

# Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan Lessons Learnt.

Write up of meeting held virtually 6 December 2021

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**Facilitator:** Rachel Hogger, Modicum Planning.

The meeting was held virtually on Monday 6 December 2021. The meeting which took place from 10 am to midday was facilitated by Rachel Hogger of Modicum Planning. Attendees were asked the four questions set out below (the questions were provided ahead of time to give participants time to prepare their answers). To encourage representative expression of views, different participants were asked to lead on each question.

## 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?

## Negative experiences:

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

## 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!)
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?

A report of the discussions is provided in the following pages. To assist the reader, the findings have been organised into the following topics:

- |                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Team building               | 10. Community engagement |
| 2. Community/NP group learning | 11. Stakeholder liaison  |
| 3. Plan inception              | 12. Formal consultations |
| 4. Project planning            | 13. Examination          |
| 5. Administrative matters      | 14. Hearing              |
| 6. Evidence                    | 15. Referendum           |
| 7. Site allocations            | 16. Using the plan       |
| 8. Use of consultants          |                          |
| 9. Plan drafting               |                          |

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

**Question 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?

**Responses:** In this discussion, participants identified a number of key benefits of the Saham Toney Neighbourhood Plan journey. These are listed below. The table following this list sets out the positive and most enjoyable aspects mentioned by the participants.

- ✓ The plan provides a clear and balanced way forward for village development
- ✓ The plan should provide certainty about what development may and may not happen
- ✓ Site allocations give additional protection against the presumption of sustainability
- ✓ The level of development allowed should give a buffer against any increase in the local Plan target for the village
- ✓ A good tool for planning officers and developers
- ✓ As well as the plan, the village will benefit from its many supporting documents
- ✓ The landscape character assessment prepared to support the Neighbourhood Plan is a key benefit for our village
- ✓ Speculative developers may be less likely to seek to promote unsuitable development in Saham
- ✓ Hopefully, villagers are more aware of planning issues
- ✓ A sense of achievement and satisfaction
- ✓ Village improvements have started to happen as a spin-off from plan preparation: flood risk mitigation, attention to design, better quality planning applications
- ✓ We learnt some new skills
- ✓ We made good friends

| Aspect                                | What was positive?   | Most enjoyable  |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>1. Team Building</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From 2017 onwards we started to build a team of active volunteers in a work group to help develop the plan. Building the team was a positive and constructive experience.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting to know people we didn't know previously, and on an intellectual level. Team was varied in its experiences in contributions it made.</li> <li>Making new friends, teamwork and camaraderie in the group</li> <li><i>"Being selected by the group as leader and having their support throughout"</i> Chris Blow, 2021.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>2. Community/NP group learning</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The research we undertook on topics such as flooding, biodiversity and heritage. The documents produced were constructive. They were written in an interesting way so that, for example, the history of the village could have been understood by many, including children. <i>"I feel there is a permanent record of the status of the village as it is at the moment."</i> Brian Mitchell 2021.</li> <li>Our neighbourhood plan website. It is easy to follow. The quality and extent of publication/information that can be found there. Every subject can be located. The website is beautifully indexed. Anybody interested in the subject could find what they were looking for.</li> <li>The amount of useful information available on the sites of other neighbourhood plan groups and local authorities</li> <li>The understanding we gained of planning regulations and guidance</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning new things about the village.</li> <li>Learning from other plans.</li> <li>Being able to put professional skills from another field to good use</li> <li>Learning about village heritage from Brian and local wildlife from Chris D</li> <li>Acquiring new skills – website creation, online forms and surveys, video creation, streaming of online meetings</li> <li>Changing our personal views about development</li> <li>Analysing how to use the regulations to justify our policies</li> <li>Keeping up to date with planning matters via the Chief Planner's newsletters and online research</li> <li>Learning from experts who were more than willing to share their knowledge and explain</li> </ul> |

