**[area name] Neighbourhood Plan**

Me: What I was going to do…the way I’ve started it off is these are some of the key steps that are in guidance documents. I did this so that we didn’t start with just a big blank piece of paper because I don’t think anybody likes that. I was going to start by getting you to put them in the order that you did them. If there’s steps missing, that’s fine, we can add them. We can add steps that are missing then we can go back and start scribbling on…yeah…we can go back to the beginning.

P5: The way that we started here was we actually asked a company that advises on neighbourhood planning to come to the village and we advertised the meeting and anybody that wanted, that was interested. Because as a parish council we’d actually talked about it but none of us really knew very much about it. I mean, I did a bit because I did a bit of background work but it was a company came in and gave a very good presentation right at the beginning and that actually was how we formed the group because people that attended that meeting then…there was some that obviously fell away but we ended up with a really good, quite cross…well, shall we say, different backgrounds type of group that we wanted. It had to include, we hoped, people from the businesses, farming, residents and you know, just that kind of thing and parish councillors obviously and that’s how we…

P6: Just as diverse as possible

P5: Yeah the aim was to try and do that. I think, to be honest, I think that’s something that could be put in to any kind of training thing because to say… Just get somebody in to give you the whole things from start to finish, go through the facts, let people ask questions. So that’s how we started.

Me: And that kind of formed the group

P5: That formed the group. Then the boundary. The parish council decided that, given it was a parish council…you know, obviously we were doing it, that the parish boundary actually was sufficient.

Me: So was that decided from the very beginning?

P5: That kind of evolved. We were still, I don’t think, at that stage, quite sure whether we were doing one or whether it was right for us. The…what we got from the county council, because they actually attended this to watch…they said ‘oh this will never take off’. And we just said ‘well, we think it’s a really good idea because it’s all part of the localism and all this’ and they went ‘nah it’s doomed to failure, this’. So we realised then that we were probably going to be up against quite a lot of… Having said that, the person who said that is now one of the people in charge of neighbourhood planning [laughing]. I think he’s been proved wrong. But yeah, that came across quite a lot so the formal application…

P6: It was negative

P5: Yeah, it was very negative. The formal application went in and same response – I had to keep chasing up because we didn’t get, for months…

Me: What year was this?

P5: Pfff…well, we’re going back…

Me: I should just say is that what I haven’t done is I haven’t gone and researched lots about this neighbourhood plan because I wanted to come with a fresh

P5: Well I’ll have a look [laughing] I can’t remember! Hang on, let’s have a look… So we started in about November 2013. I think that’s…we put that in then and I think it must have been about March or something of the next year. Or we put it in in March and didn’t hear until November. It was something ridiculous but I had to chase it up. So that was how we started and then we…we…checked with everybody that had attended the meeting that had shown they were interested and said ‘would you look at...you know…being on the steering group committee?’.

P6: The steering group did not make decisions.

P5: No

P6: That was still up to the parish council to make all the decisions.

Me: So there was like the parish council then there was the steering group that did the work but everything would kind of be referred back?

P5: Yeah

P6: Yes

P5: But there was…about 4 or 5 parish councillors on it. I mean to start with everybody was a bit concerned because we had about 17 or 18 on this steering group which, you’ll know, is far too big. But my feelings on it, which have been proved quite right, is that people drop in and drop out.

Me: So actually having that bigger base to start with was helpful

P5: We ended up with a really nice…we always had a good 8 to 10 people attending a meeting which is perfect if you’re actually looking at evidence and you know you want to discuss where you’re going

P6: Yeah, especially the time it went on as well.

P5: Yeah. Yeah

Me: So just to put these in order because what we’ll do is we’ll put them in order then we’ll go back because I’ve got some stuff here as well that we can add on. So what happened next?

P5: I actually went on a planning camp

P6: Oh yes, you did

P5: So I went on a planning camp which was exceptionally helpful. That was at York.

P6: Yes, but to be fair, you ended up being the champion of the planning. There’s not many that really go to grips with it like you did [laughing]

P5: We had actually already done, where I actually live, a sort of, residents survey with the help of planning aid which, you know, will come in later on because we’re having a lot of problems where I lived with various things particularly to do with planning. So I actually had some background information and we had been, as a group, this was before I even joined the parish council, we had been actually being engaged in the core strategy – commenting on it. Not that we knew what we were doing [laughing].

P6: No!

P5: But we were learning. But the planning camp was exceptionally good because people were at all different stages.

Me: So that came after the formal application – nothing else really happened? You went to the planning camp then it…

P5: Yeah, then we got the group all organised and we started and I brought all the stuff from planning camp to the second…about the second or third meeting.

Me: So in terms of these steps, which order would you put these in?

P5: Errrrm….consult the community came…that came next and that went out as…gosh, this is going back now…we sent flyers to every single person in the…

P6: In the parish

P5: …in the parish.

P6: Wasn’t that the one that was in the hall?

P5: Yeah. That was the first one. First of all we sent out a flyer with a questionnaire saying ‘this is what we’re doing’. We explained exactly what a neighbourhood plan was, why we were doing it and also gave them various options that they might want to comment on or they may have opinion on and that’s what brought people out didn’t it? Because we did it on housing, infrastructure, education…

P6: Did we have the website up then? Or did that come later?

P5: No, that came much later.

Me: So was that the topics that you were talking about in this consultation – had they come from anything previously or was that just covering anything?

P5: It was probably from work done…obviously when you’re a parish councillor you’re getting people complaining or commenting…

Me: So you already had an idea of what people were thinking

P5: Yeah we knew their problems.

P6: Didn’t it start a little bit like a wish list from people at first?

P5: Yeah, we had…yeah. That’s basically what we wanted because that gives you an idea of where…what you’re objectives are

P6: It was getting people involved wasn’t it?

P5: Yeah

Me: So I’m guessing then you had to analyse that feedback?

P5: Erm, yeah. I think we took…we published everything on the website.

P6: You did actually put them into groupings like environment and roads and, you know, highways – different things.

P5: It got us started.

P6: You know, it got us started.

P5: We did a…the first consultation we did in the village hall, I mean we had over 100 people attend but it was a bit of a fist fight.

Me: Was that at this stage?

P5: Yeah, it was after the flyer went out. We said ‘there’s going to be this open day’. They came along. We had big maps and we had a map for housing, a map for road issues, a map for where you thought employment should be. So then stickers and people could actually use stickers to say where they thought…different problems…if there was an issue here or whatever, where they thought housing should be which is where there ended up nearly fisticuffs. [laughing]. And it was really annoying because it was very hard to police that situation because people were saying…where there was a danger point, they were putting like 5 stickers down. We were going ‘you can’t put 5 stickers down’ but who’s to say they can’t put 5 stickers down? [laughing] So we literally had to watch what people were doing. Then, of course, they were saying ‘you better not use this as evidence’ because they weren’t happy because somebody had come in after them, after they had left, and put 5 stickers on the opposite bit. And we said ‘you know, well, we are’. These things will be looked at. They won’t be used as total evidence because we’ve got a lot…

Me: But it’ll contribute…

P5: But it shows where there are issues. It also brought out the fact that they didn’t understand that a neighbourhood plan was for development…

P6: They didn’t understand planning as well which doesn’t help

Me: Like they wanted it to prevent development which actually it’s not…

P5: A lot of them, yeah. And that’s still there

P6: And also it was a case of a lot of personal opinions – they want development but not on my doorstep. Not in my back yard

P5: Yeah.

Me: So then after this first consultation, what happened next? What did you do then?

P6: Well, we started then to build evidence

P5: Yeah, we did. We started to build the evidence. We did get conflicting opinions there because they wanted us to start doing…working out about what infrastructure we needed and that’s not where we were going. It was getting far too…

P6: It was difficult to get people to understand it was a local plan for the future and not a case of what you want now and also explaining what you could and couldn’t do.

P5: Yeah, that was the hardest bit. I mean people had a wish list which is fine because you can have that community action thing and it was trying to explain to them what could be a community action and what could actually be in policy. People…they felt we were directing the core strategy or…it was very, very difficult. We did get quite a lot of animosity from certain quarters and it was…I mean, I think the planners here were sick to death – they got inundated. It was just purely ignorance not particularly their fault but because the information that was out there…I mean if there was a programme, actually, did it all the way down which could cross reference what applied to you but maybe didn’t apply to another group, that would have been so helpful.

Me: Well, hopefully, there’ll be one of them eventually! [laughing]

P6: And I mean, to be fair, the people we had that were on the steering group, apart form maybe 1 or 2 who didn’t stay long once they realised you’re not there for your personal agenda, it has to be the future of the whole parish not just what you want personally.

P5: Yeah, that was actually quite difficult to get across. I think they thought we were doing it as a secret meeting. But I mean, anyone could attend or observe or, you know, we actually invited…where there was a lobby group, we actually invited them on but it was apparent straight away that they did have their own agenda. We kept explaining, you know, if you want to change policy, then there’s obviously the core strategy and that’s what you comment on and that’s where you try and change what’s going on but we’re not…all we are is facilitating this with…

P6: With the evidence that was before us

P5: And you can’t… We all…I think everybody’s guilty of having their own personal feelings on things but you literally had to…

Me: But you have to put them aside and also recognise that that’s not what everybody might want and you have to compromise

P5: We learned a lot. I mean we…I mean, things that I thought should happen completely were blown out the water because then you got somebody else’s opinion and you’re listening and you’re thinking ‘oh my god, that is so…’

P6: it’s not quite what you expected

P5: Yeah. So there was a lot of things popped up.

P6: So we built

P5: So we built, yeah we built our evidence base…

[general chat while moving post-its around]

P5: This is what [consultant]…we’ve got a [consultant], our planning consultant

P6: Now, when did we get the planning consultant? Was [consultant] there from the beginning? I think we decided from quite early on didn’t we?

P5: Yeah we did.

Me: What do you think is easier? Do you think it’s easier to go back to the beginning and we’ll talk through it in detail and we can add things in?

P5: Yeah, I think there’s other things we’re thinking about.

P6: Yeah, because this is going back over 4 years

P5: Because we got [area].

P6: Yes.

P5: He came didn’t he?

P6: Yes, erm, [volunteer]…Horncastle. Because [area] was the first plan brought forward. And I think also, you know, what’s really important here is the money. You need to get the money to do this.

P5: Yeah. There’s so much isn’t there?

P6: Sorry I don’t mean to jump the gun.

[quiet while opening the biscuits]

P5: I’m trying to think because we had…we were trying to engage the school. We never did engage the high school, even though we tried, we did engage with the infant school which was hilarious!

P6: That was brilliant!

P5: That was the best days ever. We did…

P6: Well, what they wanted was even better!

