What do they know?
The power and potential of story in planning

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ABSTRACT

Interest in the relationship between storytelling and planning has grown in recent years, drawing on scholarship from across the social sciences and humanities to respond to questions and debates about the nature and purpose of planning. It has been suggested that, at the least, story offers planners an important tool to assist them in the difficult business of working for more equitable futures, whilst others have gone further, suggesting that story could represent a route to making planning more inclusive and democratic, perhaps even being a mode for doing planning.

This thesis represents a contribution to these debates, by way of a participatory engagement with a group of residents working towards a better future for their community, a working class neighbourhood in Sheffield, United Kingdom. In the context of a nationally funded community development initiative, the research has involved three years of working alongside residents on a variety of planning and community development projects. All of these have an implicit role for story and storytelling, whilst others have explicitly tried to intervene in putting these to work.

Through the course of outlining and analysing this work and its implications, and situating this within wider debates and contexts, the thesis makes a contribution to our understanding of how story figures in making change in community contexts and of what it means for non-professionals to engage in planning activity. Ultimately, it suggests that if story is to realise its democratic and inclusionary promise a re-politicised understanding is needed of both story and planning in community contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

On 4th April 2016, in a widely shared comment piece for *The Guardian* newspaper the journalist Paul Mason responded to a recently published study suggesting that the education system fails white, working class children. The origins of the problem, he suggested, were not to be found in schools but in the social, economic and political changes of the last 30 years: Thatcherism[1] did not just crush the unions, Mason said, 'it crushed a story' (2016). The roots of this story lay in trade unionism and social democracy, in Catholicism and Methodism; it taught working class children that, 'without solidarity and knowledge, we are just scum.' Mason's argument was that it was this story, drawn from a culture that was their own, that gave working class children such as himself a foundation from which to act assertively and confidently in the world, making claims on institutions – such as schools and universities – that might have once sought to make sure they did not get ideas above their stations. To have a story, then, is to be empowered.

Responding to Mason in a – significantly less widely shared – piece for *openDemocracy,* the academic Jeremy Gilbert acknowledges much in Mason's article that he agrees with, but draws our attention to some other stories, and sometimes uncomfortable truths, that Mason did not have the space or inclination to note. In the first instance this is the extent to which there was significant working class support for Thatcherism and to which, 'in a culture saturated by nostalgia,' there continues to be little collective fondness for the 'grey homogeneity' of full-employment, the closed-shop and the prejudices of the 1940s and 50s (Gilbert, 2016). It was in response to this fact that Tony Blair was able to align much of the Labour Party behind the Tory narrative that there was no alternative; nothing could be done about the march of contemporary consumer culture because it was what people wanted. Here Gilbert reads a concerted attempt to create a story that is both authentically working class and disempowering. He argues that in order to create a narrative that re-empowers greater care must be taken to respond to the nuance and tension in our recent history; and through a number of other departures from

[1] Thatcherism refers to the broad ideology represented by former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the governments she headed, it is discussed in greater detail below, see pp. 122-3.

Mason – on economics, culture and education – briefly hints at what a new story might look like.

These two articles suggest a debate that has resonance well beyond political commentary in the national press. The questions at its heart – *To what extent are we bound by our stories? What capacity do we have for imagining new ones? And what power might the act of doing so give us over the future?* – have exercised a wide range of theoretically informed practice across a host of disciplines, which has come to include planning. It is here, where ideas about story begin to intersect with thinking about democracy and how we collectively make the future together, that this thesis is situated. Mason's and Gilbert's articles are doubly pertinent, however, because the fieldwork on which the thesis is based has been undertaken in a working-class neighbourhood, Westfield, in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, with a group of residents who are looking to change their community for the better. As such they engage almost daily in the difficult job of trying to understand what the many changes of the last 30 years mean – in the economy, politics and family life – and far from being an academic exercise their understanding of their own stories is profoundly important for the past and the future of both their community and their own lives.

0.1 The promise of story

Building a little on this introduction, story and storytelling can be seen to have a number of characteristics that planning scholars and practitioners have seized upon in response to a number of challenges, problems and ethical imperatives (Sandercock, 2003; Throgmorton, 2003; 1996; Forester, 1993a). In the first instance story is seen to be a fundamental way that human beings make sense of their world, with everybody being seen to have and tell stories that help them to understand who they are and where they fit in (see for example: Kearney, 2002; Kerby, 1991; Bruner, 1987). Not only, then, can story be understood as, in a sense, the stuff of life itself, it can also be seen as an inherently democratic or egalitarian medium. Story also brings together place/space and time, which are absolutely fundamental to planning. We can read this both ways: some have gone so far as to suggest that planning can be thought about as a form of storytelling about the future (Throgmorton, 1996); whilst

it might also be seen to support the suggestion that 'planning', in a very broad sense, is a fundamentally human activity (Chadwick, 1978).

These different dimensions of and orientations to story appeal to contemporary thinking about planning for a number of reasons. Planning expertise has been problematised in light of the perceived failures of modernist planning (Sandercock, 2003; Throgmorton, 1996; Beauregard, 1991) and an attentiveness to story is seen as a way of broadening planning's knowledge base, the desirability of which stems from wider debates around the notion that there are multiple knowledges and different ways of knowing (Rose, 1997; Merrifield, 1995). This relates directly to a second imperative around the ethical importance of acknowledging and respecting a plurality of knowledges, and explicitly in relation to planning of making its practice more open, inclusive and democratic. Whilst the extent to which 'the public' should be involved in planning has long been a live question (Arnstein, 1969) it has become ever more so, both in light of arguments about planning's historical exclusion of certain marginalised voices, and in light of political and ideological movements against the overbearing and stultifying bureaucratic state, which planning has at times been seen to exemplify. Story is seen to offer potential here because it could represent a medium through which people can get closer to, participate in and perhaps even do planning.

0.2 The research problematic

This thesis, then, attempts to contribute to understanding of the relationship between planning and story, engaging with a problematic around how individual stories of self and place relate to collective stories, how these figure in creating change, what is at stake in these processes, and what this means for planning practices. More explicitly, as a PhD student I have worked alongside a group of people trying to positively influence the development of their community. The ethic of participatory action research was a strong influence on this engagement and I have sought to use the insight this experience has afforded to explore how, whether explicitly or not, people's stories interact and are pooled, what influences and forces are at work in these processes, and how the processes might be manipulated by others. In order to understand what is happening in such situations, however, using the lens 'story' on its own risks missing out much of import. In addition, then, the

research has sought to understand the political dimension of planning work at even the smallest scales. As such, the thesis contributes broadly to understanding the role that story might play in planning practices that seek to be substantively democratic and inclusive, and to conceptual and methodological debates in these areas.

The research questions formulated in response to this problematic are listed here for clarity, their sense will become clearer and they will be revisited in greater detail in what follows:

1. *Stories of Westfield – how is Westfield storied, how does it story itself and what is the relationship between these processes?*
2. *How successfully can participatory approaches to planning use story to enable grassroots level actors to articulate and disseminate their understandings, and act as communities for change?*
3. *What is the value of storytelling for planning, and how substantively inclusive and democratic could storytelling make it**?***

In the course of responding to these questions the more pointed contribution to knowledge will become clearer. I would suggest that there are three key facets to this: firstly, developing understanding of how story figures in making change in community contexts; secondly, furthering our understanding of what it means for non-professionals to engage in planning; thirdly, the development of understanding around the politicisation of community practice.

0.3 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured into three parts: *Part One – Understanding the Project*; *Part Two – Westfield, a Place in Process*; and *Part Three – A Critical Eye in Westfield*. Each part has a number of chapters that I will detail below.

Part One includes three chapters: a literature review, a conceptual framework and a methodology. Over the course of this part of the thesis, context, detail and further justification will be added to the broad introduction provided here, allowing me to explain both the three research questions and how I will look to engage with these. The literature review will situate the research within the field of planning and social scientific scholarship, particularly around narrative, setting out the arguments that the research engages with and detailing literatures that will prove useful in

understanding what is being done and what it might mean. The conceptual framework builds on the philosophical underpinnings of the thesis, which have been introduced in the literature review. It sets out a framework that incorporates how the social world that we are studying is understood and the tools that will be used to analyse it. These are taken from the discourse theory and underlying political theory of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), from narratology and from cultural studies. From here the methodology chapter details the design of the fieldwork, the details of the case study, in Westfield, and what was actually done there; of particular import to the design is the project's conception as a piece of participatory action research, and the implications this has within the constraints of a PhD project.

Part Two details the empirical work of the thesis through three chapters that tell one particular story about the Mosborough Township of Westfield. The first focuses on the history of Westfield from above and below: charting the impulses that brought it into being; economic, social and political changes over time; and the experience and stories of residents who live and have lived there. This takes us up to 2013, where the second chapter begins. It details how Westfield came to be identified as a target for the Big Local programme, what this programme is and how it has operated in Westfield. Of particular import is the experience of the planning process that I engaged in alongside residents, with the chapter ending by turning to explore some of the outcomes of that process. Chapter three takes the story further, showing how tensions that began to surface during the planning process intersected with other aspects of Westfield Big Local's activity and experience. This provides the context within which I undertook an important aspect of the PhD, a participatory story workshop, and the second half of the chapter details how this was conceived of, negotiated with residents and how it ultimately fitted into the wider work of Westfield Big Local.

Whilst analysis is inherent and emerging throughout Part Two, Part Three is more explicitly analytical. It begins by analysing the detail of the story workshop that I conducted and what this tells us about Westfield's other and multiple stories. The next chapter looks to analyse the political nature of Westfield Big Local's activity using the theories of Laclau and Mouffe. A third chapter then brings these two analytical strands into conversation with one another, the wider empirical work and

the debates around the relationship between story and planning. This sets up the conclusion of the thesis whereby I re-engage explicitly with the research questions, clarify the contribution to knowledge, outline the implications of the findings and propose ways of productively acting on them.

PART ONE – UNDERSTANDING THE PROJECT

1.1 – LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1.1 Introduction

There has been a growth over the last three decades of interest from planning scholars in story (Sandercock, 2003; Throgmorton, 2003; 1996; Forester, 1993a). It is from this body of work that this PhD project has taken its impetus. More specifically it seeks to explore the coming together of two ideas. The first is that planning happens through story and can even be thought about as a kind of storytelling about the future, and the second is the idea that story is something that all people use intuitively to understand and explain themselves and their places in the world. From here – an acknowledgment that story is something everyone does and that planning has something to do with story – it is possible to ask this thesis' driving question: can story be used to make planning more inclusive and democratic and what would it mean to work towards doing that?

The first role of this chapter, then, is to explain why these questions make sense. In order to do this, it will begin at one remove, with the wider shifts in social research that underpinned its turn to story and, by extension, that in planning. It will then explain the ways that planning scholars have been interested in story and why, going on to unpick some of story's implications for planning and some of planning's implications for story. In a sense, however, this thesis departs from other work in this area in how it prioritises certain elements of the theory and practice of planning, turning on the idea that planning is first and foremost a political activity that all people can engage in. As such, the chapter will move on to consider how planning, broadly conceived, in what we might call community contexts relates to the professional and academic practice of planning. The chapter also introduces the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001). Together with storytelling this constitutes a key element of the projects conceptual understanding and from here its approach to analysis. The juxtaposition of this work and the debates around story has had important implications for the nature of the work that I have undertaken, so the chapter will close by spending some time considering related literatures around memory and hope. Ultimately, however, this chapter does not represent the final

word on the topics it introduces but a foundation. Readers should, therefore, expect many of the ideas introduced here to be further clarified in the chapters that follow, on conceptual framing and methodology.

1.1.2 Language, culture, interpretation?

There is not a great deal to be gained by trying to advocate for a single path towards an increased interest in narrative and storytelling from within the broad field/s of social research and in planning. Rather there are elements and impulses across a range of disciplines and areas that have all contributed to it. Throughout the twentieth century scholars have identified linguistic, cultural and interpretive turns (Fischer and Forester, 1993; Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006) that apparently chart changes in philosophy, social science, the humanities and, more specifically for this thesis, planning and policy studies, and it is undoubtedly the case that all of these apparent movements have had something to contribute. Similarly, Czarniawska (2004) has found routes to narrative that seek to set its foundations in a variety of national and academic traditions (pp. 1-3). In an attempt to cut through the surrounding academic noise, then, I am going to lead with the concept of story, hoping that it will add definition to ensuing discussions, first of social science relatively widely and then of planning more specifically.

1.1.2.1 Just what do we mean by story?

> Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating. More so, in fact, for while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living. They are what make our condition human. (Kearney, 2002, p. 3)

Some might find this suggestion, that stories are more important to human beings than eating controversial, not least if they were or had ever found themselves in want of a meal. Nonetheless Kearney conveys something of just how seriously we might want to take the consideration of stories and links this directly to their universality and ubiquity, which Hardy (1968) neatly demonstrates in relation to much of our everyday activity:

> […] that inner and outer storytelling that plays a major role in our sleeping and waking lives. For we dream in narrative, day-dream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, re-vise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate, and love by narrative. In order really to live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future. (Hardy, 1968, p. 5)

I will return to this aspect of story shortly – of how it might or might not constitute aspects of our social and individual worlds and to what extent – but will first pause to briefly lay out a provisional, nuts and bolts definition of story and narrative, terms frequently used interchangeably, this will be elaborated and deepened throughout the rest of this chapter. A good place to start is with a definition from literary theory:

> …narrative is the representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse, story is an event or sequence of events (the action), and narrative discourse is those events as represented (Porter Abbott, 2002, p. 16)

There are a number of important elements to acknowledge here. Firstly are the two dimensions of narrative: most importantly *time*, for as Porter Abbott has it, 'narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time' (p. 3); and also, and equally importantly for this project, the way that stories and narratives are emplaced. In the gap between story and narrative as Porter Abbott constitutes them we also need to insert an author, authors, or some manner of agency, which does the work of turning story, the raw material we all find ourselves living amongst, into narrative. The fact that narratives are constructed is vitally important and it allows us to acknowledge and think about a variety of contexts– social, political, economic, geographic – and how the stories that unfold within them manifest themselves in narratives, in forces that make events in the world mean one thing rather than another. Of equivalent importance, however, is the audience/s or listener/s, both imagined and real, who are equally involved in giving life and meaning to the stories and narratives that we construct and find ourselves living amongst.

What we can begin to understand the appreciation of narrative to offer, then, is a nexus that connects space and time, the individual and the collective, interior and exterior life, the universal and the particular, self and other. From here some have gone on to suggest, influenced by phenomenologists such as Paul Ricoeur,[2] that:

> … the major revelation afforded by the investigation into narrative, then, is that *it is precisely the privileged medium for understanding human experience*, an experience that is paradigmatically a temporal and hence historical reality. (Kerby, 1991, p. 4 emphasis added)

[2] Working in the fields of phenomenology and hermeneutics, Ricoeur represents a key philosophical bedrock for arguments around narrative's primacy in human understandings of self and time (see, 1984).

So when a social researcher or a planner engages with narrative there is one sense, of course, in which they are dealing with data but another in which they are dealing with the stuff of life itself, for people live their lives and demonstrate what kind of world they believe they are living in through narrative:

> Much of our self-narrating is equivalent to telling the story of our lives (or parts of it) from the perspective of a first-person narrator. Such narrating generally seeks closure (totality) by framing the story within a beginning, middle, end structure. Closure of this sort, I contend, is not only a literary device but is a fundamental way (perhaps *the* fundamental way) in which human events are understood. […]
>
> Though I shall deal primarily with first-person narration, it should be clear that such narratives are considerably influenced by the social milieu in which the human subject functions. The stories we tell of ourselves are determined not only by how other people narrate us but also by our language and the genres of storytelling inherited from our traditions. Indeed, much of our self-narrating is a matter of becoming conscious of the narratives that we already live with and in – for example our roles in the family and in the broader socio-political arena. (Kerby, p. 6)

This extract from Kerby points towards where we might find what we could call the democratic potential of story, in its centrality to every person's life and personhood and in everybody's ability to take part in and *do* narrative. The second section of the extract demonstrates why social scientists might be interested in narrative, as a means of reading the social for the effects of history, politics and power. In between these two narrative islands – of narrative's democratic potential and its social situatedness – we can find the drive for centring this project on story and narrative. This double movement, however, also gives rise to differences, and now I will turn to the background of social scientific related research of and through narrative, ultimately this will allow me to demonstrate both what has been done and what I am doing differently.

1.1.2.2 Narrative in social research

In light of the brief discussion of narrative above we should not be surprised that for decades scholars from a host of disciplines across the humanities, social sciences and beyond have been utilising narrative to deepen their understanding of their fields and of the problems that interest them. We will touch on some of the planning and policy related scholarship below but Riessman (1993) highlights numerous other studies in history, anthropology, psychology, sociology and sociolinguistics, and their

applied relations in law, medicine, psychoanalysis, social work and education (pp. 5-6). A comprehensive review of all of this literature, then, is both impractical and unnecessary, but it is worthwhile to lay out some of the broad movements in use and understanding of narrative that have taken place and indeed grown somewhat in recent years.

Squire, Andrew and Tamboukou (2008) identify two parallel movements in the rising interest in narrative in the period since the Second World War (p. 3). The first was in western sociology and psychology, representing a humanistic reaction against positivism in the social sciences. This sought to raise the status afforded to biographical case studies and the experience of individuals. The second has its roots in the influence of Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp on Levi-Strauss and the subsequent course of continental philosophy from structuralism to post-structuralism, postmodernism and deconstruction, accompanied by an enduring interest in psychoanalysis. Czarinawska (2010) also highlights parallel trajectories but her suggestion is that by the 1980s the huge increase in volume of work in narratology might make it difficult to delineate. The hugely influential work of the Americans Labov and Waletsky (1967), and Labov's (1972, 2006) individual work, demonstrate this point further, influenced as it was by their own reading of Propp in Russian.

It is worth pausing to mention Labovian narrative analysis, which stands as a yardstick for much work in the area. The heavily structural approach is based on a definition of narrative as, 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred' (Labov, 1972, pp. 359-60). A narrative, then, could be as simple as two temporally ordered narrative clauses, whilst a more 'fully-formed' narrative could show a variety of different types of clause, of which six are identified:

1 – Abstract
2 – Orientations
3 – Complicating action
4 – Evaluation
5 – Result or resolution
6 – Coda (p. 363)

From this basis, by looking at how people narrate their personal experiences Labov was able, through his work on the subject, to demonstrate that Black English Vernacular is not subordinate to standard English but equally as complex, expressive and sophisticated. Particular import is given to the ability of this method of analysis to demonstrate how people understand events and offer evaluations of them. The method is also strong in so far as it makes it relatively straightforward to compare the ways that different people tell of their experience.

There are, however, numerous critiques of the Labovian approach, particularly around its focus on structure at the expense of context. When Labov reads the narratives for their *point* – the ways in which *good* narrators prevent their listeners replying with a *So what?* question – this sees him neglect to mention the fact that his narrators are being pushed to narrative by Labov himself asking questions of them. Furthermore, Squire, Andrews and Tamboukou (2008) highlight the way that the clauses of many narratives of personal experience are not temporally ordered, meaning that an unreflective adherence to the Labovian method could see much of import side-lined. What the method does provide, however, as Riessman (1993) reminds us, is a route into interpreting meanings, and as such it serves as an important point of departure for interpretive researchers interested in narrative.

As mentioned above, the context for the growth in interest in interpretation and meaning is the critique and rejection of positivistic social science. The work of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz is particularly important for many scholars in this regard:

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (1973, p. 5)

If narrative inherently contains an interpretive aspect – in so far as it involves human beings in analysing the events they find themselves caught up in – and if it can also be understood as fundamental to social life, as a distinct form of knowledge and as a mode of communication (Czarniawska, 2004) – then it is hardly surprising that interest in it has grown to the extent that Czarniawska is able to discern a ‘turn to narrative’ (pp. 2-3), itself largely lying within what has been presented as an

'interpretive turn' within social science (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006). There is a sense in which, as a theoretical enterprise, planning is pulled along by these movements within scholarship more widely, but it also speaks back to them through its application. These arguments will become clearer, then, as I set out how the narrative turn in planning has manifested itself and begin to demonstrate where this research project is situated.

1.1.3 Storytelling: a model *of* or/and a model *for* planning?

In his work on story and planning van Hulst (2012) responds to narrative oriented work in planning by drawing on Geertz (1973) and suggesting that we can think about the literature through two broad, fluid categories: one that uses storytelling[3] as a model *of* planning and one that uses storytelling as a model *for* planning. This is a good place from which to introduce the debates. The stronger variant of the first model suggests that planning is essentially a storytelling process, whereby certain understandings of the past from the present are used to tell a *constitutive* story about the future (Throgmorton, 1996). The weaker variant would say that storytelling is *one* important *aspect* of planning, which people use as they try to understand, discuss and practice it (Forester, 1993a). Storytelling as a model *for* planning, by contrast, says that planning can benefit from using storytelling, in so far as it can become more democratic, inclusive and creative, addressing specifically its perceived sterility, elitism and complicity with or impotence in the face of inequitable imbalances of power (Sandercock, 2003). For clarity these two approaches are set out below in Table 1.

Van Hulst (2012) suggests that a rigid separation between these two models is problematic (p. 303), and indeed it is in so far as much of the literature speaks across the categories, but it does allow us to picture more clearly how different approaches to the relationship might lead to different approaches to scholarship and different impulses in practice, which is helpful as I seek to position this project. In order to attend to the complexity of these positions, their overlaps and divergences, however, I will now consider in turn how the three theorists mentioned each make a case for story. This brief diversion from the typically thematic construction of a

[3] 'Storytelling', as I understand and use the term, means the same thing as narrative, albeit with an earthier, more organic flavour that casts 'narrative' in a more clinical, analytical light.

literature review helps us to understand the frequently quite creative ways that the theorists work with story and make story work for them, which in turn represents some justification for the relatively open approach to story adopted through the course of this thesis. It also allows us to highlight the caveats and nuances in the arguments, which can sometimes get lost or ignored as academic arguments are constructed.

Table 1 – Story as a model *of* and model *for* planning (van Hulst, 2012)

	Model *of* planning		**Model *for* planning**	
	Position	Implications	Position	Implications
Weaker claim	Story is one important aspect of planning practice (Forester, 1993a).	Listening to the stories of planners can help us to learn about planning practice.	Storytelling can be used to help make planning better. (Forester, 1999)	Normative application of story as a model *of* planning, encourages practitioners to become better users of story.
Stronger claim	Planning is a form of storytelling about the future (Throgmorton, 1996).	Becoming good storytellers is essential for planners, who need to tell persuasive stories in order to plan equitably, in the interests of the least powerful in society.	Storytelling can be used to fundamentally reimagine and reconstitute what planning is. (Sandercock, 2003)	Draws on potential of story to make planning more inclusive & democratic; explicitly supposes story generates local knowledge that can have political effects.

1.1.3.0.1 Forester

The work of John Forester (1993a) represents one understanding of the relationship between planning and storytelling. He locates this understanding in the wider context of a growing attention to story within social scientific research (p. 187) and within what has been termed, not least by him, the argumentative or communicative turn in planning and policy analysis (Fischer and Forester, 1993). This element of Forester's argument will be elaborated later in this chapter as I would like to begin by setting out what his work suggests for the relationship between story and planning. It centres on the notion of 'practice stories' – collected from interviews and represented with the interviewer's questions removed – which Forester uses as teaching aids in the classroom (p. 187). Forester feels, however, that in light of empirical research (1989) we can understand 'practice stories' as more than abstractions, they are in fact a medium through which planning happens and he

proposes that we see their importance in relation to doing *and* understanding planning, both within and outside of the classroom (1993a, p. 188).

Forester seems to propose 'practice stories' as an antidote to what he suggests is an unhelpful distinction made between theory and practice that has seen some dismiss the particular, real-life experiences of practitioners:

> Faced with such stories and paying careful attention to them, planners and policy analysts do seem to learn in practice about the fluid and conflictual, complex, always surprising, and deeply political world they work in. (p. 192)

In a sense we can see Forester as saying that the particular, with its mess, its conflict and its politics, is universal, and it is through careful attention to stories that we can learn the lessons we need to, whether in the classroom or the planning office. He takes this further, however, suggesting that stories often *do the work* of planning, which involves an ongoing iterative negotiation not just between interested actors but also values and their application:

> Values and ends are not just presumed, and means and strategies alone assessed by the staff; what matters and what is doable are explored, formulated practically, together. (p. 195)

It is the stories they tell and work out together, then, in situations when there is not time to step back, investigate the evidence and write a report, that allow planners to understand events and to try and get things right when they respond to them. The point that planning, and by extension storytelling in planning contexts, is about *doing* is an important one that we will return to later in the chapter.

The most important question for Forester, however, is '*How* do planning analysts learn from practice stories, and *how* do they learn politically and practically from such storytelling if they obviously do not do it through systematic experimentation?' (p. 196, emphasis added). To find an answer, Forester suggests, we must shift our perception away from models that might better suit cold, hard experimentation. His proposed answer is that we learn from story in a similar way to which we learn from friends:

> Both help us to see anew our practical situations and our possibilities, our interests and our values, our passions and our 'working bets' about what we should do. (p. 200)

What this perspective seeks to inject into our understanding is some of the depth and richness, warmth and complexity that we experience in our own interpersonal

relationships. When we seek to make decisions in our own lives our friends help us to deliberate by presenting us, 'with a world of experience and passion, of affect and emotion' (p. 200) – and stories can be seen to do much the same thing for planners. We might wonder whether something is getting lost in the turn Forester's argument takes, however, for planning and the drivers of action that underpin it are about coldness and hardness as much as they are about warmth and richness. The question I want to raise here, then, relates to how Forester maps the terrain of planning and the role that storytelling finds within it, and whether it might cause us to lose sight of where else storytelling might be happening or might happen in the future towards a variety of ends.

1.1.3.0.2 Throgmorton

James Throgmorton sets out his case for the importance of story and storytelling in and to planning and by planners in his book *Planning as Persuasive Storytelling* (1996):

> …we can think of planning as an enacted, future-oriented, narrative in which the participants are the actors and joint authors, and we can think of storytelling as being an appropriate style for conveying the truths of planning action. (p. 48)

His understanding's roots lay in the work of scholars such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1981), Martha Nussbaum (1990), and Walter Fisher (1989), which leads Throgmorton to see human beings fundamentally as storytelling animals who understand themselves and their world through story. Beyond this he sees the literary rendering of stories into narratives as an expression of the richness, complexity and value of human lives. This, Throgmorton suggests, has been neglected hitherto as planners and policy-makers have focussed on and celebrated plain, non-literary styles. Alongside this move in the way plans are understood is a move in how they are evaluated that sees Throgmorton attempting to raise the status of narrative rationality, which employs understandings of concepts such as coherence and fidelity. This novel understanding of planning and plans is firmly set in the context of the perceived failure of modernist planning and the response from many prominent planning scholars in the so-called argumentative or rhetorical turn. I have introduced this above but will consider the wider context in greater depth below. First, however, I will elaborate further on Throgmorton's theorisation.

For Throgmorton planning as storytelling is attended by two important elements. The first is that planning stories must be persuasive (p. 49). This is closely related to a conception of planners as authors or constructors of narratives. What sets their texts – plans – apart from the story of the person on the street, and the measure of their persuasiveness, is the presence and particular employment of the marks of a good story: conflict, crisis and resolution; characterisation; setting; point of view; and a felicity with imagery and language. At the other end of the process readers of plans can assess them in much the same way as a literary critic with Throgmorton introducing reader response theory[4] to demonstrate how the meaning conveyed in plans is created in dialogue with non-planners – readers (p. 51) – and thereby making multiple spaces for the political and normative content that has long been acknowledged as a fundamental element of planning theory and practice.

The second element central to Throgmorton's theory is the notion that in addition to being persuasive planning stories must also be constitutive, shaping 'community, character, and culture' (p. 51). In addition to injecting a certain materiality into what might otherwise be viewed as a frivolous focus on the textual, the importance granted to this element of the theory also highlights the ethical dimension of planners' work in so far as their practices will have real consequences for people and places, or as Throgmorton poses the question to himself: 'what kind of communities, characters and cultures do planners want to help create?' (p. 52). Summarising what he acknowledges to be a tentative answer to this question Throgmorton could perhaps be seen to step back from that responsibility, albeit with a strong nod towards Habermasian communicative rationality (Habermas, 1987):

> …planners should strive, not to do good and be right and get things done, but to create, sustain, and participate in a public, democratic discourse that enables them (and others) to argue persuasively and coherently about contestable views of what is good, right, and feasible. (p. 54)

The optimism about planners' abilities to be in positions of real influence and from here to tell stories that make real change for the better is both clear and questionable

[4] A broad variety of approaches to literature developed in the 1970s, albeit with supporting tendencies that well precede it, reader-response theory draws on frameworks from hermeneutics, stylistics, psychoanalysis and semiotics to explore the role of readers in giving meaning to texts (Schneider, 2010).

here, and as with the discussion of Forester above begins to point to some troubling gaps in Throgmorton's argument. The same might be said of later work which imagines a concomitant role for social scientists and their storytelling (2008). In subsequent work, then, such criticisms have seen Throgmorton seek to strengthen and deepen his position with a number of qualifications. These will be discussed below in comparing the theorists to one another, drawing out the differences and the gaps that remain in order to set out my own position.

1.1.3.0.3 Sandercock

Leonie Sandercock (2003) moves our understanding of the relationship between story and planning further still. Whilst there are threads that connect her work to that of Forester and Throgmorton it suggests a slightly different emphasis and an emphatic role for story:

> In order to imagine the ultimately unrepresentable space, life and languages of the city, to make them legible, we translate them into narratives. The way we narrate the city becomes constitutive of urban reality, affecting the choices we make, the ways we then might act. […] Stories are central to planning practice: to the knowledge it draws on from the social sciences and humanities; to the knowledge it produces about the city; and to ways of acting in the city. Planning is *performed* through story, in a myriad of ways. (p. 182)

The suggestion that planning can be thought about as performed story straddles the two central planks of Sandercock's argument, the first argues for the importance of story to planning practice, the second makes a case for story's importance to multicultural planning (p. 183). Whilst the relationship with planning broadly conceived could include a broad range of planning practices it is Sandercock's attendant commitment to multicultural planning that points to a normative stance for her as a planner-theorist but also for story itself.

Sandercock goes on to suggest a variety of ways that planning is performed through story. The first relates to *process* (p. 186), for which a variety of examples are given including community participation, mediation and participatory action research. We could see the unifying factor here as the way that story can be used to encourage people to embark on some sort of journey, drawing them into planning processes. Foundational stories of origin and identity are Sandercock's second example of how planning might be performed through story (p. 192). This might be

necessary when existing understandings are challenged by the voices and presence of migrants, for example, or of previously marginalised indigenous populations. Performing planning through story here represents a route to new stories about how we got to where we are that attend to a multiplicity of senses of self and history, creating a foundation for moving forward together. Thirdly story might work as a catalyst for change by engendering hope: 'deciding what stories to tell in what circumstances is part of the planner's art' (p. 194). Sandercock acknowledges the political dimension to this around who decides when change is necessary and what that change should be, cautioning in favour of 'good conscience and humility' and for the Freirian notion of 'education for a critical consciousness' as against the discredited 'false consciousness' and 'revolutionary vanguardism' of certain strands of Marxism (p. 194). Fourthly we might perform planning through storytelling by incorporating it in our approach to policy, moving away from the 'dry as dust' prescriptions of traditional policy reports – which are political whether they acknowledge it or not – and seek to reinject 'life's juices' into our plans, thereby laying bare 'the kinds of problems and choices we face in cities' (p. 196).

Sandercock goes on to give two examples of how planning education might be performed through storytelling. The first – story as critique and/or explanation – relates to the discussion of policy, acknowledging the way that stories of the urban – academic or otherwise – draw on and are *constructed* through narrative (p. 198). Students, then, need the tools to understand these constructions – their employment of time, space and voice – and the ability to deconstruct and reconstruct the stories they encounter whether these are in the classroom, the library or out in the street. The second is about pedagogy and how story might be included as an element of teaching students, whether this is in understanding their own positionality, the experiences of others or the possibilities of planning practice, which encourage students to reflect on the morality of employing their skills in different ways (p. 203). In conclusion Sandercock seeks to ensure that her claims cannot be misunderstood. She should not be seen to suggest that storytelling represents a route out of all conflicts but rather those at scales where planners have some leverage. Furthermore, Sandercock acknowledges that planners work within fields shot through with power imbalances and that performing storytelling through

planning does not represent some kind of panacea against the misinformation, lies and deceit that can be mobilised by the powerful:

> Using stories in planning must be done with an alertness to the ways in which power shapes which stories get told, get heard, and carry weight. Critical judgement will always be necessary in deciding what weight to give to different stories, as well as what stories are appropriate in what circumstances. *The telling of stories is nothing less than a profoundly political act.* (p. 204)

An important question that remains for this thesis, however, is where that alertness to power comes from and what tools we have for assessing how much weight certain stories carry and which ones are not getting heard. What we begin to perceive is the need to put story to work alongside or in tandem with a way of understanding the politics of stories.

1.1.3.1 Story in planning I

It is clear, then, that planning thought that engages with story is not a one-dimensional body of work. Different authors in their understandings of story take us to quite different places that point to different kinds of theory, practice and politics. Forester's attempt to introduce nuance to a fundamentally quite straightforward view of planning practice, for instance, as opposed to Sandercock's, which makes space for a much broader conception of planning practices. This suggests different ways of conceiving of planners, seeing them working in different places, at different scales and, potentially, in different ways. Closely linked to this is the question of how planning relates to politics, in both the broad and the narrow senses. Throgmorton's view on this question, whilst acknowledging how planning is political, particularly in relation to what is perceived to be its problematic modernist legacy (1996, pp. 3-7), seems to be that story represents one way of avoiding re-making the mistakes of the past. This is quite different to Sandercock's potentially more fundamental critique and the attendant reimagining.

Observing how Throgmorton (2003) has developed his theorisation in response to criticism is particularly instructive here. He sees four principal lines of critique. Firstly, the suggestion that 'to tell a story is to lie' (p. 131); the second criticism is linked to wider critiques of communicative rationality, which suggest that a focus on process leads to the neglect of context, particularly around how power is

constituted and exercised (p. 132); thirdly, Throgmorton acknowledges a related suggestion that other theoretical perspectives, 'neo-Marxist, post-Fordist, or postmodern' (p. 132), might offer more fruitful, compelling or illuminating ways of understanding what is happening; and finally a critique from literary studies that suggests Throgmorton has underestimated just how much is going on when stories are constructed and told (pp. 134-5). Throgmorton sees these lines of critique as strengthening rather than diminishing his suggestion that planning can be thought about as a form of constitutive storytelling about the future but he does revise his claim in light of them. Principally he does this by elaborating on a suggestion in his initial proposal that planning as storytelling takes place in 'a global-scale web of relationships' with places as 'nodes' in this web (p. 139). This creates space within Throgmorton's theory for the theoretical work that he is charged with neglecting (Castells, 1996; Harvey, 2002; Soja, 2000), and brings to the fore ideas around the multidimensional nature of places and the multiplicity of subject positions within both those places and planning activity. His revision, then, sees him acknowledging that planning necessarily begins from normative positions that are open to contestation and thus charging planners with recognising and juxtaposing diverse narratives in such a way as to 'defamiliarize' places:

> This revised argument acknowledges, indeed presumes, that powerful actors will strive to eliminate or marginalize competing stories, and that those powerful actors will induce some planners to devise plans (stories about the future) that are designed to persuade only a very narrow range of potential audiences. (p. 146)

The difficulty here, I would argue, is that Throgmorton responds to legitimate, well-founded criticism by moving in the wrong directions. He moves us away from a key point about planning knowledge, which is that it is knowledge for doing things, for making change in the world, *and* away from where this change happens. The stories of Throgmorton's planners are still imagined as having the power to make substantive change to a large extent on their own terms – you change the story, you get a better outcome – a situation reinforced by the kinds of theory that Throgmorton draws on to create his new conception of nodes in a global web, which does not correspond well to where planning knowledge might be put into action most productively to make change and what is involved in this. That is at the smallest

scales, an appreciation of which needs not just theories of global connectedness, but of how politics happens at the neighbourhood scale, of what kinds of planning and change are made possible here and, just as importantly, not possible.

I will now look to set out my own position in relation to these arguments, which in some senses goes further than Throgmorton does in seeking to understand the implications of politics and power for how we understand story and its relationship with planning, in addition to clarifying what it might mean to plan, who can do it and how. This will involve returning to the notion, set out at the beginning of this chapter of broad shifts in scholarly understanding and unpicking the perceived argumentative or communicative turn in planning theory, which either attended or followed on from the cultural, linguistic or interpretive turn in social science, forming the backdrop for what could perhaps be called a turn to story by some within planning. Subsequently this project will come to define itself against this approach to planning, albeit constructively, a return to underlying principles that allows me to introduce the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001) by way of setting out a quite different approach to the political based on the discursive construction of reality. This has found expression in planning through the concept of agonistic planning, the philosophical positioning and implications of which are central to our understanding of story. I begin to set out a novel theoretical approach, then, that will put storytelling to work alongside Laclau and Mouffe's psot-structural political theory, in an attempt to make sense of places, of how change does and does not happen within them, and of how planners might intervene here.

1.1.4.1 A communicative or argumentative turn?

Attending in greater detail to the communicative (Healey, 2006) or argumentative (Fischer and Forester, 1993) turn that some have identified or, perhaps more accurately, advocated for in planning and policy studies will help to illuminate the above discussion of a perceived cultural or linguistic turn in social scientific research. Furthermore, this will allow me to situate contemporary planning as an activity, its recent history, theoretical underpinnings, and the way in which this research understands and is oriented towards it. The broad background for these arguments is a dissatisfaction with or response to perceived failures or inadequacies in 'modernist planning'. Notably, in the UK context, the top-down planning activity that

made the much demonised concrete tower block, brutalist civic building and prioritisation of the motor car prominent features of many urban landscapes in the period following the second world war. This is perhaps a more mixed legacy than many would care to admit and we should overlook neither the background of ongoing slum-clearance that made – at least in the minds of planners and politicians – such grand schemes necessary, nor the many positive impacts that attended them, nor still the political context that saw the major political parties competing on who would build the most houses most quickly, which ultimately saw quality suffer (Balchin & Rhoden, 2002; Burnett, 1986). Alongside these, however, were a broad range of unintended consequences or outright failures that served to undermine the activity of post-war planning, arguably already rendered problematic in relation to the valorisation of supposed technical expertise at the expense of citizen engagement, involvement and/or control. It is against this backdrop – the implication that planning and public policy making more widely are not neutral exercises in implementing ever better knowledge towards ever more progressive ends – that planning and public policy were forced to give new accounts of themselves. Three different approaches to understanding and doing this are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 – indicative responses to or after 'modernist planning'

Sandercock (2003, pp. 32-33) – *Six problematic pillars of planning wisdom*	**Hajer and Wagenaar** (2003, pp. 8-12) – *Five challenges for policymaking in the network society*	**Healey** (2006, pp. 29-30) – *Key emphases of the argumentative, communicative or interpretive turn*
Rationality	Radical uncertainty/the problematisation of expertise	Knowledge is socially constructed
Science over art		Development and communication of knowledge take many forms
Comprehensiveness	Interdependence	People develop their views socially through interaction
State-direction	New spaces of politics	Move from competitive interest bargaining to consensus building
A unified 'public interest'	The dynamics of trust and identity	In contemporary life people have diverse interests, oppression can occur through common sense assumptions and everyday practices
Value neutrality	Difference	Good public policy draws on and spreads ownership of a range of knowledge
		Context and practice are socially constituted together and practice can challenge and change social relations

Alongside these changes and problems for what we might term the publicly visible work of planners and planning, however, there were concomitant changes in the theoretical understanding that made planning possible. To a large extent, and as Table 2 attests, these are the same or at least closely related to the linguistic or cultural turn in social science discussed above, although their expression in planning – a self-consciously applied or practical discipline - could be seen to mark them with a certain uniqueness. Of particular import has been the influence of Habermasian communicative rationality, demonstrated by Healey's (1993) suggestion of a communicative turn in planning theory. Healey (1996) contrasts the ideas of this turn to the instrumental and materialist approaches that preceded it, which failed to appreciate the fine grain of people and places understood at more human scales. The communicative approach that Healey advocates for, then, focuses instead on the public realm and fostering participation and inclusionary argumentation (1996, p. 219). What advocates of this turn, communicative or argumentative, are keen to stress is the *practical* applications of their ideas, especially in a contentious area such as planning. This, they suggest, allows them to understand how to intervene towards realising better outcomes in a way that is sharply at odds with the lofty abstraction of some of those they are turning away from.

Not everyone within the planning academy turned towards communicative rationality together, however, and neither were they necessarily willing to concede that it represented a new paradigm in planning thought. Huxley and Yiftachel (2000a) set out their critique of the communicative turn in an article notable for provoking a debate (Yiftachel and Huxley 2000b) with both Healey (2000) and Forester (2000). Their argument begins from the fact that there continues to be a multiplicity of research and theorisation on planning that stems from different places, particularly that rooted in historical materialist and political economy traditions, and that the prime place given to *practice* in work associated with the communicative turn sees much of import being neglected (2000). Around the latter point, particularly disconcerting for advocates of the communicative turn is the suggestion that daily planning practice as it unfolds in planning offices is still largely informed by, 'the taken-for-granted status of various kinds of technical rationality' (p. 335). Whilst Huxley and Yiftachel focus on the state we might also perceive larger questions about

elevating a limited range of practices over others and indeed the role that the day-to-day practice/s of *all people* play in creating space and place, and what is more, how that practice might be mobilised towards different ends.

In turn, Forester's (2000) and Healey's (2000) responses begin by questioning how Yiftachel and Huxley (2000b) have presented the communicative turn, suggesting that nobody has ever sought to suggest that there were not other ways of orienting scholarly work to planning and, indeed, that these are important. More substantively they ask some important questions back to Yiftachel and Huxley about the utility of critical work that might appear to hinge on a narrow definition of planning revolving around the state, which is, therefore, comparatively distant from the day-to-day activity of people in places – whether the planning office or the community centre – and as such that tells us very little about how we might seek to intervene or act differently to create different outcomes:

> If we are told that planning theory must deal with power as critical analyses have since the 1970s, we should be told something about the *kinds of counter-hegemonic power* that social groups, community organizations, or progressive political bodies might develop with, or without, the support of official 'planners'. (Forester, 2000, p. 915, emphasis in original)

In many ways this statement and the debate that has provoked it could be understood as a point of departure for this thesis. There is much to commend in both Yiftachel and Huxley's critique of the communicative turn, its underpinnings and consequences, but also much to commend in a critique of what might be understood as *traditional* explanatory social science. In other words, can we unsettle the lionisation of *planning practitioners* – i.e. professional planners – without giving up on the idea that we can endeavour to make positive and substantive change? Enthusiasts for the communicative turn initially seemed to suggest that their work did this:

> If we need theories of politics in planning theory, then we will soon come to theories of organizing and the shaping of hopes and expectations (i.e. communicative theories) about the spaces we call communities and neighbourhoods and regions. (Forester 2000, p. 916)

Whilst Forester's direction of travel here is fine as far as it goes it does not seem to follow that theories of organising and shaping hope have to be communicative theories, rather they might be political too. Ultimately Forester seems to have seen

something of merit in such critique, coming to propose an approach he terms, 'critical pragmatism' (2012; 1993b), which looks to attend to both process and outcome, and more fully acknowledge both the complexity of deliberative processes and the role of antagonism, geared towards moving us, together, away from 'zero-sum adversarial bargaining' (pp. 6-7), presumably both in the academy and in the planning office. Latterly Forester's self-conscious reconstruction as a theorist has seen him more explicitly incorporate the lexicon of post-structural political theory into his work (2014), conceiving of it in terms of *agonistic intersubjectivity* (p. 152). It is from this direction – post-structural political theory – that the most trenchant critiques of the communicative turn have been launched and it is in this direction that we will turn next, to lay out what is at stake in these debates, not least because it is here that this project will come to ground its own understanding of what is at stake in both planning processes and this thesis. In turn this will serve to cast story and narrative – which entered the debate to some extent as communicative tools – in a new light.

1.1.4.2 Politics and planning

This project revolves around the idea that planning decisions are, at heart, political decisions and that the desirable response to these is a democratic one. That is not to say that there is no place for reason or rationality in planning or that democracy will definitely provide the most desirable outcome in every case, but that the act of making a decision is in almost all cases a political act. This understanding rests in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), but of Mouffe in particular, as she reacts against the project of communicative rationality or deliberative democracy. This seeks to realise an 'ideal speech situation' – that removes 'the impediments to free and unconstrained public deliberation of all on matters of common concern' (Mouffe, 1999, p. 751) – in order to realise a state of affairs whereby, 'reason and rational argumentation, instead of interest and aggregation of preferences [can become] the central issue of politics' (Mouffe, 1999, p. 746).