| Aspect                           | What was positive?  | Most enjoyable   |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
|                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in the Local Plan hearings gave access to policy officers' advice and information that helped with the plan</li> <li>• Learning from technical publications, newsletters, webinars etc</li> </ul>  | <p>things to we laymen (for example at plan review and health check stage).</p>  |
| <b>3. Plan inception</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PC decision to start the plan which included a delivery of a survey to every household in a prepaid envelope</li> <li>• Setting up a steering committee</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>4. Project planning</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a detailed plan of work that was readily adaptable as things changed</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying project planning skills from a different field.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>5. Administrative matters</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For us, a small work group worked well</li> <li>• Weekly group meetings, recorded with notes</li> <li>• Andrew's meticulous management of our budget</li> <li>• Andrew's identification of available grants and his administration of applications and close-out reports for them</li> <li>• The large degree of autonomy the work group took for itself</li> <li>• Getting to grips with online meetings was a positive experience</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One member enjoyed being in charge of administrative matters whilst others enjoyed that he could be relied upon to undertake that effectively</li> </ul>  |
| <b>6. Evidence</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a landscape character assessment in place for Saham Toney is beneficial</li> <li>• SEA/HRA work (undertaken by AECOM). The consultants were good. They could explain to the NP group clearly the complex process in a way which could be understood by NP group members.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The analytical process of site selection and gaining group support for that</li> <li>• Team village walkarounds to gather evidence</li> <li>• Researching other plans and learning from them</li> </ul> |

| Aspect                       | What was positive?  | Most enjoyable   |
|------------------------------|---|--|
|                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group was readily able to provide its own evidence for the selection of local green spaces and heritage assets and to justify the rural gap</li> <li>• Each of the specialist reports that justified and shaped policies and now serve as material considerations</li> <li>• The artists impressions included in the masterplanning report</li> <li>• The extent of evidence we presented</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researching and writing the village development history</li> <li>• Understanding the intent of the environmental assessments and how to reflect them in the plan</li> </ul> |
| <b>7. Site allocations</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This has a very important impact on village</li> <li>• The site assessment process provided opportunity to discuss/almost interrogate potential applications. Every application has been dramatically improved as a result (several people have put in applications but then quietly withdrawn them).</li> <li>• Village involvement in the site assessment process.</li> <li>• Considering all the evidence before making final decisions on site selection – site assessments, site rankings, landscape impact, the conclusions of masterplanning and flood risk mitigation</li> <li>• Criteria we used to assess the sites. It is a template that other groups could benefit from</li> <li>• A land agent's part in prompting us to allocate sites</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation with owners of allocated sites</li> </ul>   |
| <b>8. Use of consultants</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction with consultants including: Rachel Hogger (Modicum Planning); AECOM, Locality, Cambridgeshire ACRE (housing needs work), Lucy Batchelor Wylam (Landscape Character Assessment).</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with excellent consultants</li> </ul>   |

| Aspect                          | What was positive?  | Most enjoyable  |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with consultants pushed limits we maybe wouldn't have reached without them. This was reflected in quality of the final plan.</li> <li>Appointing a main consultant who doesn't work with developers</li> <li>Work undertaken by Lucy, the landscape architect. Feedback on landscape from Lucy was a light bulb moment. <i>"Set off a train of thought of balanced development versus environmental protection. Unknowingly she had a huge impact"</i> (Chris Blow, 2021)</li> <li>Establishing clear scopes of work for consultants' studies</li> <li>Ensuring consultants studies were specific to Saham Toney and correlated well with our policy development</li> <li>Our housing needs assessment was a good balance of our own work and a professional's review and recommendations</li> </ul> |   |
| <b>9. Plan Drafting</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The process to create a vision and objectives and use them to decide policies</li> <li>The process of refining and improving policies as we gained more knowledge and gathered more evidence</li> <li>Sticking to our guns and gaining acceptance of a long and complex plan</li> <li>Rachel's incredibly comprehensive and incisive reviews</li> <li>The two health checks we commissioned</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The structured way in which we tackled things</li> <li>Introducing new ideas and ways of approaching things</li> </ul> |
| <b>10. Community engagement</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whilst some of our events had low attendance, there were some very good events. The first of these was at the beginning in 2016 at the village fete We were</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Publicising the plan in meetings, leaflets and online</li> </ul>   |