P5: I painted a dragon…it was a planning dragon then a planning wizard. Then I found all these stickers for the children to write what were bad planning options and what were good planning options. I mean, we started them off by saying ‘we’re going to put a toilet in the middle of the church’ and I mean that just got the kids engaged straight away. They were shouting out after that. One of them said ‘we want a climbing frame in the playing field as high as the angel of the north’. Another one wanted a shooting alley which was really a bit worrying. Then somebody wanted a swimming baths didn’t they? ‘We want a huge sweetie shop with cakes’…there was so much…[laughing]. Then we got some funny ones where the parents had obviously been discussing the neighbourhood plan and they were…it came straight from the parents ‘we don’t want any more housing in this village’ [laughing] and you know full well it’s not them!

Me: So what I’m going to do, we’ll go back to the beginning, we’ll talk about it in detail, I’ll jot stuff down on here but I’ve got some stickers as well.

P5: Stickers! We get to do stickers. We never get to do them,

P6: I love it!

Me: So I’ve got local government which is where there was any specific involvement by the local authority. And if it was negative…you can still put it on there….what another group did was put the sticker on upside down if it wasn’t helpful. So, it’s still good to mark it…

P5: Do you want us to do it?

Me: Yeah. The other one is the money so obviously you mentioned money…

P5: I’m being very negative here putting them on upside down.

Me: Basically, if at any point you either applied for money or spent money just stick a money sticker on. If at any point you used a consultant, put a sticker on so then we can map out where you spent money. Don’t worry if you can’t remember it all.

[general chatter about sticking the stickers onto the map]

Me: The other thing is…as we talk through, what I’m going to do is be jotting things down around them. The other part of this is when I develop the tool, one of the things I need to think about is how to move from that step to that step to that step. So at this step, what were the key things you had to do to be able to move to the next step so that could be at any level so things like, for example, deciding who was going to chair the group, or deciding roles of the group, up to we needed a draft planning policy at this point. Like at any level, so any thing you needed to move in between and then I’m going to stick these in between. But I’ll prompt on all of this as well.

P5: That might be a good idea. Before planning camp when we got [volunteer] Horncastle to come because they’d finished the [area] and that was one of the forerunners.

P6: It was.

P5: And he was both negative and positive wasn’t he?

P6: He was.

P5: He was really very honest so he was helpful but he actually probably helped us with deciding that…had you already been…I think you’d already been put forward as chair?

P6: Yes, I was.

P5: We got the impression that it was better for a county councillor to chair the meeting than to have the parish…I mean, I was vice chair, but it was better…

P6: I think also because I don’t actually live in [area name] so I could be seen as a little bit more impartial.

Me: So when did you decide? When was that?

P5: Well that was probably before planning camp. We need to move planning camp. I would say that…

P6: It was gathering information and we picked [volunteer] Horncastle because of their…what they’d been through.

Me: So that was a visit by…

P5: He’s a local councillor who’d actually been through…they were one of the forerunners. They’d actually…they’d got…had they got it through then?

P6: Yes, it had gone through. It was more or less just agreed.

[quiet – writing on the process map]

P6: He gave a very, very honest report

P5: Yeah.

P6: And it wasn’t all plain sailing.

P5: No. It was negative and positive. I mean, he talked about, you know, considering things like barn conversions and how the green belt…that’s probably what brought the green belt right into the forefront for us because they were very…the area that it happened had been totally…I don’t know what you would call it…nothing happened there. It had been left for years and years because it was under green belt and the villages were dying and it suddenly came to the forefront that that’s exactly what could happen to [area name] Parish if we didn’t do something. It actually made it more important.

P6: Or we’d just become a commuting area.

P5: Yeah.

Me: So, and it was this visit that prompted you to decide on roles like chair?

P5: Yeah, that helped us.

P6: It gave us the grounding. I think most…

P5: That was the most helpful thing that we probably did at the beginning out of everything because it made you realise how much money you needed…it was just, it was a real eye-opener.

P6: He didn’t come in with it’s going to be roses and this is how you get there.

P5: ‘You’re all absolutely mad’ he said. [laughing] But, you’ve got to look at what’s…

P6: He’d been through it and he was…it was good to hear from someone that had actually done it.

Me: Because obviously back in 2013 there wouldn’t have been many people that had done it. I know that [area] started around the same time that Fish Quay in North Shields and it was Fish Quay that I worked on. That was also one of the first frontrunners but, yeah, we had different challenges entirely.

P5: Yeah, that was interesting because it gave you an idea of what can happen if a parish or an area is left under green belt and they can’t…that’s it you can’t go anywhere with it and it was also interesting that it had upset, not only local businesses, they’d lost shops and whatever, they’d lost schools, they’d lost a lot of things.

P6: Unable to progress…you can’t progress…

Me: So if we go right back to the beginning for a sec. The external presentation that came in to do this. What prompted that? You said that the parish council had been talking about neighbourhood planning?

P5: it was a prompt by the parish council. Because we’d had a…we did have a parish plan many years ago but we’d never done anything since then. It was when localism came in, you know, I’d brought it up a few times but I wasn’t chair. That sounds terrible doesn’t it…it wasn’t until I was chair that I bossed them all about?! [laughing] No, that’s not true.

Me: But you kind of new enough that you knew it was interesting and could be helpful.

P5: Yeah…

P6: We wanted to shape our own future

P5: I was just sick of hearing about villages losing their schools, their post offices and all the rest. And we’d lost our post office and our shop at that time. We’ve now got a little…well, one that’s set up from the church which, again, came from the neighbourhood plan. There’s loads of positives come from the neighbourhood plan. I mean, most of what we, our objectives have been…a lot of them have already happened.

P6: Because we’ve looked forward and not back

P5: But basically, yeah, we looked at that. I have to say the parish council were a bit reluctant because they could see that there was probably a lot of hard work involved. But thankfully we had 3 or 4 pro-active councillors who could see that there could be some merit in doing it and that’s when we invited this company to come along. I think they hoped for the business! [laughing]

Me: Before the external came along to present, did you contact the local authority before that?

P5: I’d had…I’d actually tried to get some information. I think we did look at…

P6: I think, to be fair, they’d only done the [area] and they weren’t really sure.

Me: No, I don’t think anybody was sure.

P6: I think everybody was muddling through together but I would still put them upside down because quite frankly, well…we’ll go over what we didn’t get.

Me: Well, yeah, just because they didn’t know what they were doing doesn’t mean they should have been so negative. Neighbourhood planning was there to stay by that point…

P5: Yeah, I found that out at the planning camp but you’ve gone quite a long way before I did that. But the thing that got me…it was information actually that I got on the county council website was just totally unhelpful. I mean, when I did actually enquire, they said ‘oh well you know you’ve got to decide your boundary’. So you’re like ‘ah right, okay’. ‘Then you’ve got to make this formal application and then we’ll decide whether you can or you can’t and we need all this criteria’ and I must admit the statement that [clerk], our clerk, put in…I mean some of the stuff he put in I thought was a bit pfft…I don’t know why he did. But again, nobody was given any direction about what it was that the county council wanted to know. I mean it sort of…we gave what our population was, how diverse the parish is in all sorts of areas and that was it and it was really difficult what was expected.

Me: So this external…who was that again?

P5: God…I’m going to have to go right the way back…I can’t even remember

Me: Was it a consultant did you say?

P5: It was a consultant that came, yeah. It was a company. It was a consultant that did a…

Me: And they had experience in neighbourhood planning?

P5: That’s all they were doing. They were specialising in that and they were offering…they’d done a road map which, again, it was okay but it was still very…above a lot of people’s understanding of planning.

Me: It wasn’t the locality roadmap was it?

P5: No. This was a completely…this was a private company.

Me: And they basically just talked about the process and…?

P5: They basically…the presentation was excellent because it did go from the start to the finish. Because, as you know, it’s such a long process, a lot of what they put up on this presentation couldn’t be explained in a couple of hours and so therefore, you could see a lot of confusion coming from a lot of the statements they made. I mean, the feeling I could see coming from some people who because they had no planning backgrounds it was going over their heads, was that ‘oh, right, we’re going to get inundated with loads of housing’. That was quite scary. It’s how to explain what the neighbourhood plan is without making people feel they’re going to be bombarded with 10,000 houses that they don’t want and no infrastructure and all the rest.

Me: So how did it come about that you ended up inviting these people in?

P5: Erm, I think there was emails going round. I do believe I got an email from these people saying ‘are you considering a neighbourhood plan? If so, we are happy to come and give you a presentation’. So I think they, initially, contacted, I think, a lot of parish councils…

Me: Off that bat kind of thing…

P5: Yeah. I think as soon as localism came out they sort of kind of jumped on the bandwagon. I mean I still remember them, they were very good.

P6: I think in fairness though, when this all started off, people were told by the county council basically they were…not pushed…requested to go for their own local plan. I think originally it was stated that ‘if you’re going to have build, you would have a say’ and I think there was a bit of a rosy picture and people wanted…and they thought ‘yeah, because if we’re going to have build then we’ll say where’. It hasn’t actually worked out that way but I think you…

P5: Yeah, that kind of got lost a bit. That annoyed me…

Me: So everybody was invited to this?

P5: Yeah, it was an open meeting. I think we probably got…oh dear…I can remember it because I got rushed into hospital that night. I was really ill at this meeting and then ended up in theatre! [laughing]

Me: What a way to remember!

P5: Actually, I was so ill, I attended and I was in agony [laughing]. Anyway, there was about…probably about 80 people. There was 2 rows…I’m just trying to remember the village hall as it was set out…there was probably about 80 people attended.

P6: I don’t know how you can remember that

P5: I do because I even remember the discussions because we had the county councillors there…some of the planning officers there. That’s when they made the statement ‘these aren’t going anywhere’ which I thought ‘great!’…this is as we’re leaving, as we’re going out the door. Because I said to them could we use this….we’d done our residents survey and I said ‘is this the sort of thing that you would put in or is this now out of date?’ and they said ‘no that’s out of date now’. Which, I mean, as soon as a document’s been written it’s out of date so I understood that. They said ‘well, it’s pointless because you’re not really going anywhere’. The other thing we kept getting told was we had to gather evidence, then you’d gather it and they’d go ‘well that’s just someone’s opinion’ and you’re thinking…

Me: Well, then, ‘What are we all doing here?!’ [laughing]

P5: That’s what I kept saying! We had that continuously didn’t we?

P6: It was one particular person being negative and, to be fair, people were doing an awful lot of work but as [chair] says, you do the work and they come along and knock it wouldn’t he? [laughing]

P5: They’d tear it to pieces [laughing].

P6: To be fair, the more we got into it…

P5: We learned to answer back!

P6: Yes, exactly!

P5: And we actually got Teflon coated by the end I think! So the group wasn’t formed immediately. So I think you need to put decide boundary because I think we decided as a parish council that yes…

P6: And then was it not the formal application?

Me: So was it the parish council decided?

P5: Yeah, in a meeting, we decided…we’d looked at all the different options and thought if we’re going to do it, do it now. As it’s turned out, they’re wanting all parish councils to do it and I’m glad we did it 4 years ago! [laughing]

P6: I always said it was best to get going!