To outline Mouffe's rejection of both facets of this Habermasian project is illuminating for us. Firstly, the ideal speech situation is rejected on ontological grounds, for misunderstanding what makes deliberation possible or necessary: 'without those so-called impediments, no communication, no deliberation is possible' (1999, p. 751). The point here is that if decisions could so straightforwardly be made

on a rational basis it would not be necessary to deliberate, for there would be no disagreement; or from the other direction, it is the impediments – inequitable imbalances of power and resources – that necessitate deliberation. Mouffe's second rejection relates to these imbalances of power in so far as every identity is constituted by that which is outside of it. This leads Mouffe to see power and antagonism as having an 'ineradicable character' (Mouffe, 1999, p. 752) and leads her to define *politics* and *the political* thus:

> By 'the political', I refer to the dimension of antagonism that is inherent in all human society, antagonism that can take many different forms and can emerge in diverse social relations. 'Politics,' on the other hand, refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions that seek to establish a certain order and to organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by this dimension of 'the political.' (1999, p. 754)

This understanding poses a particular question for democracy:

> if we accept that relations of power are constitutive of the social, then the main question of democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic values. (Mouffe, 1999, p. 753)

The proposed answer is *agonistic pluralism*, a politics that 'aims at the creation of unity in a context of conflict and diversity' (Mouffe, 1999, p. 755), and seeks to reimagine the relationship between *others* not as an antagonistic relationship between enemies but as an agonistic relationship between adversaries:

> When we accept that every consensus exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power and that always entails some form of exclusion, we can begin to envisage the nature of a democratic public sphere in a different way. Modern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order. (Mouffe, 1999, p. 756)

At this point, where a case has been made for the desirability of actors being able to form collective identities around clear positions, we can say that Mouffe goes further than Foucault (1978) – an important point of reference in relation to both the relationship between power and knowledge, and discourse theory – by at once acknowledging the pervasiveness of power, its fragility *and* setting out a platform for meaningful action.

Planning theorists wary of consensus have found this to be a particularly productive space and a host of literature has emerged in recent years that looks, to varying degrees, to oppose, rework or provoke what had been planning theory's communicative mainstream in light of Mouffe's insights (McClymont, 2011; Pløger, 2004; Gunder, 2003; Hillier, 2003). Work in this area reacts against the idea that we are living in a post-political age, finding Mouffe productive not only in relation to her ontological problematisation of communicative rationality and by extension collaborative planning, but also because of her normative project of radical democracy and agonistic pluralism, which speaks directly to normative debates within planning. This has its roots in Mouffe's work with Laclau (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) and their development of the concept of hegemony, to understand how political projects endeavour to fix meanings within a social arena that they argue is characterised by contingency. From here we can begin to ask what it might mean for marginalised voices to mobilise and pursue counter-hegemonic projects and practices (Purcell, 2009; Mouffe, 2005). Furthermore, what represents a more helpful approach to issues around planning – where power imbalances are so frequently writ large – that of seeking a rational consensus, with the risk of hiding the exercise of power and marginalising dissenting voices as irrational, or an approach whereby the contestation is seen as political and the right of actors to form around positions and fight their corner is acknowledged, even encouraged.

Those who have drawn on Mouffe's work in the context of project's similar to this one, focussing on *grassroots level* planning activity, are particularly instructive here, having drawn attention to various ways that Mouffe's ideas are refracted through a number of empirical case studies. These include, the importance of antagonism in the current conjuncture (Fougère & Bond, 2018); the tactics by which calls for regeneration and the language of 'community' have been co-opted and dissent neutralised in the era of 'post-politics' (Baeten, 2009); and the importance of inhabiting uncertain discursive spaces – such as 'social enterprise' – in order to work towards realising new political formations (Larner, 2015). This work highlights the importance of finding a path between naivety and cynicism, of seeking to explore and exploit whatever potential and possibility exists for change without underestimating the forces mitigating against it. This is the context imagined for the

introduction of story and the exploration of its potential. As something all of us do, regardless of our relative positions, story could almost stand as a metaphor for the bare minimum 'ethico-political principles' (Mouffe, 1999, p. 756) that actors in an agonistic pluralism would share. From there we ask what is the value of story, in particular for deepening and strengthening that democracy? To what extent does it represent a tool for the marginalised, a way for individuals and groups to make their voices heard? To what extent might storytelling be mobilised to do the *political* work of organising and shaping hopes and expectations? Does it have a *counter-hegemonic power* and how might it be harnessed? Before outlining how I intend to approach these questions, however, it is now crucial that I set out in more detail Laclau and Mouffe's ideas, which form the ontological underpinning of the thesis and are central to its conceptual and analytic understanding and practice.

1.1.5 Anti-foundational foundations

The ontological positioning of this thesis relies to a large extent on Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (2001). Their work has two significant aspects, the first rooted in post-structuralism, developing ideas and insights from Foucault, Lacan and Derrida into a unique theory of discourse, the second an interrelated project of critiquing and reimagining over a century of Marxist theory and practice. I will begin with a broad overview of their ontology, I will then lay out their key arguments and some of their most useful concepts, before turning to explain how these relate to narrative and this project, and also where I might depart from them.

One of the strongest characteristics of Laclau and Mouffe's thought is its anti-essentialism, and this represents a good way into their theorisations. This is perhaps best introduced in relation to the Marxist tradition that they are both working within and reacting against. If, as in what we can crudely characterise for brevity deterministic Marxist understandings, economy represents the determining structure to which everything is oriented it follows that a person's identity stands in an essential relation to this – regardless of how they understand this relation – and that all politics is oriented to these essential relations, more or less consciously and more or less clearly, as indeed is everything else. Now, if our practice and experience demonstrates that these relations and their implications are not essential, we might

– as per Laclau and Mouffe – conclude that actually there are no fixed poles. What we are left with are the shifting relations between different objects. Here we can introduce a second, interrelated facet of Laclau and Mouffe's anti-essentialism, because they understand these objects as lacking an essential or natural character or identity. Their route to this position begins with the contention that everything is defined in relation to what it is not, as *not* that thing. This drawing of a boundary, the creation of others, results in all meanings being unstable, because that which is rendered outside always threatens to unsettle and undermine attempts to fix meaning and constitute identity. Within any field, then, we can begin to see that there is no objective position from which to view and understand that field, instead there are different subject positions with different subjects pushing and promoting their own understandings. What is also emerging here is Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of politics or the political (see p. 34), a fundamental tenet of their work, which sees the creation of antagonisms and the exercise of power as an inescapable underpinning of the social.

Having endeavoured to sketch the ontological skeleton of Laclau and Mouffe's work, I will now turn to explaining their discourse theory. This is fundamentally intertwined with their ontological stance so it is important to stress that the decision to order the explication in this way is mine – in contrast to how others have tackled this task (Howarth, 2000; Wagenaar, 2011) – in an attempt to make the arguments clearer. In light of the arguments briefly explained above, then, Laclau and Mouffe can be seen to expand and/or reimagine foregoing conceptions of discourse in a variety of ways. Setting these out now will hopefully clarify points already made and furnish us with a set of concepts for thinking about this project. I will do this as Howarth (2000) does by making a distinction between *the discursive*, *discourse* and *discourse analysis*.

The discursive is a concept that operates at a relatively high level of abstraction. Starting from the position that says that all objects and practices are meaningful, it posits that all objects and practices are the objects and practices of discourses. *Discourses* exist at a lower level of abstraction representing, from Foucault (1972), 'historically specific systems of meaning which form the identities of subjects and objects' (Howarth, 2000, p. 9):

> Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 112)

Laclau and Mouffe's innovations in these areas are in expanding understanding of the discursive to include the behavioural as well as the linguistic, arguing that there is no difference between these two things at the level of signification. And, in relation to discourses, highlighting both their historical specificity, construction and, therefore, the relationship between contingency and necessity in discourses; and linking this to the political, as discourses are always contested and vulnerable to that which they exclude. In light of these categories Howarth (2000) describes *discourse analysis* as, 'the process of analysing signifying practices as discursive forms' (p. 10). Being interested in texts broadly conceived allows those analysing discourse/s, 'to draw upon and develop a number of concepts and methods in linguistic and literary theory commensurate with its ontological assumptions' (p. 10). This is clearly very important for this project and I shall return to it in the following chapter, where I begin to show how this project's conception of narrative relates to these ideas. Firstly, however, a number of key concepts need to be expanded to demonstrate more fully both Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and their attendant political and normative project.

1.1.5.1 Articulation

The concept of articulation is key to Laclau and Mouffe's conception of discourse and discursivity, discourse being a result of the practice of articulation:

> The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity. (2001, p. 113)

We can see in this quotation many of the elements already alluded to: *practice* points towards the material element of discourse as something behavioural as well as linguistic; *partiality* points to the anti-essentialism of the theorisation; *fixation* points to the political nature of this process; and the linked notion of the *openness of the social* points towards the impossibility of this struggle being ultimately won. The importance of articulatory practices will become clearer below as we expand on other aspects of Laclau and Mouffe's theory.

1.1.5.2 The subject

For Laclau and Mouffe what is true at the levels of discursivity and of discourse is also true at the level of the subject, where they maintain a resolute anti-essentialism:

> The category of subject is penetrated by the same ambiguous, incomplete and polysemical character which overdetermination assigns to every discursive entity. […] 'Objectivism' and 'subjectivism'; 'holism' and 'individualism' are symmetrical expressions of the *desire* for a fullness that is permanently deferred. (2001, p. 121)

We can conceive of this as a breaking down of the conventional dualism between structure and agency, which rejects both enlightenment notions of selfhood and the deterministic understandings of certain structural Marxists. What it replaces it with is a discursively constructed subject. In Laclau and Mouffe's theorisation this renders subjects' attempts to constitute themselves as inherently partial, in both senses of the term, as whilst subjects are positioned discursively they also act, politically.

1.1.5.3 Antagonism

Above we have introduced antagonism in relation to Mouffe's rejection of communicative rationality and how this relates to her conception of the political (see pp. 34-5). This taken together with the explication given in this chapter points towards why antagonism should be fundamental to Laclau and Mouffe's ontology, whereby identity and meaning are created by the positing of insides and outsides or – possibly more clearly – friends and enemies, and which are as such inherently contingent and precarious. It is important to highlight, however, that *antagonism* refers to something different to *opposition* or *contradiction*:

> Real opposition is an *objective* relation – that is, determinable, definable – among things; contradiction is an equally definable relation among concepts; antagonism constitutes the limits of every objectivity, which is revealed as partial and precarious *objectification*. (2001, p. 125)

Antagonism might appear to present as opposition or contradiction, then, but what is really at stake is the inability to fully realise an identity or close a discourse. From here Laclau and Mouffe identify two logics that work in endeavouring to fix the political space where antagonisms play out: equivalence and difference. The consequent notion of the chain of equivalence sees elements united in opposition to a purely negative outside that threatens them – they give the example of peasant struggles which unite in opposition to the urban (2001, p. 129) – whilst the logic of

difference seeks to positively constitute elements within a system of relations with a view to marginalising antagonism – they give the example of one-nation Toryism and its affirmation later in the Welfare State (2001, p. 130). With these concepts now in place Laclau and Mouffe turn to setting out their conception of hegemony.

1.1.5.4 Hegemony

Like antagonism hegemonic practices are understood to be an inevitable consequence of Laclau and Mouffe's social ontology. This social ontology, however, is intimately intertwined with a critique of Leninist and Gramscian conceptions of hegemony. By degrees less deterministic, Laclau and Mouffe's ultimate disregard of the notion of a fundamental class, foregrounding of contingency and vigourously argued anti-essentialism sees all elements and subjects drawn into the political practices of articulation. Hegemonic articulation, then, is possible when antagonistic forces are separated by unstable frontiers (p. 136), with subjects seeking to stabilise meanings around the privileged nodal points mentioned above. There are other dynamics at play beyond the agency of subjects, however, with partially fixed formations vulnerable to *dislocation* – particularly, it is argued, in the contemporary moment – this can radically undermine identities and social orders. What this points to is a vastly increased space – perhaps *ad infinitum* – for different types of political projects, an insight which sees Laclau and Mouffe advocating for their own project of radical and plural democracy.

Laclau and Mouffe's political project, then, is advanced by the utilisation of their theoretical insights to think about changes that have confronted the subject in the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly in relation to the new social movements and the multiplication of democratic struggles in a host of novel ways and in new spheres. The hegemonic struggle they see this as giving rise to is, however, equally demonstrable in the 'anti-democratic offensive' (2001, p. 171) of the new-right – visible in attempts to redefine concepts such as liberty, equality, democracy and justice – to which the last three decades have arguably only added weight. Laclau and Mouffe's suggestion, then, is that the left need to understand that the terrain they are now fighting on has no privileged positions, indeed, no ultimately fixed terrain from and on which to launch a counter-hegemonic project. This is the radical pluralism that the reactionary right have succeeded in inflecting with an

individualistic character and against which Laclau and Mouffe advocate for widening and deepening 'democracy' understood in egalitarian terms. There are clearly implications in this understanding for planning practice. On the one hand, planners' positions within the state might appear more problematic, as might more traditional understandings of planners' roles, rationalities and their realisation of 'progress'. On the other hand, potential appears for radically democratic planning practices and projects – around expanding our understanding of who might be a planner, where they might be positioned, and what they might do to what ends – and this thesis looks to speak to this potential.

1.1.6 Implications for the project

This project is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on and speaking to scholarship from across the social sciences and humanities. It is also, however, about politico-cultural practices in addition to academia, in particular planning, participation and community development. The ontological foundation described in the discussion of Laclau and Mouffe above, then, which is fundamentally about understanding how a plurality of ideas *and* actions relate to and interact with one another politically in uncertain discursive and political spaces, gives a firm basis for thinking about these practices, the specific contexts in which we find them and how they relate to one another. As such the implications Laclau and Mouffe see for their work – their epistemology – also speak to the work I have undertaken. This is the case in two particular ways: firstly, in what the implications of their discourse theory might be for this project's primary interest in story; secondly, Laclau and Mouffe's route towards a democratic politics and the implications of this has much to say to this project's interest in democracy, in relation to both planning and social research.

What we are also introducing here, however, are a number of differences and departures. For instance, Laclau and Mouffe are frequently referring to events, movements and discursive shifts that happen at scales much larger than that which this project seeks to frame. What they might make of 'story' and 'narrative' is also certainly debatable: narrative does appear in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* as an analytical lens, but only in relation to highlighting the essentialism of Leninism and an attendant *supplementary* conception of hegemony that seeks to explain away events which undermine the '*first narrative*' of deterministic class relations and class

struggle (2001, pp. 50-51). Here again we might run in to another problem, as Laclau and Mouffe's analysis is inherently suggestive of quite traditional modes of academic practice and articulation, offering in some senses a definitive refutation of Lenin and his comrades. I have no doubt that any criticism would be tempered by an appreciation that conducting a revolution and scholarly work simultaneously could be somewhat difficult, but this is secondary to the question it raises around how they would respond to attempts to democratise the academy, especially if we are at all sympathetic to criticisms based around the opacity of their work and the vocabulary they invent to explain it (Wagenaar, 2011).

It would be a mistake, then, to characterise this project as a straightforward attempt to conduct discourse analysis within a framework provided by post-structural political theory. Instead, taking a lead from others in the field (Fougère & Bond, 2018; Baeten, 2009; Larner, 2015), productive insights are imagined as arising from the contradictions and discrepancies that arise when different concepts rub against one another and, equally as importantly, the social and political fields in which the research takes place. Laclau and Mouffe have given me one important set of lenses in relation to this task, whilst another, story, has been introduced earlier in the chapter. I will return to this now, expanding on the definitions and arguments already made. Its relationship with Laclau and Mouffe's work will then be clarified over the course of this chapter and the next, which unites the various conceptual strands in an analytical framework built around the concept of a reading practice. Ultimately, a case will have been made for their productive utilisation together, pointed towards discovering story's potential for a) more egalitarian planning practices and b) grassroots actors attempting to influence how the places where they live change and develop.

1.1.7 Back to the story

Laclau and Mouffe can be seen to present a framework for understanding the whole, its parts, how they are related and how they might change. Story can be considered in much the same way: texts have contexts; they are constructed in one way rather than another, but as such invite consideration of how they might be different. In setting this out we can see how the two conceptual or theoretical strands both complement and productively challenge one another, and in turn how they might be

put to analytical use in tandem. What is important now, then, having done this for Laclau and Mouffe, is to demonstrate what story adds to our understanding of the social and what it is of difference that it brings to social research. For this reason, I will initially advance this project's understanding of story and narrative using ideas from literary theory and scholarship, before braiding this back into the interests and overall approach of this project.

Fundamentally, one can be oriented to narrative in one of two ways: that of storyteller/writer or listener/reader. This can be understood as true even for the scholars and academics who might imagine themselves at one remove from a narrative, isolating an instance of storytelling and considering both angles simultaneously – *what* is this narrative or narrator *doing*? *How* are they *doing* it and to what *effect?* – because if someone else stands at one remove from them it is clear that the academic is in the role of listener/reader, and there is a sense in which what is really at stake is their reading of a narrative, whether it stems straightforwardly from a single narrator or from the interaction between a number of people. This throws up questions, of course, not least because social researchers may well have had some hand in the production of the narrative that they are now reading, indeed, they may even be one of the characters. Readers of this thesis may also be wondering whether I am in the process of reducing all social action to practices of reading and writing. The implications of these questions will be covered in the course of this chapter and the ones that follow. I want to move on, however, by furnishing us with some additional tools and key concepts for understanding narratives from both of those orientations: reader and writer.

The previous chapter made the case for what we might call narrative's ubiquity, as something that all people do. Now I want to turn to consider what appear to be some of the most important elements that come together in what Porter Abbott (2002) terms the rhetoric of narrative:

> The rhetoric of narrative is its power. It has to do with all of those elements of the text that produce the many strong or subtle combinations of feeling and thought we experience as we read. These include those elements that inflect how we interpret the narrative: that is, how we find meanings in it. Arguably, *everything* in the text contributes to its impact and our interpretation of it, and so everything has some rhetorical function. Change one thing, and the effect of the whole changes. (p. 36)

Here, then, I will outline four of the key rhetorical effects of narrative as described by Porter Abbott: causation, normalisation, masterplot and closure. These will constitute crucial elements of my reading practice as I turn to the narratives that occupy this thesis. The decision to orient the consideration of narrative around literary studies is a conscious one, which will allow me to turn to social science towards the end of this section, demonstrating where I am in agreement and what I am doing differently. In turn this will allow me to relate the understanding to the social ontology and discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe set out above.

1.1.7.1 Causation

To construct a narrative is a very effective way of showing or explaining why things happen. As Porter Abbott contends: 'Narrative itself, simply by the way it distributes events in an orderly, consecutive fashion, very often gives the impression of cause and effect' (2002, p. 37). The process of narrative, then, which sees us linking things that happened in the past to states of affairs in the present, can even be understood as satisfying a fundamental human need for order and explanation. Taking these two things together, however, also shows why we must at times maintain a certain scepticism about narrative. For whether it is explicitly stated or merely implied that one thing has caused another we know that this need not be the case, and in some instances we might have to struggle against ourselves in order to remember this. Looking to this project, and thinking about social science more widely, we can see how actors from different subject positions might want to attribute certain causes to things, or as receivers of narratives to believe them. What is more there is a strong impulse within scholarship to utilise this element of narrative rhetoric, as we build our arguments.

1.1.7.2 Naturalisation

In a sense Porter Abbott highlights normalisation as an extension of what is implied in the relationship between narrative and causation. Normalisation relates to the way that narrative makes things make sense:

> Bringing a collection of events into narrative coherence can be described as a way of *normalizing* or *naturalizing* those events. It renders them plausible, allowing one to see how they all "belong". (p. 40)

Again, this relates to our desire as human beings for order. It also introduces an interesting relationship between narrative, reality and truth, insofar as whilst seeing things as part of a story can help us believe that things are true the narrative is only a representation of the reality. Indeed, people are commonly suspicious of narratives that seem too neat; this can see them on the one hand refusing to believe things are true when they are, and on the other taking fictitious narratives as truth. As with causation we can see how it is easy for social scientists to fall into these traps, whether they are refusing to let go of a beautiful theory or making the mistake of reifying theories that happen to be helpful.

1.1.7.3 Masterplot

A number of different aspects of narrative find expression through Porter Abbott's understanding of masterplot. There is a structural element to it around how narratives unfold or are emplotted – what do we see or hear and when, what is the nature of the conflict and how does it come to be resolved – that we experience in tandem with a cultural element relating to how we experience closely related or similar narratives time and time again from our situated subject positions:

> We seem to connect our thinking about life, and particularly about our own lives, to a number of masterplots that we may or may not be fully aware of. To the extent that our values and identity are linked to a masterplot, that masterplot can have strong rhetorical impact. We tend to give credibility to narratives that are structured by it. (p. 42)

This understanding clearly overlaps with genre and type, which have exercised the minds of many other scholars in both the humanities and the social sciences. What I think Porter Abbott's concept expresses very clearly, however, is the cultural, emplaced – both temporally and spatially – dimension that is fundamental to this project. The understanding suggests an almost dialogical relationship between individuals – the stories they tell about themselves and the understandings these give rise to – and the storied places these individuals and their own narratives stem from. Furthermore, looking back to the discussion of causation and naturalisation above, noting on the one hand the distance that always exists between 'reality' and its representation and on the other narrative's openness to manipulation and deceit, we can see how there is very real potential for tension within such a relationship, at

the least for the emergence of doubts and perhaps even quite radical and troubling ruptures and dislocations.

1.1.7.4 Closure

Porter Abbott begins his discussion of closure with conflict, a key characteristic of many if not all narratives, and whilst the other characteristics already discussed demonstrate why social researchers might be interested in narratives, considering conflict helps show what narrative might offer as a mode of planning:

> One very plausible possibility is that the representation of conflict in narrative provides a way for a culture to talk to itself about, and possibly resolve, conflicts that threaten to fracture it (or at least make living difficult). In this view of narrative, its conflicts are not solely about particular characters (or entities). Also in conflict, and riding on top of the conflict of narrative entities, are conflicts regarding values, ideas, feelings, and ways of seeing the world. There is, of course, no culture without many such conflicts. (p. 51)

Closure, then, representing some response to or resolution of a conflict, is absolutely fundamental to narrative, or rather the expectation of closure is absolutely fundamental, especially when it never quite comes. Again, in relation to story as it unfolds in social life, as opposed to in literature, whilst closure might always be in a sense ephemeral, it is still present, in how we understand the past, and what we think we are doing in the present in order to realise some manner of closure imagined for our futures. Given this perspective we can see how disruptive it might be if people or groups of people buy into a story that closes too definitively and too soon, shutting down options and avenues for worthwhile change, or when no closure appears possible in a troubling situation.

As readers and writers, then, in the settings where grassroots actors try to intervene in planning – how places change and develop – there is scope for action, for attempts to intervene, and there are constraints on this. At the outset of this chapter, in introducing the promise of story, we saw how it has been seen in some senses as encapsulating space and time, the individual and the collective, interior and exterior life, the universal and the particular, self and other; here we have introduced some means of interrogating more closely the mechanics of this. In doing that now, in the wake of similarly outlining the mechanics of Laclau and Mouffe's discursive theory of the social, I am keen to emphasise the way that the two theories mesh with one another, as theories set in time, which always appear partial in so far as the

question of how the story might be otherwise never goes away. Laclau and Mouffe similarly give us a means of considering how the particular and their contexts relate, from here of what scope there is for trying to effect change – to act politically – and on how such action is constrained. This meshing does not constitute a perfect synthesis, however, and rather than being a problem for the design of this project it is what makes it possible, for the differences of the approaches are what generate new insight. This is particularly the case, as we will see now, when we return our consideration to planning.

1.1.8 Story in planning II

Looking back to van Hulst's (2012) arguments around narrative interest in planning we can see that he has already begun to move towards some of the implications of a reframing. Firstly, he cautions against assuming too narrow a focus that might see us, 'start to think that storytelling is something positive in itself' (p. 304). As much as we might wish to reassert the value inherent in story as a universal way of knowing about the world (Bruner, 1986) we cannot assume that stories are inherently inclusive; they are just as capable of excluding or shutting down. This relates to a second point about acknowledging the contexts within which storytelling takes place; a reminder, 'to see how planning is *not* storytelling' and a caution against 'overestimat[ing] the impact of facilitated storytelling sessions on the rest of the planning process' (van Hulst, 2012, p. 305), and, indeed, on the social, economic and political settings within which planning processes take place. Forester's (1993a) metaphor about learning from stories as we learn from friends can, depending on one's perspective, be shut down or expanded here. Do only friends tell stories? If stories are *rich* and *deep* they might nourish us, but might it not also be possible to drown in them, or to drown others in them? Reintroducing our critique of Throgmorton above (see pp. 29-30) there is a risk, when we think about identifying political, social or economic contexts that we might imagine only big arguments powerfully made – a kind of power being exercised at one remove from everyday life – but this is to miss something. Storytelling can be more pernicious than this, can shut down and exclude not just from the top down but from the bottom up. Whilst we might hope to sustain loving friendships across our lives we surely also expect we might come across those who seek to manipulate us, and it is vitally important to acknowledge that the stories that make this possible,

that make people feel stupid and worthless and hopeless are also doing political work. Hitherto, I would argue, those interested in storytelling in planning have not equipped themselves with a suitable set of conceptual tools to understand the political nature of this storytelling.

To turn once again to van Hulst, then, he makes the case for research that investigates the implicit role of storytelling, highlighting:

> 1) the way in which storytelling is part of a political process in which various stories compete for attention and that most of the time has winners and losers, and 2) the way in which storytelling relates to other activities that do political work. (2012, p. 305)

This thesis responds to this advice and to the field opened by the other work on storytelling in planning discussed above, but it does so by assuming a slightly different position. I *do* want to contribute to exploring further the potential in what we might call the promise of story – its ability to make planning more inclusive and democratic – the conceptual underpinnings of which I explored earlier in this chapter. As, however, the discussion of the communicative turn shows, I am also not naïve about the political context in which planning happens, indeed planning's inescapably political dimension. This has necessitated the reconceptualisation of the storytelling/planning relationship that I have begun to set out and the introduction of Laclau and Mouffe's work by way of facilitating this. My contention is that insight provided by the two conceptual strands can be brought into conversation with one another, representing a useful and illuminating approach, and an important theoretical development. The focus on participatory interaction with grassroots driven planning activity is also important here. The theoretical and practical implications of this activity are developed further in the following chapters, which develop the conceptual framework for this project further, in particular the mechanics of how storytelling and Laclau and Mouffe's work will be put to work together, and set out its methodology. First, however, given our insistence that planning is about intervening, about *doing*, it is important to bring more firmly within the orbit of this project literatures on how change happens in community contexts, on what it means to be able to conceive of something better and to believe that you can do something to bring it about, and of where planning fits into this space.

1.1.9 Theories of Action, Theories of Change

Change is at the heart of this thesis and at the heart of planning. Both are interested in how change happens and as such are also interested in how change becomes possible, the scope of such change and the attendant concept of action; what does and does not make people act, why and how. There are a variety of ways that one could orient oneself to begin to answer such questions, an awareness of this is vital to the work of this project because the bottom-up planning process it seeks to understand has brought together a variety of different actors and agencies, around place-based questions and problems. Here I will look to highlight some of the theories of change and action that speak to the project, principally from within planning and community development, although these have their roots in wider ethical and philosophical literatures.

Modern town planning assumes a particular orientation to change, namely that it can be controlled, that we can intervene to try and realise particular outcomes. Looking to the apparent pioneers of such activity (e.g. Howard, 1902) we can see how there are a number of elements to this. Normative understanding, for example, of horror at conditions in urban neighbourhoods where no heed has been given to the outcomes of courses of action, which rests on a further normative belief that justice matters, that those who were compelled to live in such neighbourhoods were lesser for the experience, and thereby society is lesser more widely. From here there must be some understanding of what outcomes would be just or desirable, of what would be good for people or what they can reasonably expect. In turn, this normative analysis bleeds in to more technical considerations, about how to realise the outcomes that it has been decided are better. At the other end of the planning conveyor belt, then, are questions about action, what we should do with our knowledge. Across this spectrum we find questions that still exercise much planning thought and theory. Campbell (2012a), for instance, begins her theorisation from the position that action is driven by knowledge, unpicking the contentious and normatively influenced relationship between '*is* and *ought*' (p. 135), to advocate for an understanding of *synthesis* as distinct from *analysis* but, and importantly, no better or worse (p. 141). The starting point for this is setting the remote analysis of the academy apart from Schön's 'reflective practitioner' (1983), who is up to her

elbows in the messy problems of society more widely. From here Campbell makes the case for *synthesising* knowledge and practice, recognising the limitations of each in order to empower action from those in the thick of things. The point being that practitioners do not have to have a perfect explanation, they need to be able to have a basis for choosing one course of action over another in the heat of the moment. In Campbell's theorisation this is an incredibly important moment for planning because it is here that the synthetic knowledge is pointed towards achieving a *better* outcome.

It is at exactly this point, however, that others have sought to complicate things. Winkler and Duminy (2016) suggest that *better*, as Campbell and the majority of ethical thinking in planning understands it, retains a focus on normative ethical recommendations that is in conflict with much contemporary planning theory, which conceives of knowledge/s as situated and subjective. Campbell's own interaction with the direction of travel of contemporary planning theory was to suggest that it has been, by and large, a road to relativism, nihilism and nowhere (pp. 140-1). Yet Winkler and Duminy argue that coming to understand what *should* be done can only come out of an interrogation of what planning's normative categories – *justice*, *better*, *common good* – mean in situated contexts, and they demonstrate this by describing a contentious case from South Africa, where professional understandings and ideas came into conflict with those of residents in an informal housing settlement. It is debateable, however, whether this is as complicating for Campbell's argument as Winkler and Duminy suggest it is. It is unhelpful to read them as suggesting that planning theory from the global north is a more straightforward fit to planning problems in the global north because Campbell's very premise is that it is all too often not helpful at all. As such it is perhaps more helpful to read their argument as an assertion of the right of those in the global south to an equal share in debates around planning. What is interesting here for this thesis is who else might be granted a voice, in relation to what both arguments leave relatively well alone, the underpinnings of contemporary planning in some authority or other mandating people called planners to plan, and an attendant theoretical preoccupation with *professional* planning practitioners.

In this vein planners and planning scholars have for decades been endeavouring to question this aspect of planning, to broaden the scope of what

planning might constitute and as such who might be doing it. The advocacy planning approach proposed by Davidoff (1965) is particularly important here, whereby he argues for making the political function of planners explicit at the same time as deepening pluralism in relation to public policy making. Similarly, Arnstein's (1969) typology, the 'ladder of citizen participation', still stands as an important point of departure for debates around public participation in planning, its efficacy, substance, appropriate place and scope. The communicative or argumentative approaches already discussed in this chapter are one recent iteration of these debates, which as we have seen in relation to the critiques offered by Yiftachel and Huxley (2000) and those drawing on the work of Mouffe (1999), continues to polarise opinion. We can, if we choose, situate a great deal of these debates at the intersection of planning and community development activity, a space – to add yet more complication – referred to, primarily from a social work perspective, as community practice (Weil, Reisch and Ohmer, 2013). I will turn to consider this now, demonstrating some of the breadth in these approaches, which suggest different understandings of what change is desirable and possible, with different implications.

Rather like planning, that community development represents a contested term and a contested field is a commonplace amongst recent attempts at working towards definitions or accounts of its activity (see e.g. Matarrita-Cascante and Brennan, 2012; Mayo, 2008; Bhattacharyya, 2004). This is the case in terms of both practice and theory, with key constitutive terms such as community (Mayo, 2008) and empowerment (Pigg, 2002) equally open to adoption by a wide range of activities and approaches, with a range of assumptions and intended outcomes. Indeed, it may well be the case that this conceptual confusion is what makes community development activity possible; practitioners putting their knowledge and understanding to work by and large through skilled improvisation, tailored to the community where they find themselves working.[5] This activity does, however, tend to have historical and conceptual underpinnings and I will turn now to laying out some of these, to build a broader picture of what community development is about.

[5] It is worth noting here how similar this seems to Forester's description of planning practice, see p. 23.

In the UK context modern community development is identified as having strong roots in empire (Craig, Popple and Shaw, 2008), whereby those who had gained experience in the developing world in endeavouring to promote social development and also to steer it in particular directions began to explore and argue for the relevance of adapting their approaches for use in the UK. Looking towards the ability of communities to come together in order to help themselves this early work was keen to carve out a particular space for itself as opposed to the approaches of adult education, town planning and, particularly, the clinical, client-focussed approaches of social work (du Sautoy, 1966). In the US context, particularly that represented by the struggles of the civil rights movement, the community organising approach advocated by Saul Alinsky (1971), is one important touchstone for community development activity. Self-consciously 'pragmatic', Alinsky looked to build popular coalitions from within communities around local concerns, with an ultimate view towards transferring power to the 'have-nots'. As with the possibly uncomfortable position of early community development efforts in the UK, however, whereby it was unclear whether community development emerged as a tool for people or for empire, there are also competing strands in the US context, where the role of the state has historically been quite different, with non-government organisations, frequently faith-based (see e.g.: Baum, 1997), left to provide for those who fall between the gaps in the market. A further influence frequently cited in the context of community development is Paulo Freire (2001) and his work on education for critical consciousness, whereby he challenges traditional notions of education, teacher and student, foregrounding the importance for the oppressed of anti-colonial education, in order that they might liberate both themselves and their oppressors.

With the efforts of early community development practitioners and theorists to definitively define the scope and purpose of their activity ultimately falling short of their desire, then, there continues to be overlap with disciplines including planning. Above we referred to this space as community practice, where planning and development are identified as key processes, alongside organising and progressive

change[6] (Weil, Reisch and Ohmer, 2013, p. 11). Whilst the overarching orientation to community practice is seen to stem from social work's enduring commitment to social justice and the 'democratic revitalization of communities' (Weil, Reisch and Ohmer, 2013, p. 10), this is a commitment it can be seen to share with both planning and community development, and as it implies a particular orientation to social work – indeed, in the UK context, a divergence from (Banks, 2011) – so too it implies a particular orientation to planning. Hamdi and Goethert (1997) define this in opposition to 'orthodox' planning, highlighting a problem focussed process where communities are participating stakeholders, 'where the sacred routine of planning first and acting later is displaced in favour of acting and planning iteratively, adaptively and simultaneously' (p. ix), and where results are tangible and immediate.

This open orientation to planning and to cognate practices is at the heart of this thesis, yet the space it occupies continues to be contested. We will come to understand this more clearly now, as we turn our focus once again to the divergent understandings of change and action that emerge from this space. From a planning perspective, for example, Wolf-Powers (2014) discusses the impact of competing theories of action on the field of community development, which she understands as a response to 'the consequences of historic patterns of uneven private and public investment' (p. 203). Community development planners, she suggests, can be found working at the grassroots level in communities that can be experiencing a variety of kinds of deprivation and its consequences. What Wolf-Powers seeks to demonstrate is how a variety of understandings that community planners might bring to a community could lead to different diagnoses of its problems and differences in the solutions proposed. For instance, one might look at a community and see the breakdown of civil norms – 'the stuff of social capital' – and organise a response around restoring these; alternatively, one might see the absence of functioning markets as leading to problems such as unsafe streets and degraded infrastructure and look to respond by helping markets function again; a third approach, based in more radical analyses, might diagnose injustice as a structural problem and look to confront this. 'Community development', then, can include both those who take

[6] The latter also representing areas where Alinsky and Freire represent key foundations for contemporary practice.

underlying social, economic and political states of affairs as given and look to make them work better or to help individuals work better within them, and those who are endeavouring to radically reconstitute that status quo. Hidden conflict between these positions, she goes on to argue, is constitutive of the community development sphere in the present day. She suggests that this has problematic consequences insofar as practitioners and their funders downplay the conflict in order to preserve 'community development as a big tent capable of accommodating a variety of actors with distinct motives' (p. 214), with the effect that those voices that might come from or point towards structural critique of injustice are blocked off and potentially transformative change in those directions is stymied.

This suggestion, of a confused discursive space is explicated if we consider another key strand of the community practice/development tradition, the concept of self-help. At the community level Richardson (2009) defines this as, 'informal groups of people, acting on a voluntary basis, working together to solve common problems by taking action themselves, and with others' (p. 1). The wider community development literature, building on the idea that self-help represents, 'the default strategy of the poor' (Berner and Philips, 2005, p. 19), suggests that one role of community development is to facilitate people in realising the potential they are seen as possessing within themselves and their communities to address their collective problems. In invoking human nature as a justification for the concept of self-help this argument mirrors that of the anarchists who put self-help and the attendant concept of mutual-aid at the centre of a political project of autonomy outside of both the market and the state (Ward, 1982). This suggestion, that people in communities can begin to make a difference to their situations regardless of where they are starting from is, on the one hand, hopeful and empowering, perhaps even demonstrating a challenge to prevailing conditions in society and a route to reconstituting these. On the other hand, however, it can be perfectly compatible with political projects, such as free-market libertarianism, which look to absolve both the state and the market of responsibility for the equity or otherwise of their activity. This has seen contemporary community development criticised to varying degrees for, at best naivety and at worst complicity in neoliberal governments proposing and supporting local, self-help initiatives to structural problems, which leave root causes and

questions around justice well alone (Wilkin and Boudeau, 2015; Berner and Philips, 2005).

If what seems to be at stake in these debates is the complicated ways that people and their activities can be implicated in the state, economy, politics and/or other formal institutions, and what implications this has for knowledge, action and, therefore, what change might be possible, it is important to stress where people have identified scope for action beyond or in between such spaces. Such 'insurgent planning' (Miraftab, 2009) has frequently been identified in the wake of wider social movements, whether in the global south or in relation to struggles for indigenous or immigrant rights. There is also a current of revisionist planning theory and history that seeks to highlight the important but frequently informal role that women have played in relation to struggles to mitigate the problems of the industrial city (Sandercock, 2003; Greed, 1994). In the contemporary moment an important development is represented by Sweet's (2014) conception of 'kitchen table planning', whereby she seeks to include within planning practices the activities of Latina women in the US who are resisting the anti-immigrant city from their own kitchen tables. In relation to this thesis such work is vital in highlighting just what grassroots driven planning might involve, and also, given our engagement with a formal community development initiative, in demonstrating why one might want to maintain a critical sensibility as such initiatives seek to structure the open discursive space of community development practice in some ways rather than others.

To draw these strands together, this section of the literature review has looked to highlight just what is thrown up into the air when practitioners – whether academics, planners or community development workers – seek to engage in grassroots contexts. Each experience is different, with a different set of baggage, constraints and desired outcomes, but there are striking ways in which the experiences parallel one another. Again, in line with Campbell's (2012a) argument, the experience of engaging outside of the office brings a degree of clarity, and over the course of the thesis the work I have done will throw a clarifying light onto the debates that are being left relatively open here. Ultimately, this will allow me to speak back to them. Now, however, I will turn to the final body of literature I will examine during this literature review, on memory, hope and despair. This is

necessary in order to think about just what might be at stake when people are encouraged to think about the future. Given the desire of this thesis to question who might be a planning practitioner this is important, because just as academics or community development professionals bring their knowledge, understanding and other baggage to bear on situations so do grassroots actors, and it is necessary to have – at least provisionally – a set of concepts for understanding what this might be and what it might mean.

1.1.10 Memory, Hope and Despair

Given that, as has been suggested thus far, storytelling is inherently temporal and interpretative then it should not be surprising that we can see it as being intimately related to memory, hope and despair, which are interrelated orientations to the past and to the future. Similarly, planning is about how we understand the past and present, and how we mediate these understandings to propose an orientation towards the future. The word mediate is important here, because whilst both storytelling and planning could be understood to be fundamentally hopeful activities – the only truly despairing or pessimistic position being not to plan or to leave the story untold – hope and despair are not absolutes. Just as it would be possible to argue that much of the poverty of expectation in contemporary planning (Ellis and Henderson, 2016) is a response to the dashed hopes and unfulfilled promises of the past so too we can story ourselves into inertia and pessimism. The goal of this section, then, is to expand on these themes and issues, and demonstrate their relevance to the project, especially in relation to the foregoing discussion of theories of change and action. It will begin with the relationship between story and memory, hope and despair in the lives and understandings of individuals before turning to the role that collective memory plays in understandings of place. From here it will turn to planning, endeavouring to unpick some of the factors and issues that might emerge when people come together to think about the future of their place.

So far, this thesis has spent significant time considering story, its place within the broad field we could call social research and its relationship with planning. It has alluded to some of the foundations underpinning the variety of interest in story, which frequently begins from the contention, so obvious it might seem unnecessary to mention, that human beings are storytelling animals and that telling stories is

central to how human beings understand the world and their place in it. Turning to the consideration of memory allows us to take this a little further. In the first instance I would like to note Kerby's (1991) work on the relationship between narrative and selfhood, which is in the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions and draws significantly on the work of Ricoeur. This sees selfhood as emanating from the stories we tell about ourselves, which are not only attempts at developing a structured and coherent self-identity but also attempts to understand and interpret the world:

> …much of our self-narrating is a matter of becoming conscious of the narratives that we already live with and in – for example, our roles in the family and in the broader socio-political arena. (Kerby, 1991, p. 6)

This is incredibly important in relation to memory: 'self-narration is – and this needs stressing – an interpretive activity and not a simple mirroring of the past' (p. 7). Here we can find a great impetus for this project, the extent to which story represents an opportunity for the residents of places to engage with the interpretive work of planning and social research, a topic that will be elaborated over the next two chapters. What we also find are people born into the middle of an ongoing story, the meaning of which is always being reinterpreted, reconfigured and contested. As such, and whilst his focus is on the individual, Kerby acknowledges that these processes and this temporality inevitably have a social dimension, and it is this that I will turn to now as I discuss the important implications for social or collective stories in how we conceive of the relationship between memory and place.

Doreen Massey (1995) has suggested that time is as important a component of understanding places as space: 'the identity of places is very much bound up with the *histories* which are told of them, *how* those histories are told, and which history turns out to be dominant (p. 186).' What this theorisation draws attention to is the political nature of places and one aspect of attempts to define what particular places mean, namely the organisation or deployment of partial and particular histories. History and memory are intimately related, and numerous studies have taken place documenting both how memory can be manipulated in attempts to constitute place and how the place based historicising of history's victors – through 'state capitols, museums, and public monuments' (Cresswell, 2015, p. 122) – can be and has been contested (see e.g.: Maddern, 2008; Hoskins, 2007; Finnegan, 1998). In relation to

how we can seek to respond to the political work done when individual memories coalesce or are manipulated towards a particular end, Cresswell has suggested that at the least, the materiality of place might act as a guard against 'the vagaries of mental processes' (Cresswell, 2015, p. 120), whilst Massey has advocated a potentially liberating path between essentialism on the one hand and unfettered relativism on the other, which recognises multiple histories at the same time as the fact that no one of these will be able to seal up a place once and for all (1995, p. 191).

If planning looks to engage deeply with the question of how politics plays out in places, then, it should not only make the debate about memory and place important to what it does, it should also have much of import to add to that debate. Sandercock (2003) highlights how the modernist planning tradition sought to bracket out certain groups and places and people – women, immigrants, gays and lesbians – writing history or remembering in such a way as to support its mission of reason, order and control. Her recovery or remembering of these is a conscious attempt at contestation analogous to those mentioned above, and in her foregrounding of story for a re-imagined planning practice – one adequate for the diverse city of the 21st century, *cosmopolis* – she marks the importance of making space for diverse memories, as repositories of local knowledge. Baum (1999) agrees that memory is a repository of knowledge, highlighting how communities' knowledge, encapsulated in memory, can see them resisting planning. Yet, and in contrast to Sandercock, he highlights how this is frequently problematic, seeing communities nostalgically idealising an imagined golden-age. His response draws heavily on psychoanalysis, advocating for a planning practice that is attuned to and adept at mediating memory, remembering some things and, crucially, forgetting others, in order to productively and healthily move towards and into the future. This psychoanalytic approach to thinking about cities, as repositories of memories and emotions has been taken up elsewhere, notably by Pile (2002) who has used the figure of the ghost to show how individuals and communities can be haunted by aspects of their past, but also, in relation to Freud's work on grieving and the distinction between mourning and melancholia, how a healthy collective grieving process – again in relation to navigating what to remember and to forget – might make room for the return of the living.

There have been interesting examples of empirical work in these areas. Fenster and Misgav (2014), for example, have explored them through 'memory work', with local residents in the context of a participatory planning initiative in Israel, and their findings are interesting in relation to this project. Notably, they could not find any correlation between how the past was remembered and orientations to the future, and in line with Baum they highlight nostalgia – negative perspectives on the present together with positive memories of the past that fuel a desire to recover it – as a key, although not universal, motivator. Prominent achievements of such work are identified as being the development of a much richer understanding of place – moving far beyond professional understandings of 'the site' (Beauregard, 2005) – and also the transformative and empowering outcomes for those involved. In relation to the second point, however, they highlight the important role of professional mediation, the relative difficulty of involving residents and the consequent questions around just how 'collective' the process is. This is not to downplay the achievements of such work but to highlight that there is a strong sense in which what is playing out in such situations is politics at an especially small scale, an important insight for this project.

