, I do.

P3: So this was from March, we had a bunch of responses and by end of May we had the final policies. That was quite intensive!

Me: I can well believe that! So then did you submit?

P3: Then we submitted on the 1st June which was June 2015.

Me: Then the examination

P3: Then the examination

Me: Was there anything in between those steps?

P4: The county council did a consultation – they did their own didn’t they?

P3: Well, no, that was simultaneous with the examination because they were so keen to get on. So there’s a 6 week publicity consultation

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: And then did the examination throw up anything? Did you have to do any modifications?

P3: We didn’t. It…there was some very nasty rumours because they took a long time over it and it got rather more substantial developer responses than anyone was expecting because the developers only just twigged what we were up to. And at that stage, also, other departments of the county council started saying ‘oi what are you doing?’

Me: Okay, so did you end up having to make any modifications based on all of that?

P3: No. It…at one stage it looked…a lot of developer responses and the examiner got a bit worried. But we got the final report and approval to go to referendum in September.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: Approval to go to referendum in September 2015, was that right?

P3: Erm, recommendation to go to referendum…approval and recommendation to go to referendum

Me: And then the referendum was…

P3: No, no, you’re rushing ahead [laughing]. It wasn’t until November that the county council accepted the examiner’s report

Me: Oh…okay…why…?

P3: Because…it’s political…but the then administration at the county council were preparing to move out of county hall and go to somewhere else and we had slipped in some quite specific policies about what the site could be used for.

Me: Ahhh

P3: And they had not objected to it at this stage and so they were sort of trying to rig around it. Then they set the referendum was held in February 2016. And, it wasn’t until May 2016 that county council made the plan.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: So they wanted you to push it through because they wanted to get it…

P3: They did but it was the other departments and the political administration…

P4: It was political wasn’t it?

P3: …weren’t quite happy with what we were doing and because they didn’t understand the planning system.

Me: Right, that’s…erm…it seems like quite a lot of people I’m speaking to…I feel like there’s quite a lot of people think that once they get to…once they get to this formal point, everything should be plain sailing because you’ve done all the hard work but most people I’ve spoken to, this morning was the same and I think they’re at a point now and they’re having some issues at the end of the process, but from experience with other groups, everybody thinks they’ve done the hard bit, it’s going to be fine now. Suddenly they hit the red tape and the bureaucracy…

P3: Nothing from submission…there was nothing we could actually do. It was owned by the county council and…the examiner’s report was for the county council and not to us. We did get to see it.

Me: So do you think this is a fair representation? Have we missed anything?

P3: Oh, we’ve missed a couple of things but nothing important

Me: Is there anywhere…you said the consultant was involved right the way through…?

P3: Oh, the consultant dropped out about here…here wasn’t involved in doing the pre-submission draft because the county council people helped us with the pre-submission draft. I’ll stick this upside down to show he’s dropping out. Basically he also ran out of money.

Me: So their involvement all the way through, was that just basically what we said back there where it was advice, keeping you on track, getting involve din bits and pieces of work but it’s not like you said we want you do to this piece of work, it was just continuous?

P3: He was mostly saying to us ‘I wouldn’t write your policy like that if I were you’.

Me: So quite hands off, not kind of…

P3: And he was deliberately disciplining himself to be hands off because he was really believing it was community-led.

Me: That’s good. I personally think it’s good…that’s what I’m going for in my research.

P3: But the community did always have the strategic view that was needed

Me: The health check - did you think that was beneficial in the end?

P3: That was…it was beneficial in that it enabled us to clean up this and take out all the previous history stuff and all the soft…the non-tech[chair]al…the soft language and harden it up. It enabled us to re-edit it and, although some people had been telling people that it needed to be sharper, not until the consultant told them…The thing was though, the consultant recommended that they plan, that the actual policies, should have a strategic elements in the policies themselves because that was her particular style of policy writing. The actual examiner we had said ‘no, the strategic should be in the pre-amble and not in the policy’ so we had all the strategic outside the policies there [before health check], we put it all in the policies there [after health check], and then we took them all out of the policies again as a result of his report but the text didn’t change. I’ve also…I haven’t got in there…I said all the way back here, I had a number of things that were not neighbourhood plan issues so we ended up with Part A which was planning issues and then community actions. So we got about 22 policies and then we got something like 19 community actions. A lot of the discussion at this stage and leading up to the pre-submission was whether we have it all bound into one or split into…and we were being told by our consultant that the planners would just ignore the community actions if they weren’t clearly identifiable, they’d be lost completely. So a late stage decision in the drafting of that separated them out so we had two parts…

Me: But actually the non-planning stuff you just kind of did in the midst of everything else? You just treated it like everything else and just separated them out at the end basically?