P5: So then you can say the formal application went in.

P6: The you formed the group.

P5: Then, yeah, we went back to all the people that had attended because we did do a…there was a register of attendance…

[quiet – writing on the process map]

Me: I’m just going to put here ‘not a lot of support’…

P5: Yeah…we waited a hell of a long time to get the thing accepted. It was about 3 months. I had to keep writing in saying ‘what’s happening?’.

Me: Which is crazy. The regulations were out then were they?

P5: Yes.

Me: But the regulations say they have to give you a decision within a certain amount of time.

P5: No they didn’t. No, definitely didn’t.

P6: I don’t think…

Me: I can’t remember, going back…because when I was doing the Fish Quay there was no regulations and they came out…well...not even halfway through, almost when we were finished so to make it a neighbourhood plan we would have had to go back and re-trace a lot of the things that we’d done and the group said no we’ll stick with a supplementary planning document. I remember the regulations came out but I can’t remember if they came out then were amended and things were added in.

P5: I think we applied in the November then I think it was the January or February. Because our first meeting was in the spring…it was early spring so I’m pretty sure it was 2 or 3 months. I mean, I’ll still have all the emails and all the evidence on that. But it took a long time to get a decision, there was a lot of chasing up. So then…I think the local councillor came along when we’d formed?

P6: Yes, he did. Because I asked him to come along.

Me: So you had a group that had been meeting…?

P5: Well a load of people had been there to this meeting so we went back to the people that had shown an interest. We also said…we also maintained…

P6: …Anybody could have joined…

P5: Yeah…on the first flyer that went out for the first consultation that we had, the open day, that people could join. And it was just if you’re interested in your area and wanting to be involved and you may have…Because we said that people could join if they had specialities and I know my husband joined and we had…

P6: Because we needed businesses, people that have…

P5: Because he was a vet because we were looking at…I mean, in actual fact, we never did do anything with the animal side of things because when you start looking at policies and you realise that some of the policies are already in place actually cover… He still put a lot in.

P6: We still had people that had interests…I mean, it was having that diverse group from the area

P5: We had Bellway. We had Banks, we had developers, Banks Mining because they have a big interest in the village with the open casting. We had Bellway because they had a huge interest up at St Marys where they’re building hundreds of houses. We had Blagdon Estate which is Lord Ridley’s estate because he owns a lot of the village and the area. We had…farming groups, parish councillors, local residents…

Me: And this was all on this the core group?

P5: Yeah. We just wanted…

P6: And I think, to be fair, the parish councillors that were on because…on the parish council you’ve got them coming from every area, they’re not all living in one area so they come to represent the whole of the parish and not just the one area. So it was good.

P5: We didn’t just want it to be residents.

P6: They had the knowledge

P5: We needed the businesses as well because one of the problems we had when we realised the, from the outset the whole area was going to be greenbelted, we wanted to make sure the…our businesses, in order to make a village and a parish live, you need your businesses and we’ve got over 100 and it’s quite a small parish but we’re lucky that we have that. But they were being stunted by planning policies on the green belt issue, on conservation and on all sorts of things and that’s where we became, I think, as a parish council we realised if we didn’t do something we could lose… Because if you spoke to the business community, they wanted rid of the green belt because of red tape and cost and what-have-you.

Me: So I’m just thinking about, up to this point, what else do I need to put on here? So that was just the parish council decision?

P5: Yeah. And that was just using the parish council boundary.

Me: I’ve found when I’ve been working with different groups, it’s a little bit more obvious when it’s a town or parish council in terms of the boundary but I have worked with the more urban areas where they don’t have anything set up.

P5: It’s really hard. I mean…we did actually argue…there’s one part of the parish which is on one of our roads and there’s 6 houses that are on the same road but aren’t involved. They’re not in the parish, they’re in another. We actually looked at trying to incorporate them but the logistics and what you have to go through to do that, it just wasn’t worth the…

Me: So the formal application, it was just submitting the formal documents, so you said somebody wrote those to submit?

P5: Yeah. The clerk submitted…I remember having to sign a lot of things but he submitted the application to form a…to make a neighbourhood plan. Then we had to wait ages.

Me: So in terms of forming the group, how did you actually invite people to take part?

P5: Well, we got back in touch with people. The people that had…there was…we’d been told it was a good idea to have a good proportion of parish councillors on the steering group. I don’t know why, actually?

P6: It just evolved.

P5: It came from planning camp, yeah…plus, the good thing with our parish councillors is we’ve got one councillor…because we’ve got the main village then there’s lots of little satellite settlements and we’ve been lucky that we’ve been able to get people to come in from all of these. So one size doesn’t fit all so one area might have an issue with speed and bad roads or whatever, and another area might have whatever other issues. So it was quite good. As I say, we managed to get 4 or 5 of the parish councillors came on.

Me: But a lot of that evolved quite naturally?

P5: Yeah, definitely

P6: Yeah. Yeah. We didn’t decide ourselves who was going on it. It was basically who showed an interest and came on

P5: No, no, it was people that showed an interest who had turned up to that first meeting.

P6: That’s why we had so many at first

P5: Yeah. I mean one of the guys, who’s never attended, he’s on the steering group – he’s never attended any meeting but we send him everything because he wanted to observe what was going on. He was a businessman who’s…he’s got his own business with…he’s a photographer but he does things for Marks & Spencer and all of that but he lives in the parish. He said he was quite happy to…I think he took photographs right at the beginning for different things for us…and he’s been, kind of, in the background. Yeah there was a couple like that but occasionally do.

P6: But they’re still interested.

P5: Yeah, they’re still interested and funnily enough his wife is always saying to me ‘oh I read everything. I can’t say [volunteer] does, but I do’. So she’s really got a grasp. She’s saying ‘I can’t believe what you’ve done, it’s amazing’.

Me: And you were saying that when you were meeting, you’d always have 8 to 10?

P5: Yeah. There was always, on average, 8 to 10.

P6: And over 4 years…people came and go in respect that they may not get to every meeting but it was always well covered.

P5: We always had enough to make sure we had a decent meeting.

Me: So what prompted this visit then?

P6: We just asked the council because they’d been through it. It was just to get…we’d just started and we wanted information

P5: As I say, it was an amazing…It was probably the most helpful because…

P6: Because it wasn’t out of a text book. It’s what they’d actually gone through.

P5: And I think that was when the planning camp thing came round. A couple of us went to that. And that actually, again, meant I could pick up loads and loads of information – some of it still went over my head.

Me: So, who was that?

P5: [LPA planner] Anderson…I think he was involved

Me: Oh so was it planning aid?

P5: it was Planning Aid, Locality… That was the roadmap. It was a proper one in York. I think at that point it was all paid for as well. I think all we had to do was pay for our travel. We were really impressed actually, it was at the York Station Hotel.

Me: Yeah because I think back then the support organisations were Locality, Planning Aid and I think there was a few whereas now it’s just Locality.

P6: That doesn’t surprise me.

P5: The good thing that happened there was there was a lot of examiners. So there was talks on examination. The only thing I took exception to, because we’d just dealt with a wind farm, was they had people there that were pushing to put wind farm…you know…you’re energy. I mean, we’d already decided that we were going to stay totally clear of that because…it’s been lost at examination. They’ve been turned down at examination because they’ve put ‘we only want wind turbine this high’ and they’ve gone, ‘no, that’s not how it works’. So we’ve just gone completely…the group just said…it had cost £17,000 to fight this wind farm which was about 400 metres from one of our residents and the idea of trying to raise, a little tiny parish, to fight big boys again was just not going to be part of the plan.

Me: Also, it got have jeopardised the rest of the plan because if the plan, at examination, got thrown out for that reason then it does the rest of the work as well.

P6: It does

P5: Exactly!

P6: And, to be fair, you don’t really get a say. It goes to planning and you don’t get a say.

P5: Yeah, exactly. So we thought if we’ve got to fight wind farms, we’ve got to fight them but we don’t really want to start legislating for, you know, renewable energy because, again, there’s so much even with people at the time, people thinking about putting in for these solar farms and people in the parish going ballistic about that and we just thought ‘it’s not worth it, it’s a quagmire’. So that was the good thing about the planning camp. It also highlighted the unhelpfulness of the councils. Some were getting worse treatment than we ever got. It also showed you on the map how many people…they’d made a map showing exactly who was taking part. It was also…it was interesting because you could see…you were learning the pitfalls but also a lot of the successes and a lot of what they called the planning myths – which is where I got the planning dragon and the planning wizard for the children – that was really, really helpful. All of us went there with quite preconceived ideas of what…and they were just blown out the water which was brilliant. It was really good. It also helped you to feel that you were more empowered and I think that’s important…I think you’ve got something like that backing you and they said ‘we’re not going away, this is hear to stay’, contrary to what we’d been told just a few months ago it was like ‘whey, get in!’.

Me: So sticking this row for a second, before we move on, was there anything…was there any point along here where you did advertise…was it advertised quite widely or was it just opened out?

P5: Yeah, it was very wide…I mean obviously this was advertised that there was going to be this presentation. Then we got on to the first consultation we did and that was really big. I mean there was…

P6: I mean, you advertised it exceedingly well mind and got a good turnout.

P5: Yeah, we actually…I write in a magazine, it’s not the parish magazine, it’s actually the church magazine and it covers everything, and I write there. I wrote in every month. So every month for the last 4 years…they’ll be sick of me [laughing]…there is always a mention of the neighbourhood plan – where we’re at, what we’re doing – and so if there was any consultations coming on or there was going to be a flyer drop, expect this. The first one was just the flyer drop and getting everybody to the first consultation to try and explain…we did loads of huge posters didn’t we?

P6: Yes.

P5: Trying to explain to people what the journey was to get to your neighbourhood plan. The council did help at that stage because they gave us templates for other…it might have been [area]…so I was able to sit at the computer for 3 days and do all these little pieces of paper which they could put in a little bag and write comments on. So you’d have the paper which was to do with infrastructure and you’d have another one…so there was basically…

Me: So was this the next step after the…?

P5: yes. Definitely. We did a great big one.

Me: Was there any particular reason why you decided at that point to do that?

P5: Well, that was where we were at.

P6: Starting point wasn’t it?

P5: Yeah because we’d got our group organised, we kind of knew the ideas. Although we were told do all these…can you remember, we were told to do all these plans?

P6: Yes. Now hang on…

P5: I don’t think we followed those. They kept saying do, sort of, work plans on…

Me: Ah like different activities

P5: Yeah. It was awful wasn’t it?!

Me: Like project management type stuff

P6: It was just…over the top!

P5: And it was scary because we didn’t…at that stage there was so much not understanding which the planners expected you to understand and, I mean, it used to just give me palpitations when they used to give you things like that because you think ‘well, where do you start?!’.