Baum's work continues to be instructive here, as he highlights costs that attend the benefits of consensus (1994), and finds a role for planning by looking to the future and the 'organization of hope' (1997). In this second work Baum develops an understanding of hope in relation to community, suggesting that the impulse to act together towards constituting and realising a meaningful vision of the future relies on the creation of shared understandings of the past. He takes these conceptions from Bellah et al (1985), talking about past-oriented 'communities of memory', which can re-orient towards the future as 'communities of hope' (Baum, 1997, p. 266). Through contrasting case studies, he charts how communities can struggle to constitute identities, navigating geography, class, ethnicity and religion to create that 'something bigger' (p. 272) with which people identify strongly enough to make the project of future oriented action both meaningful and worthwhile. He also highlights the role that shared experience must play in this process, intersecting and interacting with abstract relational categories in constituting communities (p. 273).

These insights around planning's capacity to inspire hope relate closely to utopianism, a tradition that has always been intertwined with planning. Levitas (2000) suggests that an engagement with utopia unearths three possibilities: it allows us to articulate what is missing from society as it is; it allows us to think about what kind of society might be possible; and, finally, it allows us to do this in conversation with others (p. 26). Further to this she suggests that an engagement with utopian thinking might serve three functions: compensation, critique and change (p. 28). Speaking more firmly from within the planning academy Friedmann (2011) is broadly in agreement: 'utopian thinking is an ongoing, time-binding discourse intended to inform our striving. It is no more than this, but also nothing less' (pp. 158-9). Whilst he neglects the compensatory function highlighted by Levitas, Friedmann does identify two utopian moments, critique and constructive vision (p. 147). Between these various understandings we can begin to gain a sense of utopia as a transformative process:

> Its claim to being important rather than a matter of esoteric fascination and charm, is its capacity to inspire the pursuit of a world transformed, to embody hope rather than simply desire. (Levitas, 2000, p. 28)

What we are talking about then is hope as the vital stepping-stone between dreaming, especially understood as an existential feeling that something is lacking, and the political action that seeks to do something about this. Looking back to Baum's (1999) work on remembering and forgetting and Fenster and Misgav's (2014) work on participatory planning sheds light on this, giving us a sense of both what might undermine projects of hope and how precarious they can be, especially in relation to the micro-politics of participation, but also just how productive and transformative they might be if those involved can keep the wheels turning.

These various insights raise some important questions for this project. Where do our desires and by extension our utopian visions come from? Or, a different route to the same question, what is the nature of our critique and where does that come from? We have already addressed through the course of this literature review some approaches to the more political iteration of these questions, of how we deal with the desires of others and their possibly conflicting visions of a *good* future, especially in relation to the experience of planning. This has also served to begin to justify and

clarify the more explicitly political concern of this thesis, around how communities for change can be built and, in particular, what role story might play in such processes. That role for story is at the heart of this thesis, which interrogates what I referred to in the introduction as the promise of story.

1.1.11 Conclusion

As this chapter concludes we have moved a long way from that promise, which was seen to stem from the pervasiveness of story and the key role it has been identified as playing in the sense making and understanding of all people. Over the course of this chapter we have identified how this has been brought to bear on planning in a variety of ways, principally with reference to the work of Sandercock (2003), Throgmorton (1996) and Forester (1993a), and through engagement with van Hulst's (2012) distinction between story as a model *of* and a model *for* planning. Whilst none of this work presents story as a magic bullet it does all suggest that story is valuable and might be made more so, whilst questions remain over just where the limits of its potential lie. In order to really answer these questions, I would suggest, it is important to go further than previous theorists have done. To this end I have looked to make a case for the theoretical necessity of employing and investigating story together with conceptual tools that allow us to make sense of the political nature of storytelling, and have set out why the work of Laclau and Mouffe will be helpful in this regard. I have also made a case for employing this innovative approach at the grassroots level, at the interface of planning and community development.

To this end, then, part of the role of this thesis is to conduct empirical research that contributes to understanding just how far story's role might be pushed in the direction of facilitating democratic engagement in planning, particularly in grassroots contexts. This chapter has served to justify and clarify that project, situating it within debates about story, people and place both within planning and the academy more widely. Over the next two chapters, which offer a conceptual framework and methodology, that justification and clarification will be developed further, allowing me to propose an approach to answering a set of research questions on the relationship between story and planning, and what potential this relationship has for those looking to realise more inclusive and democratic planning practices.

1.2 – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has set out the emergence of interest in narrative and story in both planning and the social sciences more broadly; it has introduced the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001), which not only informs the ontological understanding of the thesis but also represents a key component of its analytical toolbox; in light of this it has demonstrated the concomitant analytical potential of story and begun to demonstrate how and why it will be used in tandem; and it has also introduced other literatures that are important to this project. This chapter builds on this work by setting out a conceptual framework for the thesis.

This conceptual frame is in some senses straightforward and much of the groundwork for it has already been done in the literature review chapter. It is possible to say this because of the two big concepts that run through it: storytelling and the work of Laclau and Mouffe. There are, of course, other concepts at play – planning and participation are two – these are no less important but whilst they have influenced what I have done and where I have done it they are not central to the analytical process in the way that storytelling and Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical insights are. As there is little to be gained from re-covering ground already covered in the literature review, the central role of this chapter is to explain: i) what is to be gained from putting storytelling and post-structural political theory to use in the same project, indeed, why I believe that this is essential to the thesis; ii) from here, how the two concepts relate to and inform one another; and iii) how they are synthesised into an analytical approach, which relies not so much on a seamless synthesis of the two concepts with one another, as on their employment in tandem as part of an overarching, analytical reading practice. As the discussion in the literature review makes clear, the ontology provided by Laclau and Mouffe enables this reading practice to include not only the textual but also behavioural and material aspects of the social (see pp. 38-9). In setting this approach out here I will be able to explain not only how it influences the analysis but also how it is reflected in the methods, which will be addressed in the next chapter, and then how it finds

expression in the format of the rest of the thesis, particularly in the analytical chapters that constitute Part Three.

What the chapter achieves, then, is clarification of the lenses that I brought to bear on my research location during my fieldwork, offering a framework for how I will begin to understand, analyse and interpret the data that is represented in this thesis. This should also provide a solid foundation on which the following chapter on methodology – centred on participatory action research – will rest. Uniting these diverse conceptual components is what could be termed a democratic impulse, or more specifically a participatory democratic impulse. I understand this to be a necessary normative response to realising greater social justice in the contemporary context of western capitalist democracies broadly and the United Kingdom more specifically, and a final important function of this chapter and the next is to coherently explain the case for this understanding.

1.2.2 What is being gained

A good way to begin to explain the potential inherent in my approach, and its mechanics, is to tackle a question that could be asked of it. *If narrative is about structure, closure, naturalisation and fundamental human needs is it not at odds with the ontology set out above, which seeks to foreground contingency, openness and, indeed, highlights the impossibility of suture?* I would argue that it is not. Our discussion of narrative has demonstrated how it is always contestable, a representation and not the thing itself; and In Laclau and Mouffe's terms, we can see similarly how the real always exceeds any attempt to define and fix it (see pp. 39-40). What both theoretical pillars provide us with are modes for understanding the whole, its parts – or the particular and its contexts – how they are related at a particular moment, why, and what scope there is for re-imaginings, reframings and change. As we look towards this project, then, I would suggest that story and narrative have much in common with how the workings of discourses are theorised. Indeed, Laclau and Mouffe argue forcefully against their theorisation being seen as a descent into or justification for total relativism and the anarchic free-play of meanings (see discussion of nodal points above, pp. 39-40; and Howarth, 2000, pp. 114-20), for whilst total or absolute closure is impossible a striving towards this is inevitable. It is also political and they are happy to understand their own arguments in these terms.

The same can be said of individuals and communities as they strive to tell stories that make sense of where they find themselves, where they believe they have come from and give them some idea of where they want to go.

At the same time as having much in common, however, the two conceptual arms of this framework differ in important ways that create insight that is vital for the success of the project. The literature review has introduced this, demonstrating the roots of Laclau and Mouffe's work in political economy and in what we might term post-Marxist or post-structural political and social theory, and storytelling's diverse roots across a host of disciplines, united perhaps by what we could interpret as a loose humanism, sympathetic without necessarily being naively optimistic. We have also seen how these traditions have found expression in planning, and it is in speaking to these bodies of thought that we can most clearly see how the differences between the conceptual lenses are most fruitful and necessary. This is because the research is oriented towards *doing* something alongside residents in my research location *and* endeavouring to inform attempts to more successfully do things in the future. Consequently, it is not enough to do a piece of research that has utilised storytelling and to claim that it has developed understanding of how narrative functions in social life or how it helps to constitute places and people's relationships with them.

Whilst on the one hand this is another justification for flexibility in relation to definition and focus around storytelling, on the other it makes it necessary to employ the second lens, provided by Laclau and Mouffe, that does not allow storytelling to declare its own success on its own terms. It is the deployment of the two frames together that makes it possible to determine to what extent story might be a useful tool for people in trying to intervene or make change in how places develop. What is more, the approach allows me to consider how meta-discursive constructs find expression at the individual level in a sedimented common sense. The story workshop I have designed to explore this, which will be introduced in greater detail in the next chapter, allows us to consider just how difficult it might be to begin to loosen this by way of making change possible, and speaks back directly to both storytelling and Laclau and Mouffe. To clarify, a political understanding is required to assess and understand this potential and its limits. Furthermore, the framework

provides this *in both directions*, meaning that the interrogation of story provided by Laclau and Mouffe also works in reverse, with story acting to inhibit simplistic reification of Laclau and Mouffe's analytical categories. What we enable through this framework, then, is a dialogue between two complementary conceptual lenses that provides critical insight on the research questions.

Further justification for this approach is provided when we situate it not only within the field of planning, but in relation to what now constitutes a very large body of work in the social sciences around narrative and story. Indeed, I would suggest that the approach constitutes an important theoretical and methodological step forward in this respect. The previous chapter touched on this as it sought to review the literature around the topic, it noted how interest in narrative in the social sciences initially tended to focus on the structural. As interest has grown and diversified so too has the range of analytical approaches adopted by social researchers (see e.g.: Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 1993). This accepted, the underlying impetuses of social research and the tradition of academic writing in the social sciences persists. This can bequeath, even to those qualitatively focussed researchers interested in narrative, an impulse to adhere to formulaic approaches that fetishise method. One could argue that it is this tendency of the field as a whole that feeds a situation whereby scholars eventually begin to express frustrations about the proliferation of apparently shallow and unreflective work: 'Look, Ma, there's a narrative!' (Czarniawska, 2004; Wagenaar, 2011). And yet, whilst the social scientists' unrelenting search for the definitive definition and the all-encompassing typology continues, one cannot help but feel that in relation to narrative there is frequently something missing. It is for this reason that I have foregrounded a relatively flexible understanding of narrative from literary studies in this project *and* determined to utilise it alongside insights provided by Laclau and Mouffe. This is partly because a driving force behind this project is a desire to inject some of 'life's juices' back into the 'dry as dust' (Sandercock, 2003) policy language of both planning and social research, and also because it allows a measure of flexibility in the face of a case study that was, on account of its participatory ethic, more than typically unpredictable. Thus far this thesis has demonstrated how such an approach is no less rigourous theoretically; in what comes next I will turn to demonstrating what implications this

has for my analytical approach. It is also worth highlighting that this apparent separation of theory and practice is an artificial one rendered necessary by the structure of a PhD thesis.

Taken together, then, narrative theory and discourse theory can work very productively: discourse theory reminds us always to look for the political in narratives of social life, to be wary of its rhetorical power; whilst substituting story for discourse when thinking about the political activity of people at very small scales is a way of demonstrating that discourse theory need not be an exercise in grand abstraction, drawing attention to how ordinary folk are implicated in the making and remaking of their social worlds. Furthermore, the language of story is accessible to everyone, its utilisation could potentially enfranchise people in grassroots contexts to interrogate the understandings and knowledge of the powerful on their own terms, and as such endeavours to deepen democracy and inclusion, both within the academy and society more widely. Yet in order to make this possible it is necessary to have a way of theorising power and the politics of knowledge, in order for us to assess the extent to which people have or have not been enfranchised and why, the theory of Laclau and Mouffe make it possible to do this in relation to both stories and their material implications. What I have done and how will be covered in greater depth in the next chapter, which deals with methodological questions and will also give a clearer idea of how theory and practice are understood as two faces of the same coin. First, however, I need to outline the structuring vehicle that carries both storytelling and Laclau and Mouffe, the concept of reading.

1.2.3 The frame: reading practices

Above we have clarified the relationship between storytelling and the work of Laclau and Mouffe, building on the literature review to set out ways in which they complement and challenge one another. It is now important to set out how they are able to be operationalised together within this project. My means of doing this is to utilise an approach to developing analytical understanding that is more common to cultural studies (see Turner, 1990; Hall, 2013; Gledhill & Ball 2013), this is to frame my work in terms of a number of reading practices, which not only inform my analytical approach but provide the structure that allows me to use the two conceptual categories in tandem as part of a unified approach. As highlighted above

the world that this project understood itself to be researching is characterised by being meaningful. Reading practices, then, are approaches to understanding those meanings – where they come from and how they are created – that account for themselves as fully and honestly as possible whilst acknowledging the impossibility of doing so exhaustively (Johnson et al., 2004). In relation to this project reading provides the frame that incorporates storytelling and Laclau and Mouffe, allowing me to employ them in tandem, learning from where they overlap and where they are in conflict – set out above – in order to develop understanding of the research location in particular, the topics that drive my research questions, and to speak back to other research in the area.

It is, however, more than a frame. On the one hand, it represents a means of standing firmly at the intersection of the social sciences and the arts and humanities, which recognises that planning is a cultural practice that incorporates some measure of 'science' and also of politics. More importantly, on the other, it foregrounds the fact that those meanings do not emerge from the mind of a researcher in isolation but are the result of interaction with others. This is especially the case in relation to a project that, as we will see in the next chapter, has involved a variety of work in the ethnographic tradition – participant observation, interviewing – and also participatory work, during resident-led planning processes and the story workshop conducted with participants. The analysis – the *reading* – begins here, collaboratively and frequently intuitively, in what we understand as the field, before we start to isolate data or texts. How the texts that I both created and read as part of this project were produced, then, is a vitally important part of the story. The following chapter on methodology will address the mechanics of this, here I will address what it means to *read* in relation to the conceptual approach I have begun to develop above.

1.2.4 Reading three ways

In most situations people read without consciously accounting for how they are doing it. On reflection, however, anyone who has read a novel, a utility bill, a newspaper or any other text will know that we come to read different things in different ways, unthinkingly employing different strategies depending on what we think we are reading and why. Reading, then, is an interpretive activity. Here I will endeavour to make my reading practice clearer, by presenting three different lenses for reading

that I have brought to bear on this project's various texts: *story and narrative*; *the political*; and *for tomorrow*. These are all related to the conceptual discussion and grounding above. The three lenses offer distinct insights that are frequently overlapping, the complex relationship between them becoming apparent by degrees as they are presented. Ultimately, they are synthesised in this document – the PhD thesis – and after expanding on each mode of reading I shall conclude by turning to this process, explaining how I understand it and what questions it raises. This tripartite reading practice is fostered and finds expression in the structure of the thesis and particularly in the three analytical chapters in Part Three, I will expand on this again below, in the introduction to Part Three, and it will inform the conclusions, but it is important to introduce the fact here in order to clarify the analytical process and the process of synthesising diverse insights into a coherent approach.

1.2.4.1 Reading for story and narrative

In a project such as this, which foregrounds the concepts of narrative and story, it is inevitable that I have spent significant time looking for and trying to understand the variety of narratives that emerge from and are told about my research location. Indeed, I have also been involved in the telling of some of these stories, and have become a character in others. The previous chapter introduced some of the key characteristics that we can use to help identify and define story and narrative, it also set out some of the important things that stories do implicitly, and what they can be mobilised to achieve, both for individuals and communities. I have built on this by elaborating a social ontology that I believe casts these arguments in a new light, but also by incorporating the previous chapter's discussion of the rhetoric of narrative. This alerts us to some of the ways that authors and tellers seek to mobilise the power of storytelling. If we reintroduce Laclau and Mouffe's theorisations here we find that across both concepts we have a number of important tools for increasing the strength of our reading, whilst also helping to explain why we must tread carefully, maintaining a certain caution or scepticism about the narratives and stories we both experience and expound.

1.2.4.2 Reading for the political

In reading for the political I am seeking to bring the insights offered by Laclau and Mouffe to bear on the variety of data represented in this thesis. As such this section

could equally be called reading for discourse or reading for power. In light of the tools they have given us, which allow us to understand structuring logics in a fundamentally open social sphere, there are significant overlaps with how we read for story and narrative. Reading for the political, then, involves paying keen attention to where people perceive conflict and how they look to resolve this; where they apportion agency, responsibility and blame; what they see as natural and abhorrent; where they posit borders between the public and the private, the local, the national and the global; and how they relate themselves and others to a variety of actors at a variety of scales.

1.2.4.3 Reading for tomorrow

Reading for tomorrow most straightforwardly relates to planning, an activity central to this project. In a sense this could be understood as reading for a topic, looking for the future in the stories people tell of themselves and the places with which they are engaged. This can be expected, even encouraged to appear in the stories I encounter as my participants are involved in or situated in a direct relation to an instance of planning activity. Reading for tomorrow is also about more than this, however, for as the previous chapter set out it can be argued that planning activity is inherently storied, because story – the realm of beginnings, middles and ends – is one of the fundamental ways that human beings seek to make sense of time. What is more, reading for tomorrow overlaps with reading for the political, because the future people believe is likely, desirable or impossible is intimately related to where they conceive of themselves in a wider social context and what control they believe they and others have or might seek to gain over their own lives.

1.2.5 Synthesising readings: the story of the thesis

The final result of the insights garnered by my reading practice are synthesised in this thesis. How I have chosen to prioritise and present the information is driven by the research problematic, the questions that arose from this, the contexts in which I addressed them, the people I engaged with, and the prior understanding that I brought to bear on all of these elements. The conceptual framework I have presented and the analytical approach it informs is reflected not only in the individual chapters of the thesis and the information and insights they contain but also in the empirical work that makes the thesis possible, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter on

methodology, and in the thesis' structure. This structure is particularly evident in three analytical chapters that make up Part Three of the thesis, which mirror the three reading practices set out here, helping to demonstrate how the conceptual framework runs through the work and makes its insights first possible and second credible.

What is presented here is wholly entangled in the same discursive and storied webs as the world it seeks to represent, and as such it could be read and analysed in exactly the same ways. In a sense this understanding is true to the project's normative and political project of strengthening and deepening democracy. There is a difficulty, however, in relation to my sole authorship of this: it might be just one account among many possible ones, but it is the only one the reader will get. The story workshop that will be detailed in the following chapter is one response to this, adding an iterative loop to the research process that allowed participants to speak back to the project. Whilst this is key in demonstrating to what extent I have realised a participatory practice a tension remains – it could not be otherwise – and once again I will endeavour to put it to good use.

1.2.6 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to outline the conceptual framework that guides and structures the work I have undertaken. This rests on the thesis' ontological foundation – albeit an antifoundational one – in the work of Laclau and Mouffe, which was outlined in the previous chapter. Their discourse theory begins to provide one way of thinking about the social and of beginning to understand the political nature of the planning activity that this project has followed. Of equal importance is how this integrates with the foregoing discussion of and principal interest in story, of how the differences and similarities between the two conceptual pillars will be put to good use. This was particularly important around how narrative has tended to be framed and analysed in the social sciences, which makes it difficult to comment meaningfully on story's potential as a driver of change. In contrast I have endeavoured to present narrative as a mode for doing engaged research, not just as an analytical lens. This is made possible conceptually through my utilisation of an overarching structure provided by the concept of reading practices, which allows me to utilise the two bodies of theoretical work in tandem and represents my approach

to analysis in what follows. These ideas will be clarified next, as I set out the methodological approach of the project, which is founded in participatory action research.

1.3 – METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis will describe the methodological approach I adopted towards the research: what I did and why. This will involve building on the previous chapters, which have situated the research within the field and explained the conceptual understanding that underpins it.

The chapter will begin by setting out the key principles that inform the research, centring on a discussion of participatory action research – PAR – less as method and more, as Reason and Bradbury would have it, 'as an orientation to inquiry' (2008, p. 1). It will move on to discuss the justification for conducting a single case study before setting out that case – Westfield, a housing estate on the south-eastern periphery of Sheffield, South Yorkshire – its particularities and the process of gaining consent to conduct it. Next it will turn to the approach taken to being in the field, what types of data were collected and how, before clarifying the approach taken to analysing that data. The chapter closes by turning to considerations around ethics and my positionality.

1.3.2 Key principles: two levels of analysis

From the outset this research was conceived as having more than one level of analysis. The decision to understand the research in this way was a means of reconciling two imperatives. The first was the acknowledgment of a normative or ethical imperative to involve participants in the research, to conduct research that benefitted them as well as me, and as such sought both to avoid being extractive and to respond to the imbalances of power and resources that characterise post-industrial societies. This led to an interest in PAR and similar approaches, and a desire to incorporate insights from this broad approach to social inquiry into the research design. The second imperative, however, was the structural fact of a PhD project. This meant that there were certain things I had to do, that I had to do these within a 3 to 4-year period, and at the end of this period I had to have completed a sole-authored thesis that represented a contribution to knowledge and could be defended in an examination. Why these different imperatives necessitate two levels

of analysis will become clear as I turn now to set out my understanding of participatory action research and how this relates to the wider research project.

1.3.3 Participatory action research

To demonstrate why PAR appeared to represent a fruitful way of approaching research questions being asked around the topic – *whether and how the relationship between storytelling and planning could be exploited towards realising greater inclusion and democracy* – it is first necessary to describe what PAR is. This is not a straightforward task, however, as McIntyre (2008) acknowledges in highlighting the myriad roots of PAR, in different locations, at different times, and across a range of disciplines. Whilst this breadth and depth of PAR practice might initially appear overwhelming or confusing it is also productive in relation to the mutual learning that represents one of PAR's driving impulses, and from it McIntyre is able to identify four underlying principles:

> (a) a collective commitment to investigate an issue or problem, (b) a desire to engage in self- and collective reflection to gain clarity about the issue under investigation, (c) a joint decision to engage in individual and/or collective action that leads to a useful solution that benefits the people involved, and (d) the building of alliances between researchers and participants in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of the research process. (2008, p. 1)

Other scholars working in PAR have similarly sought to identify its chief preoccupations, with Figure 1 representing Reason and Bradbury's (2008) five characteristics of PAR. The overlap between these broad definitions begins to give us a clearer idea of PAR's principal interests: realising a strong relationship between theory and practice that responds to issues on the ground in an inclusive and participatory way, which works towards creating better outcomes for individuals and/or their communities.

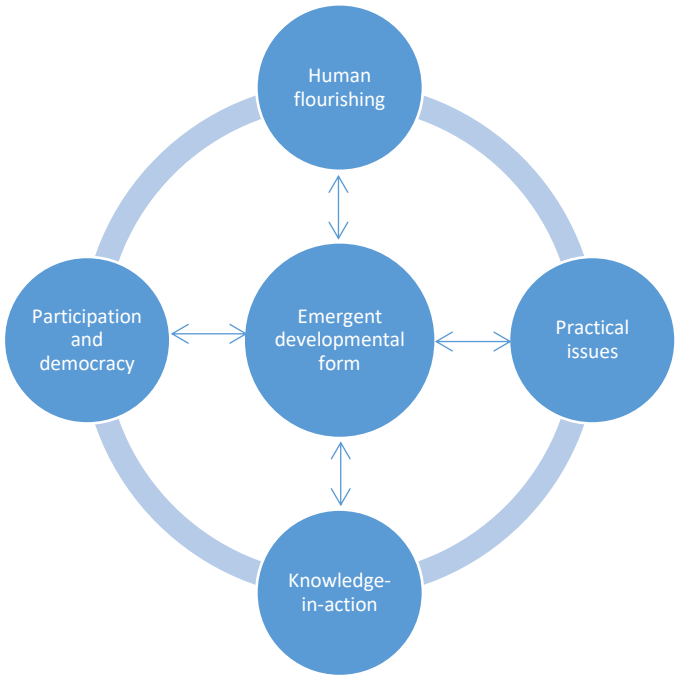

Figure 1: Characteristics of action research (from Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 5)

It is possible to see how this fits with this project in light of the preceding chapters, which set out a research problematic around storytelling's relationship with planning, discussed literature related to this, and set out a conceptual understanding of the social and how knowledge is produced within it. Indeed, story has been identified as central to PAR:

> The transformative process begins in the stories people tell about their everyday lives. Freire's (1972) comment on naming the world in order to change it gives us a clue that stories of everyday life not only transmit culture and maintain the status quo, but by telling our stories, retelling them, then rewriting them we find we can create counternarratives that steer a course to transformation. (Ledwith and Springett, 2010, p. 103)

This perceived capacity for story to make change is also mirrored in the literature on narrative research:

> Narrative research […] converges across its differences, not so much in political interests, but in the possibility of having micropolitical effects through the local knowledges that it produces. These knowledges may be particular, but they can enter into dialogue with each other and produce […] larger and more general, though still situated, narrative knowledges. (Andrews, Squire and Tamboukou, 2008, p. 12)

In bringing these understandings together, then, the central interest of this project, as with PAR, is in realising and testing theoretical understanding through practice, in furthering inclusion and democracy, and in doing this towards improving outcomes

in grassroots contexts. This relies to a large extent on a historical understanding of both planning and social scientific research, which sees them to have traditionally and problematically operated in top down, expert driven ways (Sandercock, 2003; Throgmorton, 1996). Both this project and PAR seek to respond to this through adopting a specific normative stance:

> Action research challenges much received wisdom in both academia and among social change and development practitioners, not least because it is a practice of participation, engaging those who might otherwise be subjects of research or recipients of interventions to a greater or less extent as inquiring co-researchers. Action research does not start from a desire of changing others 'out there', although it may eventually have that result, rather it starts from an orientation of change *with* others. (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 1)

The aim, then, was to situate the research within an ongoing, grassroots led planning initiative, where people were endeavouring to influence how the place where they lived changed and developed, and as far as possible to put this PhD research project at the service of their efforts. We can see at this point how a PAR project is a better fit here than, for instance, endeavouring to undertake a 'narrative analysis' (see e.g.: Czarniawska, 2004; Wagenaar, 2012), because I am less interested in narrative as analytical method and more interested in exploring what people can do with story, in light of the potential identified in the literature discussed above. Working in this spirit, however, involves ceding at least some control over a research project, meaning that how the project unfolded, how it related to the wider work of the participants, and how they were involved with it, involved ongoing negotiation and discussion that could not wholly be established or even comprehensively planned from the outset. I turn to how this unfolded in this instance below, but will first set out how, given the multiple contingencies and unknowns at the beginning, I intended to ensure that it constituted a viable PhD project.

1.3.3.1 PAR within a PhD project

Looking to the principles and contingencies mentioned above, and the way that PAR necessitates the ceding of some control over a research project, several considerations would undoubtedly exercise any PhD researcher who had secured a place in an academic department to research a certain topic and is interested in PAR and related approaches: *What if participants are not interested in this topic? Or if they are not interested in conducting 'research' full stop? Or they say they are at the*

beginning and then they change their minds? What if finding a group of interested people and building the necessary relationships takes too long? How do I square such a project with a sole authored thesis? Whilst it is important to acknowledge that these anxieties are perhaps similar to those that plague PhD researchers regardless of their topic and methodological approach, within a PAR project it is reasonable to suggest that they are amplified.

By way of encouraging research students Klocker (2012) has highlighted a number of ways in which both PAR and the academy are more nuanced and flexible than much of the literature suggests they are. That this might be the case is heartening for this thesis, but I have nevertheless chosen to avoid straightforwardly claiming to have undertaken a PAR project. Beyond the practical constraints already mentioned there is a sense in which the focus of the thesis is underpinned by questions that are very much of the academy, in particular a range of theoretical insights around story and its relationship with planning. Whilst I believe insights gained from participatory action can speak directly to this topic, and that this participatory action can still benefit those who have engaged with it and their communities, the questions I ask around it, in seeking to speak back to a largely academic literature, are in practice frequently tangential to the interests and concerns of those participants, even if further down the line they could become useful to people in similar situations. It is for this reason, then, that whilst I have oriented much of the work around participation – with the case itself taking place within the context of a participatory community-university engagement – there are elements of the work that are not participatory, with the overarching research questions sitting at one remove from the participatory process.

Whilst I hope this chapter has thus far demonstrated the proximity of the research problematic to practical action, then, in the context of this thesis they are ultimately about interpretation and meaning, and it is here that what I have conceived as a second analytical layer is situated, offering an interpretive analysis of a reality understood to be socially constructed:

> Interpretive methods are based on the presupposition that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations. In this world there are no “brute data” whose meaning is beyond dispute. […] it is not possible for an analyst to stand outside of the policy issue being studied,

> free of its values and meanings and of the analyst's own values, beliefs, and feelings. (Yanow, 2000, pp. 5-6)

In this extract Yanow highlights one important aspect of interpretive analysis' underlying assumptions. A second, equally important aspect being that seeking to understand 'meanings' is not simply to want to describe reality, those meanings are also seen as constituting or shaping that reality (Wagenaar, 2011). To create knowledge about the world, then, that understands why it is as it is and how it could be different, we can deploy a range of tools. These should be sensitively chosen depending on the questions we are asking and the contexts within which we are asking them. In Yanow's (2000) guide to conducting interpretive analysis in the realm of policy studies, from which I have quoted above, she goes on to describe how document analysis, interview and observation are central, to 'accessing local knowledge and identifying communities of meaning and their symbolic artefacts' (p. 31). Much of the rest of this chapter takes this as a starting point, and is devoted to describing how these methods will be utilised – in the context of a participatory project – towards answering a set of research questions around storytelling's relationship with planning.

Before moving on to the specifics of this project, however, it is important to explain why this conception makes sense. One could quite reasonably suggest that I am trying to 'have my cake and eat it', that I want to position this project as PAR without doing the hard work of really making it so. The straightforward response to such a charge, however, is *why bother*? From the end of this research project looking back I do not feel that my engagement with the ethical questions around participation in research has been anything other than honest, and I certainly do not feel that I have taken an easy path. Learning frequently happens by trying and failing – indeed, the planning academy has been urged to embrace this and learn to fail better (Campbell, 2012b) – and the difficulty of realising the ideals of participatory action have been acknowledged as key to the process of doing research in this area (McIntyre, 2008). As such, and in line with Reason and Bradbury's suggestion that PAR, 'is not so much a *methodology* as an *orientation to inquiry*' (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p. 1), criticising the project for failing to live up to a pure participatory ideal is to misunderstand what the process involves. Rather, and

beyond some of the practical constraints of the PhD process mentioned above, the conception of two levels of analysis makes sense because the understanding underpinning both aspects of the research rests on a commitment to methodological pluralism, which is intimately related to the conception of multiple, socially-constructed knowledges about the social world.

1.3.4 Case study research

As I now turn towards my case study it is important to explain the motivation for conceiving of it as such. In his defence of case study approaches Flyvbjerg (2006) succinctly captures what they can add to social scientific research:

> The advantage of large samples is breadth, whereas their problem is one of depth. For the case study, the situation is the reverse. Both approaches are necessary for a sound development of social science. (p. 241)

This quotation speaks directly to the motivations for understanding the research of this thesis as case study research. The desire was to reach a deep and nuanced understanding of how the research topic and questions play out in a particular instance. The point of doing this is not principally to generate explanatory or predictive theory but to contribute to a wider discussion, producing knowledge that develops our understanding and is of interest and use to both the researcher and to others. Furthermore, this in-depth qualitative approach is not adopted because it is understood to be superior to other approaches – these can be perfectly legitimate when the questions, topics and aims of researchers are taken into account – but because it made the most sense in this instance. Further justification here relates to a different rendering of the breadth/depth matrix Flyvbjerg alludes to, whereby this inherently interdisciplinary project and its broad conceptual roots require a deep case in order to say something of interest. Not least because, due to finite funding and by extension finite time constraints, it would have proved impossible to have engaged with further contexts in anywhere near the same depth.

The phrasing in the previous paragraph, which suggests a ‘decision’ to understand this research as an example of a case study is worthy of some further clarification. In a fundamental sense it speaks back to the understanding of the social described in the previous chapter, which set out a conceptual framework for this thesis, in so far as this document represents an attempt to relay and therefore to

discursively fix a certain number of meanings about what I have done, what I understand that to mean and what implications that might have. As this is a PhD thesis this is pitched towards a rarefied community within academia for whom the concept of a case study has meaning. Yanow (2000) draws attention to the constructed, perhaps even artificial, character of seeking to do this in problematising the twin notions of 'entering the field' and 'data collection' that frequently attend policy analysis. Analysts and researchers, Yanow suggests, are already in the field, and they are not collecting data in a way that removes it from its sources and contexts (p. 27). It is important to remember this as I turn to the specifics of 'the case', for those involved do not understand themselves and the places they inhabit as a case, nor do they understand their words and actions as data, rather I have decided to constitute them as such.

1.3.5 Westfield

Sheffield is the largest city in South Yorkshire, United Kingdom, and Westfield, the neighbourhood that constitutes the focus of this thesis, is situated five miles to the south east of its city centre. Westfield is one of the 18 Mosborough 'townships' planned for in the Mosborough Masterplan (Sheffield Corporation, 1969) and built on Derbyshire farmland that had been incorporated into the city in 1967. The estate was not opened until 1974 when for the most part it began to house former residents of inner-city Sheffield, many of whom were being rehoused because of the ongoing slum-clearance programme. Much happens on and to the estate over the following 35 years – activity that will be discussed in much greater detail in the empirical chapters of this thesis – but in 2009 Westfield is identified by Sheffield City Council as an area of 'extreme multiple disadvantage' (SCC, 2009) and subsequently, in 2012, Westfield is designated one of 150 Big Local areas. Big Local is a national programme funded by the Big Lottery that sees areas receive £1 million funding each. Residents of Big Local areas are then invited to come together to identify key issues for their neighbourhood alongside a vision for their community's future, before being tasked with drafting a plan that directs the investment of their funding towards tackling the issues they have identified and realising their vision. Again, the specifics of the Big Local programme and how it has begun to play out in Westfield will be discussed in much greater detail in the empirical chapters that are to follow.

In May 2013 a community-university partnership was initiated between the Department of Urban Studies and Planning[7] at the University of Sheffield and Westfield Big Local – the Westfield Action Research Project (WARP). This project owed much to the tradition of service learning more firmly established in universities in the United States (see e.g. Reardon, 2003) and looked to introduce an engaged element to the planning curriculum at Sheffield whilst putting the university at the service of the community who – as Crookes et al. (2015) describe in greater detail alongside issues that began to emerge – were always to drive and guide activity. The initiation of WARP coincided with me starting my PhD in the late-summer of 2013 and I was involved from the start in a variety of activities related to the project. At this point the intention was not for Westfield to form the focus of my research, the principal motivation for getting involved being an interest in the project and belief that it was worthwhile, but it did also represent an opportunity to begin to think about many of the questions that attended my research in relation to a real-life context.

The decision to use Westfield as a single case for exploring my research questions was made around Christmas 2014. The extent of my previous involvement meant that I had already begun to gain an appreciation of the depth and richness of specific contextual understanding that characterises single-cases as opportunities for learning (Flyvbjerg, 2006), but which is also both constitutive of and integral to understanding the role that narrative is seen as potentially playing in realising more democratic and inclusive planning practices, as discussed in the literature review chapter of this thesis. A second strong driver of the decision was that during a period of over one year I had begun to forge good working relationships with people in Westfield, which is identified as being central to realising participatory action research in practice (McIntyre, 2008). The difficulty of starting from scratch in this area and being able to complete a PhD anywhere near on schedule had been highlighted to me in attempts I had made at exploring other potential case study areas. There were a number of facets here. Firstly, the research required me to work

[7] I refer to the *Department of Urban Studies and Planning* throughout, although prior to September 2015 the department, having nobly resisted academic prejudice and fashion, answered to the name, *Department of Town and Regional Planning*.

with a group of people engaging with planning, even in light of our broad definition there are a finite number of these and they can be difficult to identify. Secondly, my approach required significant time spent in the research location over an extended period, which essentially meant it had to be within about an hour's travel from Sheffield, further limiting the pool of potential locations. Thirdly, the participatory action research ethic sees me endeavouring to make potential resource represented by my project available to participants.

Thinking about these three considerations together, we can see clearly the potential for difficulties. For instance, I had explored opportunities and made contacts with people working in the Dearne Valley, the backbone of South Yorkshire's coalfield, and as such an area which had faced significant and well-documented challenges as the industry had declined (Turner, 2000). Whilst this contentious and strongly storied history suggested a particularly fruitful location for the project transport links are such that getting to former pit-villages, such as Goldthorpe and Thurnscoe, is relatively slow and costly, before one even begins to meet potential participants and negotiate with gate-keepers, processes themselves perhaps rendered more fragile and difficult by my relatively lowly standing and developing confidence as PhD researcher. Neighbourhood planning might have represented another potentially rich context for the research, but it has been documented that areas engaged in neighbourhood planning are frequently more affluent than average (Brookfield, 2017), perhaps limiting the scope for really interrogating story's potential for helping to plan in the face of troubled histories, and also raising questions around whether the project would really be remaining true to its normative underpinnings in where it was focussing its resource, or perhaps more pertinently whether its resource was adequate for the task neighbourhood planning represents in areas of social exclusion (Henderson and Ellis, 2013). In a sense then, it was incredibly fortuitous that Westfield was open to me as a case to explore, and had it not been the project itself may have had to be significantly modified.

In focussing on Westfield, then, I was, as per Yanow (2000), very much already in the field. This field was, to some extent, defined by Big Local and WARP, in so far as they offered definitions of what Westfield was, particularly in terms of spatial scale, but I sought to exceed this in a number of ways, particularly in bringing documentary

analysis and what I termed 'professional actors' more firmly into the orbit of the research. This fact highlights the way that social scientific research contributes to the construction of its own fields of interest. Before I turn to outlining how I understood this, and particularly the methods I used to begin to explore my research questions, I will turn to discuss an important aspect of how I was able to constitute Westfield as a 'field', through gaining the consent of Westfield Big Local partnership members for my research.

1.3.6 Gaining consent

Having made the decision to use Westfield as a case study the process of gaining consent from those residents I knew and who I worked alongside as part of WARP was important. This was perhaps a slightly unusual situation as researchers would not necessarily focus on gaining consent to work on a geographical location, given the difficulties around ascertaining who had the authority to definitively grant consent, and would instead focus on ensuring individuals consented to being directly involved. It was important for this project, however, because the relationships I had formed with residents were important to both the participatory ethos of the work and to me personally, and as such I wished to continue to be open and transparent. It was also important to endeavour to situate the research within the wider work of Westfield Big Local, demonstrating how it might be of use to this, and also to WARP, as well as demonstrating how it would in some respects be different.

The first step of the process was to broach the subject of my PhD at a Westfield Big Local meeting, which I did on 15th April 2015. It is worthwhile quoting how this was recorded in the minutes of the meeting:

> Jason would like to do part of his PHD around Westfield (Makes sense). *X* encouraged Jason to do it in the Westfield area and the group agreed when X said we would be proud for him to do it here. (Thank you Jason)

The months leading up to this meeting had been important, interesting and also, at times, difficult for the partnership, as we were approaching the submission of the first Westfield Big Local Interim Plan. I discuss this process in greater detail in the empirical chapters that follow, but it is worthwhile highlighting here that I had been heavily involved in assisting in this process and as such I could have been seen to have accumulated a certain amount of goodwill from residents, which perhaps

explains the emphatic tone of their approval and support. This more informal broaching of the subject of my research was followed shortly after by the circulation of a one-page document to partnership members letting them know more about the research, what lay behind it, what it would involve and how it might be useful to the work of Westfield Big Local. Once again this met with approval from individual partnership members and I felt emboldened to continue with the research.

There are two additional observations about this process that are illuminating for what follows, relating to a small amount of 'behind the scenes' negotiating that attended the process. Firstly, a meeting at the university that preceded my circulation of the research summary document. This was attended by Westfield's Big Local Rep, two researchers engaged by Big Local as part of an in-house evaluation project, and one member of the Westfield Big Local partnership. At this meeting I was pushed to account for my research. Nominally this was so that the in-house evaluators and I might avoid stepping on one another's toes, but the questioning was more forceful than I had anticipated. Perhaps it is understandable that Big Local should be suspicious of the involvement of an apparently quite powerful outside institution – the university – but it was at odds with the, to my mind, relatively open way we had negotiated our engagement with the partnership previously, and also hints at the informal regulating processes that, perhaps inevitably, endeavour to shape projects such as Big Local. Secondly, before I circulated the research summary document to the whole partnership I circulated it to a group of partnership members who constituted the 'management group'. As we will see in the empirical chapters of this thesis the management group came to be a source of contention within the partnership, although at this point, in a relatively nascent iteration it was perhaps less so. It is important to highlight it here, however, as an indication of the way that hierarchies inscribe themselves at even the smallest scales and into the activities of groups that ostensibly subscribe to relatively egalitarian principles, a tension that will be considered at much greater length later in the thesis.

1.3.7 Fieldwork Approach

As described above the overarching methodological impulse of my PhD research was participatory, not least because of my prior involvement, through WARP, in the place that came to constitute the case on which it focussed. I have also explained, however,

how the questions that I am asking and the constraints of a PhD project necessitated two levels of analytical work, which required the use of a variety of qualitative methods and the collection and analysis of a variety of data. Whilst not all of this could strictly be considered participatory, I would suggest that it was always action oriented. Now, then, I will turn to my approach to being in the field, setting out the various methods utilised – participant observation, qualitative interviewing, document analysis, story workshop – and the data that was collected. Towards the end of this section, especially around the innovative 'story workshop' strand of my research, I will turn to consider how I endeavoured to maintain the participatory ethos of my work – or perhaps even re-inscribe participation into it – before turning to elaborate how when taken together these methods allow me to answer the research questions.

1.3.7.1 Participant observation

> Participant observation will be defined as a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection. (Denzin, 1989 in Flick, 2006, p. 220)

This quotation gives a strong indication of why participant observation is an appropriate label for what I have done. I will elaborate on the interview and document analysis elements of the research later, here I will focus on being a participant and observing. Flick goes on, in his own words:

> The main features of the method are that you as a researcher dive headlong into the field. You will observe from a member's perspective but also influence what you observe owing to your participation. (Flick, 2006, p. 220)

The nature of how my activity involved participating has already begun to be elaborated through the course of this chapter, and before deciding to use Westfield as a case-study I had:

- attended partnership meetings
- attended training events alongside partnership members
- participated in the action research project, 'Storying Westfield', with residents
- participated in other research and engagement activities, particularly at Big Local open days held at the local school

- participated in service-type activity such as litter picks
- observed how engagement activity had begun to be incorporated into the Department of Urban Studies and Planning's curriculum
- been engaged to undertake a University of Sheffield funded report on the development of engaged learning in the department, '*Better learning through engagement? Evaluating year one of Community Planning Project*' (Slade, 2014)
- contributed to the planning and delivery of neighbourhood profiling workshops
- co-produced a neighbourhood profile with residents

Having decided to use Westfield as a focus for my research many of the on-going activities with the Westfield Big Local partnership – attending meetings and training events, service and engagement work – continued, and did so up until June 2016. The work I was involved in relating to planning and delivering the first Westfield Big Local Interim Plan was happening at the same time as I took the decision to use Westfield as a case-study, although the amount of time involved in this work meant that I was not able to set out a concrete research plan until it was completed. It was as I did this that I engaged in gaining consent from partnership members who were happy for me to bring prior activity within the orbit of the research.

It is illuminating to consider how this timeline relates to the three stages of participant observation proposed by Spradley (1980):

1. *descriptive observation*, at the beginning, serves to provide the researcher with an orientation to the field under study. It provides nonspecific descriptions and is used to grasp the complexity of the field as far as possible and to develop (at the same time) more concrete research questions and lines of vision;
2. *focused observation* narrows your perspective on those processes and problems, which are most essential for your research question;
3. *selective observation*, towards the end of data collection, is focused on finding further evidence and examples for the types of practices and processes, found in the second step. (Spradley, 1980 in Flick, 2006, pp. 220-21)

Looking back to the description of activities above I would suggest that there were three stages to my work where I gained a variety of insight analogous to that mentioned by Spradley. The *descriptive* stage corresponds to the time from my first engagement with Westfield up until I made the decision to focus my research there,

more *focused* observation could be seen to have taken place from this point on, particularly around the plan writing process, whilst I collected more *selective* data through adding methods such as qualitative interviewing (discussed below) to the project.

The nature of my engagement in the field, varying between two hours and two days per week spent in Westfield over a period of almost three years, in various settings and across a variety of activities, taken together with the fact that I only constituted it as a field midway through this period, means that textbook prescriptions on how to understand data in participant observation can only really be understood as a starting point. In addition to my notes – which vary in length and detail, attempting to record particular things that happened or that people said along with my reflections, provisional interpretation and analysis – I have come to understand the broad array of documentation produced by processes such as Big Local and WARP as incredibly important ways of documenting my participation and observation. These sources include agendas and minutes of meetings, promotional material for events and activities, the profile and plan documents, and the variety of material produced by the planning activities for these events.