| Aspect                          | What was positive?  | Most enjoyable   |
|---------------------------------|---|--|
|                                 | <p>swamped by people who wanted to talk to us about issues they were worried about. Other good events we had were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) a 'drop-in' event during the first Reg 14 consultation (March-April 2018), during which we answered villagers questions about the Plan;</li> <li>2) a presentation to villagers about site allocations in December 2018, which resulted in some lively debate;</li> <li>3) our presence at a village 'harvest fun day' in September 2019 during the second Reg 14 consultation.</li> </ol> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weebly was a simple and intuitive website creator that needed no previous experience</li> <li>• The number of village events we arranged</li> <li>• Continuing the process throughout lockdowns</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing a monthly article for the village magazine</li> <li>• Preparing online slideshows for use during lockdown</li> </ul>  |
| <b>11. Stakeholder liaison</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaison with the LLFA and Anglian Water on the drainage policies, which has spun off practical help to alleviate flood risk in the village</li> <li>• Liaison with Historic England on Policy 6 – Heritage Assets</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lead Local Flood Authority comment that it wished all plans were like ours</li> <li>• Holding on to our principles in light of opposition from the Breckland (the local planning authority).</li> </ul> |
| <b>12. Formal consultations</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The use of online surveys, particularly to gather villagers' opinions on policies during the first Reg 14 consultation</li> <li>• Seeing how some villagers who had been opposed to key policies changed their minds</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level of support for our policies and parish action points when villagers were surveyed</li> <li>• Understanding alternate views on key topics</li> </ul>   |
| <b>13. Examination</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Andrew and Chris B's review of potential examiners</li> </ul>  |  |

| Aspect                | What was positive?   | Most enjoyable   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
|                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making clear which examiners we would not accept before a shortlist was provided</li> <li>• The appointment of the examiner we wanted</li> <li>• The opportunities the examiner gave to address his initial and post-visit comments, to comment on the Reg 16 consultation responses and on his draft report</li> <li>• Although we annoyed the examiner by making unrequested comments on a Breckland response to his questions, it resulted in Breckland making its position clearer on housing numbers.</li> </ul>   |  |
| <b>14. Hearing</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The contribution of Breckland's development management and housing officers</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning how to record and stream an online meeting</li> <li>• Making our case</li> </ul> |
| <b>15. Referendum</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referendum day itself. <i>"I was an observer. Breckland organised it beautifully. The hall was beautifully laid out. Record takers were friendly. Constant stream of people who were chatting and enjoying the opportunity to be part of it."</i> (Brian Mitchell, 2021)</li> <li>• At 10pm it was shut and within 35 minutes we had the result. A model of management on the behalf of Breckland. Friendly/constructive/did justice to the work</li> <li>• Big highlight was the community take up. A very good turn out and result.</li> <li>• Radio coverage following the referendum</li> <li>• The work group's active "yes" campaign, independently of the PC.</li> <li>• Our campaign slogans</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaigning (as an individual)</li> </ul>   |



| Aspect                    | What was positive?  | Most enjoyable   |
|---------------------------|---|--|
|                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few villagers made and displayed their own “vote yes” posters</li> <li>• The turnout and the % who voted yes. As an unfunded campaign group, the work group stimulated a turnout that was better than most district or county councillor elections, with more than 96% of voters in favour of the Plan.</li> </ul> |  |
| <b>16. Using the Plan</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of emerging policies to object to planning applications and appeals. Started to see some officers and developers getting used to them</li> <li>• Cooperation with the developer of allocated site STNP9 during his successful planning application for the site</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and using a policy-based planning application / appeal review checklist</li> </ul> |

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

**Responses:** The discussions in response to this question are reported in the table below.

| Prompt                                | What was negative?  | Most frustrating  | Most difficult   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>1. Team Building</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Parish Council could have participated far more actively when reviewing the Plan prior to consultations, but made almost no comments</li> <li>Cooperative team working between the NP group and Breckland was lacking, despite extensive efforts on the group's part to foster that.</li> </ul>  |   |  |
| <b>2. Community/NP group learning</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The way the planning system appears to work against certainty</li> </ul>   | The poor wording of the most relevant Local Plan policy – HOU 04  | Understanding and keeping abreast of all the relevant regulations and guidelines |
| <b>3. Plan inception</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"Biggest negative is getting conned into it in the first place (but enjoyed it in the end)!"</i> (Chris Darge, 2021)</li> <li>There was no feedback to villagers on an initial village survey in July 2015 (prior to designation)</li> <li>It was not clear how the PC recruited villagers to the steering group; participation did not seem to be open to all and there was no village event to launch the plan</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not being given the opportunity to participate from the outset</li> <li>A lack of information about the plan available to villagers between the survey in summer 2016 and a village exhibition in February 2017</li> </ul> |  |