Me: Yeah because you didn’t know what the process is really

P5: We just didn’t know where to start. It was horrible.

P6: It seemed to muddy it.

P5: Yeah

P6: I’m just thinking that after the planning camp, I know we went into the community but where did the money come in? Because we had to start getting money and I think that’s important.

P5: Yeah. I did apply then to…it would have been locality.

Me: After the planning camp?

P5: Yeah. And we were successful.

P6: I just think the money is important because I think people don’t realise the expense. I mean that was the start of…erm…

P5: I think we got about £7000

P6: Yeah, I was going to say I think we got £7000. I’m pretty certain of that myself because I was thinking that figure before. I think when we started it, we had an idea that it was going to be costly but it’s…

P5: I think they told us it would be about £20,000 but we havne’t spent that

P6: No, we haven’t

Me: I think that was because the Frontrunners got £20,000. I know the first wave frontrunner got £20,000 but that was spent in very different ways to what is spent now because they’d never been done before. For example, the organisation I worked for, the Civic Trust in Fish Quay – a chunk of that £20,000 was paid for us to facilitate through so they had someone to guide them all the way through.

P6: I think to be fair though, we were given that figure and that was a major consideration.

P5: But we did get that. The meeting place was, again, a local farm shop café. Now he’s given all the meetings…we’ve had a meeting every single month, he’s given that for free and served coffee and tea and water. So that actually helped. Some of the things like delivering leaflets and things like that were hand done. We were given quite a lot of printing from banks and they gave us a loan of the stand. So we’ve had an awful lot of help.

Me: From within the community?

P5: Yeah

P6: Community spirit

P5: The community have helped a lot, yeah.

Me: So this consultation, just to run back through, what did you do at this stage?

P5: It was explanation of what neighbourhood planning is and it was a chance for people to have a comment, point out issues. We used huge maps of the parish and there was 3 or 4 around the room and they were invited to put stickers on where they thought…you know, red sticker for an issue, green sticker for it’s lovely. So there was a chance for…

P6: For people to have their say.

P5: Yeah. And there was all these [post-its] out where they could actually write different comments that they were happy with or they wanted…I mean that’s where we found out, obviously what we expected, was that everybody wanted a shop because we’ve lost our shop. So a lot was taken from that.

Me: And was it at this stage where you had the boards with the different topics as well?

P6: Yes.

P5: Yeah. And that was also the plan….sort of, copied the locality…

Me: So to give them an idea of what was involved

P6: I mean basically there was no bars held. They could say what they wanted.

Me: So was that done mainly through events? Like drop-in events or…

P5: Well there was just….that was just the drop-in.

P6: And the village hall wasn’t it?

P5: They were allowed to write in, and email in and…yeah…and this was a drop-in event at the village hall. There was posters put up all over the parish – pubs, businesses…erm…there wasn’t one area where we didn’t put posters up.

P6: It was widely circulated that this was going on.

P5: As I say that was probably the best attended because there was well over 100.

Me: At the event or just general responses?

P5: No, 100 at the event and then all the different comments that we got from everywhere were then put on website. I think from there we were able to categorise them and have a base and see where the major issues were. And then, obviously, differentiate between what were peoples wishes and what could actually be done in policy. But that took a bit of explanation.

P6: That was an ongoing thing wasn’t it?

P5: That was quite a hard thing to…

P6: I don’t think that ever stopped.

P5: The one thing that came out of that though, it was funny that the majority of people that attended had their own agenda. That was very obvious wasn’t it?

P6: Mhm, as I say a lot of it became a wish list.

P5: Which you can understand. It brought the…

P6: But they didn’t have the background of what we’ve done there…[planning camp etc.]

P5: It brought the NIMBYs out.

P6: So if you’re going to go in, you’re going to say ‘well, I want my footpath done’ which isn’t what it’s about.

P5: Yeah or, we’re not happy with this, we’re not happy with that.

Me: So you said you’d put it on the website, so at what point was the website set up then?

P5: It must have been…I’m trying to think…it was probably about 6-8 months…it was quite a while after, it wasn’t immediately.

P6: No because we needed this…

P5: When I said…I don’t think that was on the web- I wouldn’t have put it on the web there, I think it came a bit later on.

P6: Yes, because we needed that to have it on the web… But the web…you did give something to contact on the web but was it not the parish council?

P5: Yes

P6: So there wasn’t a neighbourhood plan website, if that makes sense. Now, when did we get the consultant, [consultant]?

Me: Is this [consultant] Ludman.

P5: Yeah, [consultant] came in after the consultations because I remember her…because once we’d done all of this she came in and said ‘can you give me all the hard copies?’, so I did.

P6: Was it not a year after?

P5: Yeah, I think it was.

P6: Sorry, I’m just trying to remember.

P5: Because we were going round in circles.

Me: So was…when you came to do the consultation and you had to organise all this stuff and the create the posters, was that all you?

P6: [chair]…mhm

P5: Yeah. Well, I mean the problem I had was trying to get…I mean some people did do different things. I mean, as I say, Banks did all the posters, the county council did some free printing. We did have a very good planning officer – we all love Kevin.

Me: Is that Kevin Liddle?

P5: Yeah. We did.

P6: Was it Kevin Liddle?!

P5: Yeah.

Me: I know theres a Kevin Liddle that does neighbourhood planning.

P6: Sorry, yes, I’m thinking of another Kevin [laughing]

P5: He was really good. He explained everything very, very carefully…

P6: I think that’s something that should go down because we didn’t get the same…

P5: No we didn’t. If we’d had him all the way through, we’d have been finished sooner. He was great.

P6: That was what was the main problem with this is inconsistent. So Kevin, yes he was but he wasn’t always there.

[general chatter]

P6: I mean it was inconsistent from the beginning

P5: I mean Kevin was the one, unlike any others that came and then never came again, he was…he would butt in. He would say ‘can I just interrupt? That’s not correct.’ And he was brilliant because he brought you back because he would say when you’re going off on a tangent. I mean…

P6: He would bring you back in line but he was also…

Me: Respected you all

P5: Yeah and he would listen

P6: But it also wasn’t his agenda that was coming over. With the others it was more the council’s agenda.

P5: Yeah, definitely.

Me: I don’t know him very well but I met him at one of Mid-Coquetdale’s meetings.

P5: He was brilliant. We were really sad when we lost Kevin.

Me: Yeah, because it was [LPA planner] that went to [area].

P5: [laughing a lot!]

Me: The thing is, my role…because I’m doing my own thing essentially which means I kind of end up in the middle. Because I actually…

P5: You can see both sides?

Me: Well, yes and no. I can…I can see sometimes where the council are coming from but I don’t necessarily think that they’re right, do you know what I mean? I can see why they do what they do but that doesn’t mean I agree with them. I am more on the community side. I was talking about it with my supervisor and he was saying that I’m more on the activism side of saying groups need to have their say and it’s about the groups rather than it being about them.

P5: That’s what we had to keep reminding the.

P6: If the Council want you to do their work for you, they should back you.

P5: That’s another thing. Coming into all this, they kept throwing in, what I would call hand grenades. [laughing]. Because we had the really unfortunate thing that we’re going through a core strategy consultation which has now just gone right out the window but all through this there was a core strategy consultation going on. They kept changing the goals posts didn’t they? The one thing that was the really hard thing for us and it’s still going to be that way is that they wouldn’t give us any idea as to whether these insets were going to be allowed or they weren’t going to be allowed.

P6: We were trying to do work with out the information to work on.

Me: So you’re just kind of hoping for the best at this point?

P5: Yeah. And you’re finding all this information and they were going ‘it’s not up to you to keep it out the greenbelt, that’s the Council’s job’. And you’re like well what do you want us to do? The whole point of this which has been the worst, I think, is that we couldn’t plan.

P6: No, because we weren’t given the information to work on.

Me: But they wanted you to plan but you couldn’t plan because you didn’t have…

P5: Yeah and what they’d do is they’d have a meeting with you and they’d throw a little snippet in wouldn’t they? And we’d think ‘oh right!’ and we’d look on the council website and it would be the something, but we’d be like ‘what you’re on about?’. Or they’d say ‘the further down the line it is, the more weight we can give to this’.

P6: But that didn’t happen at planning.

P5: It didn’t happen at planning and then…right at the end they said ‘oh well..’ and that was [LPA planner] Anderson, bless, why we hadn’t him on board because he’s brilliant. He just said ‘no, the weight is given once the plan is given in, submitted to Northumberland County council and then it’s got the weight’.

P6: But that’s not what we were led to believe.

Me: So are you know working with [LPA planner] as part of the council now?

P5: Yeah

Me: Because [LPA planner] was one of the people that attended my January workshop but obviously I’d worked with him for years in different places in neighbourhood planning. I knew he was coming back to the council so its…

P5: He’s brilliant. I like [LPA planner].

Me: He’s brilliant because he’s done it for years and he’s done it not in the council.

P5: He did it as planning aid.

Me: Exactly.

P5: because I worked with him for about 2 years when we did the other one. I like [LPA planner]. He’s always sending little emails as well and he keeps you in the loop of what’s going on.

P6: But that’s back to the inconsistent in what they were saying to us.

P5: Totally.

Me: So you’d done this feedback and then what happened?

P5: Well, we started to build an evidence base.

P6: And then started to create a vision after that wasn’t it?

P5: Yeah.

Me: I was just going to say as well that this seems really linear and if there’s bits where it’s not as linear as that then that’s fine – we can put things side by side or I can draw on loops and things like that. We’re doing it as a linear thing as if it’s just that straightforward.

P6: It’s taking me back! [laughing]

P5: I know, I know. Build the evidence base so we’d kind of got that. But then that’s when we find out…this is where [consultant] came in because we were going round and round and round so this is where we got stuck. We got stuck. So, right, we had the evidence so now what do you do with it?

P6: [laughing]

Me: So when you say you had the evidence, what do you mean by that?

P6: We already had the start of the evidence. We did other consultations. We had a base to start with what people felt.

Me: So the evidence is really what you’re talking about here.

P5: Yeah. And then what happened was…because you had people like Clark who was attending a lot of meetings and he was off on a tangent and he had us doing word maps and all sorts of different things to find out what was the most relevant. What was the one he did…I can’t even think, it was a really funny one and it was a good one to do? It was something like…there was a word he made up and each thing had an outcome… Can you remember, right at the beginning? I remember thinking it was quite good fun to do but…

P6: I can’t recall that

P5: That’s how he started writing what he thought was…because he was being quite helpful at that point but, again, he was doing it more like a parish plan.

P6: No, I can’t recall that.

P5: Yeah we did…I mean…what I would put there is that we did have several ideas on how to use this and how to get the…I can’t remember what he called it…it would be on the website.

P6: I cannot recall that at all

P5: He did this and it was something like [random made up words]. Can you not remember?!

P6: No I can’t.

