

# Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan Lessons Learnt.

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## Positive experiences:

1. Please tell me about your positive experiences with regards the Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan journey? What did you most enjoy? What were the key benefits?

*I enjoyed working with a group of volunteers who engaged so fully in the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) process. The NP group was self-driven and applied good project planning in its approach to the work. In my experience, many NP groups experience periods of time where enthusiasm is lost, project planning is abandoned, volunteer resources become too scarce and outside help is sought for the purpose of getting the project moving again. In Saham Toney's case, this didn't happen even though the group was faced with its fair share of difficult challenges.*

*In addition, the NP group:*

- *Made full use of resources available to NP groups such as those hosted at [www.neighbourhoodplanning.org](http://www.neighbourhoodplanning.org) and online planning practice guidance.*
- *Took time to understand regulations and were careful to comply with them.*
- *Recognised the value of bringing in consultancy support to help with the NP journey and the value of bringing in specialist support on important matters to the parish (e.g. landscape appraisal and a consultant engineer to assist with understanding surface water management issues).*
- *Liaised proactively with stakeholders such as Highways and the Lead Local Flood Authority.*
- *Carefully digested the contents of reports prepared by consultants (e.g., reviews undertaken by Modicum Planning and the Landscape Character Assessment undertaken by Lucy Batchelor-Wylam CMLI), raised questions where they didn't understand and challenged points they did not agree with.*
- *Worked hard to understand and engage with the content of specialist reports (including the SEA environmental report), engaging the authors in doing so, so that they could make informed decisions with regards to implications for the NP.*

## Negative experiences:

2. Please tell me about any negative experiences you had? What did you find most frustrating or difficult?

*The difficult and, from time to time, combative relationship between the NP group and the local planning authority NP coordinator created at times an unwelcome distraction to the tasks in hand. This became less of an issue towards the end of the journey.*

*NP groups generally seek positive feedback from the Local Planning Authority (LPA) and are reassured when the LPA support their approach in spatial planning. Meanwhile, it is the role of the LPA to identify, as part of their duty to support, areas of concern when they relate to the basis conditions which every NP must meet.*

*Where there is a difficult working relationship between the LPA and the NP group, it is challenging for the consultant to guide the NP group to focus energy and resources on areas of disagreement (between the LPA and NP group) which matter (e.g., those that have implications for the basic conditions), and not to get distracted by other matters.*

*As a consultant it was difficult to navigate the NP group well in the process of digesting and acting positively on advice provided from the LPA (especially where advice was delivered a little unskilfully or perceived to be misguided).*

*As a consultant it was frustrating during the NP journey not to have had direct contact with LPA planning officers who were either involved in the Local Plan or development management matters since that would have assisted greatly in understanding areas of common ground at a much earlier stage.*

### Key learning:

3. Based on what you now know, what would be your top 3<sup>1</sup> tips to your younger self (when you started the NP work!)
  1. *My experience with the Saham Toney NP group highlighted the importance of engaging with stakeholders early on during the site assessment process and not to simply accept the technical site assessment report at face value.*
  2. *Develop more effective and better advice on the difference between policy text and text which is there to support a planning policy.*
4. In terms of the approach you followed or the work undertaken, is there anything you would have changed to have made it a better, more successful experience?

*I wish I had been more successful at:*

- *convincing the LPA that it was not a good idea to delay the SEA and HRA screening until the NP was at Regulation 14 stage. Had the SEA/HRA been brought forward and when initially requested, the need for a third round of regulation 14 consultation would have been avoided.*
- *communicating and building a dialogue with planning officers in the Local Plans team and development management team at the Local Planning Authority. It is recognised the NP Coordinator had an important role in supporting NP groups but the strategy by the LPA of directing all NP-related queries via the NP Coordinator created unhelpful barriers on those occasions when a conversation was needed with an officer who, for example, had detailed knowledge of the Local Plan or development management issues in the parish.*

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<sup>1</sup> 3 is suggested number to guide you!