1.3.7.2 Qualitative interviews

The rationale for conducting qualitative interviews as part of the research strategy was to access the local knowledge that participants are seen to possess (Yanow, 2000). I did not understand this as a straightforwardly extractive transaction, however, concurring with Rapley (2004) that interviews are, 'by their very nature, social encounters where speakers collaborate in producing retrospective (and prospective) *accounts* or *versions* of their past (or future) actions, experiences, feelings and thoughts' (p. 16). One feature of Rapley's description that is particularly important for this project is the highlighting of the temporal aspect of interviews – their production of knowledge about the past and/or the future – which relates directly to the temporal nature of both stories/storytelling and planning. Given the understanding of story and narrative that has been developed in the preceding chapters of this thesis Rapley's description also points to why I did not consciously endeavour to conduct 'narrative interviews'. The interviews would inevitably contain narrative elements and instances of storytelling, and I wished to avoid giving the

interviews a veneer of naturalness that belied the facts of their artificiality and the co-constructed nature of the knowledge produced therein.

I conceived of three categories of interview participants: residents of Westfield who had not been involved in Westfield Big Local; people who had been involved in Westfield Big Local; and people with an interest in Westfield who did not live there. Broadly speaking I termed this final, large pool of participants 'professionals', although their interaction with Westfield included political, charitable, governance, community development and faith related activities. The aim of having this broad sweep of participants with a variety of relationships with Westfield was to get to hear perspectives and stories that might problematise or be at odds with those encountered through the other aspects and settings of the research. This was not so that accounts could be assessed as more or less true but in order to demonstrate the breadth of local knowledge, to probe just how complex and multi-faceted the story of a place like Westfield might be, and thereby create a sense of just how big the challenges for a truly inclusive and democratic planning practice might be.

In relation to structuring a semi-structured, qualitative interview Rapley's (2004) straightforward scheme is illuminating:

- you should ask some questions;
- selectively follow up specific themes or topics;
- allow interviewees the space to talk at length. (p. 22)

From here then I took a script into each interview that posed six broad questions to each participant, phrased appropriately for residents and non-residents:

- Self and current relationship with Westfield
- Understanding of Westfield as a place
- First experience of Westfield
- Change over time
- Particular issues or problems
- Looking to the future of Westfield

Interviewees were free to respond to these topics as they saw fit. Under each one, however, the script had a list of sub-questions to act as prompts if they were

struggling to respond to a particular point and to ensure I was able to prompt them to address important points. For those residents who had been involved in Big Local there was an extra set of prompts to address that activity. This approach to designing the script and to the interviews in general owes a great deal to the tradition of oral history and in particular to the work of Paul Thompson (2000), whose schema for conducting an oral history interview proved an invaluable starting point for endeavouring to incorporate as much knowledge about Westfield life as possible into the interviews.

Between August 2015 and February 2016 I interviewed 35 people as part of my research. 14 of these interviewees would fall into the category of Westfield residents or former residents who had not been involved in Big Local. These participants were accessed by four different routes: through Shortbrook Primary School; through a local church; through interaction at the Westfield Big Local gala in the summer of 2015; and following being put in contact by Big Local partnership members. 8 Interviewees were members of the Westfield Big Local partnership who I had met through my involvement with WARP. The remaining 13 interviewees fell into the category of 'professionals' and incorporated local authority officers, police and community support officers, elected local politicians, people from the faith sector and community development professionals. Whilst the interviewees reflected a wide variety of ages from those who had recently left school to those who had been retired for a significant period of time I did interview significantly more women than men, 22 to 13. All but one interviewee consented to me making an audio recording of the interview and the typed-up transcripts taken together totalled over 527 pages. The richness of this data is attested to by comparison with the one interview I did not receive permission to record, which was rendered stilted to a significant extent as the interviewee endeavoured to read the notes I was making.

1.3.7.3 Document analysis

There are a broad range of texts and documents that can be analysed to contribute to gaining a better understanding of Westfield, how it was conceived, how it has changed over time, what various institutions and actors understand this to mean, where it is today and what futures might be imagined for it. Looking back to the conceptual chapter of this thesis it should be clear how data provided by documents

and texts are important in relation to the understanding of the social on which this research is based. Documents represent important attempts to constitute the world and how it is understood in certain ways. These are situated in wider webs of understandings; simultaneously influencing and being influenced by other documents, but also other forms of behavioural practice, which are represented here by the other forms of data and methods used to access them.

I have already highlighted above some of the texts around the Big Local process that are useful sources of data:

- Westfield Big Local Neighbourhood Profile
- Westfield Big Local Interim Plan
- Westfield Big Local promotional materials (posters, flyers, newsletters, websites)
- Minutes of partnership meetings

Underpinning this there is a range of documentation around Big Local as a programme and the variety of understandings on which it is based, which is a valuable set of data for this research. More historically the Mosborough Masterplan (1969), commissioned by the local authority, is a key document in bringing Westfield into being. Promotional material from the formative years of Westfield and the other Mosborough townships are also valuable historical resources, whilst a range of planning and strategy related documents produced subsequently by Sheffield City Council help to chart how Westfield has changed over time. A particularly important document in this respect is the Westfield Regeneration Strategy (2009).

Around this variety of what we could term 'official' documentation there is a wealth of media and cultural production. Particularly important texts of this type focus on Westfield specifically and give a flavour of how it and its reputation have been socially constituted in the years between its inception and the present day, whilst a wider array of cultural production speaks to the key social, political and economic changes over this time – particularly around the decline in industrial manufacturing – and how they might have impacted on places such as Westfield.

1.3.7.4 Story workshop

Following making the decision to focus my research on Westfield the story workshop was a key aspect of the research plan. It is a methodological innovation, designed by myself, that grows directly from the conceptual framework discussed in the previous chapter, whereby it was necessary to interrogate story not only on its own terms but in light of the analytical insight garnered by the employment of the theories of Laclau and Mouffe. I designed this workshop, then, so that it would be possible to investigate the idea that story held some potential, and also power, for actors in grassroots settings concerned about the future of their places. Furthermore, the conceptual frame also made it necessary to design a space whereby we might begin to understand what scope exists for residents to begin to loosen what Fougère and Bond term 'sedimented power' as it appears in 'everyday commonsense' (2018, p. 143), and just as importantly what limits there are to this. The story workshop achieves this in allowing participants to set out their own understandings and interrogate and develop these together with their neighbours.

The workshop involved thinking about and doing this interrogation together with residents, as opposed to conducting the analysis of both Westfield's various stories and story as a concept wholly in the isolation of the university. It was my contention, and also part of my description to participants, that this process could be beneficial to the work of Westfield Big Local and that I would endeavour to make it so. It was important, however, to ensure that the process happened in a way that did not unduly disrupt the work of the partnership, and that fitted into their plans and timescales for evaluating progress during the first year of Westfield's interim plan. As such, a more concrete plan was not established until the weeks leading up to the session itself, which took place towards the end of my period in Westfield on 14th April 2016.

The session brought together nine people who had been involved with Big Local in a focus group-type setting – 6 residents and 3 community development professionals – in order to listen to and discuss four 'Westfield Voices', which brought together a range of the perspectives I had encountered during my research on the estate. I had worked up the scripts by selectively choosing extracts from my interviews and bringing these together to form four coherent stories. The fact that

individual voices used more than one interview, together with my own attempts to anonymise the data – by, for example, changing people's ages, their gender or the genders of their children – ensured that it was not possible for people to second-guess whose opinions and experiences they were hearing. I had created audio recordings by recruiting friends and colleagues to read the scripts as I recorded them. As none of these voice-actors lived in Westfield this added a further layer of anonymity to the stories. I then took a portable CD-player to the session in order to play back the recordings to participants. After listening to each recording participants were encouraged, one at a time, to share their first impressions of what they had heard, before a more general discussion, and then after we had done this there was time for another general discussion on the session and how helpful participants thought it had been. In addition to operating the CD-player and facilitating the session I was able to make notes on a flipchart of individual responses in order to enable as full a general discussion as possible. Whilst the notes on the flipchart paper constituted one valuable source of data residents consented to me making an audio recording of the story workshop, which I was able to transcribe afterwards, giving as full a picture of the session as possible for analysis and enabling me to give the session itself my full attention.

Before returning to the rationale for the undertaking of the session itself and a consideration for how well this might have met the needs of the wider research project there are a number of choices to account for in this overarching description of the session. Straightforwardly, there was a choice around using audio recordings in order to lend the voices some measure of life or vibrancy, rather than, for example, video or engaging participants in reading out the scripts. This was, in one sense, practical: I already possessed the technology and understanding in order to make the recordings and play them back, it would not require the purchase of any extra equipment and I could, as far as possible, minimise any possibility for technological difficulties or failure. It also reduced, as far as possible, any possibility of participants feeling stressed, flustered or being put in an uncomfortable position during the workshop, in order that they could lend their full attention to considering and discussing the stories that they heard. The decisions around how the scripts were chosen – what perspectives were included and what left out – was more complex.

Fundamentally I endeavoured to represent voices that had hitherto not necessarily received a hearing in Westfield Big Local's decision making and general discourse. These were voices that perhaps had the possibility to unsettle the understandings that had come to dominate the Westfield Big Local partnership, which might lead them to question whether they had indeed listened as widely as they might have on the estate, and whether their plan did account for everyone. It is, of course, the case that this decision rested on my ongoing involvement with Westfield Big Local, and the analytical insight I had gained from bringing an academic research project into the orbit of an ongoing community development project. There were, however, practical ways I could consider whether the voices I constructed were best placed to perform the role I had envisaged for them. These were particularly around including voices from younger residents, female residents, residents who were facing issues around employment and residents who had moved onto Westfield relatively recently. As such the voices acted as a counter-balance to what I had come to see as the partnership's dominant reading of the estate, which rested on older, male residents of long standing who were, by and large, retired from relatively secure employment. Across all of these choices there are quite clearly political and ethical implications, these make up an important part of the treatment of the story workshop below – in the final empirical chapter of Part Two, and the first analytical chapter in Part Three – and as such whilst I acknowledge them here I will hold off the discussion, which is richer once placed in the context of my other engagement in Westfield.

1.3.8 Integrating the methods

By way of demonstrating how these methods integrate with one another to form a coherent plan, and as such why they are necessary, I will turn now to the research questions outlined in the introduction to this thesis. Taking each research question in turn the intention is to demonstrate how the methods come together to offer answers.

1. *Stories of Westfield – how is Westfield storied, how does it story itself and what is the relationship between these processes?*

This question speaks closely to the temporal element of story as a means of creating understanding about places (Porter Abbott, 2002). It looks to the beginnings of Westfield as a planned development using documentary analysis, including the wider

context of post-war planning, slum-clearance and social housing. The qualitative interviews parallel this process, drawing on the understandings of residents who have lived on the estate since its inception or for their whole lives. It is then possible to chart how Westfield has changed over time: discerning an 'official' story, which can also draw on interviews with politicians, local authority officers, and similar actors; a view from the ground as told by residents; and the wider social, political and economic contexts within which these understandings are set. The interviews will allude to these contexts and the analysis of media documents and other cultural production can be used to anchor the understandings. The view here, then, is in building up a complex *intertextual* picture of how locally rooted understandings of Westfield sit in a dialogic relationship with understandings situated in different places.

2. *How successfully can participatory approaches to planning use story to enable grassroots level actors to articulate and disseminate their understandings, and act as communities for change?*

Participant observation is key to answering this research question as I have worked alongside Westfield residents, community development professionals and other academic actors as part of two participatory approaches to planning: Westfield Big Local and WARP. In addition to explicit attempts to use storytelling as a method for thinking about how places might change and develop this is also an implicit aspect of the Big Local process – as we shall see in the course of the empirical chapters of this thesis – with my observational data from these processes being supplemented in the first instance by the range of documents they have produced but also by the storytelling workshop, which is an attempt to work towards answering this question with residents. The interviews with a range of actors and the contextual data – political, economic and social – identified above are still important here, however, particularly in allowing consideration of whether there are structural constraints that might influence or inhibit both storytelling and the participatory planning spaces where it might be put to work.

3. *What is the value of storytelling for planning, and how substantively inclusive and democratic could storytelling make it?*

Answering this question relies on drawing together the data gathered and the analysis done in answering research questions 1 and 2. This will allow reflection on

what influences storytelling, what it makes possible and what is, perhaps, beyond it. Of particular import is what my research, drawing on all of its various methods and data, says about the relationship of grassroots level stories with other stories situated elsewhere within the web of the social. Far from being a definitive answer, then, this question seeks to speak to the wider field, suggesting what others might learn from the research conducted in Westfield and what questions remain unanswered.

1.3.9 Analysis/Reading practice

The foregoing discussion has highlighted a degree of artificiality in the language of social science, urging caution about reifying concepts such as field and data, instead understanding them as aids to understanding that are fluid and emerging, put to work to speak primarily to a particular community in a particular way (Yanow, 2000). This is equally true of the process of analysis, which in so far as it represents a mode for making sense is not an activity that is the sole preserve of those consciously engaging in research (Silverman, 2013). As such, when brought to bear on a research topic and set of questions, analysis is not an activity saved solely for afterwards, instead we are always analysing (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). As participant observers and qualitative interviewers we make decisions about how to behave and what questions to ask in the field that rest on our provisional and emerging analyses. Similarly, our decisions about what documents to seek out and analyse are based on provisional analyses that suggest some things are more relevant than others. Figure 2 gives some sense of how an iterative analytic process is understood to work, and how emerging analyses are braided back into the various stages of the process and ultimately its writing up. Through the course of this chapter I have also endeavoured to demonstrate how this formative analysis influenced the various aspects of the research and how it was captured in research notes, interview scripts and – in particular – the story workshop. It is also important to highlight that interactions and discussions with others have inevitably informed the analysis (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006), albeit in ways that are hard to pin down, whilst the process of transcribing interview recordings also played an important part in the process, giving the first opportunity to revisit interactions in a different context.

The previous chapter set out how the concept of a reading practice is the vehicle that carries both storytelling and the theories of Laclau and Mouffe, allowing

me to employ them in tandem through the course of this project's gestation, planning, undertaking, analysis and writing-up. It does more than this, however, in so far as it replaces certain social scientific concepts that would appear, at least to anyone undertaking PhD research within a department situated within the social sciences, paradigmatic. Notably here it is the concept of 'coding' data, which relegates analysis to the position of an activity that happens after the gathering of data. As we have seen in relation to the work of Yanow, social scientists working from interpretive traditions can be aware that this is not an accurate representation of what analysis is, where and how it happens. My decision to go further and conceive of my analytical approach in terms of 'reading practices', then, is also a way of ultimately escaping from a nomenclature that appears to give interpretive work a positivistic gloss, in addition to being a more accurate way of representing the work I have done and the findings that result from it.

To this end, a process of reading and re-reading the various data and bringing the concepts and literature discussed to bear on this is key to the analysis (see section on 'Reading three ways', pp. 63-4) which is refined as provisional insights and understandings have been taken back out into the field. This has been made possible and particularly fruitful by the length of my engagement in Westfield – 3 years – whereby events observed in the field subsequently are able to ask questions of the emerging analysis. Thematic reading and understanding has been important, particularly in light of the theories of Laclau and Mouffe, which have proved a key means of understanding what has happened in Westfield, of how discursive activity has material and political effects, and vice versa. The insight this provides has been used alongside and in dialogue with the lenses provided by key concepts in narratology (see pp. 16-8 & 43-8). In the first instance these allow me to think about story in various places and guises; for individuals, collectives, institutions, the story of the thesis. Taken alongside and in parallel with discursive understandings this provides a productive matrix for making sense of how Westfield and Westfield Big Local emerge, how this relates to the individuals that engage with them, and to what ends. The fact that time and change are key to the analysis is a further reason why I have not engaged computer software and more formulaic coding strategies. As set out above, these risk hiding the role of the researcher and losing much of the

processual richness, which is only ultimately – and still provisionally – set in the final iterative loop of the research, its writing up.

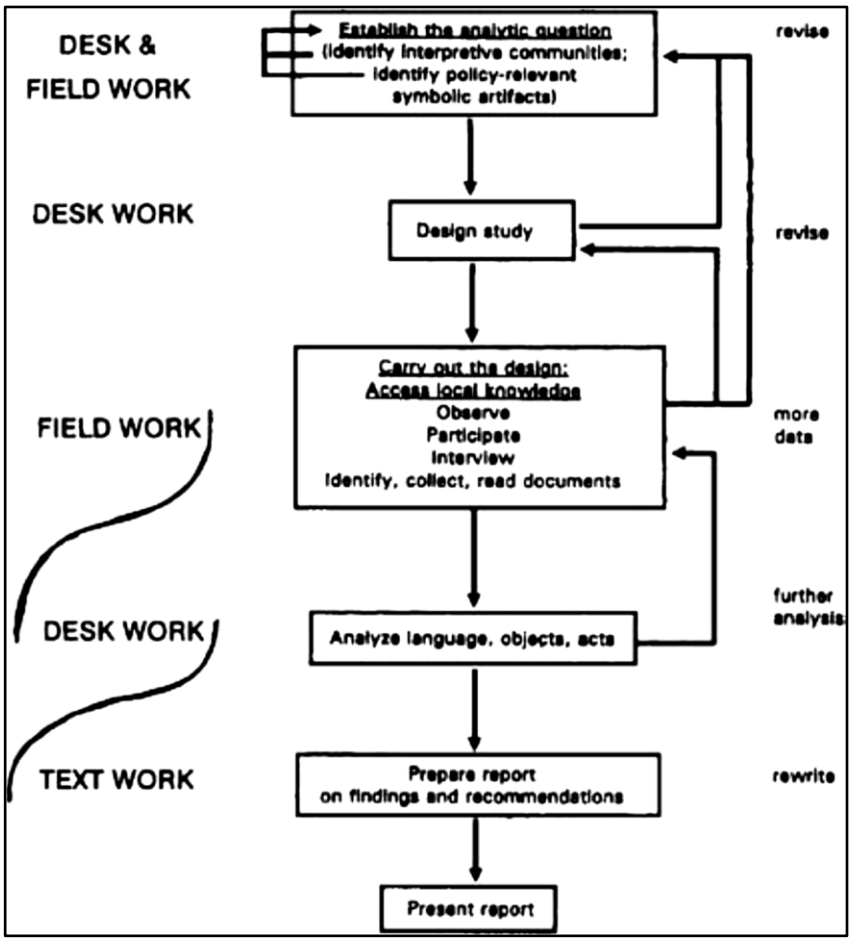

Figure 2 - The analytic process (from Yanow, 2000, p. 85)

1.3.10 Ethics

It is perhaps obvious that people's homes and the neighbourhoods and communities within which they are found can be both incredibly important to them and heavily invested with strong emotions, sometimes the result of generations of lives lived in and around a locality. This fact is attested to by the academic literature, although perhaps not always granted the credence it could or should be in the uses to which that literature and the research that underpins it is put (Allen, 2009). Research that involves encouraging people to reflect on their history and that of their friends and family in the places where they live should, as such, be approached with sensitivity. To this research project is added the complexity that comes when people – carrying the understandings mentioned here and their hopes for the future with them – are involved in the deeply political and frequently contentious activity of trying to influence how their places change and develop. The foundations of this thesis, then,

in methodologies of participatory action, suggest an ethical sensibility that has been brought to bear on the work I have undertaken. This rests on: respecting the diverse knowledges that are encountered in places; a normative commitment to addressing imbalances of power; and seeking to put the resources of the academy and the process of academic research at the service of society more widely. The attendant understanding of an ethics of planning – which exists in a dialogic relationship with the ethical foundations of this research project – has been examined in the literature review above.

Beyond these overarching concerns the project has also been through an ethics review process overseen and mandated by the University of Sheffield and has subsequently received ethical approval. This involved submitting a detailed plan of the research, how it would engage participants, what data would be collected, how it would be stored and used. I have already set out how I sought to gain consent from the Westfield Big Local partnership for using Westfield as a case-study, in relation to the individual interviews a similar process was followed. Participants received an information sheet, sent beforehand by email wherever possible, but provided again in hard copy at the start of each interview. Once participants had had the opportunity to read these I gave them the option of signing the consent form either before or after. I made this decision to prevent the opening minutes of interviews seeming overly formal, perhaps a useful decision in so far as most participants asked to sign the form after the interview. They could choose not to have the interview recorded if they preferred, although only one participant decided against this.

My data – audio recordings, written transcripts and notes – has always been kept in a secure room either at the Department of Urban Studies and Planning or at my own home, with digital data being kept on password protected computers and drives. In writing up my research I have kept all individuals anonymous. I have not, however, anonymised Westfield. Given that the research was not deemed to be unduly dangerous – and has to my mind transpired not to be – this decision was taken because of the futility of anonymising the place, especially in relation to WARP, which represents an ongoing engagement between the Department of Urban Studies and Planning and the community of Westfield.

1.3.11 Positionality

The notion that the object of social research is a field characterised by imbalances of power and resources is central to this research project and the approach elaborated towards it through the course of this chapter. This is understood to influence how actors can know and act, and with what consequences, both individually and together. If an awareness of positionality within the social is fundamental to the questions that have been asked in relation to this project, and in turn the methodology that has been used to investigate them, then this cannot but extend to include my position as a researcher. How to account for that here, however, is not a straightforward question, and I am inclined to agree with Rose (1997) that, 'we cannot know everything, nor can we survey power as if we can fully understand, control or redistribute it' (p. 319). Whilst not downplaying the importance of understanding how research and researchers are positioned this short quotation points to the fact that we cannot expect to reflect, discuss and position our work and ourselves until we are transparent, revealing something approximating a pure account of ourselves and by extension the research.

Mercifully for readers that means I can refrain from giving a blow by blow account of the research's origins in my personal history, or what I might imagine them to be. This is not to say that they do not exist, but rather that in acknowledging them I do not need to succumb to the sort of navel-gazing for which us 'university-types' have at times been good-naturedly teased and at others – whether justly or not – castigated in Westfield. Instead then, in being honest I will seek to take on board Rose's suggestion of doing something more modest: 'inscrib[ing] into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands' (1997, p. 319). That will mean, in good faith, endeavouring to acknowledge where the research falls short of the standards it sets itself, and in particular grappling with the moments where it could not possibly attain them, for perhaps it is here that we can see something of the extent and limits of our positions in the power/knowledge matrix.

1.3.12 Conclusion

The primary function of this chapter has been to describe in detail the approach taken to the research: the case on which it focuses, the methods adopted, the

reasons for this, how these methods relate to one another and how they will be brought to bear on answering the research questions. In doing this it brings to a close the first part of the thesis, which has laid the foundations for the empirical chapters that are to follow, and beyond that the conclusions.

PART TWO – WESTFIELD, A PLACE IN PROCESS

The second part of the thesis sets out its empirical work, in light of the positioning and design described in the first part, and thereby tells one particular story about Westfield. It has three chapters: *Introducing Westfield*; *Westfield Big Local, The Early Years*; and *Emerging Tensions*. The first offers an interpretation of the history of Westfield from above and below, discussing the forces that brought it into being and how it has changed over time, drawing on a variety of documentary data and the stories of residents who live and have lived there. *Westfield Big Local, The Early Years*, begins where the first chapter leaves off, in 2013, and details how the estate came to be a Big Local area, what the programme involves and how this has found expression in Westfield. Detailing the planning process that I engaged in alongside residents is a particularly important part of this chapter, which ends by turning to explore some of the outcomes of that process, around the gala that Westfield Big Local organises annually and the community building that they have taken over, 'Com.unity'. Chapter three, *Emerging Tensions*, takes the story further, showing how tensions that started to emerge during the planning activity intersect with other aspects of the programme and of Westfield Big Local's activity, and with what consequences. This is the context within which I undertook the participatory story workshop, an important aspect of the PhD, which I then begin to document, detailing its conception, how it was negotiated with Westfield Big Local and how it eventually fitted into their wider work.

2.1 – INTRODUCING WESTFIELD

This chapter begins the more empirical part of this thesis. Its aim is to introduce Westfield, a housing estate to the south east of Sheffield, South Yorkshire, which constitutes one of the 'Mosborough townships'. It utilises a variety of data to chart the estate's beginnings and how it has changed over time, in doing this it tells a story that is made up of the stories of others. It also seeks to situate these stories in their wider contexts, demonstrating in what ways Westfield is unique and in what ways it is implicated in wider changes and shifts that might be happening at different geographical scales. I say implicated because it is important to acknowledge that the residents of places like Westfield have some role in creating those contexts, they are not merely passive victims of historical forces. Whilst there is inevitably analysis inherent in how the representations here are presented this chapter might feel more descriptive than the ones that are to follow, looking to provide the foundations for the understandings and insights that come next. By the end of this chapter, then, readers should have a good understanding of the forces that brought Westfield into being, what forces have shaped it over time, how these have come to be expressed in the experience of its residents, and why a community development initiative such as Big Local was seen to be necessary in order to imagine a different, better future for Westfield and its residents.

2.1.1 The idea of Westfield

> *INTRODUCTION (Chapter 1)*
> *HISTORY*
> *0.1 On the 1st April 1967, an area centred on the village of Mosborough in Derbyshire became part of the city of Sheffield for the purpose of accommodating the city's overspill.*

Thus begins Clifford Culpin and Partners' *Mosborough Master Plan* (Sheffield Corporation, 1969, p. viii), a 'technical document' supported by 'tables and diagrams', rather than 'frequently misleading' artist's impressions (p. v). Its aim was nothing short of recommending to the Council of the City of Sheffield a way of life for up to 50,000 citizens for whom the city as previously constituted no longer had room. This was necessary, the preface tells us, in order to mitigate the problems of modern living and, in contrast to the dull suburban sprawl of unplanned developments,

> …[would] creat[e] an environment where a fuller life can be enjoyed and where successive generations will be born, will live and develop in a setting designed for greater health and happiness and more complete fulfilment. (p. v)

As the plan continues to unfold we are invited to begin to imagine a new place emerging from the former fields of north Derbyshire, and on page 25 we are introduced to Westfield, the township with which this thesis is principally concerned:

> TOWNSHIP 13 – WESTFIELD
> 3.71 We propose that Westfield should be regarded as a demonstration township, designed and built to show the way in which the master plan principles should be applied. We would expect that the principles we have put forward would be developed to a more detailed stage and would be modified to take account of the physical and other constraints, which arise in practice. The experimental nature of this exercise is an inevitable and logical part of the development of the master plan area as a whole and we believe that if Westfield is regarded in this light, useful lessons may be learnt from which later townships could benefit. (1969, p. 25)

From our position in the present it is possible to ask a variety of questions about this experiment in health, happiness and fulfilment. Some of these questions inform this thesis and also the resident-led community development process that it follows. In order for them to make sense, however, it is necessary first to say something of the past, which made it possible for Westfield to come into existence.

2.1.2 Context

There are a number of interlinked strands that make up the wider context within which the development of Westfield and the other Mosborough townships must be seen. One of these is town planning as it had developed in the United Kingdom, on which we have already said something in the literature review, whereby the term ‘town planning’ belies, to some extent, the varied and diverse influences and impulses that made it possible and brought it into being. From utopian dreaming to moral crusade, popular struggle and practical scheming, planning and planners have had stakes in them all. Building on this, however, and the spectre of ‘modernist planning’, it is important to say something briefly about the particular experience of planned development represented by the New Towns Act of 1946. Not least because the Mosborough townships were not ‘New Towns’, a fact that relates to where our focus will turn next, to the city of Sheffield and the particular kind of municipalism practiced by its local government.

Britain's 'New Towns', like much public policy in the wake of the second world war, were in part forged by necessity and in part by idealism; looking to meet the immense need for housing whilst aspiring to the Garden City ideals embodied by Welwyn and Letchworth (Bennett, 2005). This aspiration is clear in the aims of the programme, as set out by Lewis Silkin – the government minister responsible for introducing the New Towns – to the House of Commons:

> …our aim must be to combine in the new town the friendly spirit of the former slum with the vastly improved health conditions of the new estate, but it must be a broadened spirit, embracing all classes of society… we may well produce in the new towns a new type of citizen, a healthy, self-respecting, dignified person, with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride. (House of Commons, 1946)

The people charged with delivering this markedly difficult brief were, chiefly, planners, such that in her study of Milton Keynes – one of the third tranche of New Towns but perhaps that foremost in the popular consciousness – Finnegan notes that 'for many people *the* story of Milton Keynes is that of its planners' (1998, p. 25). As Finnegan charts, however, the planners' story is only one of Milton Keynes' many stories. So too with New Towns generally, which mixed stories of success (Garvie, 2017; Grindrod, 2017), with criticism of their suburban feel, 'prairie planning' (Burnett, 1986), and of the 'balance' that they achieved in practice (Bennett, 2005). Such stories were still emerging as Culpin and Partners were planning for Westfield and the other Mosborough Townships, and are explicit in their plan, particularly a preoccupation with getting the balance right:

> It is our belief that most of the social problems of our times stem from unnecessarily large geographical concentrations of one social class, one minority group, one age group or one family size. A vast council estate, an immigrant district, an area of mainly old people and a suburb consisting of almost entirely young families are accepted examples of social imbalance. We believe that economic and social pressures can be relieved if all such forms of over-concentration are reduced. A population which is balanced in age, sex and household structure, for instance, will not have the disproportionate number of young families common in new towns and housing estates. (1969, p. 8)

Culpin and Partners, then, were confident that they could, to a large extent, plan out problems in the Mosborough townships. We could speculate about whether there is some degree of professional bravado evident here, what is certainly the case is that,

to some extent and whether justifiably or not, Sheffield wished to present itself as in some ways unique.

Historically there are a number of ways in which Sheffield differs from cities of similar size in the United Kingdom that can be seen to have lent a certain specificity to its politics. That its population trebled in the five decades between 1851 and 1901 (Marshall, 1993, p. 17) is not surprising given the backdrop of widespread industrial development, but Sheffield had a smaller middle class than cities of comparable size (Thorpe, 1993, p. 86), having never been a commercial or administrative centre in the way that Manchester or Leeds had, a fact no doubt influenced in turn by its geography, the seven hills on which it is built making it less accessible. The make-up of its increased population was not, however, characterised by the relatively high immigration rates found elsewhere, instead being drawn from the surrounding countryside (Thorpe, 1993, p. 87). The resultant cohesiveness and a longer tradition of religious non-conformity running back to the seventeenth century could be seen to lend Sheffield a strong proletarian identity and an independent, perhaps even rebellious spirit (Hey, 1993, p. 8). This has been seen to go some way to explain Sheffield's rich history of working class political action and, along with the widening of the franchise, it ultimately becoming the first provincial city in England to elect a Labour council (Thorpe, 1993). Labour consolidated this position over the course of the twentieth century, spending only two years out of office between 1926 and 1993, over which time they set to work in public health, education, employment and, of course, planning and housing, in trying to improve the collective life of the population.

The factors that have seen Sheffield at times blazing a trail nationally, however, present a number of contradictions when the scale is reduced, with a culture that has been characterised as patriarchal and 'a tendency towards insularity and parochialism that is slow to adapt to changed circumstances' (Child and Paddon, 1984). We can see this reflected, to some degree, in the delivery of the Mosborough Masterplan, but given our discussion above of the development of town planning in the UK it would be overstating the case to suggest that a tendency towards imposing schemes on people from above is peculiar to Sheffield. This is not to say, however, that Sheffield did not understand itself as being in some ways different, as this extract

from a promotional brochure from the 1970s – *Sheffield: City on the Move* – suggests when talking about Mosborough:

> Through this comprehensive development, Sheffield will become the first city to build its own private New Town within its own boundaries, and maintain its position as a leader in urban planning. (Sheffield Corporation, undated)

Given that Sheffield never officially got its own New Town we might detect some resentment underneath this statement, which emphatically suggests that whilst Sheffield wants its place in the modern world its elected representatives and their officers reserve the right to mediate that world on behalf of their constituents, and to do so on their own terms. As conditions changed, however, their ability to do this was significantly undermined. We will turn to discuss this, and its impact on Mosborough and Westfield, in due course. First, however, it is necessary to think about what Westfield meant to the city and its residents when they still felt, to a large extent, in control of their future. I want to do this by thinking about who it was imagined might live in a place like Westfield.

2.1.3 Who would live in Westfield?

A pamphlet produced by Sheffield City Council Publicity Department in the early 1970s tells us a great deal about who the Local Authority imagined might constitute the new residents of Westfield and the other Mosborough Townships (Sheffield Corporation, undated). Entitled 'Mosborough: a great place to live' it introduces us to the overarching concept, with further information under the headings 'Housing', 'Schools', 'Recreation', 'Industry' and 'Shops'; alongside each is one of the artists' impressions that Culpin and Partners had suggested were frequently misleading. We have two additional sheets on Westfield – one focussing on the township as a whole and the other on the amenities in Westfield Centre – and a final sheet about the adjacent township of Halfway. One of the most striking immediate effects of this pamphlet is its pride in the grand ambition evidenced in the Mosborough Masterplan and the way that this is historicised:

> For years Mosborough was simply regarded as a village on the south east edge of Sheffield. For future generations the word Mosborough will be mentioned to describe one of the most spectacular community concepts in this country. Sheffield's housing needs have meant development takes place here, but existing residents need not fear that their environment will be

> destroyed. Many people will live here. New industry will arrive. (Sheffield Corporation, undated)

The short, declarative sentences that close this extract are characteristic of the rest of the document, which makes a lot of promises about the future that lies in store for Mosborough and its residents – 'Employment in pleasant surroundings is guaranteed' (Sheffield Corporation, undated) – and yet, this optimism about the future – it does not feel hyperbolic to say zeitgeist – is firmly rooted, with a strong emphasis on balance and inclusion. We are told there will be equal numbers of council and private homes; special provision will be made for the young and the old; there is space for work, rest and play; and whilst all needs will be met in one's immediate environment it will be easy to get into the city and out into the world.

These points represent an apt departure for characterising who the pamphlet suggests Westfield is really being aimed at: we are told about the young and the old because we, the pamphlet's readers, are clearly neither. We are the young parents being invited to imagine ourselves in this future. As Westfield was the first township to be developed the sections which focus on it have photographs, yet somewhat eerily they are largely devoid of people – except children, teachers and social services community workers – instead there is empty space ready to be occupied. If the pamphlets are anything to go by, one of the principal ways that we will mark our occupation of this space is through driving, for whilst their drivers are only present through their absence the photographs do show a number of motor cars. In an age where driving was not yet as ubiquitous as it was to become (RAC, 2008), that Westfield's residents are imagined as either driving cars or wanting to drive cars can be taken not only as a further example of the plans' optimism but also of the imagined nature of the new residents' aspirations. This is reinforced by the fact that the first thing we see in each of the pamphlet's sections – first Mosborough as a whole, then Westfield, then Halfway – are maps that highlight the development's innovative grid-road system, which is swiftly followed by text that introduces how this is conceived. It is worth pausing to note just what this connection, dynamism and movement signified about the future imagined for Westfield's residents: it belonged to them, they would be a part of it and as such they needed to be connected to it. In a sense this appears to be the most exciting element of what Westfield represents

and as such we are told about it before we are told anything about the kind of houses that we might occupy or the jobs that we might have. This is, of course, suggestive of just how solid the foundations on which Westfield and the wider Mosborough townships were built appeared to be in the early 1970s – economic, social and literally concrete. It also reinforces the extent to which they have been, in the first two instances at least, undermined in the intervening four decades.

Before moving on to document not only the reality of life on Westfield in its early years, but where it finds itself today and how it got there, it is worth thinking about those foundations for a little longer. It is perhaps easy to be nostalgic for a future that did not emerge but that nostalgia is here, in the promises that were made to potential residents, promises of progress and prosperity, but also of balance and rootedness. The motor cars, we are told, will be kept separate from the houses, gardens, schools and playgrounds where family life will happen, and in this idyllic in-between space a host of institutions will structure and provide support for the day-to-day: The Community Centre, where facilities and staff would be on hand to support 'people to develop the community along the lines they wish' (Sheffield Corporation, undated); The Health Centre, which 'will not only provide treatment for sickness and injury, but will also attempt to prevent illness occurring' (Sheffield Corporation, undated); and Shortbrook School, which will educate children from the ages of 4 to 8. Additionally, Westfield was to have employment opportunities within easy walking distance, a variety of playgrounds for children of different ages, four shops, a small supermarket, two public houses, one of which would include a discotheque and restaurant facilities, and access through Westfield Comprehensive School to youth and adult education and also recreation, in the form of a swimming pool and sporting facilities.

2.1.4 What experience did the actual residents have?

When those residents who were some of the first to move to Westfield are asked to describe their experiences their responses, perhaps rendered somewhat impressionistic by the passing of four decades, frequently mix an unpretentious realism with something approaching a mystical quality:

> …when we arrived it was a little like a celebration, y'know, everybody gathered round, watching us unload the van. And it was, to us it was just like

> being on holiday, it were like a holiday feel. To go in the house and have hot water and an inside toilet, because we didn't have nothing like that at Hillsborough, we had outside toilet, no bath, no hot water. […] you just felt, you felt like you shouldn't be there you should be going back home. But then you had to realise, *no, this is where I am now*. And, it were, just a lovely feeling to be there.

This account, given by a former Westfield resident who has since moved to another Mosborough township, represents her experience as a tenant of the local authority. It is reinforced, albeit at one remove, by that of a man who bought one of the private houses on the estate during the same period:

> …just picture this in your own mind, if you were a steel worker in Sheffield at that time, and all the grime and the muck and all this, that and the other, and you were living in a two-up, two-down, back-to-back, with an outside toilet, and then you were offered a council house out here, and that council house consisted of a downstairs toilet and an upstairs bathroom and toilet, three bedrooms, big back garden, and views overlooking Derbyshire, you would jump at the chance, jump at the chance, it was absolutely heaven on earth for that sort of person. So that's why a definite community spirit was nurtured here, because people were so grateful for what they'd got.

We might suggest that the shared experience and cultural reference points that we see in these accounts must also have contributed to people's sense of a community spirit. More importantly, however, whilst the accounts point to what is arguably the biggest achievement of the kind of planned development that Westfield represents – affording people the ability to leave behind the cold, dirt and damp of the industrial city and its slums – they also raise the question of what kind of relationship residents of Westfield were encouraged to assume in relation to the local state. Digging down into people's experiences it is clear that they exercised some choice over where they lived:

> So they offered us one house, and we went to have a look at it, and it was the show house and we didn't particularly like it, and then they offered us another house and unfortunately the neighbours I used to live at the side of in Hillsborough, had been offered the same house at the side of it, and we didn't want to live at the side of them again [laughs]
>
> **Oh, I see, yes.**
>
> So they then offered us our third choice, because you only got three choices, and I absolutely loved it.

Ultimately, however, it is also clear that moving to Westfield was for the most part experienced as something that happened *to* people. On an individual level, then, this

was not experienced as the end point of a collective struggle for justice in relation to the built environment, but as something that others had done for them and for which they were encouraged to be grateful.

This could be seen to contrast with the stories Westfield residents frequently tell describing the variety of activities that they were involved in instigating or bringing into being on the estate. From nursery provision to discos, a luncheon club for older people and communal celebrations such as galas:

> …this woman called *X*, she started doing them, I believe, I don't know, it were through, whether she advertised it or how we knew about it, whether it were in doctors', but a lot of us got together and met in the community rooms and decided yeah we'll form a committee. And that's what we did, we all put a pound in, I think there were about 17, 19 of us put a pound in and we had us first disco. Y'know and from there it escalated, we thought, y'know, we could have a disco every now and again, we could hire a bar in and that. So we decided we'd have us first gala. And playgroup opened for kiddies, luncheon club. I used to do the luncheon club, cook for old ladies and, y'know, all of a sudden you've got this community growing and coming together…

The residents, then, remember themselves very much in the driving seat of this blossoming community. In this example the infrastructure provided by the local authority in the shape of, for example, community rooms, initially passes by unremarked. It is only on being asked to reflect on what has happened to resident driven activity over time that the interviewee remarks on the difference it made once the local authority began charging for the use of the rooms:

> I think another thing with down at Shortbrook, I think the council started putting up the money for the hire of the rooms, got too expensive as well.
>
> **Oh I see, OK.**
>
> I think that was another problem. I think initially we could hire them for free, then they started charging and I think the charge got too much.

In a similar vein, whilst the resident explains that a community worker was initially involved in helping residents to form a committee she sees the lack of any similar organisation in recent years as resulting not from a lack of support but from people not being interested.

These stories begin to show some of the difficulties that the initial residents of Westfield faced. These are expressed more explicitly in a counter-narrative offered by a Westfield resident who had been active in the community for a number of years and had also been involved with Big Local:

> …so they moved a lot of people who lived in that sort of east side of Sheffield out to Sheffield [sic], because they were, y'know, they'd built housing here, and a lot of people didn't really want to move, they were used to being in Attercliffe, they were used to being, having the shops on their doorstep, they were used to, they'd got work, they'd got money, they'd got the things that they needed. And all of a sudden they were moved seven miles out of Sheffield and life was tough and difficult…

The suggestion that life for the first residents of Westfield was not without its toughness and difficulties emerges in the testimony of the original residents when, after expressing their initial euphoria, problems posed by the lack of transport and also of shops are a recurring theme:

> …after a while they started, a little delivery van used to come round selling bread and things like that. So once a week if you couldn't get to the shops a little delivery van come round and buy a few things off of that. But there were no buses; the main bus was one an hour and that only went from Killamarsh, up station road that way. So for my husband to get to work, y'know, he had to make sure that bus wasn't full. [laughs] Because he had to get on in the morning.

It also suggests that the promise of Westfield – 'Employment in pleasant surroundings is guaranteed' (Sheffield Corporation, undated) – appeared to be elusive from early on. This might lead one to be somewhat sceptical about the suggestion noted earlier that people did not mind because they were so happy to be in such lovely surroundings. Some interviewees also hint at the existence of other problems in Westfield's early days:

> …there was a lot of unhappiness, shall I say, with the local people, because [the new residents had] lived in a city, no green fields, no nothing, and they came out here and they thought that to roll in the corn, roll in the barley was great fun.
>
> **Ah OK, I see.**
>
> So the farmers weren't happy. And then they helped themselves to the orchards. Apples and pears and whatever else, because it was there. So there was a bit of, a bit of antagonism.

This suggestion, of a culture clash between the hitherto rural population of Mosborough and Westfield's new residents, can only add to the suspicion that it may have taken some time for the cohesive community that is often at the forefront of people's remembrances to emerge.

In response to these difficulties, and in addition to the ways in which Westfield residents organised or were empowered to organise activity for and by

themselves, a picture also emerges of Westfield residents confident enough to make demands of the local authority, with some expectation that these demands might be met: organising petitions for better footpaths and lighting, for additional shopping facilities, nursery provision and protesting against late school buses. There was an attendant understanding from the local authority itself that it should engage with residents, with the community development worker based on the estate consulting young mothers about their needs:

> …we used to be able to take the children to school, come back upstairs, go in the community rooms, have a coffee, have a chat with the development worker about what was being planned, because she was city council development worker, and we had a chance to have input into Crystal Peaks.[8] So we said what we wanted as mums, at that time, y'know, as parents, we said we wanted crèches and we needed to know that there were lifts and we needed to know that, y'know, we could get around with the prams and the kids and things. So I feel as though, when I go to Crystal peaks, I'm a part of that, and that's quite a nice feeling when you live somewhere, and you've lived for a length of time.

It would appear, then, that life on Westfield at its inception was something of a mixed bag. On the one hand residents experienced intense happiness in relation to the holiday-like feeling created by the fresh air, the space, cleanliness and hygiene; it is important to highlight that this, along with the sense of community and togetherness, is foremost in people's remembrances of life on the estate soon after its inception. On the other hand, however, this bubble was all too frequently pierced by the day-to-day difficulties around transport, shopping and employment at Sheffield's expanding frontier. These tensions are evidenced too in the relationship the tenants had with the local state, which for the most part was also their landlord. Residents were grateful for what had been done for them, rather than feeling that the project of improving people's living conditions was one in which they were an equal partner. Sheffield City Council, for its part, was only too happy to assume the role of beneficent patriarch in relation to Westfield's residents, which saw them in turn adopting a child-like role, by which I mean that whilst they were able to petition the council when things went wrong or they were unhappy, ultimate power and responsibility rested with Sheffield City Council. In time a number of issues arise

[8] A shopping centre in Mosborough.

around the relationship being constituted in this way. Not only are residents to some degree disempowered, they are not wholly aware of exactly what resources were being provided for them by the local state, which in turn makes it difficult to see clearly the consequences of services being taken away and in turn to understand what can be done about it.

2.1.5 Westfield today

Having spent some time thinking about residents' early experiences of Westfield I will now turn to consider their experiences of the present. These are frequently coloured by many decades lived on the estate, but by starting from people's experience and feelings in the present we will be better placed to understand what has changed over time. I will turn to consider this afterwards from three different angles: economic, social and political change. Frequently people introduce the notion that Westfield has changed over time to discussions of their own accord, suggesting that it has gone downhill or become markedly less pleasant.

