**RSN Chester – What Makes a Community Sustainable (10 September 2013) – Composite Notes from Group Discussions**

**Neighbourhood Planning:**

Is the development of an NP too onerous – even bearing in mind the grants - £7K to the parish (via Locality) and £30K to the District – for smaller parishes?

Is it fair that "higher tier" authorities don't have to run a referendum on their development plans but neighbourhood planning does require that?

Is there any prospect of County Councils in 2 tier areas getting some support towards the cost of involvement in Neighbourhood Planning ? – it was indicated that this is currently not on agenda

Could more work be commissioned to formally map the Neighbourhood Planning journey for parishes and to identify the points at which organisations either drop out or make the transition to a full plan?

One really powerful additional outcome of the N Planning journey for Tattenhall was the engagement and enthusing of volunteers – the Tattenhall website is a very useful resource for people wanting to see the key documents which go into the process: they are now involved in the referendum stage.

Community led plans can make a major contribution to the N Planning Process

Developer pressures are in most cases the most significant driver in terms of the N Planning process.

**Rural Proofing:**

Is really important and currently still not embedded in the policy making agenda enough.

Rurality should be recognised alongside other key themes as a genuine equalities issue.

One reason rural proofing isn't taken seriously is that rural places are still seen as secondary in economic terms – this of course isn't true if we think through rural urban connectivities and realise that such places are part of a continuum rather than work on a separate economic basis.

**Parish and Town Councils**

Are in many cases stepping "up to the plate" in terms of the localism agenda

Face the concept of double taxation – ie taking on services with no overall reduction in council tax charges – as a disincentive to get more involved in local service provision

Are they sufficient modern in name and image to be truly engaging and representative where communities are concerned

Is Government working hard enough to support and engage parish and town councils in the development of the local services agenda

Would more external challenge – ie from outside the Parish and Town Council movement help to drive their agenda?

**Going Carbon Neutral in Ashton Hayes**

Carbon usage has been persistently driven down in the village over the last 7 years

There have been some minor set -backs alongside major successes: closure of the pub, need to re-think the electric car scheme

Some of the issues have been controversial and have had to be managed carefully – ie the development of wind power as a component

The engagement of national media has made a real difference to the project – but is it known widely enough and engaged with widely enough  - bearing in mind is real success

**Alternative Service Delivery**

Is successful ASD always fragile because it is led by one – inspirational leader?

Do rural areas find taking on services more challenging because they have less critical mass?

It seems clear that approaches to "risk" and more general procurement practices are a real challenge for smaller organisations and rural geographies keen to be involved in ASD.

Networks of communities working to share and spread best practice are the most potent way of ensuring that ASD is disseminated effectively.