| Prompt                           | What was negative?  | Most frustrating   | Most difficult  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|---|
|                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The initial survey was repeated in virtually the same form a few months later</li> <li>The checklists used to give answers to some of the survey questions perhaps rather predetermined responses</li> </ul>   |  |   |
| <b>4. Project planning</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It was near impossible to get Breckland to advise how long the stages it was responsible for would take or for them to clearly define each party's responsibilities</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeated extensions to the time required, albeit often for good reasons</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being able to inform villagers of key dates with any certainty</li> <li>The impact of Covid restrictions was frustrating, as was the inability to hold PC meetings in person during restrictions.</li> </ul> |
| <b>5. Administrative matters</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of information from Breckland about the various grants and support packages available</li> <li>When the work group was formed in 2017, both it and the steering committee had defined roles and responsibilities, but in practice the committee played no active part in steering the work</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not being aware of available grants and technical support packages from the outset</li> </ul> |   |
| <b>6. Evidence</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The time it took to gain a clear understanding of what evidence was needed</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparing the Basic Conditions Statement –</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparing the village design guide and accompanying policy</li> </ul>  |

| Prompt                       | What was negative?  | Most frustrating  | Most difficult  |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|
|                              |   | because it was a tedious exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The deletion of 7 of 8 surface water drainage policies at examination in spite of the evidence presented to support those</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing evidence to support a requirement to improve village infrastructure in advance of, or in parallel with development</li> </ul>  |
| <b>7. Site allocations</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some landowners wanted development to benefit themselves but not the village</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We feel the PC chair did not support the inclusion of site allocations in the plan.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site assessment and sites selection process was the most difficult part of the NP journey, but it was also the most rewarding.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>8. Use of consultants</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lacking sufficient funds to commission all the studies we wanted</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delays inherent in obtaining technical support packages via Locality</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fully understanding the environmental assessment process</li> </ul>  |
| <b>9. Plan Drafting</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following work by the steering committee to establish the overall approach and to obtain initial comments from villagers and others, subsequently, actual drafting of the first version of the Plan was undertaken by just one member of that committee, rather than as a group</li> <li>The first version of the Plan presented to villagers in February 2017 lacked structure and was</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not having a stronger policy to improve village infrastructure</li> <li>“Re-write fatigue” sometimes crept in when amending a policy for the nth time</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Site allocations</li> <li>Maintaining enthusiasm when rewriting policies for the nth time</li> <li>Creating useful maps</li> <li>Fully understanding the difference between policy and supporting text, and between the latter and evidence documents</li> <li>Making Policy 3A – Design Saham Toney specific</li> </ul> |

| Prompt                                 | What was negative?   | Most frustrating  | Most difficult   |
|--|--|---|--|
|  | <p>more a description of the village than a policy document</p>  |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding typographical errors despite thoroughly proof-reading the plan</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>10. Community engagement</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor turnout at village meetings and generally low number of website visitors</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low turnout at some events was frustrating, taking into account the work and preparation that went into organising events.</li> <li>• Failing to convince the 17 people who voted “No” at referendum, of the Plan’s benefits</li> <li>• Failure to create any social media interest</li> <li>• Inability to create an NP mobile app</li> <li>• Lack of feedback from our mailing list</li> <li>• Having to pay for the hire of parish-owned village hall for events concerning the village plan</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explaining complex topics in simple and condensed form for villagers</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>11. Stakeholder liaison</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biggest downside was coming into a process that was supposedly supported by the local planning authority (it seemed we would have plenty of support). But when</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure of our efforts to instigate cooperative working with Breckland NP Coordinator.</li> <li>• The lack of rigour in the Local Plan</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting advice from MHCLG (now called Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). Firstly, it took a long time to get a response to questions and second of all</li> </ul> |