There are recurrent problems or issues that people use to characterise Westfield in the present. Drug dealing and attendant drug use, alcohol abuse and anti-social behaviour are very common themes:

> …you see drug deals as you're walking by, just groups of youngsters, 14 to 17ish age, and it's quite scary when you're on your own and it's going dark.

As this interviewee suggests, related to this are particular problems around anti-social behaviour from young people, especially their congregating in large groups, and anti-social use of cars and motorbikes:

> …at one time I wouldn't go down shops after tea, because they used to get, at one time gangs of boys, young men, shouting and things like that. If it's like that now I don't know because I don't go, as I've got older I don't go down there anyway, only in the day time.

It is important to note, however, that people frequently demonstrate an understanding of potential causes here in that young people are lacking opportunities to occupy themselves meaningfully both in terms of leisure and in education and employment. Petty crime, especially burglary, is highlighted as a further problem on the estate, alongside a certain harshness in day-to-day life that includes some violence and more frequently the fear of violence:

> There's all sorts going off. Obviously people getting jumped when they're getting off buses. There were nothing like that.
> **OK.**
> You never heard of anything like that getting done [in the past]. Burglaries, that's left right and centre, you have to make sure everything's bolted down. Otherwise they'll take it. Just stuff like that basically.

A number of murders that have happened on the estate are an important reference point here. Fear, however, also manifests itself in other ways, particularly in relation to people's children, with referents both inside and outside of the estate. Outside of the estate fear can be seen most frequently to have its roots in the stories of the national media, which make people anxious regarding the possibility of their children being abducted or groomed for sexual abuse, as this extract from an interview I conducted with a mother and her daughter, who is herself a mother, demonstrates:

> **Grandmother**: It's with X, with X though, what scares you about letting her out?
> **Mother**: Not necessarily people off estate, just in general, I'm scared of somebody coming and snatching her or, y'know.
> **Interviewer**: Yeah.
> **G**: You just don't know nowadays.
> **M**: I'm not saying it's somebody who lives on estate. You just don't know.
> **G**: You hear about things don't you.

Inside the estate itself people worry about the culture of drug taking and the possibility of their children becoming involved and also about bullying, where fears often have their roots in personal stories of their own childhoods growing up in the local area. Another frequent indicator of Westfield's current situation is the range of services that have been withdrawn from the estate, particularly the loss of the Post Office, disappearance of 5 play-parks that were an important part of the estate's original design, and the disregard the city council are seen to show to the maintenance of Westfield's environment more widely. Over the top of all of these issues are two big, bridging sentiments. Firstly, that the design of the estate has failed, that it is an experiment that did not go to plan; secondly, that the wrong people now live on Westfield – drug addicts, criminals, people with mental health problems – and that they have been consciously moved there by the local authority whether for unfortunate reasons – there is limited social housing provision elsewhere – or malicious reasons – the council want these trouble-makers as far away as possible from the city-centre and the town hall.

Many of these concerns are reflected in the feelings of those people who do not live in Westfield but have an interest in the estate through another capacity, whether as elected representatives, local authority officers, community development workers or faith leaders. Some understandings are very straightforwardly concomitant – anti-social behaviour is exacerbated by young people being bored – whilst others are refracted differently through the particular lenses provided by their position and experience. For instance, it is common for outsiders to see Westfield as having a lack of aspiration or a feeling of hopelessness, this is seen as resulting from a particular set of historical circumstances:

> It goes back, I think, to the days of high unemployment, y'know, the 80s, that I remember when I left college and spent a couple of years not being able to find anyone who'd pay me to do anything. And aspiration has dropped, they're not the kind of highly motivated, they've not probably received the support that they should have received, because as there's certain forms and various things going back 10 or 15 years, because of the more affluent areas around Westfield centre it didn't qualify for sorts of assistance that other areas did, that were able to get a bit of a push. Y'know, people have become a bit disengaged and a bit demotivated and, no-one's there or has been there to say, y'know, you're better than this.

It is suggested that this is exacerbated in the present by the context of austerity, which really does make life harder and limit opportunity for many of the estate's residents:

> …without a doubt the current austerity programme is creating a much, much harder environment to build community trust or involvement, it's becoming a bigger and bigger challenge, year on year. I would perceive it myself, there's less likelihood of people giving their time if they've got less money, they're being sanctioned left, right and centre, people are using the local food banks. Really, really struggling. It's horrible to see it face to face, and deal with it.

Whilst some residents do allude to wider contextual drivers for issues it is quite rare. Another point frequently raised by professionals but less so by residents is health and well-being on the estate, again making links between larger city-wide, regional and national contexts and Westfield's particular problems around poverty. The design of the estate as a problem is something that professionals also frequently raise: 'it just sort of smacks of that planner's dream gone wrong'. Below I turn to putting some of these perceived problems and worries in context, by thinking about changes in economics, society and politics since Westfield was designed and built.

2.1.6 Economic change

The wider economic picture against which life on Westfield has been set, and the broad change which residents and others use to frame Westfield's fortunes is de-industrialisation. Specifically, in Sheffield this includes the massive reduction of jobs in steel production and the virtual disappearance across the wider region of coal mining (Thomas, Pritchard, Ballas, Vickers and Dorling, 2009, p. 16-8). We see both aspects of this change in Westfield, for whilst many of the estate's early residents had moved from Sheffield's industrial east end the area to which they were moving – formerly part of north Derbyshire – was a coal mining area, the villages of Mosborough and Beighton being home to miners and their families. It is important to point out, however, that the beginnings of the economic change that was to come were perhaps already in evidence from the time people began to move onto Westfield, with many local pits already closed and others closing before the end of the decade. Nevertheless, when we look at the data we can see how Westfield may have fared particularly badly, with the rise in unemployment during the 1980s significantly sharper and more prolonged within the Attercliffe constituency, of which it was then part, than elsewhere in Sheffield (Thomas, Pritchard, Ballas, Vickers and Dorling, 2009, p. 47).

Looking to the Mosborough Masterplan, we can see that it anticipated that the economy would change, and pointed to a shift towards employment in services more widely that was reflected only modestly in Sheffield as a whole, which remained relatively static, as did the wider Yorkshire and Humberside region (Sheffield Corporation, 1969, p. 96). In retrospect this was an ominous sign and we can see that the forecasts in general overestimated the economy's dynamism, its capacity for growth and job creation, and underestimated the negative impact of, for example, increased automation. Furthermore, the Masterplan gives over significant space to planning for industry moving to the Mosborough area and overestimates the extent to which this might create jobs, particularly in light manufacturing. These insights should be tempered by the acknowledgement that the planners could not have reasonably expected, writing at a time of full-employment, the extent to which relatively well-paid, skilled jobs would disappear and that what job creation would follow in its wake would predominantly be in low-skilled, low-paid work, a fact which

would have significant cumulative effects on Westfield, Sheffield and the wider region.

These various insights are reflected in the experience of Westfield residents. The families that moved onto the estate in its early years frequently had small children, which often saw the father working whilst the mother concentrated on childcare and running the home. When asked to reflect on the jobs that they and their neighbours had in those early years it is worth noting the variety: telephone engineer, delivery driver, lorry driver, clerical worker. Whilst this is in addition to people working in manufacturing and engineering it could also perhaps be seen as at odds with the dominant narrative of the past discussed above, whereby the archetypal Sheffield steel worker moves to Mosborough and, as time moves on, becomes redundant. Issues highlighted around work in Westfield's formative years, therefore, more frequently relate to difficulties about transport as opposed to difficulties about finding work itself. Where women went back to work when their children were older they describe most commonly working in cleaning, catering and retail.

The situation in the present is different in a number of respects. There is a much greater incidence of unemployment and difficulties reported in getting work, with Westfield above the national average in relation to both unemployment and youth unemployment, and in the 3% of most deprived communities nationally in terms of education (Sheffield City Council, 2009). Opportunities that are available are almost always described as precarious and low-paid, which presents problems of its own, insofar as the costs of getting to and from work can consume a significant amount of what a person can earn, especially if available opportunities are part-time. There is a second tension here around childcare, with women expected to seek work whilst their children are still so young as to preclude looking after themselves. Westfield residents report that they are unhappy about this change, pointing to the apparent absurdity of having to spend a significant amount of money for someone else to look after your children whilst you are at work:

> …that's all this new agenda what's come in, y'know, that you'll be forced into work, whether you're a mum, whether you're a dad, whether you've got children, you feel as though you've got to. And then government pays somebody else to look after them children.

Yeah.

Because what that usually does, it takes the employment rate down. That's, I'm sorry, that's the only reason for that.

It is important to draw attention to two aspects of this situation, one is the wider social shift predicted in the Mosborough Masterplan, around women entering the workforce in ever greater numbers, the second is the discourse around benefit claimants, which has seen receiving welfare payments become both increasingly stigmatised and increasingly more difficult, with punitive penalties designed to force 'shirkers' into work becoming a dominant theme in the austerity policies of recent years and their supporting rhetoric (Friedli and Stearn, 2015; Garthwaite, 2011). People I interviewed utilised this rhetoric when talking about other residents on the estate, with residents who were themselves unemployed even suggesting that many people who could work just do not want to, and sometimes voicing resentment about the apparently comfortable life of the welfare claimant. At the same time, however, people frequently suggested that there were fewer opportunities than there used to be, expressing especial pity in relation to the plight of young school-leavers who found it particularly difficult to find a way into an ever more competitive job market:

> …I do think in general, especially in retail, which we're both in, they've cut back so much on staff to try and keep their costs down. That they're not, although we are just interviewing at the minute but it'll only be for temporary staff, I think. And you see people coming up, have you got any jobs going, have you got any jobs going, and especially school leavers, I feel sorry for them because there's just nothing. Unless, they're going to college and uni, y'know. I think it's, it's harder. It's like when I left school I'd got my job in the May time, I didn't leave school while July but I'd already got my job.

People also frequently talked with pride about the fact of working to pay one's way in the world regardless of the nature of the work, the stigma regarding claiming benefits demonstrated by the attendant emphasis on them, their partners or children always working and never claiming benefits.

A final important point to mention in relation to economic change is the effect that it has had on many Westfield residents in inflicting what we could term significant psychic damage (see e.g.: McKenzie, 2015; Charlesworth, 2000; Sennett and Cobb, 1972). Residents, local councillors and other professionals reporting a collective lack of self-belief and an ensuing despondency engendered by negative

experiences of, first, education and afterwards of employment and unemployment, and the ensuing inability to realise the opportunities that success in these areas can afford:

> …people don't come forward with anything because they're frightened of rejection, and that is a big thing on this estate. They've been, jobs, whatever's advertised, you hear it all the time, what's the point, I won't get it anyhow. **Yeah.**
> What's the point in me going to volunteer, they'll not want me to anyhow. You hear it all the time. Y'know. This area, it's so de-motivated…

As this extract shows, the effects of this trauma are not only felt in relation to employment and the workplace, but also in education, in people's willingness and ability to access training, in their relationships with their neighbours, friends and family.

2.1.7 Social change

Some of the significant social changes that people in Westfield refer to are referenced above, linked as they are to economic changes. The move of women into employment is one, whilst the consequences of de-industrialisation inevitably have significant social dimensions. Taking this further, a common theme that people reference in relation to social life is that people are more individualistic; an identification with and interest in one's immediate community of neighbours has reduced, giving way to a more pronounced emphasis on the family unit:

> …some of these people just drive up, go in, shut the door, draw the curtains, that's it. They don't engage with this community, y'know, it's maybe a convenient place to live.

There is a class element to this understanding, which sees some interviewees suggest that more affluent people who have undertaken non-compulsory education are more likely to be willing to move for work, meaning that they sustain relationships over longer distances, which we could understand as them living their lives at a larger scale.

> I've got family, most of my family are scattered around Cheshire, and some in the midlands. I can't think of two family members that live closer than 25, 30 miles.
>
> **Yeah.**
>
> So the idea of everyone living on each other's doorstep is a bit weird to me [laughs] But I think again it's down to aspiration because lots of families sort of diverge when you go off to university, when you travel to the city to go and

> get your first jobs, sort of things like that. And that doesn't happen [in Westfield].

As this extract suggests, such an understanding is in contrast with how many Westfield residents identify very closely with the estate, it being common for youth workers and others to relate anecdotes about how young people on Westfield may very rarely travel, even to other areas of Sheffield:

> …I said one option is to put on a minibus and we could all go to Sharrow and go to their youth club, and then maybe they could come to our youth club, and you'll meet new peop… *No, absolutely not!* 17 people said they would possibly, *possibly* go to the football up at Westfield [secondary school], but that's like if we did it as a taster session for them and if we put a minibus on, so it's basically just making them feel safe going as a group.
>
> **Yeah.**
>
> And not a single one said yes to going to Sharrow. I'm like, I think, when I was their age I was just really keen to meet new people, particularly boys, I'd've gone anywhere to meet boys, and I was like, wow, but you just come here every Tuesday and it's the same people and the same things, and I thought they'd be excited to have the opportunity to go somewhere new, the girls, I thought they'd be like, ooh, there might be fit boys at Sharrow, and they just didn't want to leave Westfield, and that's quite a recurring thing.

The innovative road network designed in the Mosborough Masterplan, then, has not necessarily seen the emergence of ultra-mobile residents. One might feel that, in some senses, Westfield has failed to change, and that what is in fact at issue is the way that cultural reference points and economic opportunities for different groups on the Westfield estate have diverged, particularly between those residents who live in the predominantly privately owned cul-de-sacs at the edge of the estate, who often report that they rarely go into the centre of Westfield, and those residents who live in the predominantly local authority owned properties in and around the centre.

There is a political element to this change, which is dealt with in greater detail below, but it is interestingly attended by other apparent changes in how people conceive of the family. Concern for one's children, their wellbeing and their future opportunities is incredibly important to all of the parents that I spoke to. It is possible to argue that this is attended by greater fear than it might have been in the past, both in terms of immediate threats – of children falling victim to the drug pushers who are identified as a problem on the estate, or the sexual predators that people hear about from the media – and more long-term uncertainties around opportunities

for employment and housing. At the same time as people on the estate express concern about children, however, they can be rather less sympathetic to mothers, or rather the stigmatised grouping of 'teenage mothers' (Luttrell, 2011). Whilst there is undoubtedly an understanding that young mothers need help and support there is normally an element of moral judgment that suggests these women have had children in order to gain housing or evade work. It is important to note, however, that these women are not much younger than, perhaps even the same age as, many of Westfield's first residents were when they moved to the estate with their children, the difference being that they were married. Marriage being one aspect of social life to which attitudes have changed since the estate was built, with divorce rates steadily rising and marriage rates declining nationally. These have plateaued in recent years with divorce rates decreasing as the number of marriages continues to decrease in parallel (ONS, 2014). These are changes that many of Westfield's original residents have lived through, divorcing and sometimes remarrying. Whilst divorce may have lost its stigma, however, and whilst they may have benefitted from this themselves it is interesting that residents frequently still hark back nostalgically for the apparently stronger values of yesteryear.

2.1.8 Political change

It would not be an understatement to suggest that since Westfield was conceived of, in the context of local government in the mid to late-1960s, politics has been, in some senses, turned inside out. Above we have pointed to the myriad economic and social changes of the past forty years and the intertwined changes in the UK political context are at least as significant. To take some of the most straightforward points, Westfield was not only planned at a time of full employment but also at a time when government was seen to have much more responsibility for the economy and by extension things such as the rate of unemployment. As such it exercised some degree of planning in relation to the economy – an industrial strategy. Put the other way around, we have seen politicians simultaneously doing two things: firstly, aggressively promoting deregulation and ever freer markets as goods in themselves, which secondly allows them to evade responsibility for the problems that such an approach causes. Another very obvious change is that over time the power of local government has been dramatically reduced. It is inconceivable that Sheffield City

Council would undertake a scheme on the scale of the Mosborough townships today. Even if they had the ambition, which is arguable, they would have neither the resources nor the capacity and no conceivable way of acquiring them. There is a linked point here in that responsibility for housing has also largely been handed to the market. Issues around housing can therefore be characterised as political problems to a much lesser extent, allowing politicians to talk of problems in the housing market rather than acknowledging any political failure. A third political change is demonstrated by a move away from social understandings of problems and their causes and towards suggesting that it is individuals who have responsibility for changing their situation if they desire such change. Again, we can link all of these changes together, demonstrated in Westfield by the policy of the Right to Buy. This not only gave local authority tenants the right to purchase their council houses at greatly reduced prices but also prevented Local Government from investing revenues generated from sales into developing more social homes (Burnett, 1989).

There are, of course, names for these various, linked, political changes. Neoliberalism, the term employed to describe the ideology of those who, drawing on 19th century neoclassical economics, reacted against the central planning of the post-war Keynesian consensus and promoted an ever smaller role for the state and ever freer markets (Harvey, 2010); and Thatcherism, the particular practical implementation of neoliberal ideas as they found expression in the UK in the 1980s and beyond. In a sense the latter term has become such a part of the vernacular that it would be easy to neglect to notice that there was some controversy over it when Stuart Hall (1988) first posited it, around whether it truly represented a new approach to understanding what politics should be and how it should be conducted in the UK in the late 20th century. In retrospect, however, it is clear that Thatcherism did indeed represent a concerted attempt to recast British politics and wider society, and that it was to a large degree successful. We can note a number of shifts here: the way in which capital has been empowered at the expense of workers, to such an extent that being seen as 'economically competent' – which paradoxically constitutes a determination to intervene in the economy as little as possible – has become *the* determining factor in electoral politics; the way that central government has been empowered at the expense of local government; and in which the free-spirited,

entrepreneurial individual has been empowered at the expense of the local and the community. This is attended by a moralism that has seen a stigma attach itself to council housing and being in receipt of welfare, with policies designed to make achieving the former almost impossible and the latter as difficult and unpleasant as possible (Garthwaite, 2011; Watt, 2008).

There might be an interjection here. Margaret Thatcher left office almost 30 years ago and in the meantime, it could be argued, the politics of the third way or Blairism has sought to intervene, undermining the 'greed is good' ethos of the 1980s and reinforcing a new communitarianism (for a critical examination see: Imrie & Raco, 2003). Whilst increased spending in areas such as healthcare and education no doubt improved the experience of those accessing these services, the extent to which it represented a distinctly different approach has been questioned from relatively early on, including how continuation of business as usual was discursively constructed as a change (Fairclough, 2000), and of how the rationality of the market, its attendant discourses and particular moral perspective have entrenched themselves right across our social life (Massey, 2015). This is as evident in relation to the built environment, planning and policy research, and the academy more widely, as anywhere else (see e.g.: Allen and Imrie, 2010; Crookes, 2011). Whilst there is not space here, then, to comprehensively examine to what extent the New Labour governments departed from the Thatcherite or neoliberal projects, we might feel confident in looking to the current context provided by austerity and documented throughout this thesis, to suggest there are enough continuities to use it as a point of departure, not least because of its particular historical resonance.

This suggestion is further supported if we look more closely at that context, not least because Conservative led governments can more straightforwardly be seen as Thatcher's heirs. Whilst the austerity policies and deep cuts that they have presided over can be seen as an entrenchment of neoliberalism they have also been attended by social policy pronouncements centred on localism and the 'Big Society' that, Levitas (2012) has argued, look quite different depending on whether we read them with 'a hermeneutics of suspicion' or a 'hermeneutics of faith'. It is important to stress that Levitas, whilst acknowledging the philosophical roots of the approaches, sees them as masking deeply regressive policy choices and outcomes (2012, pp. 331-

2), an argument that this thesis can be seen to support. She also suggests, however, that the underlying impulses of self-organisation can be re-oriented towards, 'a narrative in which they cease to be an ideological cover for neo-liberal dispossession of the poor, and become positive attributes embedded in another potential society' (2012, p. 336). This is an important insight for this thesis because it is similarly interested in potential futures – and potential re-readings – that are geared towards being more equitable; but also because the Big Local process it follows in Westfield emerges from this context, both of austerity and of the 'Big Society'. Moreover, this context speaks directly to the discussion staged in the literature review about competing theories of change (see pp. 50-6), and to wider discussion within community development – analogous to Levitas' – about its potential or otherwise (Taylor, 2011; Alcock, 2010). In due course, then, and in light of more detailed discussion of Big Local in the next two chapters, we will be well placed to contribute.

2.1.9 The good old days…

Returning to the broad changes – social, economic and political – discussed here we can identify that one way a large number of Westfield residents orient themselves to them is to contrast them to an idealised past. We have seen above that whilst there was a mystique around people's memories of moving to the estate it did not take a great deal of scratching to unearth experiences that highlighted the sometimes difficult reality of having moved to a new estate on the edge of the city. Perhaps some residents choose to ignore these difficulties when they summon up 'the good old days' or perhaps they feel that in spite of difficulties the past was still preferable to the present. What is unarguable is the role that nostalgia does play in people's memories:

> It were brilliant growing up, I don't remember any bad things like nowadays you get a lot of trouble round here. I just remember a happy childhood. All the kids playing out together, playing games from stupid o'clock in morning to nine o'clock at night. No bad things, just really good.

Some people's memories not only idealise the past but begin to point to some of the change that residents have seen:

> When I first moved up here. Then it was very different, it was a community, it really was a community. And I'm telling you this because I want you to see how it's changed. So when I moved up here, Saturday mornings, Saturday days really, community day, men used to be all out on cars, doing their cars,

> else watching films in one house, women used to be in another house, and kids were all playing together. So, it were broke into a community if you like, we all used to do things together. That changed in about 1980, it started changing, to it no longer felt like a community, it was more individuals and families.

The language that this long-term resident uses to describe the initial community, as broken down into different parts is particularly interesting. People's identities had clean edges, this gave them the security of a well-defined role, based on different permutations of age and gender. Whilst the understandings and experiences of those who transgressed their allotted role or did not easily fit are implicit in this account the description of a person who grew up in the only black family on the estate, of experiencing racism and bullying, cannot but balance too sanguine an interpretation of outwardly homogeneous and harmonious societies. At the same time, however, we should not seek to undermine the effects on people who have experienced profound dislocations and disorientations about their place in their place. Equally interesting here, however, is the shift in scale of people's senses of self, down from the notion of a community to 'individuals and families'. As noted above, this is a common reflection from interviewees, who refer to those on the estate who are essentially uninterested in their neighbours, going to work outside of the estate and then coming home and 'shutting their curtains'. In a sense, then, we have witnessed a two-step movement in some people's lived experience, one shrinks down to the individual the other widens out to include places and opportunities beyond their immediate locale. This understanding is even visible in the context of the longer quotation above, whereby people's understanding of estates like Westfield was altered by the Right to Buy and the other legacies of the Thatcher government discussed above, which were underpinned by an ideology disdainful of society, instead valorising individual families at a smaller scale and encouraging identification with the nation state at a larger scale (Hall, 1988).

2.1.10 A bifurcated and problematic estate?

In framing the problems that Westfield faces in the present, however, those who long for the good old days do not choose the explanations afforded by reference to the changes in housing and other policy and the growth in individualism of the last three decades, or if they do they do so only in passing. Rather they blame many of

Westfield's woes on incomers and trouble makers, vandals and thugs. There is a political explanation here but it refers to the city council and its officers. A more sympathetic variant suggests that due to an ever diminishing housing stock they have had little choice but to house people in acute housing need – particularly drug users, people with mental health difficulties and recently released prisoners – in Westfield. A harder-headed explanation sees the germ of a conspiracy here, feeling that the local authority has deliberately moved problem residents to Westfield in order to contain them in one place and keep them far away from the centre of the city. Talking to local authority officers demonstrates that there is enough truth in aspects of these accounts to allow the narratives to seem plausible: there has been a marked decrease in the availability of social housing whilst the demand is still there, which leads to fewer options when considering where to house people, especially the most vulnerable; and historically it seems it has been argued within the Local Authority that there are some potential positives in housing vulnerable individuals and families in an area where services can be concentrated to support them. Unfortunately, and as we have catalogued, these support services are far from adequate in Westfield.

The accounts of the professionals who have been involved with Westfield understandably have a different perspective to residents, not only generated by their more policy, 'evidence' and institutionally focussed understandings, but also by the distance that living elsewhere allows. There are, however, many different approaches. Some are very much influenced by the 'evidence based policy' perspective of the Blair years, the attempts to find ways to influence and address 'social exclusion' (Fairclough, 2000). Tensions exist though, as demonstrated by this lengthy quotation from an interview with a local authority office, which is caveated by worries about the ethics of coercion:

> …in terms of community engagement from the mid-2000s right up to the early, y'know, 2010, people would say, oh let's do some community engagement, and if you got 3 or 5% engagement rate from an area it was classed as a success, y'know. People would come back and say, oh we had a TARA[9] meeting the other night and it was a brilliant turnout, 30 people turned up. Actually when you think about it that's pretty rubbish if there's 1000 people that live on the estate. And the way that they communicate, and it was almost taken that anyone who didn't speak up, oh they must be happy, not anyone who didn't speak up didn't know how to speak up, felt apathetic so if they spoke up it probably wouldn't make any difference, there was lots

[9] Tenants and Residents' Association, discussed further on p. 195.

> of issues like that, but, I spoke with [colleague] about this a lot, and we almost said that if you strip every layer back, you just end up with this thing that what you're trying to get is wide-scale behaviour change, you're trying to basically influence a few thousand people to change the way that they live their lives, to make an area more positive. And therefore you're onto the notions of, is that up to them, is that what they pay their rent and their council tax for? Because it really boils down to whose responsibility is it? You as a citizen or is it us as a government to change things.

Further context specific facts and understandings emerge, especially around how deprivation on Westfield was masked within statistics for a long time by its being located in amongst more affluent neighbourhoods, and by how its geographical location meant it was remote from where resources were strategically located within Sheffield to tackle deprivation and its consequences – primarily in the north-east of the city (Thomas, Pritchard, Ballas, Vickers and Dorling, 2009). Knowledge of these facts can be shared with other perspectives that we could characterise as class based. These understandings see issues on Westfield driven and exacerbated by many of the economic, social and political changes discussed above, based on the foundational fact that, in a socio-economic system that is predicated on some becoming affluent at the expense of others, the less well-off have to live somewhere. They diverge, however, on whether they see solutions in local government being adequately enough resourced to assume the role it once had in relation to its citizens, or whether they are critical of this patriarchal inheritance and see a greater role for empowering those citizens to engage economically, socially and politically towards realising better futures for themselves.

2.1.11 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to introduce Westfield and to explore where it came from, where it is now and what happened to it in between. The principle mode of doing this has been to consider the wider contexts that gave rise to Westfield, to examine how these contexts have changed over time and then to bring these insights into conversation with past and present understandings of how Westfield residents understand the estate and their lives in it. In doing this I have begun a task that will continue over the rest of the thesis, looking to understand how Westfield has been storied, how it stories itself, and what implications this might have for how it stories its future. In the next chapter I will turn to examine how these stories figure in the community development initiative Westfield Big Local, which sought to intervene in

Westfield's apparently troubled present, and what effect this had on the activities of the group of residents who became involved in it. It is here that we really begin to unpick the relationship between storytelling and planning, with the ultimate aim of starting to demonstrate how it might be reconfigured more productively.

2.2 – WESTFIELD BIG LOCAL, THE EARLY YEARS

Introduction

This chapter begins by introducing Big Local, the community development initiative that, from 2013, sought to begin to engage residents in making positive and lasting change in Westfield. Big Local was also the catalyst for an engagement between the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Sheffield and the community, with which I have been involved for the duration of my PhD project. As the chapter moves on to consider how the Big local process has unfolded in Westfield, then, the story is intertwined with that of this engagement. The chapter considers the profiling and planning processes that constitute important steps of the Big Local process and with which we participated. It moves on to describe and provisionally analyse two important planks of Westfield Big Local's activity, the community gala that they seek to organise annually and the community centre, Com.unity, which they now run, having taken this role over from Sheffield City Council. This chapter unfolds in light of the preceding one, which provides an illuminating context for the activity of Big Local – both nationally and in Westfield – and my particular experience of engaging with and attempting to assist this. Throughout, the question of how the activity described orients itself to Westfield's multiple stories remains open, representing a critically minded approach to further questions around what change Big Local offers the residents of Westfield, what change might be possible, what change the residents want to see, why and how they hope to realise this.

2.2.1 Big Local

Big Local is a community development initiative that has identified 150 neighbourhoods around the UK and given them each £1million to invest in their community over a ten-year period. The areas have been chosen primarily because they may have missed out on previous funding initiatives in spite of facing significant issues and challenges, frequently around deprivation, cohesion and/or various types of social and economic isolation. Local Trust, the organisation created to deliver the Big Local programme, used deprivation related data to target areas, in addition to talking to local authorities, the voluntary and community sectors. The money – which ultimately comes from National Lottery funding – is intended to be used to address

these issues by way of making the communities more prosperous, resilient, cohesive and better places to live. Big Local understands itself to be unique or innovative in a number of respects: the programme being significantly longer than the two or three years that is typical for funded community development initiatives; that local residents lead in deciding how the money is invested; and that there are relatively few stipulations governing what this investment can be and where it can be targeted.

These priorities and processes are reflected in Local Trust's statement for the public – *What is Big Local?* – about what the outcomes of Big Local will be:

- Communities will be better able to identify local needs and how to meet them.
- People will build their skills and confidence, enabling them to identify and respond to needs in the future.
- The community will make a real difference to what it believes are its most important needs
- People will feel that their area is an even better place to live.

(Local Trust, 2015)

And also in its stipulation of what Big Local is not about:

- It's not about your local authority, the government or a national organisation telling you what to do.
- It's not about individual groups fixing their favourite problem without talking to a wide range of people who live and work in the community.
- It's not about short-term thinking – you've got 10 years or more to plan and deliver the best options for your area.

(Local Trust, 2015)

Each area is supported by a Big Local Rep. Reps are imagined as having community development experience and as such are able to offer advice, support and 'critical friendship' to Big Local areas, especially in the early stages of the process as people come together to start to think about their community – these groups of residents are eventually formalised into 'Big Local Partnerships' – and to establish a vision for how they would like it to be in the future. Seven steps are identified as part of the process, termed the Big Local pathway:

- Getting people involved
- Exploring your Big Local vision
- Forming your Big Local partnership
- Creating a Big Local plan
- Delivering your Big Local plan

- Collecting the evidence
- Reviewing your Big Local plan and partnership.

(Community Development Foundation, 2012)

What the Big Local pathway begins to demonstrate is the extent to which Big Local constitutes a plan-making process, with research and planning preceding action, which is in turn followed by evaluation. To this end, areas produce two important documents in the early stages of the process: the area profile, which introduces the partnership's vision, their understanding of their area, the problems it faces and the assets it has; and the plan, which develops the profile into concrete actions, representing first steps towards addressing issues and realising the vision.

The design of Big Local rests on specific understandings of community development and of how change happens, related to these are some particular assumptions and normative positions about community development and how it can be most productively practiced. These are set out in a document called *Big Local theory of change* (Local Trust, 2013), and are suggested as stemming from the experience of those involved in setting up Local Trust/Big Local. The basic assumptions are suggested as being the following:

- residents have a capacity and desire to drive change, and can achieve lasting and positive changes for the areas where they live
- previous models have failed to ultimately transfer power and control to residents; the Big Local funding model will put residents in the driving seat by giving them power over decisions made about money
- building networks, relationships, support and expertise will facilitate and foster resident involvement in decision-making activities
- investment in people, communities and locally driven enterprise and investment will support sustainable positive change

(Local Trust, 2013)

Big Local then use a process diagram on how change happens, from New Philanthropy Capital[10], to elaborate their own theory of change. The logic of this is reproduced in Figure 3:

[10] New Philanthropy Capital, 'is a charity think tank and consultancy that occupies a unique position at the nexus between charities and funders, helping them achieve the greatest impact' (New Philanthropy Capital, 2017)

Source: Kail, Lumley, Theory of Change, New Philanthropy Capital, 10th April 2012, page 4. Found at http://www.thinknpc.org/publications/theory-of-change/

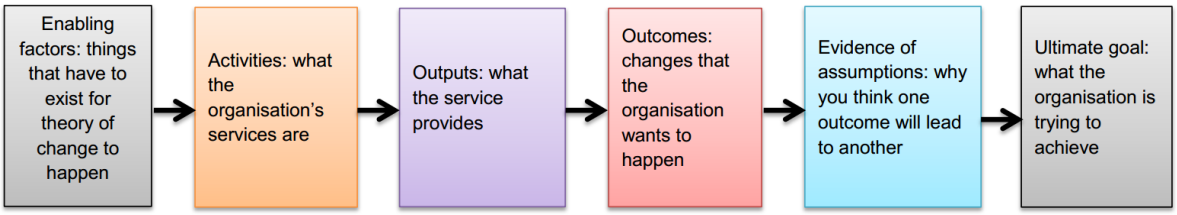

Figure 3

Big Local's Theory of Change is then represented in a diagram that reflects these stages, represented here in Figure 4:

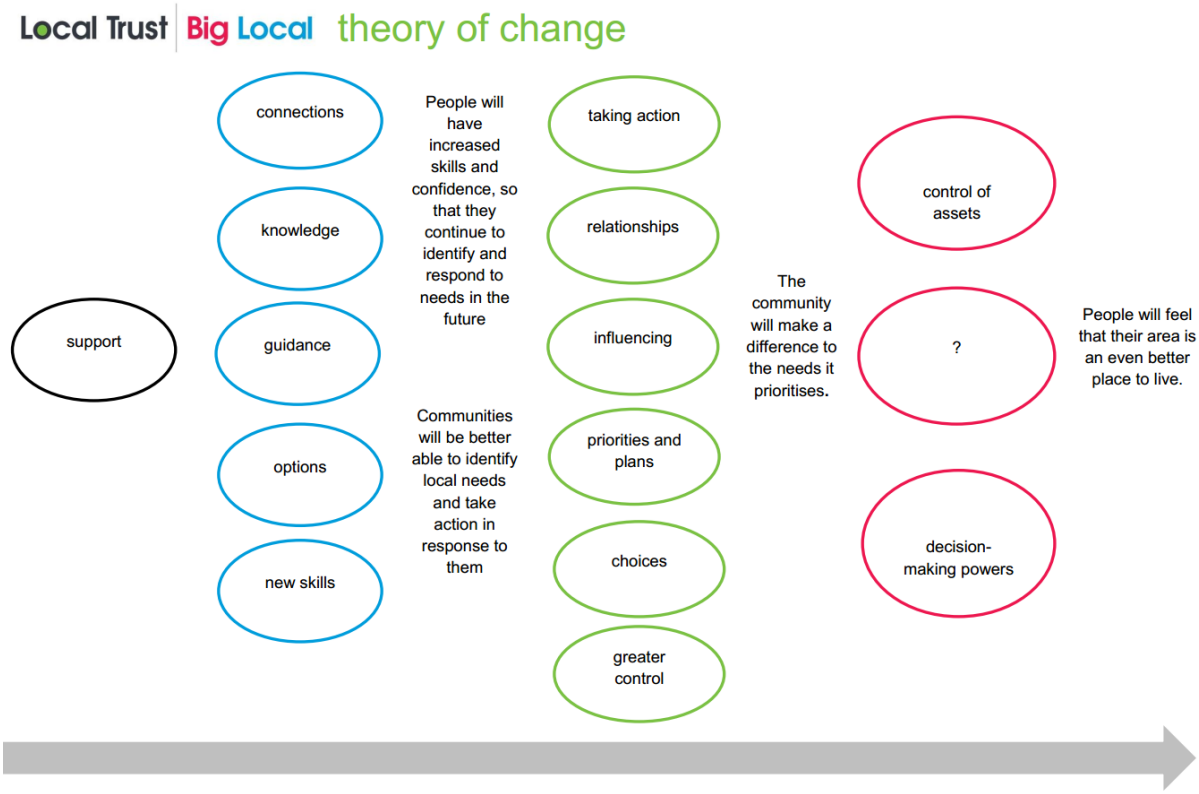

Figure 4

Theorising change is a difficult task, doing this collaboratively in such a way that various viewpoints and experiences are acknowledged and represented adds an extra layer of difficulty. We could say the same thing about clearly expressing this in a succinct written document and then attempting to distil this into a single diagram. It is important, then, to acknowledge both Local Trust and Big Local's efforts in doing this and also to acknowledge that a certain level of opacity might be inevitable. That Local Trust document where there are assumptions in the design of the programme, where there are things that they are still working out, and the extent to which Big

Local represents something of an experiment is also laudable. Looking at these things together and through a critical lens, however, there are some big questions worth considering. Big Local's 'overall outcome' is that people will feel that their area is a better place to live. Is this not somewhat impressionistic and intangible? Looking to the steps that will take us there we might wonder about capacity; Big Local see assets and capacity everywhere – integral perhaps to hopeful community development activity – but what about the histories and specificities of the Big Local areas and the lived realities of the kind of deprivation that residents might experience (see e.g.: McKenzie, 2015; Charlesworth, 2000; Sennett and Cobb, 1972)? How does this relate to the residents and how they engage with the process?

More questions present themselves around these residents and the extent to which those who engage in Big Local activity are aware of just what sort of programme they are signing up to participate in. It is worth noting that whilst it is not advertised as such there are two levels of documents and promotional material on the website – more and less wordy, more and less succinct – and whilst both are available to everybody is it not important to consider to what extent those engaging in the Big Local process as residents share its assumptions about the world and how change is made? And, to what extent are they aware that the activity they are engaged in is in some sense experimental? It is not that I am dismissing a desire to empower residents and to challenge the traditional hierarchies that might characterise or emerge in community development activity, but in light of Big Local's theory of change I am posing an open question about to what extent that is possible without some consideration of wider contexts (see discussion of theories of change, pp. 37-43), not least because those hierarchies and power relations could be seen here to be re-emerging in Big Local's activity. It is important to be alive to this, then, endeavouring to understand whether it is inevitable, how it might happen and how it might have been stopped. These questions, which could lead individuals and groups to approach their work in quite different ways, will be better elucidated as we turn now to consider Westfield's experience as a Big Local area.

2.2.2 Big Local in Westfield

Westfield was identified as a potential Big Local area by Sheffield City Council who, a long-time local authority officer told me, felt they had a choice between putting

Westfield forward for the programme or an area of social housing in the Totley neighbourhood. These areas of deprivation within Sheffield were geographically isolated in a city that is quite distinctly polarised between a more affluent south and west and a relatively more deprived north and east. As such, these areas had missed out on funding that had been strategically targeted elsewhere in the city. In contrast to neighbouring areas Westfield had also missed out on funding that targeted former coalfield communities because it was built after the nearest coal mines had closed. As documented in the previous chapter the level of need in Westfield had also been disguised in deprivation data on account of its more affluent private cul-de-sacs and relatively more affluent adjacent neighbourhoods (see p. 115).

Residents describe attending early meetings about Big Local and then choosing to sustain their involvement for a variety of reasons. These include a desire to direct where the money was spent, a desire to make the project a success, a feeling of responsibility or a belief in giving back to the community. During the project's early stages, the group of active local residents was referred to as a steering committee. They began meeting regularly in April 2013 along with some interested local organisations, including the church, schools and the University of Sheffield's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. The involvement of the university was initiated by two members of academic staff, one of whom had grown up in the area, and I became involved from the start of my PhD in the late-summer of 2013.

This fledgling group of residents and others began to engage more closely with Big Local's provision of learning and training opportunities, attending events around the country that sought to enable Big Local areas to share with, learn from and be inspired by one another. A number of activities were organised in and around Westfield, including two open days, coffee mornings, a litter pick, a Christmas party with carol singing, and the group also began to support play schemes for younger children on the estate. Additionally, the engagement with the university had led to a number of collaborative projects that had sought to generate more detailed feedback and data on Westfield, representing important first steps on the planning process that the group were now embarking on. These projects included three evening planning and feedback sessions, a storytelling project, an asset mapping

project, and some collaboration and assistance on accessing and analysing statistical data about Westfield.

The group of residents had chosen to adopt a committee-style mode of working that would be familiar to those whose experience in local government and politics or trade union activity had brought them into contact with Citrine's (1982) seminal *A.B.C. of Chairmanship*: electing a chairperson and vice-chairperson, paying significant attention to the production of agendas and the minuting of meetings. There was no instruction from the Big Local project centrally on how to organise activity within local areas, suggesting that Westfield Big Local's choice was influenced significantly by how members had worked before, it perhaps being unsurprising that the majority of local residents who came forward initially and gave their time to the project had previous experience in local politics, community development or tenants and residents' associations. The formal committee structure provided a framework for progressing work that many were comfortable with; in many respects this was a positive, but as the rep and others acknowledged at the time it did shut out potential alternative ways of working, especially in the formative stages, setting up a hierarchy in the group that favoured predominantly older and more confident members, and potentially creating a barrier to involvement for others on the estate unfamiliar with how it worked.

In June 2014 the steering group of local residents and partner organisations was formalised into the Westfield Big Local Partnership. This named 13 people and one organisation, the Department of Town and Regional Planning. Of the 13 named members some represented organisations including local schools, a local church, the tenants and residents' association, and also included a local councillor who was a resident of the estate. That one resident was named as 'young person's rep' is indicative of the group's make-up in terms of age. In terms of gender there were 8 women and 5 men. The chairperson was a retired male resident who had been a county and then city councillor, the vice-chairperson a female resident with young children. It was this group that contributed to the Westfield Community Profile, the production of which I will now turn to address. The profile document was a key part of the Big Local process that preceded the production of a more comprehensive plan.

2.2.2.1 The Profiling Process

The profile document seeks to demonstrate two things: an understanding of where Westfield was in the present – that is, late 2014 – and the particular challenges it faced; and a vision for what Westfield might be like in the future, at the end of a successful Big Local process. The Department of Urban Studies and Planning, including myself, played an instrumental role in this process: organising a series of workshops that considered these elements; assisting with the compiling of the activity of these workshops into a document; and subsequently looking to bring this thinking into the creation of a plan. Here I am keen to describe this activity, how it was imagined that it would unfold, how it did unfold and why. This activity holds important lessons for how grassroots level actors engage in planning processes and by extension key insights about the role their stories and the stories of others can and do play.

A day-long workshop called 'Building an interim profile and agreeing a vision for Westfield Big Local' was held on 12th August 2014. The morning was spent considering the profile. Residents reflected on the purpose of a profile and then assessed the data gathered from the various consultation and research exercises listed above. This was presented to them in a variety of visual representations, accompanied by text, under a number of different headings. A group discussion of what aspects were more or less important fed into consideration of two very different stories that could be told about Westfield based on the data we had seen, one that saw Westfield as in crisis and another that saw a wealth of opportunities on the estate. From here residents began to discuss practicalities, forming a working group and allocating tasks. The afternoon followed a similar pattern around the question of the vision. Following an interactive task where residents wrote postcards back to themselves from Westfield in the year 2030, thinking then occurred about what would have to happen to realise this vision, before residents began to refine what topics their vision should cover. There was some tension between achieving a vision that was broad and flexible enough yet also meaningful, and residents again began to think about how the vision and profile were linked. Ultimately, practicalities around drafting a vision were considered and tasks allocated. It is interesting to note that residents felt an important task for each process was to research what other Big

Locals had produced in relation to these processes. This could be read as a lack of confidence or a demonstration of how unnatural these activities felt to residents, but they also demonstrate how they understood the steps of the process that Big Local were making them go through, as instrumental means to drawing down the funding rather than as important ways of learning about and planning for their specific community.

The group aimed to have a draft profile completed by 26th August but in the end this did not materialise until well into September, and the final draft was not complete until the end of November. There are two notable things to mention about the process of producing the profile. Firstly, the difficulty residents had in producing it, and secondly, the role that the university had in the document that was eventually produced. These twin aspects say something important, both about the Big Local process and about grassroots driven planning. On the first point the group of residents who convened to produce the profile document delegated the task of producing a draft to one person. The draft document produced included a short introduction to Westfield and Big Local, the bulk of the document that followed was composed of the visual presentations that had been created by the university to assist the workshop, these had been copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document. They were presented without comment, before a concluding section highlighting areas of concern about which the Big Local group did not yet know enough. It is, of course, important not to understate the work put into this process by residents in their own time. They had, however, been unable to turn the raw facts that represented the bones of a profile into a coherent story about their area. It may have been the case that the Big Local process had thus far not equipped them with the necessary skills to do this work, and it was certainly the case that at points during the process partnership members who may have had the skills did not necessarily volunteer them, instead leaving the work to residents who found it more challenging. What we also seemed to be seeing, however, was a more concrete example of a theme that had been emerging over the previous 12 months, that is, just how difficult people find it to view their community and their neighbours in the abstract. They were more than willing and able to describe their community in their own terms, but not to go that step further and say what it meant.

What happened next was that I was asked to amend and take forward the original draft produced by the resident. Condensing the raw data and adding the narrative framing that was needed to create a coherent and convincing picture. Given that much of the work had been co-produced it would be unfair to say that the university had done the work *for* the residents, indeed they continued to have input during the drafting process. It is important to note, however, that the contribution of the university was significant, and that as such it could be difficult to say who was pushing the process forward and to ascertain to what extent residents were learning the skills to do things for themselves. This would be unremarkable if it did not seem to be at odds with how Big Local/Local Trust presented the work that residents did, as proof that they were gaining in skills and confidence that would outlast the programme. Anecdotally we came to understand that our experience in Westfield was not unique, with other areas often engaging consultants to fill the skills gap that we had sought to fill in Westfield. My aim in highlighting this is not to do down the residents or Big Local, but to highlight the structural support that was frequently key to moving things forward – in Westfield this seemed to go as far as *suggesting* foundational stories to residents – to question whether this was always fully acknowledged, and to ask whether it might be the case that residents were not interested in – as opposed to prevented – from learning how to do the work for themselves.