P5: It was when [LPA planner] came. He came to a neighbourhood plan meeting and it was like a chart – it’s on the website. But yeah, what I would say there…he did do it. It was fascinating…oh, it’s something that they use all the time and I can’t think.

P6: I really don’t know.

P5: It is like a…every letter leads down to something else. You probably do it all the time see, when you’re just a… It’s not something we use but he uses it all the time because he’s part of Northumbrian Water and in charge of that and Kielder and all of that so they use it all the time. What they’ll do is they put a load of comments in down and then they start to take out…

P6: Put them into categories

P5: Yeah. Put them into categories but he called it…it was a special name. It was good and it was really good fun. But anyway, that’s…if you want to say that the evidence was all logged on the website then so it was actually published.

P6: But we had the website then? The neighbourhood plan website then. And people could comment at any time.

P5: And they were published.

Me: So the actual website, the neighbourhood planning website, was set up somewhere between here?

P5: Yes. And everything was logged. So people could log on and see all the different documents that had been done so that went…so every flyer, every poster, every meeting minutes, everything was on there so people had the chance to look at it. And yeah, it was a word search type thing that he did but I can’t remember.

P6: I really don’t recall this at all.

P5: Maybe when it was when you were in Australia. I’m just thinking it might have been that January.

Me: But you got stuck at this point yeah?

P5: Yeah. Totally stuck. And I think at this point we decided we were going to get a…

P6: No, we went in a circle! [laughing]

P5: Yeah, what we kept doing…we weren’t getting any further from here so you could say it was a circle.

P6: It was horrendous.

P5: We didn’t know where to go next.

P6: I think also, at that time, it didn’t help at that time that the council were throwing an awful at us.

P5: Yeah, it was terrible.

P6: And nobody knew…you thought you understood and then as soon as they walked away you’re thinking ‘well what are you doing?’

P5: They brought us here…there was about 4 parish councillors – you and I and [consultant] because we’d brought [consultant] in at this stage, the planning consultant. So she started to create the vision. We sat then…even [consultant] came out and said ‘what was all that about?’

P6: ‘What was all that?’ [laughing] That is actually true.

P5: We got nowhere.

P6: So I think that was possibly one of the worst time.

P5: Yeah, it was one of the worst times. That was the bit where we’d come along this journey, we’d got money, we’d got everything sorted out, we had a rough idea at this stage of what everybody’s issues were…

P6: Even what we visualised how it was going to be was just out the window.

P5: Yeah, because we didn’t know, you know…because then we were told…because we were having meetings and we had a few then and I can remember [LPA planner] saying ‘that’s not policy. No you can’t have that, it’s just a wish’ or ‘that’s just a community action’ or ‘that’s just an opinion’ and it was like well ‘what do you want?!’ [banging on table] We were really confused. So [consultant] came in and she not only created a vision, she made us have a vision [laughing]. She made us see and we saw the light! She actually unravelled a lot of…

Me: So did you actually get in touch with [consultant] and hire that consultant to do that – saying ‘we’re stuck, how?’

P5: How did we get [consultant]? Was it through the council that they suggested her?

Me: So you spent money on [consultant] as well

P5: Oh, big time.

P6: I think it was because of the size of the project. I think it was always…I don’t really know, I think it just evolved.

P5: No, when we went to planning camp, they said it was a very good idea to get a planning consultant and the one thing they did say is ‘don’t let the planning consultant write the plan’ but, I’m sorry – that is happening. Because she was actually able to transcribe all of the different things we’ve thrown at her and put it into…

Me: Planning speak.

P5: Yeah. That was the problem. The one thing that the council are insisting on…now I didn’t get that from planning camp, I was told you could write your plan any which way you wanted…in other words, if you wanted to do your plan with music and drawings, you could do…it didn’t have to be planning speak. This council here have insisted it has to be in planning speak even to the point where they’ve had this…this is our draft plan that went out into the community…and they’ve had this and they’ve completely annihilated it. It’s now got 2 or 3 more policies and…I mean, I can understand why they’ve done because they said ‘when it comes to us now for submission, then we’re probably just going to tick off and that’s fine’. But, they tried to…there was loads they tried to…[consultant] was absolutely…she says ‘I’m not changing it!’

P6: They did try to change quite a bit but we weren’t having it.

P5: No we didn’t. We just said no.

P6: We wouldn’t have it. We stuck to our guns because there’s no point in having a neighbourhood plan if you’re not going to give local input.

Me: Yeah, because if you change too much then it’s not a neighbourhood plan.

P6: Exactly. They may as well have done it themselves if they were going to change it too much.

P5: And that’s what we said. There was certain things that they were coming out with and I took exception.

P6: To be fair, I think with [consultant] as well, when we originally got her I don’t think we…we needed help, professional help and we got [consultant].

Me: And she helped you to decide what to do next.

P5: She kind of tabled what we…

P6: She did the framework that we could work on.

P5: She did. She was good and she gave us free range to write things and then totally pull us back in again and sort it out. But she could…what she did was she could pick the bones out of anything that was written and explain why that was…she was just very good. [consultant] did…I mean, I’ve attended parish conferences and I think the one she did a really good presentation at was at the fire station in Cramlington. They did one of the parish council conferences where they starved us. She did an exceptionally good presentation on neighbourhood planning and I actually sent that round to the group and I actually kept it. So [consultant] is…we’ll just say she’s amazing. She’s a really good person to ring up. She’s the kind of person if I had a problem when I was doing something – if I was putting a blog up or writing the minutes or I’d had a very confusing email from [LPA planner] or anybody else from the planning department, or a resident had asked me something – I know I can just ring [consultant] and she’ll just immediately, you know, sort it out.

P6: And she kept everything in layman’s terms.

P5: She did. And that was important and I think the group got confidence then. We didn’t have any before and up to that stage we were all like headless chickens.

Me: Whereas she gave you that confidence to realise that actually you can do it.

P5: Yeah, she made us realise that we weren’t as stupid as we thought we were, that we had actually done loads and what we’d done, she was really impressed with.

Me: So in terms of this vision then, what did she do for that?

P6: Well she just worked on the evidence that we gave.

P5: But it wasn’t her vision was it? She then went through it with us saying ‘what are you trying to say here? You’ve got this here, so where do we go?’. So she led us away from the circle and led us on the right path without telling us what to do. So she was really good.

Me: So after the vision what happened next?

P5: We had another…did we have another consultation?

P6: Yes and we also had…

Me: So what was this consultation about?

P5: Yeah, so this was about the vision and possible policies, objectives.

Me: So was it one of these issues, objectives and vision consultations which seems to be very common in Northumberland.

P5: Yeah. It was quite good other than you get the same people coming back to throw stones at you.

Me: So were the issues, objectives and vision that you went out with to consultation all created through this vision and [consultant] helping you pull all of that together?

P5: Yes.

P6: Based on what the community had given us.

P5: Because we wanted to say ‘have we got it right?’. And what happened then was…this is where it went really bad in the sense that people that did have their own personal agendas and that weren’t wanting insets and didn’t want any housing, didn’t want any change – they all came out of the woodwork big time. So we had a lot of lobbying. But that was more not to do with the neighbourhood plan, it was more to do with the core strategy and the fact that they’d asked the parish council to draw maps which, again, was really wrong. They said ‘can you draw maps in your parish where you think there should be insets?’. So we just thought ‘wait a minute, we’re not going here because this is their job’. So we drew a line round every settlement in the parish and said ‘you sort it out’ because we didn’t want to be responsible

P6: Because they knew what they were going to do and didn’t tell us.

P5: Yeah and they didn’t tell us and they’d got all this information. They knew that…we had a satellite area which is St Marys which is some way out the parish so it’s not really local to the main village and we didn’t know what they were going to do with that so that was one area. There was the main village which had had a settlement boundary so it was presumed that would inset and it’s still presumed that. Then there was Station Road which, unfortunately, is where I live which didn’t help the situation because obviously I was making it all happen. You get that stupidity and people get these ideas in their head because they don’t understand. But that was an area where we knew it was sustainable, where we knew that it could take...if we wanted development in the future we could take some so when all of this went up in our faces it was more to do with the fact that we were at that point in the core strategy but it wasn;t us.

Me: And it just so happened that you were doing a consultation at the same time?

P6: Yes

P5: And we were doing a consultation at the same time so they went ballistic. So, of course, they didn’t want anything planning at all and they were writing, they doing great big fraudulent…

P6: And they actually came along to 1 or 2 meetings and once they realised that these meetings weren’t behind closed doors as they put it, and we weren’t actually making the decisions that they thought we were making, they didn’t last long did they?

Me: So they were thinking that you were making all these underhand decisions and it wasn’t true.

P5: And as it turned out, and this was the funniest thing of all and this is where you learn so much about your community, is that they started coming to every parish meeting to cause disturbances. We actually had 2 of them at every parish meeting just writing everything just checking that…because they suddenly realised that the parish council were overseeing what was going on here. But then they committed a fraud and were actually…some of the other residents threatened to take them to court that they have suddenly gone to ground and the whole thing has been dissolved now. Again, it was lack of understanding, it was inconsistent information they were getting from here because what they were doing was they were writing to somebody here, either a councillor or a officer and if they didn’t like what they heard, they would then go to another one who was giving a different answer. So the consistency wasn’t there and it just made it worse. We had quite a few where we got the planners out and, you know, trying to chair something like that was really difficult. I think once they resorted then to doing things underhand and obviously being found out and everybody realised they had their own personal agenda. By that time, they’d actually managed to get the council to change the map. I was told you could never lobby a council like that…and these were 30 people approximately…they managed to get the size of the inset, and upset an awful lot of other people who could have been in the inset…

P6: Which is why the council wasn’t consistent

P5: So basically at this point in time because of the core strategy happening at the same time as us trying to do a plan, because the greenbelt issues and inset issues, it caused humongous amount bad feeling. It’s all settled now.

P6: It’s settled now but it was awful at the time.

P5: It was dreadful at the time.

P6: But it was muddied I think.

P5: It was really bad but the awful thing was we kept saying ‘look, we were asked to draw maps, we drew one for everything’. It wasn’t our job. They gave us 3 weeks to do this and how the hell…you’re expected to go out for consultation. I mean you expect at least 6 weeks for consultation. So we had all of that. I would say that there…that was the problem – that was our biggest problem. You know, what were the outcomes? Well, the outcomes were the fact the core strategy about the greenbelt and insets, it muddied a lot of what was happening for the neighbourhood plan and that put 6 months on our…

P6: Oh, it set it back a lot. But, again, but not only did we have that but we had inconsistent information from the council.

P5: And there was people leaving.

P6: I don’t think anybody at the council really knew at that stage what they were doing. I mean, I would go in and I never got the same answer twice.

P5: It was at the same time that there were planning applications going in were totally inconsistent. You’d have one officer saying ‘this could be inset within the greenbelt’ – that was Clifton and we hadn’t even put Clifton in. That could planning for 34 houses so you can imagine…

P6: Yeah but we also had a situation where we were quite a way down on the local plan and, again, we were told this would have weight at planning. That didn’t actually happen when you went into planning. It was an absolute joke.