P3: Yes. But we had to work out what sort of wording we wanted for those community actions, who were they aimed at and what meaning they had. And so what we’ve done with those now is we’ve taken them and they feed into the town council action plan which, having just had an election last May and a significant political change on the town council, we’ve now got to get all the new councillors to buy into the community action plan and realise what’s needed. But that’s by the by.

Me: In terms of how much it cost to produce the plan, is there anywhere else where there was money spent?

P4: We applied for 3 lots of funding didn’t we?

P3: We did get money from Locality, was it?

P4: Locality. I think it was 3 times but off the top of my head I can’t remember.

P3: I think they helped with the 3 phases of consultation basically.

P4: Yeah, I think it was.

Me: A lot of the time groups seems to spend money on the consultation and on the consultants.

P4: Yeah, that was about it.

P3: It wasn’t the launch but it was the issues and options, the submission draft and then there was one other… It was…it wasn’t drafting. It was something around this stage…

P4: I can’t remember what it was

Me: Was it when the local authority did their official consultation – did you supplement that?

P3: No, we weren’t allowed.

P4: No, we just had to hand it over and they had to do that

P3: It might have been the referendum…

P4: Was it? No, it wasn’t for the referendum

P3: No…

Me: Because the local authority pays for that

P4: There was something…there was 3…or was there 3 lots? Or was it 2 lots but we got 1 bit in 2 bits?

P3: I think we got 1 bit in 2

P4: If that makes sense? We could apply for 7 grand and we got £4300 at one time and what did we use it for?

P3: I think we said that…I think we got some of that money was for the health check.

P4: Actually, yeah, I think it was.

P3: And they were all from Locality

P4: It was because I had to find out how much would cost for the train for her to come

P3: And then we had to give the money back at the end and we didn’t like doing that did we?

P4: No, that’s right.

Me: If you think we’ve covered that, we can keep chatting but I’m going to give you these red dots. The last thing I want to do…I just want you to put dots next to things that were the most challenging where you think was the most difficult things? And you might put on 1 or you might put on 21 – it’s up to you.

P4: Go on [chair]

P3: Well you put on the things that were difficult to you because they’ll be different.

Me: Yeah because there’s things you mentioned, like the database, if that, for you was the most difficult then put it there.

P4: It was the consultations…because that was what I was mainly involved in. It was consultations.

Me: So in terms of the consultations and the digital side, it was mainly website, SurveyMonkey…

P4: MailChimp.

Me: And that was the main…

P4: And just emails as well. General emails going out. That’s right because we had a problem because I sent out a group of emails and then no-one could send anything back to me because emails were picking it up that I was spam because I’d sent out group emails. That caused loads of problems for people.

Me: Is there anything where you think…and this is a bit of an ambiguous question…do you think there’s anything where any kind of digital ‘thing’, tool or whatever, might help? Or at least support bits of it?

P4: For me, speaking from my side, it is the logistical…like around databases and things like that. It’s managing that information. Like I said you’ve got you data protection act as well which you need to be careful of when you’re managing that amount of data. You’re getting 900 people and leaving contact details and things.

Me: What I’m doing is…if I can try and explain it…I haven’t yet found an easy way to describe it so you might have to bear with me. What I’m aiming to do is have this online tool where it has the process broken down into steps…and I’m not quite sure yet what those steps are but simplified enough that it makes it easier to navigate through but whilst still allowing groups to have the flexibility to manage it the way they want to manage it. Then at each step it would have that advice and guidance and also suggestions of how to go about things so it might have template databases or it might have…for groups who have never…obviously parish and town councils have some structure in place and you’re used to having meetings with minutes and that kind of thing but some groups are not used to having that, especially some of the more urban groups, so silly things like templates for how to do meetings or templates for terms of reference because some groups are not as used to that. So you could have imagine at different stages you could have templates or bits of guidance or bits of advice and then at, say, consultation stages it might have suggestions of what you could do – offline stuff but also online tools or tools that might work for young people or tools that might do whatever. But set up in a way that it provides you with all of the instructions in how to go about that. Do you think that kind of thing could be useful depending on how it’s developed?

P3: It might be an extra layer of complication they feel they have to… I think the template documents and template terms of reference would be useful. A template database would be the most useful thing. There’s also the knowledge management systems. Now if you can find some way of helping people work out what it is…what the evidence is…not what it means but what it is. We were finding it difficult to say what does all this mean, how is it relevant so it’s almost that knowledge management.