2.2.2.2 The Profile Document

The *Westfield Community Profile* leads with the vision that residents had settled on as the bedrock of their work:

> Our vision is to develop the Westfield community to its full potential, where people feel it is a great place to live and where children, young people and adults feel included and are inspired to be the best they can be. (2014, p. 5)

The vision can be seen to touch on some of the issues that had been identified on the estate, particularly in its desire for a Westfield that includes people of all ages, as opposed to the perception of an estate where older and younger people are suspicious of one another. Similarly, the suggestion that people might be 'inspired' seems to directly address the feeling that Westfield suffered from a collective disenchantment and low self-esteem. More than this, however, it is very clearly an

attempt to create a guiding purpose that is in some sense inarguable. Nobody could reasonably oppose the creation of 'a great place to live', claim that folk reaching their full potential was anything other than a positive, nor be fool hardy enough to set themselves against the catch-all term, 'community'.

Pages about Westfield and what the Big Local group had done so far then fed into the 'key themes' that Westfield Big Local had identified as the areas around which they should focus their activity. These were:

- Community
- Crime and antisocial behaviour
- Spaces for socialising
- Activities for the community, young and old
- Health and Well-being
- Environment and Green space
- Education and Employment
  (2014, p. 8)

The profile document then acknowledges that there are still many people on the estate that Big Local has not reached, and eventually a number of areas are acknowledged as needing more exploration:

- Debt and financial inclusion (food banks)
- Energy
- We need to reach more people on the estate, especially young people
- Citizens' Advice Bureau involvement for advice sessions
- Learning from the experiences and initiatives of other local communities
- Community enterprise initiatives
  (2014, p. 17)

Looking at the emphases of these two lists we can see once again the suggestion that whilst people's own feelings about and experiences of the estate are easier for them to engage with – and indeed can constitute a platform for activity – more strategic thinking that relies on abstract engagement is harder for them to do. This will become clearer as I now turn to consider how the introductions to each category – drafted by me in consultation with residents – frame the activity.

Community was identified by residents as the most important category, the area where they most wanted to see change. Central to this was the feeling that many residents had – shared strongly by a majority of partnership members – that something had been lost over time in Westfield. Two of the other categories are closely linked to community: Spaces for Socialising; and Activities for all of the

community, young and old. Another feeling that people had was key here, that people did not talk to one another anymore and that the 'sense of belonging, inclusion and community spirit' (2014, p. 12) that they wanted to feel necessitated people doing things together on the estate, as they were reported to have done in the past. Crime and Antisocial behaviour, with special reference to the feelings of discomfort caused by drug use on the estate, appears in the profile in a similarly affective vein, but as the negation of the pleasant environment residents want Big Local to contribute to engendering. Here some of the divisions on the estate emerge, in quotations from residents that refer to 'gangs', 'youth', 'riff raff' and 'druggies' (2014, p. 10), but this remains implicit, as opposed to introducing a category such as cohesion as an area where Westfield Big Local might concentrate their activity. It is important to emphasise, however, that two of the final three categories covered in the profile – Education and Employment, and Health and Well-being – do demonstrate a desire from residents to endeavour towards strategic action in their planning efforts, with the final category of Environment and Green space straddling the affective/strategic divide. The way that these categories fall outside of the overarching narrative of community lost, however, demonstrates the difficulty of integrating these abstract areas into a story about Westfield's past that seeks to intervene in how it changes. What is more, reference back to the 'druggies' and the 'riff raff' seems to demonstrate how such a story might actively exclude and shut down certain avenues for potentially transformative action. Nevertheless, this was the platform that Westfield Big Local and their university partners occupied as we looked to the next stage of creating a plan that would identify actions and areas for targeting investment that might take us further towards the vision all had collectively developed for Westfield's future.

2.2.2.3 The Plan writing process

The steps that fed into the writing of Westfield's initial interim plan – for the first three years of their activity – were very much like the steps that fed into the writing of the profile, albeit geared up to respond to the bigger task. Two further workshops were planned by the university that we felt would take the Westfield Big Local Partnership to a sound foundation from which they would be able to produce the plan. The first of these took place in October 2014 and looked to evaluate options for

the plan. This involved the group thinking about how it might be possible to respond to the priorities they had identified and looked to examples of work from other communities and organisations that might act as inspiration. Some time was spent thinking about how we could evaluate activities we might plan and therefore how we would know if progress was being made towards realising Westfield's vision. The afternoon was spent focussing on the community centre Com.unity, which it was clear would almost certainly be playing an important part in Westfield's plans. The aim of this activity was to think how the space could be put to work towards addressing the priority areas and realising the vision.

The second planning workshop – third overall – took place in early December and moved the focus onto producing the plan. Starting by revisiting the steps and intended outcomes of the Big Local process, by the end of the day we hoped to have finalised a list of activities and investments that would respond to each area of the interim plan. In retrospect this may have been somewhat optimistic but the timetable agreed with residents saw a group of four of them – 'Resident Planners' – taking the raw material from the profiling and planning workshops and producing a first draft by mid-January. This would be discussed by residents at a meeting, the university then agreed that we would go away and create a second draft in line with the discussion/comments, a task that was to be completed by me. Doing things this way around was intended to ensure that the university could not be seen to be doing the job for the residents, the residents would 'own' the plan and would have acquired and developed their skills. There would then be another chance to discuss and revise a draft before submitting the final interim plan to Big Local in mid-February.

Residents had reported being pleased with the workshops we had planned and feeling confident about progressing the work of the partnership and in achieving our goals. Unfortunately, however, things took longer than expected over the ensuing weeks. Once again work that had been imagined as being taken on by a group of residents was largely delegated to one person – albeit with that person's agreement – and the first draft of a plan was not circulated until mid-February, the date we had initially hoped to submit a final draft. The resident who had done the bulk of the work reported finding the process incredibly difficult – the hardest thing she had ever done – and went so far as to suggest the stress of the process had begun

to make her unwell. Having received the plan, it was agreed that I would first endeavour to format it in a more accessible fashion prior to people feeding back. This was a relatively minor issue, however, in so far as a number of quite substantive questions were thrown up by the circulated draft:

- The plan was at odds with the profile: using 5 instead of 7 themes; eliminating crime and anti-social behaviour; creating a new category for children and young people separate to activities for all the community, young and old
- A divide seemed apparent between the partnership and the community, the partnership doing things *for* the community as opposed to being a representation or part of it
- There was no indication of how more volunteers would be recruited, trained and involved, which was essential if the broad range of activities alluded to was to be possible
- There was no clear link between the plan and the 4 Big Local outcomes
- The plan represented a significant front loading of investment with no mention of sustainability/enduring legacy

There were more minor issues around unrealistic costings and the need to tender for providers as opposed to listing them in the plan but the substantive points mentioned above were particularly alarming because they highlighted a number of issues around the Big Local process and the Westfield Big Local Partnership. Significantly, it was clear that not all members truly supported decisions that had been made during the workshops and had sought to change these in writing the plan. Furthermore, the plan suggested that residents either did not support or did not understand the intention that the social investment of Westfield's one million pounds should look to continue providing returns beyond the project's ten-year lifespan. We can also see in this further evidence that the residents were not really on board with the idea of a profiling and planning process. All of which could be seen to suggest a number of vulnerabilities in the Big Local process, not least that residents did not have and were not acquiring the skills, confidence or means to do what was being asked of them. That a draft plan was produced at all was largely a testament to the determination of a single member, which may well have not been the case had the task fallen to someone else. What followed as we sought to amend and progress this initial plan, towards a document that would satisfy Big Local and provide a means for making the most of Westfield's funding, placed yet more work on partnership members and increasing strain on relationships.

Some residents felt that the plan should be submitted immediately, they were resistant to having to spend any more time thinking about or working on it. They used the argument that the wider community in Westfield were beginning to ask what Big Local were doing in the area and that no more delay could be afforded. The university together with some other partnership members were concerned that the plan did not provide a suitable framework for moving forward, particularly around taking over the community centre, Com.unity. After some careful negotiation it was agreed that we would organise a final, fourth workshop, which would make completing the plan possible. We titled this, 'The Damn Plan' and framed it with an apology from us. We had promised that the three workshops we had organised would enable us to produce the best plan possible, which had not been the case. Having stressed what we felt was the importance of being able to have an open and honest discussion we built the workshop around three questions:

1. Is it a plan for our entire Big Local area?
2. Is there enough detail to know what's going to happen, who will be responsible, and what will happen as a result of these actions?
3. Investing to make a lasting and positive difference in Westfield?
   (Workshop presentation)

Together the partnership discussed each question in turn. Our implied answers to this Socratic dialogue were that whilst a good start had been made there was more work to do in each area. Whilst it could be argued that the residents could not but agree with us, ultimately we determined together to strengthen the links to the priority areas highlighted in the Profile. At the end of the session residents each took responsibility for one area of the plan's activity and led on completing a form we had designed that sought to include all of the information needed to successfully plan for that activity. Together we began completing these forms during the workshop and residents were then to finish these in their own time. When completed they would send them to me and I would integrate them into the plan that I was seeking to strengthen, based on the first draft provided by residents.

From my position this was a difficult and somewhat fraught process. The overriding impression from a research note I made on receiving the initial draft from residents was despairing:

> *I'm supposed to take it and make it more like a plan – more convincing, more structured, coherent, readable – and not only is it bloody hard but it feels dishonest. Who do I help by making the half-truths more convincing?* (Research note, 4/3/2015)

It also points to the ethical tensions that accompanied every aspect of the department's engagement in Westfield. Were we imposing our ideas about what it would mean to plan for Westfield onto people who did not want them? Ultimately, however, it did not seem that residents had their own ideas that we were overriding, rather they were at a loss. Continuing to have the residents engage through producing their action planning sheets seemed to us to be an important way of making sure we had not monopolised the process, but from a more egalitarian perspective it shared the work, which I just did not have the inclination to do wholly on my own. Getting the sheets back from residents went the same way as the whole process, fitfully. Some residents returned their sheets the next day, others took weeks, some were completed, some only partially. Eventually, however, a plan was assembled that did contain work from everyone and which looked like it might do the job. I will now turn to the content of this plan before entering into some more substantive discussion of exactly whose story it told and what our experience might tell us about grassroots driven planning activity.

2.2.2.4 Westfield Big Local Interim Plan: 2015-2018

Like the Profile Westfield's first Interim Plan begins with the residents' vision of a great, inclusive place to live. This appears alongside an introduction from the chair. A general introduction then summarises the work of Westfield Big Local and the contents of the profile, before outlining 'the journey towards the plan'. This links back to Big Local's four outcomes, followed by a section that briefly outlines how the activity will be monitored/assessed. The bulk of the plan is then made up of 'The Action Plans' detailing the work that will go into and the outcomes that will stem from the following activities/investments:

- Community Hub
- Community Development Worker
- Maintaining the Partnership
- Calendar of Events
- Community Chest

- Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Adult Education
- Community Wi-fi
- Play Scheme (5-12 year olds)

A section is then devoted to detailing how these activities address the partnership's priority areas. Table 3 is reproduced from the plan, detailing intended outcomes for those activities that are not seen to be doing work across all of the activity areas:

TABLE 3	Adult Education	C.A.B.	Wi-Fi	Calendar of Events	Play scheme (5-12 years)
Community					
Crime and Anti-social Behaviour					
Spaces for Socialising					
Activities for all the community, young and old					
Health and Well-being					
Environment and Green Space					
Education and Employment					

The plan is honest about having more work to do in some areas, particularly around Crime and Anti-social Behaviour and Environment and Green Space, and mentions more potential projects that residents are interested in exploring: a community café; acquiring premises on Carley Drive[11] as a revenue stream/start-up business space; installing play equipment on a variety of possible sites. Final sections outline a communications strategy, an overall budget table and a list of current partnership members.

Whilst the plan is open about what the partnership currently felt unable to address it is still the case that there are strategic implications of this, especially if we interrogate a little more closely what is in the plan. For instance, crime and anti-social behaviour are often foremost in many people's reflections on Westfield, including members of the partnership, and whilst the focus of much of this anxiety is around younger people's role in this there is nothing in the plan expressly aimed at that demographic. This not only suggests that partnership members do not feel able to

[11] An area of Westfield with some vacant, light-industrial units on.

address these areas, or that they do not know how, but that the plan might be imagined as serving some people more than others, perhaps with a moral purpose, to reward what is seen to be good conduct. Similarly, green space and the environment are another frequent concern of residents, particularly around upkeep/maintenance – or lack of it – and around the provision of parks and play equipment for children. Whilst it is understandable that larger projects might be better left to later, when the partnership is perhaps more stable, more knowledgeable and, with experience, more confident, this could be seen to be at odds with the finite nature of their resource, which diminishes with each passing year. In relation to this last point there might even be strategic concerns around what the plan does promise will be addressed by its spending in the present. Com.unity and the Community Chest fund, for instance, are imagined as addressing all priority areas, but this wholly depends in the first instance on the activity that takes place there, and in the second on what local residents come forward and look to fund. All of which leaves an anxiety around to what extent residents really feel themselves to be in the driving seat of change on their estate, as opposed to taking a punt and crossing their fingers.

Thus far this chapter has introduced the Big Local programme and explained how it began to play out in Westfield, particularly through consideration of the profiling and planning processes. We have seen how the experience in Westfield attests to the fact that residents of places can be willing to come together to intervene in how their neighbourhood develops, and that collectively they can develop their capacity to do this. We have, however, also seen that there are difficulties and constraints on these processes. In particular, the extent to which they cannot but be intertwined with and implicated in the contested histories and experiences of places, to such an extent that the rhetoric of community development initiatives such as Big Local – with invocations of 'community' and exhortations towards 'empowerment' – could be seen as significantly undermined and, indeed, a potential constraint on the ability of communities to work through, deal with and move forward from their pasts. I will seek to make these points clearer in what remains of this chapter, where I will work through two key planks of Westfield Big Local's activity, The Gala and Com.unity. This is important as, in line with

Sandercock's suggestion that planning can be understood as 'performed story' (2003), the *actions* and practices of Westfield Big Local are not only important facets of their planning activity but also concrete demonstrations that their stories have material and political purchase and implications.

2.2.3.1 The Gala

The Gala was one of fifteen suggestions that made its way into the initial Westfield Big Local Interim Plan under the heading 'Calendar of Events' and one of three to actually be delivered in the first year, the others being Litter Picking and O.A.P. Trips. The idea behind the Calendar of Events was that events staged throughout the year could, 'act both as engagement activities, publicising Westfield Big Local and getting more people involved, and as an opportunity for the community to come together and socialise' (WBL, 2015, p. 15). Inclusion and momentum were central motivations, then, with a stress on a series of events that would give, 'all ages and backgrounds the opportunity to take an active role in the community' (WBL, 2015, p. 15). The view was towards changing people's experience and understanding of life on the estate: 'creat[ing] the feeling that Westfield is a good and enjoyable place to live, where people have the opportunity to participate and in which they have a sense of pride' (WBL, 2015, p. 15). Whilst the events had the potential to respond across all of the priority areas identified in the profile the primary priority attended to was identified as being Community, fostering the attendant concept of 'Community Spirit'.

The event took place within an enclosed part of a large field adjacent to Shortbrook Primary School. Anyone travelling through the estate or arriving by tram would be likely to see the event as it was situated in a prominent location easily visible from the road. The bulk of the stalls at the Gala were either food stalls or rides/entertainment for children, there was also a Big Local Tent, which sought to engage with wider Westfield, soliciting the ideas of residents and encouraging them to think about getting involved. Other features of the day included a raffle, a number of classic cars on display, and a space with children's karate and street-dance displays, this aspect of the day was directed by the master of ceremonies, MC Nige, whose public address system played music in-between and after acts.

The Gala was widely regarded as being very well-run, but on the fundamental point of its worth and wider achievement opinion within the partnership was

polarised. On the one hand were those who believed that the Gala had been broadly successful:

> I think we're getting there, I really do. I mean one of the indications were, one of the big indicators was when we had the gala and we said that we'd get about 500 people and we thought we were being a bit optimistic when we said 500, because every other thing that we'd done we only got 200, 250 people.
> **Yeah.**
> And, we give tickets out as they crossed the entrance, and we had over 750 people come to that. So I regard that as being a tremendous indicator that people do want the good things in life on this estate again, and I think if we provide it as a community for the community, I think year on year it'll improve. Definitely will improve.
>
> ~
>
> I helped organise the gala last year, it was myself and one other partnership member did the main bits, but there was 4 of us all together, and we pulled that together in three months. And we've already started planning this year's.
> **Yeah, that's a real, kind of, success.**
> It was, we got over 700 people on the day, a big success.
> **Great. And what kind of difference do you think that having something like the gala makes to the estate?**
> We're hoping eventually it's going to bring the community together, so they'll know that every year on the 2nd Saturday in August there's going to be a gala.
> **Do you think that over the kind of, well, two and a half years now, of Big Local, that you've felt the community come together more or do you think that's still a sort of…**
> It's still a battle.
> **Why do you think it is so difficult?**
> I don't know, I think it's just the way the area's been run down over the last 15 years.

On the other hand are those who question this story of success and community togetherness:

> I got a real awkward question, well, it weren't awkward, a funny question, which even I went, what? And it was, you've got this million pound – OK, yeah – to improve Westfield. What's a gala gonna do to improve Westfield? I got asked that question, and I was like, it gets the community together, it's about engaging. But it lasts three hours and that's it, what now? And they're right, because what now? What are we doing with that? Yeah, we're planning next year's. I mean the other thing that, this is the other reason I feel as though I'm not listened to, is because when that gala happened people were coming to me and saying them rides were way too expensive for Westfield. Yeah, they were full, what people didn't get the gist of is, it were full, but if you looked at them people, a lot of people come from Beighton. They weren't Westfield kids,

> Westfield kids I were having to pay for to go on them rides. So how can that have benefitted Westfield, how can it?

Or, as another partnership member put it rather more succinctly: 'The gala I think was probably irrelevant to the community, and I'm not quite sure what percentage of the community actually came through the door'.

These two distinct understandings of the purpose and impact of holding a Gala are interesting in a number of ways. The first thing to note about those arguing for the success of the Gala is the way in which they temper their praise by stating that it is for now an 'indicator' that they are moving in the right direction, and that 'eventually' it will bring the community together, furthermore, their belief in its success rests on the number of people who attended. Whilst who those people are and the nature of their interaction is irrelevant to some partnership members, for those sceptical about the Gala it is at the very heart of things:

> …when I said I wanted a feedback day for the gala, didn't need one apparently. Didn't need one. But all I wanted to say is actually when you think about, £2 a ride when people can't even afford to get their milk sometimes for their babies, how can you afford £2 a ride?
> **No, it's a good [interruption to open door]**
> And then when it is mentioned it's like, yeah but rides were always full. So why have I got photos where rides were empty? It's because they don't want to see it.

Taken together with the other sceptical comments above we can see a distinct approach, which seeks to take a strategic view of Big Local activity with an awareness of and desire to respond to some of the larger issues on the estate. This might suggest a quite different way of conceiving of community, which is based on an understanding of the 'Westfield People' who constitute the community and by extension the belief that community activity should be oriented towards them. This is opposed to the position of the gala enthusiasts who want to feel and perform community, and for whom anyone who comes to the Gala constitutes the community.

This second sceptical comment, however, also highlights some of the difficulties around asking people to critically appraise work and activity in which they have invested a lot of their own physical and emotional energy. Taken together with the different views about community, and ideas about how to act evidenced above, one can begin to appreciate the extent to which the community-led planning activity

that led to the Gala happening revolves around what we could term the micro-politics of small-group interaction. This is not to say that the Gala is trivial or unimportant, for as another partnership member highlighted, it was important to do *something*:

> **So what do you think the biggest achievements so far are then, for Big Local?**
> We 'ent got none. Gala I'd say. I wouldn't say nothing else because we haven't done anything.

The Gala, then, is crucial, in so far as it represents a concrete task undertaken and completed by Westfield Big Local, yet it does not bear up under scrutiny as evidence that the community is 'coming together'. This gap between the desired outcomes of the Gala and what it could be seen to have achieved in reality continues when it is assessed against some of the other aims that it and the wider Calendar of Events had. For example, some partnership members did not know what the Westfield Big Local tent at the gala was for, believing it to be 'some scheme or other of the university's', in which we were being assisted by some partnership members, when in fact the opposite was true, it was a Westfield Big Local Partnership 'scheme' to which the university was giving assistance. It might not be surprising, then, that subsequently none of the local people who visited the tent and showed an interest in becoming active in Westfield Big Local actually did so, not least because nobody from the partnership followed them up. Finally, whilst it is not the fault of the Gala itself, it could not be said to have contributed to a sense of momentum around Westfield Big Local because there were not enough other initiatives around it to assist in creating this. One reason for this, however, is the amount of the group's time and energy that had to be invested in another key plank of the first plan, the taking over of the community building, Com.unity, which had previously been a Local Authority managed facility, and which I will turn to now.

2.2.3.2 Com.unity

Com.unity is a community centre on Westfield. It was converted from a former pub – characterised in the press as 'notorious' and a 'drug den' (BBC, 2010) – and designed primarily as a youth facility using funding from the government's Youth Capital Fund. Sheffield City Council's *Westfield Regeneration Strategy* (2009), which sought to, 'identify the main needs and priorities for action for this local area of extreme disadvantage, and then develop appropriate responses' (p. 5), had identified

the creation of the facility as a 'Keystone Project' in their approach to tackling some of the issues Westfield faced and when it opened in 2011 there was genuine hope that Com.unity could act, 'as a real catalyst for change' (BBC, 2010). Almost immediately, however, Com.unity was under pressure in competing for Local Authority resource that was ever scarcer and by 2014 the Local Authority let Westfield Big Local know that if it was to remain open they would have to commit their own time and money to this end:

> Two local authority directors came to [a WBL Partnership] meeting to break the news that the council would no longer be able to afford to fund the community centre that had been created on the site of the former Golden Keys pub. The officers informed the group that, although they hated the term, this was a 'Big Society' moment: it was up to the community and Big Local money to fill the void. (Inch, Crookes and Shore, 2015, p. 59)

Two of the authors of the report quoted here were in the meeting described, which as they suggest was essentially an ultimatum. Westfield Big Local, then, was in a difficult position because the council had essentially shifted the responsibility for keeping the building open on to them. There is a sense in which this represented an opportunity but an opportunity which was not really experienced as a choice – they felt they *had* to save the building – this extract from an interview with a partnership member exposes the reality of the position they were in:

> **What do you think the major successes of the Big Local have been so far?**
> Without a shadow of a doubt saving this place. Because if we hadn't've done that, we wouldn't have had somewhere to meet for a start, we'd've had nothing.

This sense, that Com.unity was one of very few positive aspects, often expressed as the only positive aspect of an estate that had felt and continued to feel the effect of accumulative disinvestment was widely shared:

> Westfield 'ant got anywhere else to socialise, no libraries, they've got a school, they've got no libraries, no church, they've no post office, and that might sound silly, post office, but that's where old people used to talk, y'know, when they were getting their money.

The effect of this perspective was for critical questioning about the role that the centre might play within the wider aims of Westfield Big Local – 'I don't think the community will be aware anyway, or bothered' – to be side-lined as attention was galvanised around 'saving' this asset for the community, even that of residents who

admitted to having never entered the building before their involvement with Big Local. Where questions have been raised they focus on the amount of energy that Com.unity has absorbed and the lack of concrete proposals for how a relatively new community group could make the building 'sustainable' when the local authority had apparently been unable to:

> I still think that Com.unity, although it's got its uses and I'm sort of glad that they're using it, I think that they took too much time; they spent too much time on that. And I don't think we'll get as much out of it as we could.

It should be stressed, however, that the two openly sceptical statements quoted here were made in one-on-one interviews. Where questions in this vein were raised within WBL they had to be raised more sensitively and tended to be shut down with the same broad story about the cost incurred by the council when their contractors came to change a lightbulb and the fact that Westfield Big Local would be able to do this for a fraction of the price.

This is not to say that there were not differences of opinion about Com.unity. In fact, real fissures opened up within the group about how to understand who the building is for and how it should be used, which mirror the disagreements about the Gala. A second story that some residents used, ostensibly to demonstrate how they could make savings that the council could not, helps to demonstrate this. The following exchange happened at a meeting at the University in February 2015 that looked to improve lines of communication between residents and students with a view to helping to co-ordinate action research projects in Westfield:

> **1**: Now, another thing, the phone here. People are always coming in to use it. X lets them in. You've got no idea who they are or who they're calling. It can't be right. It must be costing a fortune. We can put a stop to that.
>
> **2**: That's right; they could be calling Australia for all we know.
>
> **3**: Or they could be calling their dealer! (Research note, 10/03/15)

Implicit in this exchange is the view that once Westfield Big Local take over the running of Com.unity they will make changes to control who can use the building and how they can use it. Here we can see Partnership members responding to the archetypal 'druggies' and 'vandals' who have been an ever present feature of their community development activity. In practice it becomes a conflict around the role of youth in the building with views polarised between those who want to open-up:

> My view is it's a community centre it should be open to all, not just the youths, which is what it's seen as at the moment, it is seen as a youth centre.

And those who see 'opening up' as a strategy for forcing others out:

> For that initial first year [com.unity] had to be a young person's centre because it was them what put their money into it. After that it could be whatever you wanted. It could become a community centre as long as there was an aspect of youth still involved in it. And that's what happened. And then it was open full time, and then it got shut because of all cuts and everything and now all of a sudden you've got another area coming in, what seem to not want youth services in at all. And I think that's one of the issues that's being discussed today.
> **OK. You think that the Big Local don't want youth provision going on here? Why do you think that is?**
> Because they see young people as trouble causers and they're doing too much damage to building, and this and that and other. They've got a negative view from people.
> **Yeah. Do…**
> And I might be totally wrong but this is what I'm hearing. This is how it comes across, y'see. I've actually, I used to be in this meeting what's going on now but I've backed off from it, because I were getting frustrated, myself. And I think now, just get on, just do it because you're gonna do it because you're not listening to me. So it's pointless me being there. So, y'know, that's how I feel, that's my thoughts.

The second quotation here conveys a strong feeling about what Com.unity was, is and should continue to be that wishes, in a sense, to continue to positively discriminate in favour of youth provision, acknowledging that to treat everyone on the estate equally would be to put those less able to represent their own interests at a distinct disadvantage; an argument that the previous quotation is unwilling to countenance. The second quotation also draws attention to other inter-related issues which found some expression in the foregoing discussion of the Gala. The first of these is the continuation of the question of just who 'the community' is in Westfield and the second is governance tensions around Westfield Big Local, which we can begin to see in a sharper focus. In addition to exasperation in response to the feeling of not being listened to these tensions find further expression for the minority viewpoint on the partnership in fear:

> I am frightened of it, Jason, because if they don't get it right there's gonna be uproar on this estate. This estate, what you have to remember has been promised a lot, a lot of times, and it's always they've never had it. It's alright them taking Com.unity on, I think it's brilliant, but they've gotta get it right what they put in here otherwise there's gonna be murder.

This is very emotive language in relation to an estate that continues to be haunted by the memory of several murders in recent years, a fact which bears testament to the sense that some prominent partnership members do not only not understand the estate's 'real' nature, but actively refuse to try and do so.

2.2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of a number of things: the Big Local programme; how this has hit the ground in Westfield; and how the University of Sheffield's Department of Urban Studies and Planning – and the PhD project I have conducted within it – have engaged with the group of residents who came to constitute Westfield Big Local. It has also sought to better explain these processes and begin to analyse them by highlighting some key aspects of activity in Westfield, around the profile and plan making processes, the Westfield Big Local gala and Com.unity. This movement between the general and the particular has begun to draw attention to a number of things about community development initiatives, the specificity of place and the micro-politics of neighbourhood action, all of which can be seen to colour and enrich our understanding of the relationship between narrative, story and grassroots driven planning. There seem to be important questions arising about whether there has been too sanguine an account of story in planning literature thus far, with too little attention paid to just how many conflicting stories constitute places, and how the agency of people in grassroots contexts and by extension their stories are structurally bounded and constrained. These questions will become clearer as I turn in the next chapter to the story workshop, which sought to explore their implications for Westfield Big Local together with the residents who had been involved. The next chapter concludes the empirical part of the thesis, which will then turn to an analytical part that seeks to develop its insights, bringing them more closely and explicitly into conversation with the literature and conceptual framework outlined in its opening chapters.

2.3 – Emerging Tensions

2.3.1 Introduction

As the last chapter suggested, there were underlying tensions within the partnership about how to understand Westfield and from here how to approach the work of Westfield Big Local and the investment of the funding the programme had brought. The hard work and stress involved in producing the profile and the plan documents had also placed strain on relationships, meaning that in the period following the approval of the plan the Westfield Big Local partnership found itself, contrary to what one might expect, in a somewhat fragile situation. A further difficulty for the partnership was the time and effort involved in taking over the lease of the Com.unity building, which transpired to be a significantly more difficult and protracted process than anyone had envisaged. Partnership members had invested in the process, then, their own energy, time and emotion. This is key to understanding how their work continued and how events progressed.

Above I have introduced a number of problematic themes – different understandings of the community, different understandings of the aims of Westfield Big Local, different orientations to the role of planning and social investment – below I want to elaborate on these in relation to two elements of Westfield Big Local's ongoing work. Firstly, the role of the Locally Trusted Organisation or LTO: what this is, how it found expression in the context of a strained partnership in Westfield and with what implications. This sets up the second element of ongoing work that I want to discuss, the evaluation of Westfield Big Local's work that began to take place towards the end of the first year of the interim plan. Specifically, this discussion provides the context for the introduction of the story workshop that I hoped to conduct, which looked to some degree to constitute an element of ongoing evaluative work. Understanding how this ultimately found expression will allow me to conclude by turning to consider two questions: what it means to act politically in an apparently apolitical space; and what our experience in Westfield says about the power, or not, of academic knowledges and discourses. This sets up the more analytical part of the thesis, whereby I consider the content of the story workshop I did undertake, and bring Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory to bear on our

experience in Westfield. This analytical elaboration will allow me to conclude the thesis by setting out the implications of my work for our understanding of the relationship between story and planning, and how it suggests it might be productive to take work in this area forward, particularly in grassroots contexts.

2.3.2 The LTO

> A locally trusted organisation is the organisation chosen by your Big Local partnership to administer and account for the distribution of your funding, and/or deliver activities or services on behalf of the Big Local partnership.
>
> Your Big Local partnership guides the overall direction of Big Local in your area and makes decisions about how your Big Local funding will be used. (Local Trust, July 2015, p. 1)

This description of the LTO's role introduces Local Trust's programme guidance on how that role should be understood, clearly demonstrating that it is the partnerships that should ultimately make decisions and drive the use of the funding. The LTO role is made necessary because partnerships are not legally constituted bodies, most crucially this means that they cannot open a bank account but also that individual partnerships might face difficulties around areas such as employing staff, managing a building or delivering certain activities (Local Trust, July 2015). Even though the LTO will be remunerated for its work in holding and administering funds it is clear that, given their assumption of various legal responsibilities, a certain amount of good faith would be required if the relationship is to be realised in the way that Local Trust suggest it should be. This was acknowledged by an interviewee with experience of Big Local in more than one area:

> I think that having a locally trusted organisation is hard for the group, and with the best will in the world the locally trusted organisations can be amazing, and they can be rubbish, and they can be everything in between, and you've just got to take pot luck. And, the locally trusted organisations have also got to get a grasp of this, and Big Local and how it works, and the way it works, and I think, I guess there's quite a lot of trusts that have just sort of taken it over and run with it and everybody's happy and it's OK, but it's not necessarily the way it was set up. To run. And then there are other local trusts that probably aren't as hands on as they could be, you know, locally trusted organisations.

Westfield Big Local was in a good position to comment on this aspect of the Big Local project because they have had, to date, two different LTOs. It was necessary for them to change when the initial organisation realised they would be unable to employ staff

and sign the lease for Com.unity on behalf of Westfield Big Local, both of which the partnership felt were crucial if they were going to create the capacity to make the change they wanted to see on the estate. Only one organisation responded to the call for tenders to become the new LTO but luckily they were more flexible and able to fulfil the functions that the partnership felt were essential.

They came into the process just as the first interim plan was being finalised and approved by Local Trust, which as described above was at the end of a somewhat testing period for the partnership, as completing the plan had not been a simple or straightforward process. Into this situation, then, the new LTO brought strong ideas from their own experience, especially around how to run a community building and how to make it successful, unfortunately these seemed to place it quite firmly on one side of a partnership that really needed to try and unite again around the collective success of having the plan approved. The conflict this created is demonstrated by the following quotation from an interview with a partnership member, it came after a description of how Westfield Big Local might help a young person who was going for a job interview with what to wear or interview skills training:

> That's what Westfield would benefit. Not people saying, oh, we'll have Com.unity and we'll put chairobics on. We've put chairobics on here before and the only people what actually participated in it were the students from the University. Nobody else did it. [The chairobics instructor] stopped coming because of it, and that was free. So they're not gonna pay for something if they won't come for free.

Again we see the emergence of a debate around the nature and composition of the community in Westfield and the strong suggestion that Westfield has its own particularities and needs, making it quite different from areas a very short distance away and meaning that a community building in Westfield might need to be run differently and offer different kinds of activities. The strong suggestion of this quotation is that the LTO do not understand how the building in Westfield should be run if it is to be of value to the community. This point of view was supported in stark terms at a workshop meeting facilitated by the University where a representative of the LTO asked the question to some of those present about why everything they suggested was tailored towards poor people.

This is not to say that the LTO were immediately unpopular, that they entered into the responsibility in bad faith or that their motivation was to strong-arm the partnership in any way. Rather that they brought an approach and an ethos that suggests certain ways of conducting business and that chimes strongly with some members of the partnership at the expense of others. This situation is well represented by the following appreciative remark from a partnership member:

> And you know [the LTO], what they've done for [their] community is absolutely phenomenal. And they're supposed to be retired, but they work like bloody hell. And they upset people as well, because they know what they're talking about, they know where they're going, they know what they've done, if you look at their history in community relations, if you like, if you look at their history they've done so much for [their community]. Unbelievable. When they took [their community building] over [it] was 3 weeks from bankruptcy, 3 weeks from bankruptcy and they turned it round. Not just them two but they were the driving force to others to drive it through.

The focus on a particular style of leadership that is evident here, that sees strength in pressing ahead with what you believe regardless of whether it upsets other people, forms part of a wider discourse around what it means to be 'professional' that has served, most probably inadvertently, to do a good deal of damage to Westfield Big Local partnership. Not only is this manner of working, especially when it originates within the LTO, at odds with the wider Big Local project's understanding of itself but, as we have seen above, on the ground in Westfield it has caused some people to feel not just that they do not want to be involved in decision making but that they are actively being ignored. The rationale of the LTO and some partnership members was not that they wished to ignore others but that they, 'know what they're talking about'. A common refrain from the LTO in regard to suggestions about what kind of activities might take place in Com.unity was, 'the book is this thick', accompanied with a hand gesture demonstrating just how much 'health and safety' legislation needed to be heeded if a crèche or a community café were to be run from the centre. It is, of course, important to operate within the law, but for some the overwhelming impression was of the LTO attempting to put their own supposed knowledge to work to influence what Westfield Big Local were doing and how.

2.3.4 Governance issues

The issues discussed here in relation to the LTO were one element of growing discontent or disagreement about how Westfield Big Local conducted its business. A further important element here was the way that a discrete Management Group within the partnership appeared to be making more and more decisions independently:

> …I think [the rep] will just do whatever the management group… you see, you know my biggest problem with all this? The management group.
> **Yeah.**
> And I don't mean that nasty. But where did the management group come from? Because that was supposed to be [employee]'s working group. And next you've got a management committee. Well, I thought we were all part of it, but we're not, and I struggle with that.
> **It's a good question, yeah. I don't understand.**
> I really struggle with that, because it seems to be three people, four people now, making all the decisions and we're just here to say yes or no. To make numbers up and I don't agree with that. So that's how I feel.
> **Yeah.**
> I think if we get more people on, I think we ought to take away the management group, I really do, I don't think it needs a management group, I think we all should be making them decisions, what they have, I think that should be a core group.

A group originally intended to facilitate the line management of a part-time member of staff was able, then, to become in the eyes of some partnership members a de-facto executive. This further demonstrates not only the extent to which the rationality of a particular understanding of how things should be done, supported by the attendant conception of professionalism began to hold ever greater sway over the partnership, but also how the rhetoric of Big Local, which focussed on empowering residents and allowing them to drive decision making, might serve to mask the continuation of business as usual.

As time passed, then, the question of where power lay within Westfield Big Local, of why decisions were made and of who ultimately made them seemed to become both increasingly important and increasingly difficult to ask. Or, as one partnership member put it: 'now I feel as though, LTO, is managing the partnership, rather than the partnership managing the LTO'. To make matters yet more complicated, the different views of different partnership members were intertwined with the different understandings of the community and the purpose of Big Local

that have been set out above, with the added complexity of the emotional investment that all partnership members had made in the Westfield Big Local project. A number of related issues surfaced, then, around how Com.unity would be managed, how staff would be managed, how WBL would conduct their business, who ultimately decided what WBL could or could not do, and how WBL related to the estate more widely. In addition to the discussion of the LTO above – about whose view was more important, the partnership's or the LTO and Management Group's – an attendant question arose around how the LTO were being remunerated. Whilst their contract saw the national organisation pay them 5% of the grant's value as it was spent there was a question around how 'above and beyond' work would be paid for. Unbeknown to some partnership members the management group had been agreeing to extra payments to the LTO on an ad hoc basis for work done, which came out of WBL's grant rather than additionally from Local Trust as was the case with the 5%.

2.3.5 Evaluating the plan?

In this situation, where some members of the partnership were questioning what appeared to be the ever increasing influence of the LTO, the university was a strong voice alongside others. In addition to questioning how activity was taking place using Big Local's rhetoric around ensuring that the LTO were not exerting an undue influence we were also seeking to ensure that all partnership members were able to have their say around decisions that were being taken, and that all aspects of Westfield Big Local's activity were transparent. The events outlined here provide the backdrop for a review that had to be conducted of the interim plan following its first year. From the position of the university it seemed absolutely essential that the tensions and difficulties outlined here would form part of the plan review, not least because meetings were becoming increasingly fraught, with heated exchanges, raised voices, and people leaving midway through in distress on several occasions. It also formed the context in which I endeavoured to undertake the story workshop that would form one important part of the PhD. On the ground at the time it felt like the workshop could also contribute to the evaluation process, and in some senses it felt like it could have been an intervention, looking to assist the process whilst exploring a number of questions: would it be possible to raise the issues that had arisen around Westfield Big Local's work through the stories of others? how would

partnership members respond to these? would they be able or willing to readily link these to their own activity? An outline of this workshop has been included in the methodology chapter of this thesis and more detailed analysis of its content is included in the next. Here, then, my aim is to build on the outline I have already given, discuss the wider context further, and clarify some important factors around how the workshop was negotiated that led it to progress in the way that it did.

2.3.6 Story Workshop Preparation

A participatory action research ethic had been an important element of the design of this project from the outset and had continued to exert an influence on how the fieldwork was conducted. As such it was always imagined that the story workshop would play an important part both in the project and in responding to the imperatives of this ethic. This would build on the work I had done alongside Big Local partnership members in Westfield on producing the profile and plan documents – discussed in the previous chapter – which had likewise been understood from a participatory action perspective. When the idea had been introduced to partnership members, then, it had always been done so with the caveat that it would have to fit around their priorities and other activity, and that it could – subject to their agreement – potentially be useful as part of their ongoing planning and evaluation activity, allowing them to reflect on and respond to the decisions that they had made and had to make. Likewise, the interviews I had conducted with residents, Big Local partnership members and service providers had the potential to serve Westfield Big Local's activity in addition to contributing to the research.

In addition to discussing this in general terms with Big Local partnership members I had specifically discussed the questions of whether this might be useful and how it might work with the community development worker that Westfield Big Local had employed to assist them in implementing their plan and realising their vision. This could have been tied explicitly to Westfield Big Local's evaluation processes or been removed from it. In either case the community development worker suggested she felt that it would be a positive and helpful way of raising potentially fractious or difficult topics and engaging people in discussing them. As such she was keen that, even if it could not form an explicit part of the process, it

should happen in advance of other evaluation exercises in order to provide an illuminating background to these:

> Because that's the week of the action plan review and I think before that, either hearing some of the stuff you've collected, or you doing something like that that starts making them maybe think in a more, I think it's almost that [residents] probably got into it in the first place because [they] found it all interesting and [they]'ve just got into this rut of like going to meetings, reading the agendas, yes that's fine and not actually thinking, I mean, it is really interesting, but not actually thinking about the big issues anymore. Just being like, God it's another meeting, yes, whatever, how can we spend less, how can we save some, and not thinking about the big, and not going, well, we don't even have to do that, we could just change, we could just stop doing that, it's having an environment in which they almost feel safe to do it, and I think the meetings aren't that environment. So having something like that where you're going to come and provoke them into maybe, a more thought provoking conversation, but timing wise, like, let's say a week before that action planning.

The feelings she expresses here stem from her own experience of people's fatigue in relation to the amount of meetings they had had to attend, coloured as we have seen in the previous chapter by the protracted profiling and planning activities, and some of the strain that these had put on relationships.

We might begin to see a tension around the project's participatory ethic here, given the way in which the activity of Westfield Big Local and its participants appeared to be – in line with the definition influenced by Laclau and Mouffe and discussed in the first part of this thesis – increasingly political, that is, antagonistic. Is it the case that the workshop looked to do something deceptive or to use participants as guinea pigs? In this context, however, I would suggest we cannot understand academic actors as standing outside of events, rather they are inside and their actions have political consequences too. In these terms, then, the important questions are, what was the story workshop looking to do? What was the nature of its political intervention imagined as being? And what implications does this have for the overall ethic? To be explicit, then, the story workshop was imagined as a way of getting partnership members to hear some of the voices and perspectives that were beginning to be drowned out in the work of Westfield Big Local. It was also imagined as a way of getting partnership members to re-engage with their bigger, strategic purpose. Even if such a thing were possible, it was not intended to make Westfield

Big Local do one particular thing rather than another, nor even to make them reassess or change their priorities. Rather it was to remind them that those other voices existed and ask them to consider what claim they had on the work of the partnership. Here we can see an academic angle, in exploring the power of particular stories, and in understanding how they might be useful for planning. To what extent can people be provoked to at least pause for thought? Would they be able to re-engage with the planning element of their work through story? Accepting that a participatory ethic, then, will always pose questions for research as opposed to representing an absolute benchmark, we can see how my understanding of the workshop does not undermine this, in so far as it continues to seek to elevate the voices of the marginalised, and to engage with these alongside Westfield Big Local Partnership in a useful way. Furthermore, as we turn to discuss how the space for the workshop was negotiated and what space it actually managed to occupy, we can see, in the constraints placed on the workshop, further justification for understanding it in expressly political terms.

2.3.7 Story workshop, initial plan

Following our initial discussion during the interview, then, the community development worker and I had a further meeting on 12th February 2016 where I presented some ideas about the implications of my formative analysis under two headings: *Stories of Westfield*; and *Stories of Westfield Big Local*. Under the first heading I felt it would be important to explore the ways that Westfield's stories were in fact multiple and frequently at odds with one another. Seeking to understand Westfield in light of this might have serious implications for the plan and the activities inside it, focussed as it was on the concept of community. I posited the following in a note shared in advance of our discussion as topics that pointed towards Westfield's multiple stories:

- Agencies (*Reluctance to report issues* Vs *Seeing agencies as allies*)
- Change (*Westfield can improve* Vs. *Westfield will get worse*)
- Future (*Optimism* Vs. *Pessimism* Vs. *Inability to think beyond the present*)
- Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime (*Bad Parenting* Vs. *Boredom* Vs. *Hopelessness*)
- Drugs (*Proof of innate badness* Vs. *Escape from reality* Vs. *A way to make money*)
- Self (*I am good and have something to contribute* Vs. *I'm stupid and worthless*)

- Westfield/its reputation (*Love*/*Pride* Vs. *Hate*/*Shame* Vs. "*Better the devil you know*")
- Priorities (*Going to Blackpool* Vs. *Topping up electricity* Vs. *Not getting sanctioned*)

I hoped that presenting these various viewpoints in a storied form through a number of talking heads might prove useful for a discussion on priorities and for evaluating the plan. A different focus might come out of this and I felt that within Westfield's various stories there were the seeds of a potentially new story that different people with quite different perspectives could see the truth in, if not unite around. Again provisionally, I suggested what some aspects of this could be:

- Westfield as a 'forgotten' estate
- Neither Derbyshire nor Sheffield but Westfield!
- A shared experience of de-industrialisation/traumatic change
- Coming together in the face of adversity

The second group of stories I felt it might be beneficial to consider, *Stories of Westfield Big Local*, would encompass the achievements and optimism that individuals had spoken of and shared with one another, but also some of problems that had been raised: exhaustion; confusion around Westfield Big Local's purpose and direction; and some of the further problems that had arisen over time in how the group related to one another, especially as some interviewees had spoken to me about feeling bullied at times within the partnership and still others had stopped engaging with Westfield Big Local altogether. Taken together there was the potential for the discussion to help create a foundation from which the partnership could evaluate how they worked and possibly look to change this so that people could contribute towards the collective vision in useful ways with which they felt comfortable and, by extension, respected and valued.