P5: So basically that was probably our worst time.

P6: Which is the core strategy, not us!

Me: So did that…and that consultation, did you do the same kinds of things?

P5: Yeah. Basically, there was boards up.

P6: I think we had them in a few different categories by then didn’t we?

P5: Yeah. It was a lot more nearer to where the draft plan would be. We had planning officers there who were completely got by these people big time. From that we actually did the walkabout.

P6: Ahh yeah, on station road.

P5: Yeah, Station Road. We actually…we also engaged with students from Newcastle University on the planning course. They looked at how they could plan – 1 year was to do the village and the green spaces, green corridors and how we came up with 30 houses as being the perfect number if you were going to increase in the village how it looked and the second year was how you would look at green corridors on station road which is where all the problem was. So from this we, as a group, moved on to being able to consult again – so you need that again…

Me: So, sorry, what happened between those 2 consultations?

P5: We got the university involved. I forgot the professor and his…

P6: Yeah and he had the students doing the work. We engaged the residents association because that seemed to be the main problem that come out of that one area. But we didn’t just…you know, anybody could come so that led to an even more in-depth consultation.

Me: So the university students did some specific work around…

P5: Over 2 years. And that was over the 2 proposed insets in the greenbelt.

Me: I wonder who that was…I’m always curious. I went to speak to a group yesterday and they were saying they engaged with students and they did a really good job considering they didn’t know the area and the work was around infrastructure to do a report. They said 3 students from the south, very posh – and I asked what year it was and it turned out it was my year group.

P5: They were brilliant.

P6: But who was it?

Me: Was it [volunteer] Haylock?

P5: That was it. Professor [volunteer] Haylock. He came to use and we said yeah, so we had 2 girls and they did the village then we had a lad do Station Road.

P6: He did some good things.

P5: Yeah. We came out with a lot from that but that’s where they…

Me: So was this recent then? Because I was speaking to [volunteer] and he was aware that I was working in neighbourhood planning and we were saying we need to make sure we both know what each other are doing. I might be doing some work with some students in the future but I wonder if this was one of them.

P5: Well last year it was the young lad and the year before it was the girls.

P6: I can’t recall the lads name.

P5: But they were really good.

P6: But their consultation led to a lot more.

P5: We really went out of our way to try and help these people even if half of them you would like to have murdered.

Me: So this consultation, what was this consultation?

P5: This was the same – it all stemmed from this consultation. That led to a walkabout in one of the proposed insets just to get an idea of how the community saw their area.

P6: And it wasn’t just 1 or 2 that were invited. It was the whole street who were invited. The whole road, rather. And you didn’t even have to be on the road to go, it was invitation to all.

P5: It was quite good what was thrown in. I mean some you could see they weren’t going to communicate at all, they’d just come to scowl. But there was o1 or 2. But then the rest were explaining…

P6: What you can and can’t do.

P5: The other thing that came out was that they totally contradicted themselves. That was really interesting because what they’d originally said was that this had always been an open countryside and there was about 70 houses and there were separate entrnces into all of these house. Lots of people being there for 60 years, the place had been sterile, and a land settlement area and you’ll know from planning that it’s really hard to plan and nobody knows what category to put them under because are they a village, are they not a village? A lot of it is concrete. All of this is going on and there was people who had lived there for 60 years who were saying ‘you can’t even build a bungalow where, we don’t want to be in a big house now, we’ve got this land and we can’t use it’. So they had their objectives. Then you had the ones that wanted nothing because they didn’t have gardens or anything – so there was a lot of those that have and those that don’t. Then in between all this that the law as far as planning policy and as far as greenbelt had slightly relaxed so you could have infill. I went in for it, I got infill so that didn’t help either but I was hoping it was for medical reasons. So trying to explain to them that if you didn’t look at the road in a proper way you could end up with infill, infill, infill, as I’d got and that’s unfortunately that’s what happening now. So whatever they did, they weren’t going to stop development. That was the bit they couldn’t get in to their heads. You know, you could either plan for an area so that it’s a pleasant area for everyone.

Me: Yeah, so either you plan and have some places or you don’t plan for it and it’ll just happen.

P6: Yeah, but we had people there for their own personal agenda which you just can’t do.

P5: Yeah, they want to live on a country road. The fact that there’s 6,500 cars per day and they were saying a country road. Some of things they were coming forward with is silly because they weren’t true but then when you started talking with them, it was lovely to hear that where these single openings were coming out, they were saying it’s really hard when you’re pushing a buggy or you’re taking the dog out, there’s cars coming out onto a very busy road – it would be much better if the houses were set back and wouldn’t it be good if we had a cul-de-sac situation where we could see through to the open countryside but where there was other families for children to play and it was a bit safer. So that was really good…that was one positive things that came out because they then could see this vision and the young student that came was good at drawing them out.

P6: he was excellent.

P5: So not only did we do a walkabout, we actually sat and had a really big discussion.

P6: I think a lot of the myths were put to bed.

P5: Although, they did still manage to put the fraudulent thing into the core strategy.

P6: But that was wrong. They shouldn’t have allowed that.

Me: So the student – I know you had one then another – but did this happen and then that happened or was this in parallel?

P5: We had 2 students the first year and 1 student the second year and he was the one that did this consultation. We didn’t really have another consultation.

P6: No. Well, wait a minute though. We didn’t really have another consultation but we had the website.

Me: So thinking about the first lot of students you had – they did that bit of work? What happened after that? Was it just they did that work?

P5: Probably in the middle of that, it was the realisation that if there was anymore work done in the village…it showed us where if we needed a new school, it showed us the type of developments that would be allowed and this was all coming from the evidence – the girls took on board everything that was said. I mean I walked the whole village with them.

Me: And this was all based on the evidence of the community?

P5: Yeah. So they looked at what we already had, what was happening and it was really interesting that we could walk round and they could see…because you’re coming in cold which is brilliant, they didn’t have any preconceived ideas or whatever so they could see where a school would be best suited, what could be done with school land which could be 30/40 houses – Lord Ridley…well, he doesn’t own it, the council do but the council would let him do it if he gave up here his land which is the school land. And they actually put a lovely little estate up, you know, they did some beautiful little graphics for us and maps. They showed the best place for the school and they looked at the economics, they looked at, you know, if you had a school on the north side it’s near a roundabout, it’s straight off the A1 so therefore you might get a shop back. There was all this kind of thing. We had terrible parking issues outside the school. Our school is falling down. It’s just really… P56: The location is outdated now – as most are.

P5: They two girls were very, very good. The lad that came the second time – his maps were rubbish but his vision and the way that he drew people out and what he did was excellent. So they looked at the two…I suppose what you could say here is these were the insets, proposed insets within the greenbelt which we couldn’t plan for but we could wish…

P6: They showed a vision and a future vision and it was good because they weren’t from the area, they were from the outside looking in and they took on an awful lot of what we said.

P5: Yeah they did, they did.

Me: So that consultation was mainly this walkabout more than anything else and the discussion yeah?

P5: Mhm. And that was all put on the web, it was all published.

P6: Everything was published. Everything we did.

P5: Yeah, it’s all published every month anyway. I mean we haven’t met for a couple of months because we’re changing…

Me: So then what happened after that?

P5: Basically, I think there was a lot of meetings then with the county council because this is where we’re having the issues over is it going to be inset, is it not going to be inset, where are we with the core strategy, where do we go from here? We kind of dropped [consultant] for a bit because…

P6: Well because there’s nothing we could do.

P5: Yeah, there was nothing we could do.

P6: We were left in limbo I think. We didn’t get the information we needed from the council to be able to move on did we?

P5: No. It was all a bit up in the air as to what we did next because…I mean at that point I think [consultant] was like ‘why you even bothering doing a plan now?’ because they were making it so impossible.

P6: And I think we did have a discussion about do we go ahead or not? Because there was 1 or 2 questions, one of them was about whether we keep going. I was all for going and in the end we did agree it was going to forward because I think people were feeling like…

Me: …like people feeling like…

P5: I think it was just an impasse.

P6: Limbo.

P5: We didn’t know whether we carried on. It got a bit negative with the council.

P6: Very

P5: Because they were telling us one thing and doing another. So, yeah, it was quite a….

Me: …an uncertain time.

P5: And what changed it? I think it all just became a bit…I think we all just got a bit more positive and had a real deep discussion on…

P6: Yes, I think what really changed was the fact that we’d gone so far down the line. It was too late to turn back.

Me: And actually you’d done all this work so let’s do it.

P6: Yeah, we had to finish. I think at that time there was a question about whether it was going to have any value because by then we’d had the planning meetings…sorry, we’d had planning applications totally contrary to how they were being dealt with as to how we’d been led to believe.

P5: But I think the changing bit was when we realised the core strategy was in trouble.

Me: So it was like, actually if that’s not going to go through then we need to keep going.

P5: Yeah we need to.

P6: We were too far down the line.

P5: Yeah we said lets go ahead because at least we could be like [area] and end up with something that is at least safeguarding our community.

Me: We talked a lot about the core strategy with [area] yesterday because they were basically saying that for a long time they’d told that they couldn’t submit their neighbourhood plan until the core strategy was done.

P5: Which was wrong

Me: Which was wrong but I think part of it stemmed from being, you know, nobody really knew what they were doing because it was so new up until the point where the high court decision which said no you can have a plan without a core strategy and they went full steam ahead after that.

P6: This is what they led us to believe at the beginning then took it away which they may have had the power to do that, but that was wrong and that did not serve the local plans at all.

Me: Once you’d decided ‘right, okay, core strategy we’re going to go ahead’ what did you do next?

P5: We got [consultant] back on board.

P6: We got [consultant] back on board but did we…what did we write? Did we write basic conditions statements or draft policies? I can’t recall what came next. We got onto putting things into further than what we had.

Me: Would it have been draft policies then?

P5: I think it would be. That’s [basic conditions statement] to submit and we haven’t done that. At the moment we’re...we’ve got that…

P6: Did we not?

Me: You might have started writing it but that’s when you submit to the local authority. When you submit to the local authority you have to submit your neighbourhood plan, your basic conditions statement and your statement of community consultation.

P5: No, it was the draft policies. She started to write those out. What happened was, we had quite a big debate on all of that.

P6: What is that? I don’t understand

P5: That is the…well, you’ll know. It’s another planning speak thing.

Me: It totally is.

P6: Oh so that’s when you go for?

Me: It’s when you submit everything. That’s the one where you have to say how you meet all the regulations that are set out.

P5: So she came back in there.

P6: And we had the council out.

P5: We had the council out as well and they were actually helpful.

P6: Yes, we could have done with that earlier.

Me: So how did you go about actually starting to draft the policies?