| Prompt                                 | What was negative?  | Most frustrating   | Most difficult   |
|--|---|--|--|
|  | <p>it came to it, it couldn't have been further from the truth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It seems other local planning authorities such as Broadland provide more support to groups e.g. they host a neighbourhood planning forum.</li> <li>• Relations with Breckland</li> <li>• Breckland's environmental screening process</li> <li>• PC's willingness to accept the opinion of Breckland's NP coordinator over the work group's opinion</li> <li>• The PC often appeared to have little interest in matters concerning the NP.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lack of involvement from most parish councillors</li> <li>• Breckland's insistence on undertaking a pre-Reg 15 informal review of the Plan, Basic conditions and Consultation Statements and then not completing it in the agreed time and not reducing the time between Reg 15 and 16</li> <li>• Failure to convince the Local Highways Authority of the acceptability of access to all allocated sites</li> <li>• Breckland appeared not to take much notice of our evidence base documents.</li> <li>• Planning White Paper consultation by national government. Disappointed it didn't provide a firmer basis for neighbourhood planning in the future</li> </ul> | <p>when the response arrived they simply referred to national guidance which we already had access to.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to see who is accountable at Breckland now that they have delegated responsibilities to Capita.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>12. Formal consultations</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breckland did not seem to take into account our many supporting documents</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very frustrating that we ended up with three rounds of Reg 14 consultation.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collating all consultation information in the Consultation Statement so that it told the story of how</li> </ul>  |

| Prompt                 | What was negative?   | Most frustrating  | Most difficult   |
|------------------------|--|---|--|
|                        |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The way in which Breckland's comments increased in quantity but decreased in relevance at each iteration</li> </ul>  | <p>we had engaged the community and others</p>   |
| <b>13. Examination</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breckland's failure to comply with all examiner instructions or to complete all actions in the time allotted</li> <li>The PC making an initial agreement with Breckland NP coordinator regarding the fact check report without consulting the NP work group.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delay of one month between examiner appointment and the start of the examination</li> <li>Deletion of 7 out of 8 drainage policies and softening of the remaining one. The likelihood the topic will continue to be dealt with by planning conditions</li> <li>Introduction of the word 'approximately' to the allocated site housing numbers</li> <li>The NP group feel that the examiner seemed to lean towards Breckland and his "usual" way of doing things</li> </ul> |  |
| <b>14. Hearing</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We felt that the examiner seemed to have pre-determined some matters</li> <li>The examiner seemed to give more weight to professional officers' opinions</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Realising after the event there was more that could have been said on certain topics</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Making effective off-the cuff responses about complex topics</li> <li><i>"Being satisfied I'd represented villagers well"</i> (Chris Blow, 2021)</li> </ul> |

| Prompt                    | What was negative?  | Most frustrating   | Most difficult  |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>15. Referendum</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PC's failure to even announce the referendum at its preceding meeting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lack of grant funding for a referendum campaign</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Selling" the plan effectively in a 4-page A5 leaflet</li> </ul> |
| <b>16. Using the Plan</b> |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on experience to date, we worry the PC will not use the policies in the plan as a basis for its planning consultation responses, but hope this will be addressed by the creation of a PC Planning work group</li> </ul> |   |



**Question 3:** Based on what you now know, what would be your top 3<sup>2</sup>tips to your younger self (when you started the NP work!) and to others (in italics).

**Responses:** The discussions held in response to this question are reported in the table below.

| Prompt                                | Key learning tips to self ( <i>and to others, in italics</i> )  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>1. Team Building</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build an active team. In our case, at the beginning, there was a steering group but no teamwork. Brian was given largely free reign to write the plan which wasn't the best approach (if there is no shared consensus or team behind you).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>2. Community/NP group learning</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Keep up to date with planning rules, regulations and guidance, which are often updated</i></li> <li>• <i>Take part in consultations on planning reforms, a Local Plan's development etc</i></li> <li>• <i>Sign up for various useful newsletters: chief planner's, TCPA, Susdrain, etc</i></li> <li>• <i>Find out about and participate in any relevant webinars</i></li> <li>• <i>Remember you can't please everyone: write policies that reflect the evidence</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>3. Plan inception</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put more research into the project at the outset. For example, look to available funding. Find out what you are trying to achieve. Then look at the Local Plan to see how the two relate.</li> <li>• Make more use of training and resources</li> <li>• Do more research on similar sized communities and look at their plan. Cringleford Plan which we had was not a relatable example to us.</li> <li>• Create opportunity for all villagers to volunteer to participate</li> <li>• <i>A group preparing a plan needs to work out its own structure and dynamic; there's no standard method</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>4. Project planning</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't underestimate the commitment required</li> <li>• <i>Be ready to give up a huge amount of time and get little thanks for it</i></li> <li>• Examine closely what is required. Understand and examine the role of the Parish Council and the support that is needed from the Parish Council to the NP group.</li> <li>• Make sure the Parish Council are kept informed and require Parish Council to keep up to date on neighbourhood planning matters.</li> </ul>  |