The community development worker was receptive to these ideas, their potential use and impact. She discussed them with the chair of Westfield Big Local who agreed that a day was needed to undertake the review activity and that it would be interesting and potentially beneficial if I ran a workshop or something similar, along the lines outlined above, in the first part of that day, which would be 18th March 2016. From here, however, this plan was derailed as the Big Local rep for Westfield had strong ideas on how to run the plan review that left no space for me to elaborate

on the research I had done or run the workshop that the Community Development Worker and I had begun to discuss. The rep's understanding was that she was tasked with running the session, which would be focussed on 9 plan review questions provided by Big Local. This was frustrating, not least because the rep did not seem to be open to discussion on this, or on the wider question of what a plan review might involve. Indeed, it seemed she did not support the idea the university shared with the community development worker, of a plan review that could be potentially quite substantive, which would involve in-depth reflection of what the group worked on and how. As such it was decided that I would put off the story workshop until after the review and evaluation activities.

2.3.8 'Reviewing your Big Local plan'

It is important to briefly outline the review activity that did happen, because it is not the case that there was not a review, and it did lead to proposals for change. It is the case, however, that once again what happened could be seen to sit uncomfortably with Big Local's own rhetoric, not least because of the strong implications about what a review is and how it should be conducted. We can see this with reference to Big Local's guidance on how to conduct a plan review, whereby in spite of the suggestion that 'it is up to you how and when you [review]' (2015, p. 1), the question 'What's in a review?' is answered by the instruction that it should answer the following nine questions:

1. What have you done against what was in your plan?
2. What money have you spent?
3. What impact have you had?
4. What have you learnt?
5. How have you progressed on your vision and priorities?
6. Do you need to refresh your vision and priorities?
7. How does your progress relate to the achievement of the Big Local outcomes?
8. Do you need a new or revised plan, or will you carry on with your existing plan?
9. How do you know this is what your community wants?

(2015, p. 2)

In practice it was these 9 questions that constituted the substance of Westfield Big Local's first review, which took place over the course of an 'away day' in the function

room of a local pub. The day was facilitated by the rep, and partnership members had not had input into its structure or substance.

A traffic-light activity took place to cover questions one and four. Those present split into small groups, each looked at one area of the plan's activity, discussing these to answer 'what have we learned?', and decided whether to award it a colour: red, 'not started'; amber, 'getting going'; or green, 'good progress'. Ultimately three activities were awarded green, five amber and one 'blue (between green and amber!)'. In relation to 'Community wi-fi' its amber score had initially been red, but the rep led the ensuing discussion that suggested it should be regraded. This is indicative of a process that seemed geared to accentuating positives or ensuring success. Potentially more difficult questions – 2, 3 and 9 – were left for another day. That question 4 was asked in relation to the activities rather than as a broad overarching question – the guidance not indicating what it is to refer to – is also suggestive of a desire to keep focussed on a relatively narrow 'review'. Questions 5, 6 and 7, relating to vision and priorities were discussed together, with the discussion supporting the original vision but with an acknowledgement that the priority areas needed to be revisited to clarify what was most important and what might be the best ways of making a difference. This led to question 8 being answered with the suggestion that, going forward, Westfield Big Local should revise its plan.

In the aftermath of the review session, following discussion in 'action-groups' and individuals working independently, a document was produced that updated each of the plan's 'action plans' and proposed two new ones, around 'Environment and Green Spaces' and 'Anti-social Behaviour'. These had been acknowledged as important omissions from the first interim plan, so it is important to stress that the review had allowed the partnership to consider their work over the preceding year and to look to the future. There are two important things to consider alongside this, however. Firstly, that the review as it had been undertaken in Westfield avoided some of the more complex issues and challenges that had begun to emerge, about governance and overall purpose. Indeed, it seemed to have been set up so as to keep these off the agenda. Whilst this helped to 'keep the show on the road' in the short-term, longer-term implications did not necessarily figure. Secondly, it is interesting to note that the national Big Local organisation, Local Trust, propose what we might

see as a relatively shallow or traditional review process, which in practice was watered down still more. This is interesting given, on the one hand, its self-consciously 'innovative' nature, which might see us asking a question around whether, if community development needed to be done differently, it might not be important to re-assess our methods for evaluating it. On the other hand, Local Trust centre the Big Local project on the notion that it is transferring power to residents. In light of the review process described, then, we might ask whether this is actually happening, with a process designed above residents' heads whereby more complex or contentious questions are postponed. A related question arises from here in so far as the experience in Westfield suggests there is no clear idea of how residents are able to decide explicitly for themselves whether they are really being empowered or not.

2.3.9 Implications

Through the course of this discussion we can see tensions between what we might choose to see as different approaches to the activity of Big Local: that of the LTO, trading on their experience and the discourses of professionalism and managerialism that underpin it; that of the Big Local rep, aligned closely to the national project alongside her own understanding of her role; that of the university actors, whose understanding of Big Local as a different kind of community development activity was strongly coloured by our position as academic planners; and the varied position of residents, sometimes caught between these competing understandings. There is a further tension in relation to how the Big Local programme imagines that residents are in the driving seat. Key to unpicking this situation is the fact that the residents did not, perhaps could not, constitute a homogeneous bloc and neither did they collectively share a particular way of seeing the activity they were engaged in. The quote above from the community development worker suggests a reason for this (see p. 162), insofar as the Big Local process was not something they identified with in a substantive way, rather it was a means to an end. Whilst the theory that underpins much practice in both community development and the academy places a great deal of emphasis on process, residents saw hurdles to be cleared to get to where they wanted to be. It is not surprising, then, that as partnership members aligned themselves in relation to the different understandings of the LTO, Big Local

and the university, a number of older, male partnership members fell vocally behind the 'common sense', 'this is how we get things done', 'money makes the world go round', position of the LTO. This dominant grouping garnered either the silent agreement or quiet acquiescence of a majority of partnership members and began to assertively direct Westfield Big Local's activity, responding forcefully to questioning and suggestions they did not like or agree with. From the point of view of the rep, and perhaps some ways of understanding the Big Local process, this was not a problem. From the position of the university, however, it certainly was – a view we shared with a minority of partnership members – whilst we lacked the ability to do anything about it. Two interesting points stem from this that will be developed, alongside other insights, in the more analytical part of the PhD that is to follow. Firstly, the problems posed by what we might term an apolitical understanding of community development activity. Secondly, the extent of the powerlessness of what we might call academic discourses, knowledges or ways of seeing, in contexts where academic actors either refuse to or cannot leverage the power of their institutions.

2.3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has advanced the story of my engagement with Westfield Big Local. This builds on the previous two chapters which have introduced first the Westfield estate and its residents, and then the Big Local process, the work of Westfield Big Local and our position within this. The picture that has begun to emerge of the messy relationships between people, place and community development, and the necessarily political character of these, will be developed over the next two chapters, through discussing the story workshop that I conducted, offering a political understanding of Westfield Big Local's activity and linking this back to the relationship between story and planning. The conclusion will then make these insights speak directly to the thesis' research questions, providing an opportunity to explain the implications this has for both planning practices and scholarship that might continue to take the relationship between storytelling and planning seriously.

PART THREE – A CRITICAL EYE IN WESTFIELD

This part of the thesis is where the more explicitly analytical work is presented. This analytical work will seek to develop our thinking through three key strands, elaborating on questions that have emerged and evolved over the course of the thesis, and reintegrating these with the literature and conceptual framework discussed at its beginning. Those strands are: i) analysis of the story workshop as a route to understanding how Westfield is storied; ii) a consideration of the political in the work of Westfield Big Local, employing the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe; iii) analysis of the implications of the first two strands for our understanding of the relationship between storytelling and planning. It is important to highlight that these three strands mirror the three ways of reading set out towards the end of the chapter on conceptual framing: *reading for story and narrative*, *reading for the political* and *reading for tomorrow* (see pp. 68-70). As discussed at the time, these are not three discrete lenses but overlapping; the analysis in each strand, then, draws on insight offered across the framework, and whilst the readings begin to emerge in process I will highlight how this happens as much as possible. Ultimately, Part Three of the thesis should set up its conclusion, whereby I will return to the research questions and look to propose answers to these grounded in the work that I have done. This will allow me to conclude the thesis by summarising its findings and suggesting where there appear to be avenues for fruitful research on its topics in the future.

3.1 – THE STORY WORKSHOP

3.1.1 Introduction

In the methodology chapter of this thesis I set out some of the practical considerations of the story workshop and the choices that were made about it, and set out the rationale for how it fitted into the wider project, this was developed in chapter 2.3, with a view on negotiating the workshop in the wider context of Westfield Big Local's ongoing work. I will recap the description of the workshop here before switching my focus to what actually happened and beginning to analyse this data, making links back to the rationale as the discussion progresses. The session itself involved 9 people – 6 residents and 3 community development professionals – who had been actively involved in Westfield Big Local, plus myself as facilitator, coming together to listen to 4 recordings of voices from Westfield. The scripts for each recording had been worked from the interview data I had collected, which had been appropriately anonymised and rationalised and then recorded by actors. After each recording participants shared their immediate thoughts one at a time in order to ensure that everyone was able to speak, I recorded these on flipchart paper and then facilitated a group discussion. After we had done this for each recording – moving around the room in different orders so that different people were having the first say – a more general discussion was had on the voices taken together and the session itself. An audio recording of the session was made, with the participants' consent, and then transcribed. The notes I made on the flipchart during the session and then notes of my immediate reflections constitute additional sources of data.

The recordings tended to be dominated by one interviewee, this results from a desire to make them as coherent as possible but also results from my feeling that some voices were particularly important for the participants to respond to. There are also, however, instances where they incorporate segments from other interviewees, who may have related particularly interesting or important anecdotes. The decisions about who and what to include and how stem from my own analysis of the stories I had heard on Westfield, and my experience of getting to know and interacting with the residents there. As such they form a significant aspect of the analytical work of this thesis and are an important expression of the storied strands that constitute

Westfield. In order to demonstrate how, I will reproduce each script followed by a commentary on how they were composed and what I felt their significance was, drawing on the conceptual framework outlined in the second chapter of this thesis. This will be followed by some more general reflection on the experience of the workshop, which will lead into much more detailed analysis of the unfolding and significance of the workshop.

3.1.2.1 Voice One

The reason we came to Westfield originally was we were in slum clearance at Hillsborough, and they said they was building a new development and there was options that we could move here. So initially we said no, because it was miles out from anywhere and at that time there was nothing at all. But then we came to have a look at the houses and absolutely fell in love with them, so then we got a house here. And it was, to us it was just like being on holiday, it were like a holiday feel. To go in the house and have hot water and an inside toilet, because we didn't have nothing like that at Hillsborough, we had outside toilet, no bath, no hot water. So we just unloaded the van and put everything out into the house and it was as though we'd been there for years.

Everything was happening so fast, I can't describe it really, it's like one minute you're stuck there at the end of that road and then they're telling you that like in ten years' time the whole estate will meet up with Hackenthorpe. And you can't visualise it. Because next thing farm's gone, cows have gone. Your buses get more frequent and the whole thing opens up.

I think they brought in a community worker to try and develop the community as it was and we decided that we would form a committee, to form a community, y'know. And that's what we did, we all put a pound in, I think there were about 17, 19 of us put a pound in and we had us first disco. Y'know, and from there it escalated; we thought we could have a disco every now and again, we could hire a bar in and that. So we decided we'd have us first gala. And playgroup opened for kiddies, luncheon club. I used to do the luncheon club, cook for old ladies and, y'know, all of a sudden you've got this community growing and coming together.

I think that has now disappeared. And everybody thinks now Westfield is like a bit of a druggy, scum area. I think you've got a yobby culture. I mean from morning till night lads are out on street, and they're big lads, y'know, they're not like 14, 15 year olds, you're talking like late teens, twenties and they just all congregate and they're shouting and they're bawling and their cars, and then they're near flats as well. And you've got the lasses that, y'know, as soon as they can get pregnant they get pregnant. And I think they get pregnant because they think, well, we can get a house, y'know, and so they never work. They just seem to hang around with all these scummy lads and I think they're in a vicious cycle where they never get out of it and I think that's what's brought estate down.

I was surprised they've been given this funding, this million pound funding, because I'm thinking why is it so bad that they suddenly need to have this regeneration funding

of a new, a fairly new estate that's really in its infancy? Because it's what, 41 years ago I moved here and you're thinking in 41 years it's gone from being such a beautiful place to being something that needs regenerating. Some life into it. But I said people are scared of how it's become. I wouldn't go down shops after tea. My daughter wants to move but she wouldn't move here, because she's scared. You can't go out and tell your neighbours to be quiet. And people have got no respect to be quiet, y'know.

It just needs somebody with ideas to say come on, stop the red tape just let us get in and do things. Buy a few toys in and some books, and get coffee machine out and just let mothers come in and have a cup of coffee and a talk and kids can play, y'know, it wouldn't take long before it escalated something like that and you could have a good mother and toddlers. And I think there's a lot of young mothers down there who need support as well, if you've got an older person in, y'know, it's not just being run by the mothers, but somebody like me who's got experience with children. And mothers would appreciate it I'm sure, because as I say there's a lot of young mothers here. A lot. So, they should be doing something like that really, for the families.

3.1.2.2 Commentary

The story told by the first voice is one that would be familiar to the participants of Westfield Big Local. It has been edited so as to have a strong temporal sensibility, starting from what is understood as the estate's very beginning, charting its perceived decline and then looking to the future; a narrative trajectory that represents a widely deployed, if contentious, masterplot in relation to discussions about post-industrial places (Beauregard, 1993). The decision to choose this voice as representative of similar perspectives stems from the way that each element of the narrative is rendered and the questions that these renderings might pose. In the first instance we see the significance of decent housing to this woman and her family, but also an overtly sentimental register which sees the role of the local authority fade into the background. The third paragraph, on the development of the sense of community in Westfield, is particularly important, not only because this woman was directly involved in planning and realising this – as opposed to a vague appeal to shared values, for instance – but also because the causation here can be directly linked to resource that was instrumental in realising this, particularly the local authority's community worker. This stands in contrast to her discussion of the estate's decline and the negative reputation it now has. Not only does this discussion deploy archetypal figures – the boy racer (Lumsden, 2013) and the teenage mother (Luttrell, 2011) – that discursively situate her perspective, but her language is

particularly useful because it is provocative: would those hearing her narrative in the context of the workshop quietly acquiesce to the suggestion that their estate was 'yobby' and 'scummy', or might they find a way to suggest that this has as much to do with tabloid demonisation of council estates as with the reality of life on Westfield? Where the voice goes next is important, however, as in depicting the very real fear and sadness that people can have in relation to Westfield it is possible to avoid making the voice itself a caricature. That the voice goes on to talk about the future is important, both in so far as this is to a large extent the point of the exercise and also because it suggests that local residents have opinions about what would make Westfield a better place and ideas about how to realise this. Finally, it is important to highlight that just as the masterplot that structures the narrative would be familiar to residents so would its discursive positioning, with concepts such as 'respect' and 'red tape' representing a particular orientation to the world that has much to say to the discursive borders that frequently constrain people's understandings of the potential scope of grassroots driven change.

3.1.2.3 Voice Two

I can't remember much about when I were younger but I think I were happy. I loved growing up on this estate and then, as I got older, I just didn't like it no more, because of stuff that we've seen. Mainly the drugs, Westfield is known as the drug estate. Everyone says it, near enough, and then because there's a load of drugs it don't smell nice every time you walk around because you can, everywhere you turn, you can smell drugs. And I've lost, some of my, who I used to hang out with, I've lost them, to people being violent. Someone I know died at the hands of his brother. So, I've lived on here a lot longer than I ever thought I would have. But I've grew up, I've grew up with a lot of people who I used to get on with and then…

I went to Shortbrook School and enjoyed it, it taught me a lot, but then, when I went up to Westfield, I didn't like that school at all. I didn't go to my lessons, I ended up on report. I couldn't concentrate in that school at all. I used to get bullied in that school. I don't know what it is, what makes it happen, but I think, mainly when people leave primary school and go to secondary school, that's when it changes, I think it's because of getting, they know they're older now, they can do what they want and everything. But they don't realise that if they concentrate more at the secondary school they're more likely to get a job, than not. And I wish that kids in this school would realise that when they went up.

I grew up when I were 17, when I had my daughter I grew up, my life changed when I were 17. So… And I don't think it's a nice place for kids to grow up in. I live on shops. At night time there's people outside causing trouble, throwing stones at windows, shouting, smoking drugs, drinking on steps and won't move. My daughter gets woke

up by noise, then she's tired in morning and we can't get into school. And everybody's in that same boat. My friend with her baby, one year old, had no electric for three days, because she couldn't get any electric and nobody could borrow her any money. People having their money stopped.

Now my daughter's at school, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, I'm bored. I stress out when I've got nowt to do, so, if there were more to do it would be less stressful. I've got Jobcentre tomorrow morning, that's just reminded me. Don't like them places, they do my head in. Apart from them, I have nothing to do, and it's so boring. I had a job once but I had to travel to town, so, four pound fifty, and I weren't finishing work until gone five and it were going dark at this point. Then I had my daughter. Now they're saying I can work 10 while 2. Or they're saying she's got to have a childminder, if I got work she's got to have a childminder. But if she had a childminder I would be worried sick of anyone I didn't know. It only takes one little thing for that childminder to change.

I don't look to the future. I just take the day as it comes. I'll say, I always say, no matter what I will say that I want a job within the next two weeks, well not two weeks but when my daughter's old enough. To look after herself. That is the only thing I will say, it will be in future. But any other time, I don't make plans, I don't do nowt, because my plans always seem to change.

I'm hoping Westfield will be different, in a good way, but with how people are today, it's most likely not to change, 'cus the people I know today are exactly the same as the people when I were younger. So I know, deep down, that it's not gonna change. Because of people that are on street now. But I'm hoping, sometime down in line that it does actually start to change. Especially, main thing is, like I said, with drugs. If that calms down then I think it will be a happier, happy place to be, properly, because like I said, every turn you turn, you can smell it. Everywhere you walk, you can smell it. So if the drugs calm down it will be a lot easier for everybody. Most people will turn round, who's from Westfield, and say that the drugs are the worst thing on estate.

3.1.2.4 Commentary

In narrative terms the second voice is significantly less clearly structured than the first, jumping between the present and the past, although the framing of the account, by references to drugs on Westfield and their significance for its residents and its reputation, serves to increase its coherence. The effect of this more frenetic narrative is its heightened immediacy, invoking the experience of living in proximity to anti-social behaviour or drug taking as opposed to the fear of these things, and also the existential experience of boredom and, arguably, alienation (Charlesworth, 2000). That this difference – the illustration of a particular mode of being in the world – should have representation and the question of how listeners would respond to it, if at all, were important factors in choosing to draw heavily on this particularly powerful account of life on Westfield, and also for maintaining its restless structure.

To this end, however, the third paragraph, which cements the effect whilst stressing a link to a wider socio-economic context, is taken from a separate interview and, whilst listeners will not know, perhaps increases the legitimacy of the whole. The link to these wider contexts is also made through accounts of both education and unemployment, particularly in the rendering of the experience of signing on at the jobcentre and adhering to the rules that currently govern this process (see e.g.: Friedli & Stearn, 2015). That these can appear not just arbitrary but also to trouble people's very identities – in this case the woman's strong sense of herself and her role as a mother – was important to demonstrate, as was her account of her experience of having a child at a relatively young age and of how this changed her. I felt it would be particularly interesting to see whether the story unsettled the expectations, or perhaps even prejudices, of listeners during the workshop following Voice One's reference to teenage mothers. The final two paragraphs of the account, which outline a particular orientation, or lack of, to the future, and go on to represent a moment of guarded hopefulness giving way ultimately to pessimism, are essential to the account and its effect. They represent, in a sense, an incomplete story that listeners might look to fill in. In the context of Westfield Big Local, however, it may even lead to some examination of how the experience of certain Westfield residents might result in them finding it difficult to engage with the process of envisioning and working towards a better tomorrow. Was there a duty to draw people in this position into or represent them in the process, and if so what might that involve?

3.1.2.5 Voice Three

I moved here '81, 1981 time. Coming out from the middle of Sheffield, inner-city, I think my parents wanted to give us a better chance, so to speak. And it was all, it was nice going out, we had the freedom to go out and play, especially at the front of the house, the kids used to merge together and we used to play manhunt, we used to go sledging, play out in the summer when they cut the grass, and make little trenches out of it and things like that. So I have a lot of good memories.

But I do feel it's gone down a lot, this area. I've got a little girl now and she doesn't really go out much, I'm one of those protective mothers. The things that are going on, it's just a bit worrying. I think the housing, I know they're supposed to let vulnerable people or people that have had difficult backgrounds, which is fair enough, but obviously that has a knock on effect to the children that are in the area. That's one of my main concerns. And there's a lot of rivalry, gangs now, with the young kids and things like that, scooters flying about. And then with that there's not much recreational, there's no parks or anything for them to go to. So a lot's changed, there's

nobody on the street that plays anymore, y'know, you look out your window and you don't see kids.

The youths that are around, they're quite, y'know what I mean, harsh kind of thing. Which is something I've worried about, as I've got older, that it's not the best area. But, then again, it's kind of better the devil you know, because I've been here for years, people know me, know my face, so I was able to, like, there was an incident at the shop, they took advantage, all ganged up on my son, I was able to go on the shop and say, look, that's not happening again, if you see my son, leave him alone, kind of thing. Living here for a long time and people knowing of you makes a massive difference, there's people that I know who've got a flat here and had really bad experiences. And we had a transvestite who lived on the estate and because he was different the youths beat him up.

So, I think it's got a name for itself now, Westfield, mostly for the bad reasons, really. Which is a shame because we've got Crystal Peaks on our doorstep; we've got a lot to offer. Still a lot of open spaces that something could be done with, y'know, and there is more of a community feel, everybody knows everybody, so to speak. But yeah, I think it's just for the crime and things like that.

I think a lot of it's to do with housing, to tell you the truth. That's how I feel anyway, a lot of how they house people that have needs and drug abuse and things like that. So, flats at the shop, they seem to have a lot. They do need somewhere to live and somewhere to support them; it's just having the right support.

But again, a centre like Com.unity, you could help out the young ones and people with drug abuse, financial situations, and I don't know what it is, is it welfare? Y'know, just managing a home. There's a lot of young kids having babies at the moment and think it's great because they get a house, y'know, but it's being able to manage that. Being able to manage your bills, eat healthily. Because the stress of life in itself has a knock on effect and when you're living in an area like this it's easy to turn to drugs as a solution. And then it's just a big roundabout. And there's so many people that suffer from depression as well. So I think in them areas.

Like I say, I think it would be a big help in just giving people a different mind-set, because I don't think there's much opportunities around here at all actually, for young ones. I know they've got karate for younger ones, but music, football, there's so much that this place could use, y'know, to reach out to the youths. That's what I really think's needed, I really do, because I think that's the main thing that's pulling Westfield down at the moment and it's because they've got, it's the same old thing, they've got nothing to do.

I think we are quite fortunate actually, when you're driving into Westfield you've got the greenery and everything, so yeah, it'd be nice if we could have people saying, I need to get a flat here because I know this opportunity would be open to me, y'know, you'd be getting different people moving in, as opposed to, [laughs] I've just come out of prison and here's a flat.

3.1.2.6 Commentary

The third account stands between the first two, representing the experience of someone who moved to Westfield as a child, and as with the first voice the narrative begins naturally from the start of her time on the estate. The suggestion that aspiration – escaping the 'inner-city' – was the motivation for the move is an interesting invocation of a time when Westfield was a 'desirable' place to live, something often suggested by reference to the length of the waiting list for a home on the estate. The comparison of her own childhood experience with that of her children, who have also grown up on the estate, is an interesting way of charting the way the estate has changed over time, and also of introducing the familiar story of decline. This relates to what might be called the foremost structuring logic of the account, its representation of counter-narratives. The highlighting of the positive aspects of the estate and its potential for change being one example. What these different strands taken together begin to do is present a balanced, reflective and markedly empathic picture of the estate. This stands in contrast to the more moralistic tone of the first voice and the sometimes rawness of the second. Taking the three together represents an interesting opportunity for listeners to position themselves, their views and understandings, but also the work of Westfield Big Local. We get a sense of what is unique about Westfield – the good and the bad – particularly in the suggestion that 'being known' is an important element of being able to live well on the estate. This point is heard repeatedly across the interviews I conducted, the story relating to the transvestite being a further instance of borrowing from a different interview to ensure that the point is made. The impression of a particularly reflective account is emphasised in the suggested causes for issues on the estate, particularly the invocation of the policies of the Local Authority's housing department and in the lack of opportunities for young people, which also serve to invoke and anchor the perspective within wider social, economic and political contexts. Ultimately, these come together in a hopeful conclusion, whereby the resident can imagine and see routes towards a better future for Westfield. It is important to highlight that a question arose in the construction of the script insofar as there were emotive and very powerful elements of this woman's story that would have almost certainly made it easy for other residents to identify

her, which as such had to be omitted. Principally this was to comply with the consent form signed by participants that guaranteed their anonymity; it may have been possible to significantly change the emphasis to guarantee this but I chose not to. This was motivated by a desire to be as faithful as possible to the stories but also out of an acknowledgment that there will always be limits to what people would be willing to air in a facilitated session such as this and it felt important not to shy away from the fact that the story can never entirely faithfully or transparently represent lived experience.

3.1.2.7 Voice Four

I moved to Westfield quite recently. Not as a place I'd hunted out to move to. I'll be honest. I'd moved somewhere else and I hated it, and needed to move fast. So it was a bit of a gamble [laughs].

In the past I'd always lived in private areas and so living on a council estate is a very different experience, bit of a shock to the system. In terms of infrastructure and in terms of people's attitudes. We've had a few anti-social behaviour type instances, which generally don't get followed up in the same way they would in a private area. No direct crime against us but constant low to moderate level anti-social behaviour. And I think one of the clearest things you take from living here is that the attitude of a lot of people is that it's OK: 'Oh, they're only kids.' Whereas in other areas you would have, if someone was tearing along a footpath on a motorbike the attitude would be, 'my god, what do they think they're doing!' But nah, 'they're just kids'. Graffiti, throw things off of buildings, nah, 'they're just kids'. I think it's a real shame because it gives them a really bad example of what adults should be doing. And puts them in a position that those that are inclined that way, you can almost understand why they do it, because it's approved of by their parents.

It was built as an estate where it's part council, part private. If you walk around you can see where you cross the borders. Really clear. A huge difference in the way property's maintained. Partly I think down to the council not sorting things out when they need to. Maybe just people's attitudes. On the plus side it's got brilliant transport links, it's really close to the motorway, you can get into town, Rotherham, Chesterfield, Worksop really fast. Much easier than when I lived elsewhere.

I think the shops really let Westfield down, but then again they're businesses and if they make a profit that's what's going to be here, isn't it. I'd love something like Costa. Like you do in places like Sharrow, Broomhill. Little coffee shops, things like that. It wouldn't work, they'd never put one here.

Where I was before I couldn't let my daughter walk to the shop. Here I've got to be selective, depending on what's going on. You go through periods where it's quite quiet. Nothing much really happens and then you get lots of graffiti as one gang tries to establish itself. Or you get a few beatings and things like that. So you've got to keep an eye on things. I'm quite bolshie as these things go. I will walk straight past them and if they start something, fine, because I'll call the police before they step up to me,

it doesn't scare me. But it scares the life out of my wife, the reprisals. To the degree that she's really reluctant for me to report crimes, which is sad. We had evidence relating to a really nasty attack, and it took me a long time to get her to acknowledge that we really had to pass that on. Because she was scared about reprisals. You've got to know who to stay away from, well, who to, be wary of. And who you can be more relaxed around. Because by no means is everybody in the area a bad person. Not at all. There are plenty of hard working, very decent people. But there are also plenty of people who aren't.

There is absolutely no community feel at all though. I know Big Local is trying to create that. It's a big ask. It's very much a head down and look the other way place, because you don't know who you're walking towards. There's no local pub. There's the community centre but it doesn't feel like a place that people would come to. I think one of the difficulties might be that when it was built there were half a dozen mines, big employers, nearby. Now, zero, and I think when most people travel away to work that kind of makes having a community feel harder. And as it's not a very mixed area young people don't have those role models as neighbours, people to look up to and say, sort of, I can be a doctor, I can be a scientist. There seem not so many life options. Sitting on a fence and smoking drugs seems a better option than school because there isn't that pressure to apply themselves, or in some cases that's what their parents chose.

More than anything else Westfield needs aspiration. Otherwise it can only become a slightly better place that people drive away from to go to work. Rather than somewhere people enjoy being. If you think about Endcliffe Park, on a summer's day, there's people sat having picnics on the grass, you have to fight your way through. I've seen one person sat having a picnic here. And I thought they were really quite brave [laughs]. And that's a shame because it would be lovely to do that. But it doesn't feel right. Grass is grass, we've got trees we've got a stream. But it doesn't feel the same.

3.1.2.8 Commentary

The final voice stands in contrast to the first three, particularly in being male and also in representing the experiences of a person who has moved to Westfield relatively recently. That the account begins by foregrounding the fact that this was not for positive reasons colours what comes next, which is primarily a comparative account of differences between council estates and predominantly 'private' areas. This does allow some level of detachment, most importantly in highlighting how resources might not be shared fairly or equally between areas, but also in remarks on the design of the estate, which long-term residents normally have to be prompted to consider, and similarly in the suggestion that Westfield is well-connected. By and large, however, the account covers many familiar topics – anti-social behaviour, aspiration and opportunity, community – but in presenting them through a particular prism,

and in the voice of someone who could be characterised as an 'outsider', it might represent an opportunity for listeners to talk about perceptions, reality and, potentially, prejudice. For whilst the first three accounts stem from people who have, in some senses, developed naturalistic or organic understandings of Westfield as a huge aspect of their lives and their identities, this account represents someone in the potentially uncomfortable position of identifying *against* Westfield whilst being within it. The language here is moralistic – there are good people and bad people, good attitudes and bad attitudes, hard workers and shirkers – drawing on and reinforcing wider societal narratives that characterise council estates in negative terms, as a last resort for the unfortunate or a sink for society's problems (McKenzie, 2015; Watt, 2008; Hanley, 2007). How would residents respond to an account where this is so explicitly the case? Would someone speaking from such a position be taken to task for suggesting, 'there is absolutely no community feel at all'? The account could also potentially represent an interesting opportunity for having a more nuanced debate on what it means to plan in a hopeful way for a place with which one does not identify closely. Would the aspirations that this man has for Westfield – a café or the ability to picnic outside – be understood in a different way from the aspirations of others? Do we need, or would we benefit from, deeper, richer or more sympathetic understandings of places to plan successfully and sensitively for them?

3.1.3 Cumulative effects

Taken together the four voices cover a vast swathe of Westfield life and of people's varied experiences. It should be clear how they are constructed in light of the three ways of reading discussed in the conceptual chapter of this thesis: representing four distinct stories of personal experience – *reading for story* – each of which intersects with distinct positions on how to understand the estate, its divisions and stratifications – *reading for the political* – by way of positing orientations to the future – *reading for tomorrow*. The topics that they address can also be seen to cover the seven priority areas that appear in the first Westfield Big Local plan, which was discussed in Part Two: community; crime and anti-social behaviour; spaces for socialising; health and well-being; environment and green space; education and employment; activities for all of the community, young and old. It is also possible to see to what extent people's stories are rooted in, and only make sense in

conversation with, wider contexts. These are evident directly, when people invoke the local authority, other areas of the city that they know of or where they lived before. They are, however, also evident indirectly. When the first speaker invokes 'red tape', for example, she is invoking a much wider discourse, extensively heard in society and articulated strongly in the media, which suggests a legislative and litigious climate in Britain that disempowers people, preventing them from doing things they would have done in the past. The concept of anti-social behaviour is another example, for whilst all of the voices refer to how this finds expression in Westfield the discourse of anti-social behaviour and its impacts are much broader (see e.g.: Deuchar, 2010); closely aligned to the New Labour governments at the turn of the century – and their language (Fairclough, 2000) – it is woven into understandings across the whole of society to such an extent that a local authority officer I interviewed referred to an 'anti-social behaviour industry'. How the discourses invoked interact dialogically across these scales is well demonstrated in relation to this last point, which receives a specific inflection in relation to Westfield as a council estate, a category of place that is frequently attended by significant stigma (see e.g.: McKenzie, 2015; Watt, 2008; Hanley, 2007), as demonstrated here by the preoccupation many residents and others share with reputation and their desire to separate themselves or certain people on the estate from neighbours, whether these are 'scummy' or 'yobby' when discussed by residents, or 'vulnerable' when discussed by service providers.

Before I turn to analysing people's responses to the voices and by extension the workshop as a whole it is worthwhile to describe my initial reaction, recorded in notes made immediately after the session. This will offer a measure of introduction for what follows insofar as it provides a bridge between the design and the experience of the workshop proper. My principal reflection was that the workshop worked well as a means of getting people to talk, reflect and discuss with one another, with participants responding positively to the session. This is evidenced in me having to actively facilitate and move the session forward significantly less than I had anticipated and I felt that the distance leant by the CD did indeed create space for the raising of fractious topics. I had taken care to explain that the voices were constructions and the fact that there were no substantive instances of participants trying to pull the voices apart, nor discover the 'real life residents' underneath them,

suggests either that they were to a large degree convincing or that people were readily willing to suspend their disbelief. That they were clearly engaged with the recordings is also evidenced by their immediate responses, for example, making notes, nodding or frowning. A number of more complex reflections will be elaborated on in what follows, but it did not seem that the stories were particularly effective at changing minds, with people reaching for the positive aspects of accounts, or for points they agreed with whilst ignoring or explaining away the negatives and that with which they disagreed. The stories also did not seem particularly effective at moving people from the acknowledgment of problems or issues to the identification of things they could do about them, or perhaps more importantly they did not immediately seem to empower in the sense that people experienced the feeling that they could or should do something about them. Both the strengths and limits of the session, then, seemed well expressed by the sentiment participants had that it would be worthwhile to run the session again for the police and other service providers. This showed that participants felt the session was worthwhile, that it was able to convey something of the truth of the experience of living on Westfield and that this was a powerful tool for making claims on the state, but also that this was not *their* tool, that they did not see it as empowering them to act independently. I will now turn to unpacking some of these reflections by bringing them more closely into conversation with the specifics of the workshop.

3.1.4 Storying stories? Or, arguments that aren't?

A good place to begin to unpack the specifics of the story workshop is what people do with the stories or how they respond. In the very first instance this can be a flat or straightforward response, in terms of listeners stating whether they agree or disagree, or whether they think the story is good or bad, right or wrong. The voices that I shared with residents did in the first instance largely garner these responses, but as complex accounts they in turn invited more complex responses, and the impulse of listeners – especially listeners listening and discussing together – was to add to the accounts, whether this means explaining them, embellishing them, relating to them, acting on them or even undermining them. It is worthwhile to follow this process through.

In response to the first voice I played to participants there was an interesting reaction, whereby the first participant to respond looked to add extra complexity to the account: 'don't get me wrong, I'm not saying she's wrong this lady, she isn't wrong but it's not as bad as what she's portrayed it there.' This is a reference to the suggestion that Westfield had a 'yobby culture', facing problems caused by a large group of 'scummy lads'. The interesting question that comes out of this is why, if one disagreed with an account, the immediate response would be to stress that you also agreed with it? The story of their own that the participant goes on to share points to why:

> I get frustrated, let me tell you something now, I get frustrated because the other day, about a fortnight ago, someone came to me and said the back of the houses on Shortbrook Close, from the flats down, all the fencing had been broken down. Right? So I went to the trouble of getting that repaired and already I've seen some of the fencing broken, brand new fencing had been kicked in. Now, these are a mindless minority.

The most striking thing about this story is that its details bear no explicit relation to its conclusion, which is that those who commit vandalism are a 'mindless minority'. The meat of the story instead expresses solidarity with the account of the woman, it says that the speaker experiences these problems too. Implicitly, however, another story goes on in parallel, in which there are people on Westfield who do not commit anti-social behaviour and on the contrary seek to repair the damage that such activity causes. The story, then, serves a political purpose. It draws a circle around the mindful majority, which the speaker invites the woman to occupy with him, and pushes the 'mindless minority' – the dehumanising language is important here – outside. This action is compounded with another story of antisocial behaviour relating to irresponsible use of motorbikes, which sees him developing his conclusion:

> …it's a minority but it's what we do about it, you know. And to go back to this lady, yes she's right but I personally don't think it's as bad as what she's making it out.

Perhaps implicitly, then, in seeking to reduce the scale of the problem and to posit a mindful majority of good people, the speaker wishes to suggest reason to be hopeful that it can be solved with people working together against it.

Other participants then begin to join in the discussion, orientating themselves to these two interrelated accounts. In the first instance this takes the form of what appears to be a discursive negotiation:

> I agree totally with her (laughs), there's no respect. No respect anymore, anywhere. Kids aren't being brought up to have respect. And because their parents don't respect anything, they're the same and it's just going on and on and on. I mean, I've been here 33 years, 34 years.

In this description of what causes anti-social behaviour responsibility is put firmly onto the individual and the family, with an invocation of what we might term traditional values. There is an interjection, however: 'community disappeared because nobody talks anymore'. This suggestion of an understanding of life on the estate as social, possibly with drivers elsewhere, provokes a discussion amongst residents about 'bubbles' on the estate that are pleasant to live in and other areas that are less so. A resident then introduces the concept of 'parenting' in support of the earlier suggestion that the breakdown of social norms comes from the level of the family and individual. What story has done in the first instance, then, is provoke a discussion, an important aspect of which is the further sharing of stories. What it does not do is resolve apparent problems or contradictions, rather it creates a space where they – and the values they embody – can co-exist, albeit here that is in coalition together against the 'mindless minority' that has been pushed outside.

Whilst the discussion that continues is recursive – sometimes harking back to points made previously, with participants reiterating the points that they felt had not been duly acknowledged or attended to, before they move on – it is still possible to identify clear movements and developments. In this instance residents talk about what Big Local might be doing about some of the issues raised by the account they had heard, with some of the concerns downplayed by the suggestion that I had likely interviewed her before some of the latest Westfield Big Local initiatives. There are also two important instances where residents invoke wider contexts to qualify or expand on what they have heard; these stand in relation to the discursive positioning discussed above. The first is around the suggestion that young women get pregnant in order to get preference for council housing:

Well, when she mentioned about the… some of the girls getting pregnant for pregnant's sake, just to get a place to live. Some of them, yes, they will do, but I know some girls on there that no, they're not like that.

The thing is, we can't blame… I mean, I hate to be sexist, and I think that's a very sexist thing to say, that girls get…

Yeah.

They don't get *themselves* pregnant.

No, takes two.

Well, yeah.

[laughter]

It's a generalisation, it's like everybody's doing it.

The discussion then develops in an interesting way:

But it is the girls who are involved with the antisocial behaviour as well, it's not just the boys again, do you know what I mean?

Yeah.

[various people agree]

But it's the minority…

Rather like the discussion of values and responsibility the partnership members are, whether intentionally or not, having a discussion with implications well beyond Westfield; this time on how gender is socially constructed and what implications this might have.

The second wider context that is invoked relates to this, namely much wider socio-economic shifts that have happened over the last four decades:

I think, too, we've not really touched on how the whole society was different, you know, 40 years ago.

[Various people agree]

And what happened in Sheffield.

Yeah, exactly.

Full employment, etcetera, 40 years ago.

[Various people agree]

So I think sometimes we get… and this happens everywhere, I'm not saying it's unique here, but we forget to look at the drivers that changed on a wider level what happens.

Mm.

> So it's easy to say, oh it's all the young people, but what led to those things happening? You know what I mean, like… anyway, that's just a thought.
>
> **Yeah, no, I did say the parents.**

These disagreements rather fizzle out, however, where one might hope that they would progress towards some sort of conclusion or explicit accommodation, possibly leading to further questions around, for instance, why there can appear to be few opportunities for young people in Westfield and whether Big Local in the area needs to address or orient itself to this and why. This is an interesting observation in light of how the voices were constructed – in view of the various ways of reading that I had brought to bear on the estate – and what the session looked to achieve. These were exactly the kind of discussions that it was hoped residents might have, but whilst a researcher equipped with practices of reading can interrogate them and take them forward the participants, who did not have recourse to a similar analytical apparatus find this much harder.

Finally, participants also had an important discussion on how activity driven by the community progresses and succeeds, based on the account they had heard of the woman's experience of being active in the community in Westfield's first few years. This is by the small-scale actions of people and is, therefore, incremental, with the suggestion from the Big Local rep that such change is then perceptible in positive changes in people's feelings. We got to here from the discussion of Westfield Big Local's activity, however, via the interjection of one of the participants. I will quote this in full because it seems to tell us something important about the power and limits of storytelling:

> …she arrived rather like we did, with lots of ambition and what a lovely place and the cows were in the fields you know, etcetera. And I mean it's pleasing to hear what she said, how she was involved with others and they paid a pound and they did things and things got going. And of course this was a pub, it wasn't a community facility, there was no or very little community resource in this area, all brand new. And I thought there were some positive messages. Yeah, she talked about lots of things that when encouraged anybody would say, antisocial behaviour, kids don't respect anybody you know. A grumpy old git like me might say that. But I thought there were lots of positive things. Yes, we have got some money. We know that *X* and the boys down at the Town Hall haven't got any money and it's up to us to try and do something, isn't it? Not replace the things that the Council would have done but actually do the things that we know can be done in our community.

The contributions that most participants made to the discussion over the course of the story workshop were not as lengthy and internally coherent as this, relying instead on continuing to shape meaning in collaboration and dialogue with others. By contrast this participant offers his own fully formed interpretation of the discussion that had taken place, a response to the concerns raised in the recording we had heard, which smooths over contention and downplays some of the more trenchant opinions, and finally offers an indication of what implications this could have for Westfield Big Local. What is more, this is artfully done. In the first instance it is narratively framed by his own experience of living on the estate, an implicit authority coming from the length of residency, and by way of the self-deprecating rendering of himself as a 'grumpy old git' – a rhetorical device that buys sympathy – we reach another implicit indication of his authority in his familiarity with 'the boys down at the Town Hall'. Ultimately we receive a suggestion of how Westfield Big Local might act that contains within it a certain political understanding and approach to the context of austerity.

Given these factors it is not surprising that, like the participant whose political storytelling started the discussion on the 'mindless minority', this participant has had a long career in public life and local politics. Both of these men have developed skills in expressing their points of view and endeavouring to influence discussions that not everybody shares. Even here, then, at a grassroots level, rhetorical skills in crafting and telling stories are important and, significantly, they are not evenly shared. This seems especially clear in light of the forgoing discussion of how residents invoked and then responded to wider contexts, around teenage pregnancy/housing and economic change. In these instances, the residents had the raw material to begin to question these wider narratives but not the tools to put these to work to stage a successful reframing.

3.1.5 Breaking down the fourth wall…

After listening to each voice and discussing them in turn the session moved towards a more general discussion of the workshop itself and also to linking what the participants had heard to the work they had done, intended to do and might yet decide to do as part of Westfield Big Local. It is this element of the session and some of the discussion and insights that came from it that I will now turn to discuss. Before

doing this it is interesting to note that whilst the workshop had been planned to include this component I did not have to facilitate or engineer a shift in the discussion, which occurred of its own accord. It is the case, however, that once engaged in this discussion I did intervene towards the end of the workshop to ask the question of whether participants felt anything they had heard had specific implications for their activity. The first aspect of this element of the session that I will turn to discuss, then, is when residents began to discuss the workshop itself.

This occurred following a discussion of the various partners or service providers that might be involved in tackling issues, particularly around anti-social behaviour. There was some speculation about how cuts had impacted on the police in particular and what, as such, they had the resource to do to help. Across my engagement with them a frequent role that Westfield Big Local partnership members felt they could play was that of co-ordinator or broker, getting different agencies together to discuss and co-ordinate their work on Westfield. In attempting to do this Westfield Big Local would have itself been filling a gap left by the Local Authority whose Neighbourhoods department had provided a similar function in the past, before cuts to Local Authority budgets meant they no longer had the capacity to do so. The suggestion came from a participant that I could run a workshop similar to the one we were engaged in for these providers: 'So, you're inviting [the agencies] to listen to something and then really you're saying to the agencies, *what can you do?*'. This was an interesting suggestion and it was pleasing that it met with broad agreement, with participants suggesting quite strongly that it would be a good idea. From here, however, a participant turned the discussion towards interrogating the method/methodology:

> Just a question about the voices; how representative do you think were the four that we heard of the ones that you have sat down and talked to or interviewed?