P5: Well, again, we, using all our evidence, we started…we actually did full on these policies to start with.

P6: They were

P5: And then we could see that they could potentially hit loads of problems. So it was how to word them…I mean there was certain things like…we were talking about community…

P6: Transport and everything wasn’t it?

P5: Yeah, it was everything. We went through everything.

P6: And what we had information for and we had to get information from the council on certain things that they’d already done statements on.

Me: That’s what I was going to say next is, in relation to the policy…because everything has to be backed up by evidence – a different type of evidence – so where did that come in?

P6: Council,

P5: The council helped there. We did get a lot of stuff from the council. Again though, it was like pulling teeth.

P6: It was. They were very negative.

P5: I know. They took forever

[break for tea and coffee]

P5: I forgot that I became a neighbourhood planning champion after the planning camp too!

Me: Well it’s funny because I went to a neighbourhood planners London conference. I’m not sure what they are, whether they’re a charity or what, but it’s organised by people who are quite high up in neighbourhood planning. Like one of the guys that runs it actually helped DCLG set up neighbourhood planning. Anyway, at the conference a few people mentioned neighbourhood planning champions and, as someone who has worked in neighbourhood planning for years and is now doing research into it so I’m trying to contact key organisations, I honestly hadn’t heard about them. Then I went on to have a look and their records on the website don’t actually show you very much about who your champions are.

P5: I mean we had Nic Best.

Me: Well that was who I met yesterday

P5: He’s good because he’s got a lot more of the background than I have and a lot more planning expertise than I have. But the one thing I’ve found with it is you’re expected to…I mean the one thing that worried me was that you’re expected to know an awful lot which…most of us can guide people. I mean I know I could…if someone said they had this problem with planning and I could tell them where to go – I don’t have that problem at all, I can always point them in the right direction. The thing that worried me was giving advice when I haven’t done a degree in planning and I’m not an expert. That leaves you wide open to being done and Nic felt the same. They couldn’t really give us what our roles were. You were also expected to do all these things and it was like, well, do we get…you know, as a parish councillor I don’t get any money at all – I don’t get expenses or anything. So everything I do, I do off my own back. Nic does get expenses to a certain degree but, again, if they’re saying to me ‘there’s a group in Sunderland’ or whatever and ‘would you go an do a presentation?’, well the answer is actually no because I still don’t know what…

P6: You’ve also got the problem with planning a legal…you’ve got to…when you have a planning officer look at it, it’s like any legal document, it’s how they read it.

P5: Exactly! It is a bit scary. You could leave yourself wide open.

P6: And you also had…we have had it muddied in the middle of all this because the planning officers were not reading how they’ve done in the past. So you can’t give advice on planning because you don’t know what one officer is going to come forward with a decision.

P6: You can tell them your experience. I mean what I’ve done is if anyone’s emailed me and said ‘oh, you’re a planning champion’ or they’ve got a setup where they’ve got your email and it says my expertise is neighbourhood planning…I can do a certain degree point them in the right direction. If they ask me what are the pitfalls, I can say be very careful or make sure… So that side of it…I mean, Professor Haylock had me…I had to give a lecture at Newcastle University [laughing]. It was for first year planning students – I mean I had them laughing because I made it very funny – but they could have shot me down. I mean, all I could say to them was ‘why have you become a planner? Are you insane?!’ [laughing]. Again, it’s very difficult, as a layperson, to start to tell other people about something you don’t have…you may have a bit of knowledge about but you’re not an expert in.

Me: Have you had…other than the locality grant…have you had…?

P5: Oh we had another grant as well. We’ve had two grants and we had some money from your chest…

P6: Erm, yes. Member schemes mainly

P5: So I think that came around here. It was another grant – so we had the member’s scheme…

P6: You did very well to get the money that we needed.

P5: Yeah but we’ll probably be using parish council money at…I would think…here. She’s busy doing this bit.

Me: So other than getting the grants from locality, have you had much involvement or any kind of…I don’t know…have they spoken to you? Have you had much involvement with them, have you had any help or support or is it mainly the money?

P5: Mainly through me. What they do is, they send a newsletter and I just send it round the group. When I get them I just forward them. I have to say, I might read a bit of it but, again, because it’s not always relevant to you and especially, you’ll know doing something like this, meeting every month for 4 years. You know, it’s voluntary. Therefore you don’t really, although it’s nice of them to send us all these lovely emails… The only thing I have done is when there’s been consultations or there’s been a white paper or something’s happened government wise, I have actually commented. I have gone on and, even just in layman’s terms, told them what I’ve thought of them.

Me: Yeah because…the thing with locality is I was actually interested to read people’s experiences because they’re somebody that I really should be engaging with.

P5: They’re hard.

Me: But I can’t because nobody replies. Nobody… I’ve been to a couple of their events. There was one in Durham in April and I went to that because I’m working with [area] who want to do a neighbourhood plan. I was going to try and get some of the group to go along, they couldn’t in the end and I think it was probably quite a good thing that they couldn’t go because I think it might have just scared them away. They were there…again, what was strange is that the person who delivered it doesn’t actually work for locality, she was a consultant that locality had employed.

P5: Yeah, they’ve got loads of those.

Me: And the woman that ran it was actually one of the convenors of neighbourhood planners London and I knew her from previous things and she’s brilliant. But that’s actually…nobody from locality was actually standing at the front tp say this is what we do. I got the impression that a lot of locality employees aren’t necessarily planners, they’re just community development…I say just but I shouldn’t. But that’s because they do more around asset transfer and that kind of thing which is great. That’s just something I’ve been thinking about recently. Im going to their conference in November to see where I get to.

P6: Well, good luck with that!

P5: That must be a bit like…

Me: It’s their annual conference so there’s stuff on neighbourhood planning and other community-led stuff. Then me and the director of the lab are going down – me particularly for planning, the director’s going because it’s very relevant to the kind of work we do. But, just with…if I’m going to develop a tool like this, really it would be great for them to be involved or for them to even know what I’m doing.

P5: Yeah, you’ve seen the locality road map haven’t you?

Me: Yeah but I don’t find it all that great. Actually, I don’t know if they would even welcome what I’m saying because I’m saying ‘they need more guidance’ and they’re saying ‘we’ve got pages of guidance’…well, actually…

P6: You need more [laughing]

Me: You need more…

P5: Well, it’s not so much they need more…they need to be more concise. What it is is there’s loads of it there. I mean, the road map is pretty good. That’s quite a good start for people just to read through but it’s…I don’t know. What I found is you go to the things and they give you loads, you come back with tonnes and tonnes of paper some of which I never look at again because I read the first line and think ‘not a clue what you’re talking about’. Or it either isn’t relevant or the piece of paper you get…you could do with a directory of help.

Me: Well, actually the directories thing…at the Durham event, they did this neighbourhood planning resource pack where they’d basically sorted all of the resources that they provide into categories into things like ‘all of these resources are about this and these about this’. But even so it was literally just lists upon lists upon lists with links to find them and it was maybe 4 or 5 pages long. Even that was sorted into categories…even that was like ‘where do you start?’. It was just a crazy amount of stuff to look through especially when you consider those links might be 3, 4, 5, 10, 20 pages long.

P5: Yes. Exactly. And you’re talking about layman people here who have no experience of planning – or very little.

Me: And are volunteers as well!

P6: To be fair, with planning, they can’t give you list of ‘this is how it is’ because quite frankly it’ll be read different by the officers that’s dealing with it. So you’re left again with information and there’s nothing you can do with it anyway.

P5: Yes, because that was consistently the concern.

P6: Because you’re not making the decision. So it’s how somebody else will read it.

Me: So, the draft policies came from the evidence so far. In that process you were getting evidence from the council as well to back up your policies? Was that evidence the things like housing numbers and those types of things?

P5: Yeah it was all to do with environmental

P6: And transport plan as well

Me: So quite technical?

P6: Yeah because you couldn’t ask for buses and things.

P5: So it was all the stuff that basically we needed from them to actually back up our plan or at least show that it had been added.

Me: Did the group the policies or did [consultant] write the policies? Did you say ‘this is what we’re doing’ and she translated it?

P5: Yeah we said what we wanted and she put it into…

P6: She translated it into English.

Me: Well…she put it in planning not English! [laughing]

P5: And even when that was done, we still changed it.

P6: We did but she’d give us it and we’d give it back to her to give us a chance to change things

P5: She would send it round to everybody and the there were people, like the business, who would say ‘actually, we’re not a community asset’ or ‘we don’t want to be ever ‘got’ by the community because that’s not we’re at and if they know that’s where we’re at we’ll get a lower price if we ever go up for sale’. What we did learn, because in between all of this and doing parish work as well, that there were things we missed which was really quite good because in between all of the start of this and this stage there’s now a village hall going up at St Marys or it is up so they will then become a community asset. So things that we said definitely were community assets have been taken out and things that we didn’t even know about have been put in. That was changed. Also, the infrastructure thing, the highways thing, changed didn’t it? We started with something like 7 policies and I don’t know how many is in here now.

P6: Yeah we got less. We got them down but also, here, we had a meeting with the council on this.

Me: So were you in that kind of cycle of drafting the policies, getting them back from [consultant], amending things and just going back until you were a happy with it?

P6: Yeah, we had to just keep re-addressing some things.

Me: Until you were all like ‘actually we’re okay with it’.

P5: Yeah, because we had another meeting with the council there.

P6: Yeah that was another thing that we had to go to the council and…

P5: Yeah, because they went through all our community actions. They also went on about how they wanted the layout.

Me: Yeah, I’ve heard this a lot.

P5: Because they didn’t want the community actions put next to the policy. They wanted them just at the back or something. Yeah, so we had 8 policies and…now we’ve got 10. Is that right? We ended up with one policy being 3 because they decided it needed to be.

Me: And those kind of things, were they mainly from the local authority?

P5: Yeah they then went through and said ‘I think you should re-word this’ or ‘we think you should change this’. I think the transport and access was the one they made bigger. I mean, some of things – that’s when I got really angry…I was just getting so frustrated with some of the things they were coming out with. There was a lot of questions about listed assets and actually that led onto making…you know, the next parish council meeting after we’d met the council then, I was able to say ‘look, we need to apply for these community assets to be listed’ and that was one of the areas we didn’t know about. I have to say, in all of this, the learning curve has been tremendous. Stuff that we didn’t even know as far as issues in the community and getting to know the community, on a positive note, it’s been amazing for that. I mean there’s some you wish you didn’t know but [laughing]

Me: So where are you at know?

P5: Right, well we’ve done the pre-submission consultation. So we got about half a dozen comments?

P6: Did we even get that many?!

P5: It was really just from…I mean, by that time everybody’s kind of been happy with it. Because we did…did we not do another…?

P6: Did we even get half a dozen? I didn’t think it was that many.

P5: Yeah. I’m trying to think, we had another big consultation here….somewhere here?