<sup>2</sup> 3 is suggested number to guide you!

| Prompt                           | Key learning tips to self ( <i>and to others, in italics</i> )  |
|----------------------------------|---|
|                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a better understanding of the SEA process in terms of how the timings in the SEA process and the plan making process relate<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Be informed and realistic about how long things will take. Allocating sites particularly may add 18-24 months to a schedule</li> <li>• Be flexible; quality is more important than speed.</li> <li>• Write the Consultation Statement as you go along as very difficult to do in one go at the end.</li> <li>• Set up documentation much more formally from the start and complement it with a website from the outset.</li> </ul> |
| <b>5. Administrative matters</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Learning as you go is inevitable and a plan will evolve as a result - be flexible and ready to adapt and improve the work</i></li> <li>• <i>Plan quality is more important than time needed to achieve that, but too long a timeframe can lead to villagers losing interest and belief</i></li> <li>• <i>Make sure agreed actions are followed through</i></li> <li>• <i>Locality technical support packages are worth tens of thousands of pounds so do check if they are relevant to you</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>6. Evidence</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sometimes the evidence will surprise you</i></li> <li>• <i>Base decisions on objective evidence not village emotion</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>7. Site allocations</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you include site allocations, that's likely to be the most contentious and difficult topic you tackle (and will add time to the process)</li> </ul>   |
| <b>8. Use of consultants</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Some work that consultants undertake might be equally well done by the village group, but the former will carry more weight and a professional gloss</i></li> <li>• <i>Agree clear scopes of work with consultants before a quotation is accepted</i></li> <li>• <i>Carefully review and challenge consultants' reports before signing them off: ours were happy to include most of our comments, or to explain when that was not appropriate</i></li> <li>• <i>Appoint a main consultant who doesn't work with developers to avoid any conflict of interest</i></li> </ul>             |

<sup>3</sup> In the Saham Toney case the practice by the local planning authority to issue the SEA/HRA screening at Reg 14 stage and not before means for cases where SEA is required, there is no opportunity for the SEA environmental report to be fully considered alongside the Reg 14 Neighbourhood Plan. In the case of Saham Toney, this ultimately led to a need to repeat Reg 14 consultation.

| Prompt                          | Key learning tips to self ( <i>and to others, in italics</i> )   |
|---------------------------------|--|
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Don't accept comments if they weaken the ethos of your plan; at the same time make clear why they are unjustified</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>9. Plan Drafting</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Treat the plan as a formal agreement between the village and those involved in the planning process: write precise policies that cannot be disputed later, as you would a contract or technical specification</i></li> <li>• Better understand what each step in the process will really involve</li> <li>• Understand a plan should positively support development coupled with good protection for what's valued in the village</li> <li>• <i>Write black and white policies with robust evidence</i></li> <li>• <i>When group members had differing views on various topics, consensus was reached by amicable and constructive discussion, so that mutually acceptable decisions were agreed before moving forward. Such group consensus is good and should be at the heart of things, and although it can take time to achieve, that's time well spent</i></li> <li>• <i>Avoid the use of vague wording open to interpretation</i></li> <li>• <i>At plan review stage, frequently review (yourself or with professional help) what you have done and are still due to do and adapt accordingly</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>10. Community engagement</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the community at an early stage and get more support on the process and assistance. Get them involved in a village walk about. Get more buy in on the plan</li> <li>• Make better use of social media</li> <li>• Better understand and collate what villagers want, using open questions as well as closed ones</li> <li>• Effective villager engagement involves a lot of preparation</li> <li>• <i>Create a website as early as possible, even if it starts with only a little information</i></li> <li>• Involve younger villagers right down to school age</li> <li>• <i>Tailor your website content to what you can realistically keep up to date</i></li> <li>• Set up and use a village 'sounding board' group. Invite occasional villager participation in online meetings to discuss key topics</li> </ul>   |
| <b>11. Stakeholder liaison</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's your plan: manage your Local Authority's involvement rather than be managed by it</li> </ul>   |