Me: How did you find it overall going from step to step? Was the group quite clear on this is what we’re going to do and how we’re going to do it at each stage? Or was it we’ll just take it one step at a time and make decisions as we go as to what we do next?

P3: Well, people at this stage and this stage wanted to just jump straight to here. Everybody had a clear idea of what the end point was but, this bit in the middle, why was it taking so long, why was it needed. Also, what could it do and what couldn’t it do. And the limits of the planning system because we still have people saying ‘why can’t the council get us a better range of shops?’ and we were getting that sort of thing.

P4: We were very lucky with this group as well weren’t we? The plan preparation group because we had some people on there that were really committed and they weren’t members of the council, they were just volunteers but they put in a lot of time.

P3: It would be useful if you could get some digital way of doing a skills audit to say what skills do we need, what skills have we got therefore, what sort of people do we need to recruit. Because we sort of stumbled across that but really it was in the back of my mind thinking we need someone to do this, this and this but we don’t anyone else to do that.

Me: I think we the way that we’ve been thinking about it so far is…however this tool might look in the end, it would display that process but there would be more emphasis on different parts that…more emphasis on some parts than others. For example, at the beginning, trying to set out some of that more educational stuff about what a neighbourhood plan is and what it isn’t, what you can do community plan wise…and kind of, making that a bit more clear

P3: But in such a way as to not put people off. I think there’s 2 bits to this, identifying what needs to be done in the area and what needs to be done through a neighbourhood plan.

Me: I think from what I’ve heard in previous workshops is that a lot of groups struggle at the beginning either to form a group off the bat and get it going and once they’ve formed the group, they’re really enthusiastic and want to do it but are just a little but overwhelmed about what to do next and then what it is, what they can do, what they can’t do. From what I’ve found in practice and from speaking to other people is that a lot of groups don’t end up getting a lot of support at the very beginning and, in some cases and some groups I’ve worked with, it’s ended up that they’ve just dived in without really having…this is particularly in an urban area where they don’t have a parish or town council, that they’ve actually ended up setting themselves up for failure almost because they’ve not done enough at the beginning to set that up in the right way. Which is not the case for everybody.

P3: You’ve also got a situation which we narrowly avoided where the group that sets up the neighbourhood plan, who have a particular interest and want to do the neighbourhood plan to deliver something that’s of particular interest to that group and they don’t hear what the other people are saying. You might find that in Stannington… So if you’ve got a particular person with a policy they want to achieve through the neighbourhood plan, they’re not the person to lead the group.

Me: Because they’ve got their own agenda

P3: They’ve got the own agenda and they don’t listen. We didn’t really have an agenda except it would be a good, prestigious thing for [area name] and for the town council to have a neighbourhood plan. That was basically where we were coming from.

Me: And it would help with development pressure and that kind of thing?

P3: Yeah, but it wasn’t until we had our launch that we identified the whole range of issues and options that we began to see the whole range of things. If we’d gone into that launch saying ‘this is what we think needs to be done’ basically jumped straight into the issues and options consultation, people would have said this isn’t…go away. In a very [area name] type language

Me: So, actually…something’s just popped into my head from earlier that you said that you had these working groups but there was other groups emerged, the sport and leisure and others. Where did they come in then?

P3: Erm, basically when we’re building this evidence base…then we said ‘well, we’ve got these things’. We’ve got the infrastructure study but someone was saying we need sport and leisure because they were building, about 3 or 4 people went off and did an audit of sport and leisure facilities. And transport…we need to sort out transport. All the topic groups had said ‘we’re coming up with transport issues’ so we had to put together…and that was pretty much recruited on a skills audit and it was targeted, headhunting people from specific communities into that. And, unfortunately…well, because the people leading those 2 groups had not been involved in the whole process, they came in with their own ideas and it took a while for them to realise that they weren’t working with a clear sheet. They had to…click in to what had already been decided. So there was a bit of friction there.

Me: You were talking in here about the differences in opinion between people within the topic groups, so within the housing or whatever, and, obviously, those topic groups would clash with each other because one might want housing and whatever. How did that all end up being negotiated?

P3: That was the editorial group. They did that. Basically we had people from the key topic groups come in, so the editorial group was the battleground between those groups to…

Me: …to fight it out, basically

P3: Basically, yeah. To say what’s important. But also, yeah, get some sort of balance. The with the sustainability appraisal, we had to say ‘you have to make this sustainable across the whole thing’ and that was used quite extensively to make sure people…