Me: In the midst of all this? So you did some drafts, got some evidence, did more drafts…?

P5: Yeah so we had another open day so we had another consultant.

P6: That was quite…there a lot of work there really. But again there were some things we missed out and some things we added.

P5: We’d put about 12 of these [draft plans] around the parish.

Me: For this one?

P5: Yeah, this was for the draft neighbourhood plan.

P6: They were all in prominent places.

P5: And we put it on the internet. It was Northumberland County Council did the link to the website, the link was in the parish magazine, we put hard copies in the school, the church, the post office – just anywhere you think of.

P6: Anywhere prominent

Me: And just invited people to comment

P6: Yes

P5: Yeah. And we emailed all the statutory consultees and non-statutory. So they all got to know. Basically, we got, as I say, half a dozen or so comments back which were, on the whole, very positive and very nice.

P6: Aha, very positive.

P5: So that was that. But I think that meeting there comes in between that because that’s when they were moaning on that [LOCAL AUTHORITY] couldn’t get the… There was the meeting after…

P6: Hang on a minute, we did have a meeting.

Me: so there you were drafting policies and you were liaising with the council.

P6: Yeah, that’s fine.

P5: Yeah and then we had a meeting with [consultant]…this is when we did all the crossing out.

P6: Yeah, I was going to say it’s when we had that for so long and then they came and started taking it apart.

P5: So it was after the consultation. What they…they gave us a great big huge list of perhaps what we could change and how we could word things.

Me: Okay so Longhorsely is right at that point now.

P5: Yeah so I can show you…[LPA planner] Anderson did it and I have to say he did do it well because what they’d done is they’d put it around all the different departments and they came back and even they didn’t understand what some of the comments coming back were. They weren’t making any sense from the different departments. But, they said it helped them for when it finally goes to the submission.

Me: Yeah so if you get it right this time it’ll be easier later on.

P5: Yeah. So we sorted all of this out, [consultant] stuck her heels in with us and said to take a walk because we shouldn’t change some of it. It was very up and down – it was very good and bad wasn’t it?

P6: Yeah so I do think there was a bit of nit-picking at that stage.

P5: Yeah and that was when we didn’t even have access because we can’t do dropbox. So now it’s at the point where the adjustments that were discussed here, will be made and [consultant]’s doing this bit and this and then it’ll be going to the steering group to go through and obviously the parish council need to look at it before it’s submitted. So this is where we’re at now so I hope September is going to when we submit.

Me: So, just to step back a second. You said you thought there was a consultation here – what was that consultation on?

P5: We did a consultation for the draft policy so it was all together.

Me: So I’m guessing it was draft the policies…

P5: It was this. We had it in the village hall, it was all over…

Me: So it’s that – it wasn’t another one?

P5: Well it went on for about 6 weeks didn’t it?

Me: So that’s the pre-submission…

P5: Yes, it is that one actually.

Me: So I’m going to move everything off here so we can see it and see if there’s anything we’ve missed.

P6: It doesn’t seem like there’s much work done when you see it like that [laughing]

Me: Oh, I think it does!

P5: I can’t tell – I’d need to look at somebody else’s.

Me: So [area]’s was about 4.5 years though…

P5: And lets face it, it’s a slightly bigger thing that ours!

Me: Yeah because there’s was – so they had topic groups so that complicated things but when you look at it, here you’ve got 5 topic groups means that there’s a lot more. But this one is Longhorsely…

P5: Oh so they’re sort of similar aren’t they?

Me: What’s interesting stage is that they’re at this stage along with you and they feel exactly the same as you with the Council. They feel as though they’d had them involved all the way through and then they’ve got to this point. They’ve seen the draft policies and it was only at the pre-submission consultation, like what you’re saying here, that they got 18 pages of feedback saying ‘you need to change this, you need to change this’.

P5: Yeah I think we got nearly that!

P6: I think it was badly timed. They could have done that much earlier.

Me: They said exactly the same as you. It’s quite worrying.

P5: But, again, it’s if…it’s costing us more money because we have to have [consultant] re-write and obviously we knew there would have to be some re-writing because realise the core strategy has been shot down.

P6: There could have been more, I suppose…

Me: Has there being said about the evidence…so the technical report…has anything been said around that?

P5: Yeah, just the same things ‘that’s an opinion’

Me: So what’s interesting is that they are at the point where they just want to get the plan submitted and get it in. They’ve done as much as they can and they just want to get it through now. But, because the core strategy has been pulled back, they’ve been told that they can’t use the evidence that the core strategy was based on which means their policies that are back up by evidence, the evidence that the council has – these technical reports like the housing and the transport. Now that’s really interesting…

P6: Can I just say something though? What officer did they talk to?

Me: I don’t know.

P6: This is your problem – we’re back to one officer saying one thing and another saying the other. My understanding is yes, the core strategy has been pulled and they need to tweak it or what’s going to happen there. They have to do that quite quickly. They can’t tell us now to go back because we’re not changing that much.

Me: So they’ve pushed back and said they’re going to…well, they’ve got a meeting coming up about the pre-submission response, the 18 pages…and the council also recommended they get a health check – I don’t know if they’ve suggested that to you. So they’ve recommended that. They don’t think they need one but they’ve got some funding to do so because it doesn’t cost them, they’ve said they’re going to do it but they don’t want to delay the process. I don’t think they’ve had the meeting with the council yet but one of the issues is the evidence side of it. They’ve basically said because the council has withdrawn the core strategy, it means the evidence that you are using to back up your policies has also been withdrawn which now means it’s not ‘valid’ evidence. But they’re argument there is there’s already neighbourhood plans in existence, like [area]’s, that do use that evidence and their plan has been made and gone through examination.

P6: But, Longhorsely thought, did they have a plan before this or where they all greenbelt? I don’t know it that well.

Me: I don’t know.

P6: It may be, like Walton, they don’t have a plan because they’d always relied on the greenbelt. It may be that. But if they start telling us that, I’m going to go off it.

Me: But the argument is…

P6: It isn’t an argument!

Me: Well, no it isn’t. But [area] already have their plan made, as do others in the county where they’ve gone through this process which means that it’s been submitted, the local authority have accepted it, the independent examiner has passed it, it’s gone to referendum and it’s been made which means there’s a plan in existence which uses the evidence that they’re saying you now can’t use.

P6: I think, in all honesty, they want to go back and ask somebody else. Find out who the officer is, is what I would recommend.

Me: They’re going to push back on it. They haven’t had the meeting yet. They were going to be making the changes they need to make and then have the meeting to push back on the rest of it and try and resolve the evidence thing. The reason I mentioned it is because you’re at such a similar stage that I wondered if anything had been said.

P6: If the council did that, it’s going to cost the council a lot of money to get these plans back through again because the parish councils can’t do it twice.

Me: I know

P6: So I don’t understand that at all but I would be arguing that.

P5: I think there’d be loads of people shooting themselves.

Me: I mean the person I spoke to was really going to push back it because he was saying there’s plans in existence that use that evidence and, because they’d been told was…

P5: But it’s only this bit though. Because our evidence is our evidence.

Me: Yeah but what I mean is so, for example, in Longhorsely they’re talking about housing numbers.

P5: See we didn’t get into that.

P6: But if you’re talking about housing number then yes, it’s the biggest thing in the core strategy.

P5: We’re going to be greenbelt…because we’re washing over, we can’t actually plan housing and everything.

Me: But the housing numbers are up to the council, not Longhorsely.

Me: No, what you can do is neighbourhood planning with the housing numbers is you can set the housing numbers that you want in accordance with the evidence that exists. So if the evidence that exists saying you can have…

P6: I understand that but if they’ve that, why would they pull it back on that when it’s still up to the council to set the numbers so they’re just giving evidence of what they’ve found. Is it because it’s not backing what the council want?

Me: No, but they’ve got a…they’re part of a certain area where they’re going to get housing and they want housing but there’s some sites that already have permitted development so they can just a given but they were identifying other sites.

P6: Oh we never got into that.

P5: Because of what happened here [the confrontation] we just said we’re not going there.

Me: The council have then suggested them just put numbers in instead of evidence but then it’s going to look like they’ve just pulled numbers out of thin air. They’re saying ‘no, we’re going to using the evidence of the other plans, like what [area] have used’. So that’s why it hasn’t come up with you but I wanted to mention it to see if that was the case.

P5: Well, surely they…because what the council’s going for now is this latest 2012 figures that have come in so surely that just needs careful wording by Longhorsely. All they have to say is that the wording is for…because it’s got to be NPPF now, because we’ve been told and that’s what [consultant] is busy doing, she’s taking the core strategy out of this because it’s got to be NPPF…so surely they just go by NPPF for this area…what’s the problem?

P6: They need to sit down with the council and get it sorted.

Me: Well there is a problem in that there wasn’t a problem until the council turned round and said ‘you can’t use that evidence anymore’. That’s the problem.

P5: That’s rubbish. I think that’s rubbish.

Me: in terms of the housing numbers, they’re not actually trying to go against the council by saying ‘you said we were going to get this many houses and we don’t want them’. It’s nothing like that. It’s just more that the policies are based on evidence which they have to be and they’re now saying they can’t use that evidence which leaves them in a position where, at examination…

P6: Evidence is only given by what you have at that time so I just can’t see the problem.

Me: It’s do to with the SHLAA’s and all of that.

P5: Yeah but you can do NPPF surely? I would just negate the core strategy and just put NPPF.

Me: Yeah because the NPPF is just in favour of sustainable development.

P5: And it gives numbers. It gives some numbers for your area so you can use those numbers. Just [LOCAL AUTHORITY] out if it and just say ‘we’re complying with NPPF’.

Me: I think that’s what they’ll end up doing but they’d only just got…so their pre-submission consultation thing ended and three days after it ended they got the response from the council with the 18 pages.

P5: We got ours – was it when it was finished? I got the email and sent it round and it was like ‘oh my god’.

P6: Yeah it was after.

Me: Yeah that’s what happened to them. They haven’t yet had the meeting, they’d just looked at the 18 pages, they’ve decided the bits that they definitely think ‘yeah, that needs to change’ and the bits that are like ‘no, absolutely not’. Then they’ll have the meeting to push back and they are pushing back on it all and sorting it out.

P5: Well, I think the NPPF is just go with that.

P6: I really feel it’s going to be one officer’s opinion. And if it’s not, I would be taking it further. P5: I really would be ashamed if I was doing that to different parishes. I just think it’s so wrong to come in at that stage. They’re here to help…

Me: Yeah, it just seems like, from everything I’d heard, they seem to have the best intentions but they still don’t give you truly what they think until they get to here.

P5: It’s funny because I did the forward for this and I was really honest in it and I said ‘there were times when the [LOCAL AUTHORITY] weren’t constructive’ or whatever. We had to take it out. They said ‘if you put that in, we can’t agree with it’ so what we’re going to do – fail our plan because they didn’t think it was any good.

1:13:00