| Prompt                          | Key learning tips to self ( <i>and to others, in italics</i> )   |
|---------------------------------|--|
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't rely on the local authority.</li> <li>• <i>Engage with those who are experts in their field: the LHA and LLFA, Historic and Natural England etc</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>12. Formal consultations</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Make use of online surveys and take time to prepare good questions</i></li> </ul>  |
| <b>13. Examination</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Take every opportunity presented by the examiner to put across and strengthen your case</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>14. Hearing</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Prepare, prepare, prepare!</i></li> <li>• <i>Have your consultant on hand to step in when needed</i></li> <li>• <i>If you believe in your plan, sell it</i></li> <li>• <i>Don't be intimidated by the process</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>15. Referendum</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>An effective "yes" campaign<sup>4</sup> promotes a good turnout</i></li> <li>• <i>Be aware that a campaign group must fund itself</i></li> </ul>   |
| <b>16. Using the Plan</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Start using emerging policies as soon as practical to respond to planning applications and appeals</i></li> </ul>  |

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<sup>4</sup> Note: there are regulations in place which restrict the ability of the Parish Council to promote a yes campaign during the referendum period, but the four work group members who were not councillors were able to run their own campaign.

**Question 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?

**Responses:** The discussions held in response to this question are reported in the table below.

| Prompt                                       | Suggested changes  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1. Team Building</b></p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship between work group, parish council, Breckland. It evolved over time and never really batted down.</li> <li>Parish council and Breckland had conversations that the work group did not know of. At times, this dynamic undermined moral in the NP group and caused frustration.</li> <li>Although via agreed terms of reference, a formal arrangement was in place between the PC, the steering committee and the NP work group, it would have been better if all parties had adhered to those rather than only the work group. Initially NP matters were an agenda item for all PC meetings and that should have continued throughout. One councillor on the steering committee should have been responsible for reporting to the PC on the NP progress and plan content, and the PC should have demanded that sort of reporting.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>2. Community/NP group learning</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If a Local Plan is in preparation, work hard to influence the policies that most affect your Plan</li> <li>We may have benefitted from more direct contact with other neighbourhood planning groups, rather than just reading their plans</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>3. Plan inception</b></p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't just listen to the local planning authority. In our case, it would have been beneficial to seek information from others. Such as Broadland who, it seems, are more open e.g. they have a NP forum</li> <li>The PC's process of setting things up at the outset could have been more inclusive of all villagers</li> <li>A 'kick-off' village event would have added value</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>4. Project planning</b></p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The PC should have created an overall plan of the process, tasks and timetable at the outset; instead that was only done after the work group was formed</li> <li>We as the NP group couldn't have done anything better. We would have liked the local planning authority to have met their own targets.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>5. Administrative matters</b></p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NP group need to take charge of their own admin.</li> </ul>   |

| Prompt                       | Suggested changes   |
|------------------------------|---|
|                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing about available funding from the start may have resulted in earlier consultants studies and allowed us to set out a preliminary but flexible expenditure plan at the outset</li> <li>• Initial grant funds should have been managed, spent and recorded (by the PC) in a more precise manner</li> </ul>  |
| <b>6. Evidence</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure everything is backed up by evidence.</li> <li>• We should have carried out or commissioned a housing needs survey of every household</li> <li>• We should have undertaken or commissioned our own environmental screenings and started the subsequent environmental assessments earlier, rather than relying on Breckland</li> <li>• We should have obtained firm evidence about village infrastructure needs to support a stronger Policy 1</li> <li>• If we'd had a template, we could have carried out the site assessments ourselves and saved time, although they may have lacked the credibility of the professional assessments and resulted in contention</li> </ul> |
| <b>7. Site allocations</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We should have started landscape assessment and site allocations earlier, plus the various studies that supported those</li> </ul>   |
| <b>8. Use of consultants</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We should have appointed Rachel (Modicum Planning) on day 1</li> <li>• If we'd known earlier about available technical support packages from Locality, we could have used those for some additional topics (housing needs assessment; site viability; evidence base review; design guide; health checks; overcoming entrenched issues with the Local Authority) and had more money in our grant budget for other studies</li> </ul>  |
| <b>9. Plan Drafting</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would have helped if we'd had a clearer understanding of the difference between policy and supporting text at an earlier stage</li> <li>• We should have resolved the conundrum between our infrastructure policy and allocating sites in more remote parts of the village</li> <li>• We should have tackled our suite of drainage policies earlier and in a different way to gain acceptance of them</li> </ul>  |

