**Comment:** Thank you for your detailed response and I welcome the opportunity to reply and go further into the details you have provided. I and a group of Front Street neighbours would also welcome the opportunity to discuss this face to face.   
  
As stated in my original correspondence I am supportive of the majority of the plan but in complete disagreement with your justification and reasoning around the planning proposal. With regards to your response I have some further queries and comments to make.   
  
It would be useful for you to publish on your website the programme you are working to, your milestones and plans for the statutory consultation phase. Although you say you weren't intending to be exclusive the dates for this and the previous consultations you mention (21st Feb and 30th May) were all at school holiday and we would have loved to come along but were away, and as you rightly point out, weekends are not convenient for families.   
  
We are sad that you did not feel that properties on the the North of Front Street would not be affected, this is our community, neighbourhood and living environment. Some of my neighbours on the South side of Front Street were unaware of an invite to the 16th February while some on the residents on the North side of Front Street and some of my friends from further up the village have not had recent leaflets. From our discussions with friends and other residents in the village it appears that general awareness across the village of your plan is incredibly low and that the plan contains proposals on housing development was also not very transparent. You may feel you have had broad consultation but the reach has not been very far or the leaflets been very effective at gaining attention of a broad cross section of the community. The attendance of 170 people at the two events is also misleading, as some may have attended both sessions and my maths makes 7% rather than 15% of the 2400 people in the parish (stated in your plan) and this is only if they are all individuals and not repeat attendees.   
  
As you say you are volunteers and that is commendable, I work full time have a family of young children and also volunteer within this community to improve village life as a school governor. You were not elected by the community or asked by the community to develop a neighbourhood plan and although you may have tried hard to get a broad cross section of representative views I would suggest you have not been successful in achieving this.   
  
I support development where development is needed and I am comfortable and trust the local planning authority who have the remit, the expertise, the broader picture, the service provision and are paid to fulfil this service. I do wonder what uncontrolled development you believe will occur and which areas of the village you are really trying to protect. I have fully investigated the meaning of a neighbourhood plan including discussing with senior managers in house building and national planning. A neighbourhood plan has substantial weight in planning and can override the development plan. Any areas included are guaranteed to be built on so putting them in the plan actually puts them at risk rather than protecting them. If they are not in the plan, they have to follow full planning process and all the regulations, guidance and policy that planners are required to follow which is not therefore uncontrolled development. What expertise and experience do your group of volunteers have that makes you more knowledgeable and experienced to choose planning sites over the professionals trained and paid to undertake this role on behalf of our society. Your view that greenfield sites are vulnerable, therefore we should sacrifice ours is contradictory, in this case you are making our sites vulnerable. I am also uncertain why there is a rush to fill the gap in planning by developing this parish plan when the County Durham Plan is under review and due for completion next year.   
  
Why are you committing Witton Gilbert to losing greenfield land, damaging the old part of the village, including its close community, increasing traffic and exacerbating parking problems? I struggle to understand why the plan must be pro-development if it is not in the interests of our village as there are not the services required by increasing the population through development of this scale. As a community we can object to planning application as they arise which is a better approach to committing to planning through the parish plan as a defence approach against development. This area has been proposed before, opposed by the villagers and rejected. There has always been strong opposition to developing this land.   
  
I would like to correct you that we do not comply with EU Regulations but with UK legislation as all EU regulations are translated into UK law and that the referendum will make no change to this in the short/ medium term as all UK regulations are already in place.   
  
I look forward to you providing the further information I requested in my first email and I am very keen to see the data and statistics that drove you to the conclusions that the community wish for more houses and that they need to be in Witton Gilbert behind Front Street, an area you yourselves point out have traffic and parking issues. Where else in the village did you consider and what reasoning ruled out those alternatives? This also does not make sense to me as there are already large developments planned for Langley Park and Sniperley which are in very close proximity to Witton Gilbert. Please can you provide all the details of the options considered.   
  
It worries me that you have such a strong belief that   
  
- the only way to sustain a village is through new houses   
- the only way to sustain high educational standards are through new children moving to the area.   
- the only way to create jobs (when we are a commuter belt) is to build more homes   
  
When does this stop, when are we sustainable and vibrant. If this is the only place to put properties then will our village decline once these properties are built if you suggest there is nowhere else to go.   
  
As I mentioned before recent new houses have struggled to sell and are rented out to people who don't stay very long and we feel this impact on our community already from the terraces built on the north of Front Street. The rest of us know each other well but none of us know anyone from within those new properties, they are regularly up for rental and the residents regularly change.   
  
Your wish to avoid a housing estate and integrate parking is unrealistic. The reality is most families have two cars and our street already has an issue, there is insufficient space for current residents and your plan depletes this further. Overflow parking will then move onto the streets creating further pressure on an area that already has issues and is a bus route.   
  
In response to your fundamental questions:   
  
1 Can a settlement survive and prosper without accommodating new development?   
  
I truly hope so as this village has survived and prospered for many years without significant development. Front Street has many new and young families living here who have taken on and regenerated the older houses as the existing residents aged and moved on. We have social get togethers with our neighbours and many of them are good friends, this is the vision you hope for and this exists now. Ourselves and the other families are drawn here because of the rural feel of our street and it's open aspect, it is the heritage and historic village atmosphere that is appealing. We moved here to avoid living amongst modern housing.   
  
2. How will we prevent unwanted development or get good quality development?   
Through the conventional planning process and through working in collaboration with the planners. As I said this land has been proposed before and has always knocked it back, it will be interesting to find out their reasoning behind the rejections and I plan to follow this up with the County Council. This land has always been seen by the community as no go land for development and that belief must have an origin.   
  
3. If the village does need some new homes where can these be built so that they make an improvement to our community?   
Putting the major development in the village behind Front Street is a very high risk strategy. There is local opposition, the land floods and decreasing permeable area will create further flood risk to existing properties and the highway as well as create flood risk for the new house owners (major no no in PPG25). This is likely to be a show stopper! Drainage in the area is poor and surface water flows will have to be attenuated on the land which will substantially reduce the amount available for actual houses and infrastructure. The water table is high and the ground conditions are poor making any new houses more costly to build and risk damaging existing properties. This will also require a high degree of pre and post structural survey work of neighbouring houses and the likely remediation to protect existing properties will only add to the cost. All this will only make this area unattractive to small developers and larger developers will only want to build 3 storey densely packed town houses to make it viable for them.   
  
My final concern is that you have deliberately misled me. Your response states that you have consulted with the school Head Teacher and Governors with respect to the plan and the potential impact on school capacity which is most definitely not the case. As a vice chair on the Governing Body I raised this point at our last governors meeting and it was confirmed that the school had not been consulted at all. This will be followed up separately by the Governing Body. Making untrue statements leads to a lack of trust in your consultation process and causes grave concerns.   
  
It is also worrying that you link new houses and new pupils to school performance and even to the viability of the school. Again I feel this is unnecessary scaremongering and fundamentally not true.   
  
I am also planning to contact my local MP with these concerns. It should be interesting to see what happens when there is strong opposition to a neighbourhood plan as I am sure this would be a first.   
  
I too wish the village to thrive but 60 - 70 houses behind Front Street which as you say due to its historic nature was not designed for the modern car is not the solution. Planning should not be done in such an isolated and bounded way, collaboration and integration are the way forward in the modern world and that is how we should be working with the planners.   
  
As I mentioned I would like to arrange a face to face discussion as it will benefit all sides and I look forward to hearing from you with some potential dates.   
  
  
Kind regards   
  
  
Nicola Walsh