| Prompt                          | Suggested changes   |
|---------------------------------|---|
|                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes supporting text could have been reordered to better match and link to the ordering / subjects of policy criteria, but that was not always done due to the tedium of editing text numerous times</li> <li>• Our climate change policy was a bit of an afterthought and if tackled earlier could have been better linked with the design guide and backed by better evidence</li> </ul>  |
| <b>10. Community engagement</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We tried every trick in the book.</li> <li>• We may have benefitted from professional help to positively engage more villagers throughout the process</li> <li>• We should have better engaged villagers in preparation of the village design guide</li> <li>• We should have got villagers (and ourselves) used to online meetings at an earlier stage</li> <li>• We should have found out how to better to attract website visitors and engage people via social media</li> <li>• Learn how to organise online webinars and hold them to engage on key topics</li> <li>• We should have set up structured 'stand back' reviews by villagers at key milestones (over and above Rachel's reviews)</li> </ul>                               |
| <b>11. Stakeholder liaison</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not much more we could have done. The NP group ran a database of contacts and responses.</li> <li>• The involvement at the hearing day by the planning and housing officers was very helpful. It would have been very helpful at an earlier stage. We should have requested more face to face meetings with Breckland officers (planning, housing, heritage, environmental).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>12. Formal consultations</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the first Reg 14 consultations villagers were able to give their views on each policy via an online survey form. It may have been helpful to repeat the surveys at the second and third Reg 14 consultations to gather feedback on amended and new policies. Likewise, a survey specifically about site allocations may have been useful</li> <li>• If we'd known at the start what we knew at the end we could have avoided the second and third Reg 14 pre-submissions. To elaborate: the feedback from the first round of Regulation 14 consultation prompted us to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) commission a landscape character assessment and to include a policy derived from that, and</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

| Prompt                    | Suggested changes  |
|---------------------------|--|
|                           | <p>b) to consider and include site allocations. These were significant changes that made it necessary to undertake a second Reg 14 consultation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reason for the third round of Reg 14 consultation was a separate issue and related to the SEA process which we have discussed elsewhere.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>13. Examination</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We didn't understand the examination process fully. We wrote to the examiner at one point and upset the examiner. We hadn't understood the protocol in terms of this.</li> <li>Examination fact check. In our case, our Parish Council had initially agreed a procedure for dealing with the fact check report with Breckland (as a joint process). However, the examiner clearly set out that PC and local planning authority can prepare separate responses. We felt this to be more appropriate in our case and we are pleased the examiner set this out.</li> <li>Take an opportunity to respond to Reg 16 comments if it is offered and use it to defend the plan</li> </ul> |
| <b>14. Hearing</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If there had been a way to hold a 'dummy run' to prepare for ad hoc questioning it would have been helpful</li> <li>Have some acceptable concessions and compromises up your sleeve</li> <li>It was difficult for the local planning authority to stream the meeting so they asked the NP group to do this.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>15. Referendum</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It would have been good to have mobilised an effective social media campaign for a "yes" vote</li> <li>If a Parish Council cannot actively campaign for a "yes" vote, it must at the very least encourage all villagers to vote</li> <li>There will be a period between publication of an examination report and the start of a referendum period when a Parish Council is permitted to campaign for a "yes" vote and should do so</li> </ul>   |
| <b>16. Using the Plan</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a policy-based checklist that anyone can use to respond to planning applications</li> </ul>  |