My response to the question was that the voices represented a range of the different perspectives that I had encountered: people of different ages who had lived on the estate for longer and shorter amounts of time and as such had quite different experiences. The limits of the voices were, to a large extent, where there were people that I had been unable to access, particularly residents who featured as subjects of

the accounts, as trouble makers, threatening or unsettling presences. This was not for want of trying, but these particular people were difficult to access and engage, a point participants recognised from their own attempts to broaden engagement in relation to Westfield Big Local. Nevertheless, one participant was able to succinctly and trenchantly summarise the position: '…so they're representative, except for the people we most need to talk to?'

From this point in the workshop the participants moved the discussion towards Westfield Big Local's plan of their own accord. This is interesting as the difficulty of engaging certain voices from the estate in my research parallels the difficulty of engaging and reflecting them in the activity of Big Local. Initially, however, their questions were around whether I had strategically chosen or constructed the voices to say something about each of the priority areas. Whilst the voices did do this it had not been my objective. It was from here though that participants began to ask whether the voices did beg questions of the plan, especially around areas where there was more planned activity and areas where there was less:

> …I mean from the outside perspective it's interesting that we focussed more on sort of, the calendar of events and that kind of stuff. So it's good to think about that when we're going to meet next week, to keep in mind crime, education and employment, open spaces.

This suggestion, that Westfield Big Local should not forget about or seek to avoid engaging with the difficult or bigger issues, is not one that all partnership members are necessarily comfortable with. The first response to this question from within the group, then, was a suggestion from one member that they could put up signs to direct people to amenities on the estate, with the caveat that the walls do not belong to Big Local and permission would need to be sought. In itself, of course, this could be a good idea and the attendant point was a reasonable one. Given the context though it either points once again to a lack of confidence in grappling with bigger issues or could even be read as a deliberate attempt to side-step them. The larger question was raised again by a participant, however, after we had been down the familiar avenues of discussing who we might need to speak to and who the key contacts in positions of authority were. The response this time was the suggestion from some participants that all of the areas were actually covered in the plan:

> It's all in the plan though, isn't it, as well? There's nothing really what everyone said in there that's specifically out of the plan what I can think of, off the top of my head really.

Some participants agreed with this, others disagreed and there was a short discussion, during which those present struggled to recall what was in the plan and what actions, if any, had been intended to respond to what priority areas. Whilst this vagueness about the plan reflects the instrumental attitude that I described towards it in the empirical chapters of the thesis it is interesting to note, nevertheless, that it was called on in this way. It represented, it seemed, an authoritative document that had the power to settle a discussion. It did not ultimately settle the discussion here, however, as the Big Local rep intervened to stress the importance of taking 'small steps'. Whilst this is a suggestion that it is perhaps difficult to disagree with it may also have been helpful to make a case for strategic thinking here, to ask the question of whether our small steps take us in the direction we wish to travel. This was not possible as a participant moved the discussion from here to the frustrations and disappointments they had felt around the disengagement and apathy that they had experienced from some residents towards the Big Local process. Following a short discussion around this the workshop drew to a close.

The specifics of the workshop discussed here help to inform the bigger picture I have tried paint of Westfield Big Local and our engagement with it. They are also important during the remainder of this part of the thesis, firstly in colouring the next analytical chapter, which highlights the role of the political in the context of Westfield Big Local, and then as I turn to integrating the analysis and drawing out the implications for our understanding of the relationship between storytelling and planning. Here, however, it is worth pausing to highlight how they point towards some success in realising the participatory ethic that was elaborated at the outset, and also to be honest about the limits of this achievement. Particularly encouraging, I would suggest, is that residents engaged with the workshop, explicitly highlighted ways it was useful, and at times went so far as thinking about it as a tool they could use, even if this continued to mean me running it for them. Furthermore, the fact that they felt comfortable and able to ask questions back to it is particularly encouraging. At the least this suggests I had been successful in realising relationships

that were based on some degree of mutual respect. It could perhaps be seen to go further than this, however, suggesting that my engagement with residents of Westfield during my research activity, and through the design of the story workshop in particular, had figured academic research as a practice that they were able to engage in, or at least to some degree with, on terms of equality. If I am at risk of getting carried away the limits of this are clear in a comment made by one participant towards the end of the session, where participants were thanking me for involving them in the research:

> Jason, it was a very positive look at our community and what's happening in our community. And I'm sure we all hope that we're talking to the future Dr Jason Slade because this was just one of those little things that towards you actually writing a thesis and being successful.

On the face of it this points to the inescapable fact that the research is, perhaps unavoidably, on some fundamental level mine. Nobody else can write this thesis, even if they were so inclined, and nobody else can be called Dr as a result of it. It also points back to the preceding analysis and the limits this exposes, both in relation to what a facilitated storytelling workshop can make transparent to its participants, and the social, economic and political constraints on its potential for furthering both inclusion and democracy.

3.2 – THE POLITICAL IN WESTFIELD BIG LOCAL

3.2.1 Introduction

Big Local is not invited into any area by the residents who live there, yet the Big Local project in an area will be directed and driven by the people that live in that area. In a sense this is a paradox and it is a good place from which to start to delve a bit deeper into the story of Westfield Big Local. This is especially so in light of the conceptual framework outlined earlier in this thesis because it suggests that the very foundations of the exercise are unstable. Given our understanding of the discursive construction of reality this could not but be the case; that it can be identified as explicitly being the case here, however, is important because it means that the project of Big Local involves a variety of actors endeavouring to discursively fix the project – a deeply political activity. Before beginning to analyse the implications of this it is worthwhile to reiterate that this is not a criticism of the Big Local programme as such and that there is frequently an equivalent paradox in the activity of engaged academics, whereby they initiate research projects – such as this PhD – that promise participants to varying degrees some ability to shape and steer the research. Again, these spaces are by definition never fully closed, what we see is actors seeking to make them mean one thing rather than another through processes of hegemonic articulation. This chapter follows how this happened in the context of Westfield Big Local. It starts by analysing how the Big Local project sought to discursively construct Westfield and its residents. It moves on to consider the problems this posed for those who got involved, what other actors contributed to this situation, and how a provisional stabilisation of the Westfield Big Local project was ultimately achieved.

3.2.2 The discursive construction of Westfield Big Local

If we remember back to our introduction of the Big Local project, we will recall a variety of processes and proclamations that brought Westfield Big Local into being and that suggested what Westfield Big Local would mean. Let us think, in the first instance, about the terrain that Big Local created on which to enact Westfield Big Local. In discussion with the Local Authority and drawing on statistical data regarding deprivation and the allocation of funding – in order to highlight areas that had missed out on funding in the past – Westfield was identified and chosen as a suitable place.

Westfield, in comparison to other areas had lacked material resource and had lacked funding. It was designated as other, it is important to stress, not by Big Local but by wider social and political forces. This objectification is, as we understand it, precarious; not least in this instance in that in the way that contemporary British society seeks to understand places like Westfield they are both inside the nation and outside of various acceptable spheres relating to economy, culture and politics (McKenzie, 2015; Watt, 2008; Hall, 1988). What is interesting here is how Big Local responds to the antagonistic relation represented by the unstable discursive frontiers between Westfield and everywhere else, which sees it constituting Westfield Big Local in a particular way. I will focus on two particular orientations, one which I will broadly term spatial, the second relating to people.

The term spatial refers to how the Big Local project instructs us to look at Westfield and the activity that will unfold there. This is well represented by the four Big Local outcomes, to which I have added emphasis:

- **Communities will** be better able to **identify local needs** and **how to meet them**.
- **People will build** their skills and confidence, **enabling them to identify** and **respond to needs in the future**.
- **The community will make a real difference** to **what it believes** are its most important needs
- People **will feel** that **their area** is an even better place to live.

(Local Trust, 2015)

What the emphases are intended to highlight are the many forceful, active verbs and the agents who are doing these things, namely the community. If we think about these in spatial terms, however, what the will to empowerment belies is an inward looking focus, on the problems faced by a place and of situating the responsibility for delivering solutions to these internally (see discussion on 'self-help', pp. 42-3). What this serves to minimise is the possibility of a Big Local area identifying the causes of their problems as stemming from elsewhere or of them suggesting that solving these problems is either not in their power or is the responsibility of someone else. Whilst Big Local areas are encouraged to learn from other places and institutions the focus given by the Big Local outcomes discourages them from making critically minded comparisons between places or institutions. This analysis is strengthened if we consider the first injunction about what Big Local is not about: 'It's not about your

local authority, the government or a national organisation telling you what to do' (Local Trust, 2015). This is especially the case if we ponder the question of whether the factors that allow a place such as Westfield to be targeted in an initiative such as Big Local result from residents being forced to do things against their will, or whether it is because spaces where power is exercised – economically, socially and politically – are closed to them. As such one effect of empowering residents in this way could be that the local authority and government can avoid responsibility for acting.

Let us turn now to how Big Local discursively constructs the people who live in a place such as Westfield. Looking above once again to the four outcomes of Big Local we can see two designations: people, which means individuals, and community/ies, which means a collective. The other term that frequently appears in the discourse of Big Local is residents, as per the basic assumptions that underpin Big Local:

- residents have a capacity and desire to drive change, and can achieve lasting and positive changes for the areas where they live
- previous models have failed to ultimately transfer power and control to residents; the Big Local funding model will put residents in the driving seat by giving them power over decisions made about money
- building networks, relationships, support and expertise will facilitate and foster resident involvement in decision-making activities
- investment in people, communities and locally driven enterprise and investment will support sustainable positive change

(Local Trust, 2013)

These terms are broad, looking to include everyone within a Big Local area. No doubt this is vital for a project such as Big Local but it is important to identify the political element to this process whereby the people who have designed the programme constitute a certain identity for residents – they can do certain things, they have done certain things in the past, in the future they will do certain things – which is then imposed upon or available to the whole population. Residents are, it seems fair to suggest, curiously empty, curiously detached, ready to be filled with knowledge and expertise, and plugged into wider networks. What such a definition does, then, is disguise the way that people and history exceed such categorisation, being already situated inside networks of meaning. In relation to Westfield, and somewhat ironically, the studiedly neutral term 'resident' betrays this:

> I don't know if you know, the [tenants and residents' association], tenants are the renters, residents are the people that own. But with the stock transfer of the Thatcher era when TARAs were quite high across Sheffield and in fact, in fact probably high across the UK, y'know, it was a remnant of that, it was the ability of people who'd bought their council house to still be involved in community matters, and by doing that they just paid their year's levy in one swoop, there's my fiver, I can now have a voice and a say. But as far as I'm aware, I don't really know any owner occupiers that have got involved that paid, whether they're even advertised or given the opportunity.

As a local authority officer demonstrates in this interview extract, where he explains the concept of a Tenants and Residents Association, the term 'resident' in relation to Westfield has a historical meaning and baggage that, unless they are acting in bad faith, exceeds Big Local's use of the term. This could be read as erasing, excluding or marginalising the experience of a whole section of the population. I do not mean to suggest that this is the intention, rather to point to what is at stake in this attempt to constitute the identity/ies of a population, a point that will be developed through the course of this chapter.

First, however, I want to think about the processes discussed above – Big Local's attempt to discursively construct a project within a political space – in relation to Laclau and Mouffe's conception of the logics of equivalence and difference (2001, pp. 127-35). These logics are identified in the wake of an insight about the nature of the social:

> …if society is never transparent to itself because it is unable to constitute itself as an objective field, neither is antagonism entirely transparent, as it does not manage totally to dissolve the objectivity of the social. (2001, p. 129)

What is at stake here, given the impossibility of either pure objectivity or negativity, are attempts to define spaces discursively. Using the logic of equivalence to do this means uniting elements in opposition to a negative outside that threatens them (p. 129). The logic of difference, by contrast, sees the expansion of the discursive space to incorporate more elements (p. 130), a function of which is the marginalisation of antagonism (Howarth 2000, p. 107). When we think about how estates such as Westfield have been othered by discourses that have, in the pursuit of particular hegemonic projects, historically sought to make them repositories of pure negativity – lawlessness, fecklessness, immorality, alienation – we can think about the Big Local project as employing the logic of difference to re-incorporate Westfield and its

residents inside an expanded discursive space. The effect of this is to marginalise antagonism. Inside the estate itself this happens through the discursive construction of 'Westfield residents', which either incorporates or erases wide variation and difference in their subject positions. These are constructed in a non-antagonistic way in relation to other poles inside the expanded discourse; 'Westfield residents' through having to focus on finding their own solutions to problems that are constructed as similarly their own are discouraged from asking awkward questions upwards or making awkward comparisons sideways about, for instance, uneven distribution of resources. By looking to their own community, rolling up their sleeves, and making Westfield a better place on its own terms they embody the values of enterprise, self-reliance, hard work and aspiration that are key to the political, economic and social discourses that largely dominate the UK in the early 21st century (Massey, 2015). This discursive construction of the Big Local project, however, cannot incorporate all differences and side-line all antagonisms. What I will turn to next is how Westfield residents have been unable to attain the identities imagined for them, and also those imagined for themselves, how their activity and the activity of other participants has exceeded or overflowed their allotted space, how antagonisms have re-emerged on the ground, and with what consequences. In due course I will turn to how other actors have interpreted and engaged with the Big Local process. This complicates the picture but seeking to understand this and how residents of Westfield have responded to it is an important route to understanding what 'empowerment' might mean in the context of grassroots planning initiatives and what limits exist on the ability of people in such contexts to story their own futures.

3.2.3 Decisions are made by those who show up…

I will begin this section on the conflicts encountered by those Westfield residents who have become participants in Big Local by focussing on three people, thinking about how they figured their own identities in terms of what subject positions they seek to occupy. These are taken from the interviews I conducted with them, my understanding of which is coloured by the three years we spent working alongside one another on Westfield Big Local.

The first resident's account of his own identity is to stress that historically he was a resident of the Derbyshire village of Mosborough, which was 'absorbed' into

Sheffield prior to Westfield being planned and built. His account of being unhappy about becoming part of Sheffield is given the context of his discussion with a local politician, whom he knew 'quite well', which won him around to the idea, inspiring him with the vision of a planned community, to such an extent that he decided to move there with his family. In addition to the positioning this provides we see other positions being adopted: that of father and husband, a worker, attending evening classes, taking an active part in local life through attending public meetings. We see a solidity and a rootedness across these positions, with frequent references to historical changes in the locality, and this uprightness finds expression later in seeking election to local government:

> … I was quite a lot younger in those days and thought, there had been a succession of old, older males, mostly males but there were some females involved, and we said, we need, it was said politically, we need some younger people who are gonna be bothered and get things done, and, y'know, I, was gonna say daft enough [laughs], was one of the people who hadn't dodged quick enough, so I said, OK, yeah, I'll do it. And, that was in 1979, I think it was, and I thought I could change things but actually, I realised, it's a bit like, just like the city council as well, it's a massive machine and trying to change the course of that machine is most difficult [laughs].

What this reference points to is not just the subject position of 'county councillor' but the way that the meaning of that is discursively positioned, contingent on certain understandings of duty, how change happens and how it is proper to behave. These find expression again in the present in how the participant negotiates his identity as a Big Local volunteer, albeit from a new position, as a retired person.

> …with Big Local, I thought I'll help get it started and once they get the million pounds I'll walk away. Well, people will be dead keen to spend the million pounds! And it's not really happening yet [laughs]. Now we've got staff it might mean, now we've got *X* and *Y*, it might mean that, because, the people who have been involved are all volunteers and I feel that it needs professional, competent people to actually move it forward.
>
> **Absolutely, how have you found being involved with it, what's the process been like?**
>
> Actually, it was quite tedious and thank you to you and your fellow students doing the consultation because Big Lottery require a massive amount, they want us to show how the community have input their thoughts and ideas into it, and you know what a battle it is to try and get them to tell you what they would like us to do.

This participant came to engage with Big Local, then, because he believed he could usefully help to get the process started – there is undoubtedly a public spiritedness here – given the knowledge he had of how to conduct business and get things done. This brings with it the constitution of a particular relationship between Big Local and the rest of the estate – no doubt bearing some similarities to that between an elected politician and his or her electors – that certainly disquiets the role that Big Local might imagine for its active residents.

The second person I would like to focus on positions himself quite differently in relation to arriving in Westfield, leaving behind the pollution and smoke of Sheffield in the mid-1970s for greenness and open spaces. He quickly identifies himself as enterprising, highlighting that he had run and sold a business before moving to Westfield, at which time he was working in sales and benefitted from quick links to the motorway. At the same time, however, he is keen to demonstrate a connection to working class life and culture – the world of pubs and working men's clubs that was, he implies, key to a strong community spirit emerging in Westfield – and an intimate knowledge of the slum housing that many residents were leaving behind:

> …it was a mix of council tenants and private owners, but there were no snobs, you know what I mean? It was just a real community that developed over about four or five years…

The suggestion being that in spite of any superficial differences amongst them Westfield's early residents shared common bonds that facilitated the growth of a cohesive community. He goes on to outline his belief in the importance of education, explaining how he has returned to education more than once in his life, and identifies himself as a family man, having sought to stress this importance to his children and grandchildren. Interestingly in relation to a discussion of positionality the man suggests that he is both an observer and a storyteller, charting what he perceives as Westfield's decline through a number of anecdotes, which continue as he explains why he is hopeful about the future. He draws on this experience as he suggests his numerous ideas for activity that Big Local could engage in on Westfield in order to make positive change and freely links this to his own politics, explaining that he was

a communist as a young man but developed a more pragmatic attitude after spending some time hitch-hiking around the world:

> I came back with a deep-seated belief that we should all help each other. We really should, and it's no good standing on a bloody soap box in front of town hall and saying, *brothers, workers of the world unite,* and all that shite, it's no good doing that, what you've got to do is get your hands mucky, you've got to do something, lead by example as they always say, and I suppose that's what I believe in.

Finally, he turns to discussing himself as a Big Local volunteer, highlighting the hard work that is involved and determining to see the potential for disagreement – inevitable when a group of people are each so passionate about their community – as a fertile ground for making real progress.

The final Westfield Big Local participant that I want to consider in relation to positionality moved to the estate as a child and the estate has come to be an important part of her identity, explaining that she would never move: 'because it's sometimes better the devil you know than you don't.' She has worked on the estate as well as lived there and explains that she always feels safe there, as opposed to people who, for example, would not go out late at night. This is linked closely to how she conducts herself and who she seeks to represent:

> Myself, I'm, I've always been brought up, I'm an only child and I've been brought up to care. It's changed if, I care about people, my priority, and I don't know whether it comes across when I'm talking, I always put myself on the outskirts, I'm never centre of anything. People I think sometimes see me as this trouble-causer because I listen to people then I'll come along and say what they think, and they think it's coming from me.
>
> **Yeah.**
>
> And it's not coming from me, a lot of the time it's coming from others, but because others won't come in and say it, they don't hear it.

Her caring, then, means giving support to people on the estate who are marginalised, voiceless and frequently facing material hardship. In discussing this she moves freely between her experience as a youth and community worker, and as a mother and grandmother, and is confident in her competence and in the variety of skills and experience these roles have given her. This links to her understanding of herself as honest and straightforward – she explains that she would never lie – that she listens, and understands the estate in a way others do not. This sees her feeling that frequently Westfield Big Local is not attending to the people and the issues that it

really should be, and that many of those involved are preoccupied with making money. A position self-consciously on the margins, then, as opposed to the dominant mode of understanding Westfield Big Local's activity and purpose. Ultimately she justifies her approach, and links many of these strands together, in explaining that she is a passionate person.

Having spent some time thinking about how participants seek to position themselves it is important to think about how others position them. This is in line with the foundations of the thesis whereby identity is understood as relational, meaning that how others understand a person impacts on their position within discursive structures, for just as society is never wholly transparent to itself neither are individuals. An important factor in the discursive construction of Westfield residents is where they are positioned on the estate itself. As outlined in the empirical chapters of the thesis the estate was designed as a mixed community, with both privately owned and public housing. The design of this, however, is such that the privately owned housing is in cul-de-sacs on the edges of the estate. In relation to the residents introduced above, then, the first and second are positioned in this private group:

> You've got *X* what lives up there, *Y* what lives up there, you've got LTO what live at Beighton, you've got *Z* what doesn't really communicate with estate […] So you've got all this, and then you've got me who's in the centre what people are like *rah, rah, rah*.

Whilst we have discussed above how Big Local's understanding of its project seeks to marginalise antagonism in its construction of the category 'Westfield Residents' this interview extract demonstrates how these antagonisms are important to how residents understand themselves and one another, and that they have re-emerged in their activity. It also demonstrates how the categories are unstable, not only in so far as some former tenants of the Local Authority have bought their council houses through the right-to-buy scheme but also in how those who might objectively appear to be in one category can be discursively shifted into another if they do not, 'really communicate' with the estate. In relation to Westfield Big Local, I would suggest, these antagonisms are exacerbated by a paradox or contradiction in how the project seeks to position participants, whereby as soon as a person becomes a partnership member, which for the most part relies on them being a 'Westfield resident', they

actually begin to relate to the rest of the estate in a different way, from a position different to the majority of 'Westfield residents', who are not active in Big Local. The extract above shows how this can pose a variety of problems for how participants identify. On the one hand it is possible to claim that people are masquerading as archetypal Westfield residents when they are not, on the other those who might understand themselves as archetypal Westfield residents suddenly find that their friends and neighbours are viewing them differently. This is expressed in relation to Westfield Big Local through partnership members being described as cliquey and the consistent worry about what others on the estate think or are saying about Westfield Big Local, what it is doing, and more frequently what it is not doing (see p. 143).

3.2.4 The *real* people of Westfield versus the *good* people of Westfield

In response to the questions and problems that Westfield Big Local members face, then, in squaring their own identities with that of their community and the role they are asked to play in the Big Local process they are pushed to act, to endeavour to create some stability for themselves and articulate a common project. Laclau and Mouffe theorise such action in terms of hegemony, and whilst there is more at stake than the elements of the identity crisis outlined thus far what this discussion lays the ground for is the identification of one element of hegemonic practice that responds to how participants understand themselves and their estate in the context of the project. This sees two competing attempts to stabilise the project, one around *the good* people of Westfield and one around *the real* people of Westfield. I will lay these out next, building on observations made in the empirical chapters of the thesis. This insight will then be developed further, with attention to what people's stance means for how they act, by the reintroduction of the problems posed by competing theories of change and conceptions of planning practice that found expression in the context of Westfield Big Local. The implications of this are important for understanding the competing attempts to discursively fix the project of Westfield Big Local. Taken together this section of the chapter is important in highlighting what is at stake in a grassroots driven planning initiative, for understanding the potential of story and the factors that might limit that potential.

The term 'the real people of Westfield' is taken from an interview with a Westfield Big Local partnership member who used it and discussed it with me.

Spatially the focus of this orientation is on the centre of the estate, around properties that were designed for rent from the Local Authority and where there are a greater number of flats as opposed to houses. This 'core', she suggests, is where the people who really need help live. She highlights a brashness – 'people what have got big mouths sometimes' – as a reason for why some of these residents might alienate those on the estate who do not face the same problems. These problems are around poverty; bearing the brunt of anti-social behaviour; benefit sanctions; pressures from other state agencies, including schools; the difficulty of raising children in such an environment, attended by a fear for their future; a culture of drug use; physical and mental health problems. She talks movingly about the cumulative impact of these issues in how people come to relate to the world:

> …when my son were 12 year old was when the first murder happened [on the estate], and he suffered huge problems, he were going to school and school were having to phone me up every day so he could talk to me, to check that I was OK. But not only that, drugs raids going on, so kids were walking to school and seeing these drug raids, so they were frightened to death, they were just frightened. Y'know, kids down at Shortbrook School, it means, how old are they, eight, my grandson's eight he don't go to this school no more, but, he knows what weed is, he's eight.
>
> **Yeah.**
>
> Because it's an everyday, that's what they talk about. Y'know, kids'll go to school, oh, we've made a song up about weed. Well, me mum has it. They're eight. So, it's a very, kids have got to grow up quicker these days, and that's a fact, because they're hearing a lot more.

The suggestion, I would argue, is that this is difficult to understand if you have not experienced it yourself, if you are remote from or blind to the fact that this is the reality of people's lived experience, an experience that has a cumulative effect and an impact on one's orientation to the world.

The term 'good people of Westfield' stems from my own analysis rather than as a term that people explicitly use to talk in a normative way about the estate; whilst there are instances when they might refer to the fact that many nice or good people live on Westfield this tends to emerge in situations where they desire to counter, or at least balance, what they perceive as the bad reputation of Westfield or of council estates in general. My belief that it is fair to use the term here, however, stems from the attempts of Westfield Big Local partnership members to discursively fix the

project and Westfield in a quite different way from 'the real people of Westfield' discussed above. The central way that they do this is through the construction of a negative other against which they, the good people of Westfield and their approach to Westfield Big Local are defined. It is important to stress that other Westfield residents I spoke to also think about the estate using these categories, it is not peculiar to Big Local members. There are a number of principal discursive categories through which this happens. There is 'the vandal', whose activity has caused the council to withdraw a variety of provision and whose presence means that new provision must be of a certain sort and rigidly monitored or policed. There are 'the druggies', who create a negative atmosphere on the estate, being responsible for much criminality and violence, and are frequently seen as drawing children and young people into their activity. Young people as a whole frequently form a negative category, divided between the spectre of 'gangs of lads', who are seen as a cause of antisocial behaviour and a source of fear, and 'young mothers', who get pregnant in order to acquire council housing and then often struggle to bring up their children. Finally, 'incomers' are blamed for many of the estate's problems, having moved to Westfield by choice or otherwise they are seen to have brought dischord to a once harmonious community.

Presenting these orientations to Westfield and Westfield Big Local here as two competing projects highlights how the words and actions of different partnership members have been read for the political. It is worthwhile to stress in addition, however, how they also emerge from and are enriched by readings for story and narrative, and readings for tomorrow. Not only, then, do we have the basic narrative dimensions of time and place, we also have authors representing events, and we have a variety of characters rendered in a variety of ways. If political readings risk being in some senses reductive, reading for story in parallel reintroduces incredible complexity, for these are stories built of stories, for which our authors have read their estate. Looking to the narrative rhetorics that they employ, or do not employ, similarly focuses our attention on the way that their meanings emerge from mediation of the universal and particular, real life and that life as represented. In relation to causation, for example, we can see different effects in each story. 'The real people of Westfield' are assaulted with a barrage of difficulties in their day to

day lives, these are negotiated for survival, leaving precious little time to stop and understand, which causes them to act in ways quite different to those whose lives have the benefit of more coherent narratives. Such coherence is key to the story of 'the good people of Westfield', its power lying in some senses in its simplicity, its constitution of good guys and bad guys. This invokes a certain masterplot, related to justice, with particular societal inflections around meritocracy and *proper* behaviour, which we could see as being wholly negated by a sympathetic reading of the stories of 'the real people of Westfield', which seems to emerge from a context of rank injustice.

From here we can read distinct orientations to tomorrow from these stories, and therefore distinct orientations to the purpose and implied activity of Westfield Big Local. Organising a project around 'the real people of Westfield', then, might necessitate a focus on attending to underlying issues and action oriented around helping them with their real day-to-day concerns. During the empirical chapters of the thesis we have seen suggestions relating to what that might mean (see pp. 145-6 & 157). Similarly, we saw the kind of activities that stem from an understanding whereby Westfield's problems could be easily solved if the bad people could be moved elsewhere, allowing 'the good people of Westfield' to reclaim their estate. Whilst the dream of social cleansing can remain only that, it is possible to create spaces where 'the good people of Westfield' can interact – inside Com.unity, at the gala, on trips – and enact, or re-enact, the kind of community they desire to live in.

3.2.5 But you can't build a hegemony on your own…

Before thinking about the implications and objectives of these two different responses to the disputed identity of Westfield Big Local participants, in relation to attempting to constitute a hegemony around the project, I am going to turn to discuss other elements of or impacts on hegemonic practice in relation to Westfield Big Local. The importance of doing this is that what is at stake is the linking together of different elements, practices and ideas. This will largely take the form of discussing three different actors from outside of the estate – the Big Local rep, the Locally Trusted Organisation and the university – demonstrating where they position themselves or fit in. Central to this are the implications of their different understandings of how change happens and of what a community driven planning

initiative such as that represented by Big Local should or could be. These understandings and the practices that attend them have also had important implications for residents of Westfield and I will draw attention to how this relates to the above discussion wherever possible, and in turn where the above discussion impacts on these institutionally-based actors. The importance of this political understanding of Westfield Big Local's activity for developing our understanding of the relationship between storytelling and planning will then become clear, as I turn back towards the research questions that drive this thesis.

In relation to this project's understanding of the university's engagement in Westfield there are two interrelated facets. Firstly, the Westfield Action Research Project (WARP), which was the broad community-university partnership between the University of Sheffield's Department of Urban Studies and Planning and Westfield Big Local. Secondly, this PhD project. Many of the understandings that underpin these different activities are, however, shared. One of these understandings is the broad interest in participatory action research. In relation to this project this has been outlined in the methodology chapter, in relation to WARP this is demonstrated in the principles that were agreed with residents at the outset:

- Westfield residents will determine the issues to be addressed by the partnership
- Westfield residents will be involved in each step in the process, and every opportunity will be made to learn new skills and generate knowledge together, e.g. training
- If you'll have us we're in it for the long haul. We'll try and show you what we can do for a year in the first instance.
- We'll do all we can to put the resources, skills and opportunities available at the University of Sheffield at the service of the people of Westfield.

These principles were inspired by the 'Ceola Accords', that were agreed with the community in the context of the influential East St. Louis Action Research Project (Reardon, 2005), a fact that in itself helps to demonstrate an orientation to both academic research and engagement with communities. This sees much academic research as 'extractive' – taking from communities that get little or nothing in return – and seeks to avoid what it sees as the same mistakes, being led instead by the desire that research will be conducted *together*, its focus determined by residents and that residents can expect – if they so wish – that the university's engagement is

long-term. There is an attendant understanding of universities as potentially having a civic mission, a duty to give and provide resources for the communities that house them, which can be understood as an attempt to democratise universities and knowledge production, making these open to *everybody*. This again stems from a critique of universities as frequently being elitist and distant, jealous of their power and resource. A final point that I would like to highlight is that there is an understanding and belief here in the effectiveness of research and analysis, in the importance of reflection and critical thought. This has particular meaning in the context of our engagements given our position within the planning academy, meaning that this research, reflection and critique is oriented towards action. Again, in this context this is itself a critically informed understanding that is based on the desire to democratise planning, but fundamentally there is a belief in the value of seeking to understand in order to inform action oriented towards realising better outcomes.

The main point of contact between Westfield Big Local and the Big Local project nationally is the rep, who is employed to offer 'light touch' guidance and support to communities as they go through the process. Reps are imagined as having a background in community development so in addition to embodying, to some extent, the national project they also bring a host of their own experience and understanding to bear on how the Big Local project finds expression in a particular place. The Big Local rep in Westfield changed during my engagement with Westfield Big Local. This means my understanding is coloured by my experience of both Westfield Big Local reps, and also how other reps that I had the benefit of meeting operated, whether I witnessed their approach in action or discussed this with them. The focus here, however, is on how, from our perspective, the rep approached both the question of the plan review, which was due to happen shortly after she arrived, and how she sought to position Big Local and herself in relation to the tensions that I have begun to outline above. This is exemplified by a focus on 'small steps', a term she employed during the story workshop that deflected attention from wider or more strategic questioning. A complementary element of understanding found expression at one point when it was suggested – in line with the national project's own literature – that Big Local was in some senses an experiment. This point was

made to stress that we were all 'learning as we went along', but the rep reacted strongly to suggest that it was not an experiment. This suggests a strong identification with a particular understanding of community development work and its impact, as a profession accompanied by its own bank of knowledge and tried and tested methods. She also appeared to seek, in line with the Big Local project's approach to 'Westfield residents' discussed above, to play-down contention or division both within the partnership and on the estate more widely, choosing to focus on those residents who had engaged as an uncomplicated expression of the community. In our terms we can think about this as an apolitical approach to Westfield Big Local's activity, insofar as it wishes to side-line antagonisms and difficulties wherever they emerge. It seems to represent a focus on inter-personal relationship building as a route to empowering people and building capacity, which again can be characterised as a particular orientation to community development practice. It is important to stress that the rep did not say that bigger, more strategic thinking was unimportant, rather that it was something best left for the future. When there is resource being allocated in the present, however, to choose to adopt these series of stances has political consequences because, and as will become clearer in due course, the tensions, disagreements and complication do not go away.

We have already spent some time in the empirical part of the thesis considering how the Locally Trusted Organisation came to operate in relation to the activity of Westfield Big Local (see pp. 156-8). It is important to recap that here, however, in light of the sharper focus on discursivity, discursive positioning and the political character of this. The LTO came to the project, then, with a particular set of experience and understandings, around managing staff and buildings, and administrating community level projects. There is no doubt that such experience is valuable but in relation to a project such as Big Local there is not a straightforward way of putting it to work, rather there are choices about how it is positioned and leveraged. In relation to Westfield Big Local's work, then, the LTO exercised their expertise to influence what the group could or could not do. On the whole this did not mean saying yes or no but rather pointing to how much legislation surrounded, for instance, serving food, and demonstrating how it would be important for them to oversee such activity. They drew, then, on their 'professionalism', 'business-like'

manner and knowledge of the rules – 'the book is this thick' – to manage the nature of every aspect of Westfield Big Local's activity, from employing staff to opening the building. At the same time, they frequently highlighted how little reward they were getting both for their experience and the time and effort they were expending. We have already seen above how this exacerbated tensions within the group, fuelling the suspicions of some that it had become 'all about making money', below we will turn to thinking about how the variety of discourses around Westfield Big Local interacted with one another and what implications this had for the group's activity.

3.2.6 Are we humans, or are we planners?

As set out through the course of this thesis, then, the Big Local process involves something that looks very much like a planning process, with cyclical stages of understanding, thinking, planning, acting and evaluating. There are, however, a number of ways of approaching this: it might be a puzzle-like problem, something we are charged with going through; or it might be something we identify with as a crucial step towards realising meaningful change. Looking to our analysis above of how different actors oriented themselves to this project helps us to understand a great deal here. From the position of the university-based actors interacting with Westfield Big Local it was absolutely key to understanding how best to organise both activity and investment in order to realise the change residents hoped for. This is not to say that the tenets of the Big Local project itself were understood as being sacrosanct, nor that we knew what to do whilst others did not – indeed, looking back to the literature review there are approaches to community development practice that would seem to support our position (see pp. 52-4) – but rather that our collective project was realising substantive change and that informed, intentional action was the route to doing this. The LTO were responding to Westfield Big Local from a very different place and with a very different approach. They brought their experience to bear on Westfield Big Local with a series of affirmative beliefs: we know how to do things, we know what works, we know what people want, we know what is already off the table. From this position it makes sense to look at the stages of Big Local not as meaningful steps on a journey but as hoops to jump through. Indeed, this relates strongly to the wider culture of how funding is allocated for community projects in the UK, whereby the ability to write successful bids for funding is an instrumental skill

that one can master. The Big Local rep for Westfield, I have suggested, brought a further orientation to the activity. To a great extent she was *representing* Big Local, understandably given that she had been charged with guiding the process, although not inevitably. It appears, then, that in line with the wider project she was focussing squarely on the group of Westfield residents in front of her as an expression of the community. Whilst this represents turning her back on the antagonism between the understanding of the LTO and of the university, and then between the residents themselves, it also reflects, I would suggest, a belief that the very being there of some residents was moving the process forward regardless of what they did. They were becoming empowered and strengthened through the process and eventually, if we could keep the show on the road, they *might* reach a position where they were able to make decisions about some of these larger issues and act more strategically.

The residents, I have already suggested, were caught somewhat in the middle of these different understandings of the project. At the same time, they were to imagine that they were in the driving seat. We have discussed above how engagement with the project posed challenges for their understandings of themselves, their estate and their relationships with their neighbours. There is potentially a further challenge posed to their identities here, however, represented by the process, insofar as residents may well have not thought of themselves in these terms before – as planners – and we have seen during the empirical chapters of this thesis just how difficult many Westfield Big Local residents found this process of thinking about themselves and their place in the abstract (see p. 137 & pp. 141-4). Big Local represents this as a problem relating to skills and competence, that residents can learn to do these things, yet the experience as we have discussed it suggests there is more going on than this. Some of the residents had skills and competencies gained, for instance, from their jobs or roles in local politics that provided them with modes of engaging with the world that provided a strong impetus for Westfield Big Local to become some things rather than others, deferential towards the Local Authority, assuming a service-provider-type role in relation to the rest of the estate.

Equipped with these understandings residents confront, on the one hand, a Big Local machine that continues to run regardless and, on the other, tensions within

the partnership. As they have spoken and acted, either to bridge these gaps or to naturalise them, then, we can begin to see a hegemonic project take shape. In terms of ideas this relies on an alliance between those residents who identify with the concept of 'the good people' of Westfield and the LTO, equipped with their managerial approach and common sense. The committee meetings that take place within the Com.unity building are a key element of their practice, and just as the building acts as a concrete manifestation of Westfield Big Local's ability to set the parameters of their community, to include some and exclude others (see pp. 152-5), so too some can be invited to meetings whilst others can be left out. In particular, their mode of acting is to look to invite or engage those service providers who might solve problems for them, for example, what the police might do around anti-social behaviour, and then to hear what this is or, more often than not, why there is not a lot they can do in the face of ever contracting budgets and ever expanding needs. This 'business' is attended by a range of activities that can be provided for the good people of Westfield – the gala or coach trips for pensioners – that can be carefully controlled so as not to trouble the uneasy boundaries that the dominant members have created for themselves. Some of those that trouble or question these boundaries can be easily excluded, whilst others who might be more difficult to shift can be kept away from forums, like the management group, where decisions are made (see p. 159). Ultimately residents who do not necessarily want to understand the project in the same way can even be confronted with an environment hostile enough to make them decide of their own accord that they might have better things to do with their time.

In relation to these last points the decision of Westfield Big Local to draft a letter dismissing the university from the partnership and have each partnership member sign it, whilst thanking us for what we had contributed thus far, should be seen as a key hegemonic action, uniting residents around one discursive understanding of what the project, the estate and its residents are to be seen to mean and thereby signifying what they should not be seen to mean. In light of this there is a risk that the analysis and the argument presented here could appear to stem from resentment, so it is important to stress that Westfield Big Local are well within their rights to ask us to give up a formal role within their activity, and it is not

my intention here to speculate whether they were right or wrong. I should also stress that I do not believe that they explicitly understood their actions in these terms, just as the university did not understand our intention as being to constitute a hegemony on our terms. The intention rather is to highlight the political nature of these events and more importantly what this means for projects that seek to realise change. This last point is central because what may well be at stake in the narrative I have recounted and the analysis I have offered of it, is a contention over what change is possible and how to realise it. It should be clear that in achieving a provisional stability for their project in the manner that they have Westfield Big Local have made the decision, at least for the time being, to accept a number of states of affairs as given. Not to question or push at the boundaries between themselves and the Local Authority, the University, the Big Local project, the police and other service providers; neither, through the bracketing off of the multiple experiences of Westfield residents, to question their own constitutive narratives regarding Westfield's golden age, its subsequent decline and their hope that something of the lost past can be reclaimed. This is not necessarily problematic for the Big Local project because it can frame the change as happening through the empowerment of those involved, and – given that the university do not need to be in there – keep the 'big tent' (Wolf-Powers, 2014) of community development intact. The university's position was different, however, and in relation to the conceptual apparatus brought to bear on these events Howarth's highlighting of a theory of change linked to discourse is illuminating:

> …discourse theorists seek to locate these investigated practices and logics in larger historical and social contexts, so that they may acquire a different significance and provide the basis for a possible critique and transformation of existing practices and social meanings. (2000, p. 129)

This is not to say that Westfield Big Local should have engaged in a discursive analysis of society, but that in order for something to change *something* probably has to change and – in direct challenge to that big tent – that this will involve questioning and interrogating the past, present and possible futures, not only of Westfield but also of its various contexts.

Once again, my argument is not that Big Local is pernicious or that it has been designed or operated in bad faith. What Big Local does not have, however, is a language for talking about complexity or contention, a way of understanding how the

skills and experience of the people who get involved in the process impact on the composition and workings of a group, on what work might be done and how. And, perhaps more importantly, it does not give this to its participants. The workings of any group with a collective purpose and resource to allocate will be political in our terms, but Big Local is discursively constructed so as to have very little to say to that fact. It is, of course, possible that those involved might be aware of and attuned to this, but if they want to they can make the choice not to be. This creates a situation whereby antagonism within the category of 'resident' can be ignored, leaving those less well placed to make their case, argue their point or stand their ground to be marginalised. This impacts strongly upon the change that a Big Local group might be able to imagine or realise, but as the categories that are necessary to evaluate a groups' activity and its outcomes have been merged into one there is no acceptable vehicle for critique, dissent or disagreement. Residents have done something and therefore it is a success, it could not but be.

The preceding analysis serves to demonstrate the extent of the political within a grassroots driven planning initiative. It has sought to develop our understanding of the empirical chapters of the thesis and show what is at stake in relation to choices around how we story places. In doing this it also provides important context for attempts to make storied interventions in the Westfield Big Local process. Whilst story is everywhere, opportunities for using it to intervene have been limited. The analysis undertaken with the help of Laclau and Mouffe's theorisations helps us go some way to understanding why. I will now turn to making this experience speak back to the theoretical understanding that underpinned this project, on the relationship between storytelling and planning, and the potential that taking this relationship seriously might have for attempts to make planning more inclusive and democratic.

3.3 – ANALYTICAL SYNTHESIS: TOWARDS TOMORROW

It is doubtful whether anybody is surprised any longer by the suggestion that planning activity involves both storytelling and politics. In contemporary scholarship part of the reason that such an assertion should appear almost banal is that almost everything, if we utilise relatively open definitions, can be seen to involve aspects of both storytelling and politics. As such it is now important that I begin to more explicitly tackle Labov's (1972) '*so what?*' question (see p. 20), setting out the ways in which this thesis tells us more than we know already and develops our understanding. This will involve showing how the conceptual framework has been utilised over the course of the thesis in order to develop and inform understanding. In doing this we will begin to work towards conclusions, which will be refined in the next chapter in relation to the three research questions.

In the first instance it is important to highlight that space has been identified for work that is explicitly interested in ongoing storytelling and how it interacts with processes and activities that do political work (van Hulst, 2012), and the case study that I have conducted does that. A further important broad contribution is in endeavouring to *put story to work*. Most straightforwardly this is through the storytelling workshop that I facilitated, but this represents only one of a number of instances when stories were engaged with in process, other important examples being Westfield Big Local's engagement activity, profiling and planning processes. This allows me to develop understanding around what is at stake in attempts to put story to work, it also speaks back to arguments that have been made about the potential that story holds for making planning more inclusive (Sandercock, 2003). Here, then, I will make the two strands of analytical work above speak to one another and the work that preceded them. Initially this will involve thinking about the relationship between story, place and planning, before more focussed attention is given to voice, legitimacy and the lessons offered by the ambiguous discourses of community development. The chapter ends by clarifying how these insights have emerged from the conceptual framework. This sets up the conclusion of the thesis where I will propose answers to the research questions outlined at its outset, clarify the contribution to knowledge and what I feel the implications of this are.

3.3.1 Revisiting the conceptual framework: story and place and planning

By way of highlighting key insights of the thesis that have been developed over its course, and how they have grown out of the conceptual framework, I will summarise them here through a reading/writing matrix, see Table 4. On one axis this has the three ways of reading set out in the conceptual framework and employed throughout the thesis, on the other storytelling as a model *of* and a model *for* planning. This serves as the platform for the rest of the chapter, which will i) show in more detail where the insights come from, ii) develop them further, and iii) set up the conclusion.

When the Department of Urban Studies and Planning decided to fund this PhD research they set something in motion, so too when Local Trust, the national organisation rolling out Big Local programmes, decided to designate Westfield a Big Local area and target funding there, so too when academics in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning decided to initiate the Westfield Action Research Project. Whilst there are multiple ways to tell the stories of each of these processes, any possible story would need to engage with the fact that they were landed or launched into the middle of stories that were already in process, the one that links all of them being the story of Westfield. Over the course of this thesis we have seen a partial picture of what this story, the story of a place, might involve. It involves people, it involves economy, society and politics, it involves history and geography, time and space. And it emerges – partially and particularly – in how the teller rubs these pieces together, always haunted by the spectre of the stories that are not being told. In this space, amongst emplaced and emerging stories and storytelling, we are at the periphery of narrative sense making; no doubt some would suggest that here – where stories do not straightforwardly appear to have the beginnings, middles and ends that allow us to categorise them against the typologies handed down to us by the literature – story is not a useful tool at all. Yet this is where planning starts to happen – where we find its raw materials – in places that are always evolving, always in process, always uncertain and, as such, always political, not just involved but implicated in economy, society and politics, history and geography, time and space.

Table 4		**W R I T I N G**	
		Story as a model *of* planning	**Story a model *for* planning**
R E A D I N G	**Reading for story and narrative**	Reading for story in grassroots contexts highlights the complexity of grassroots stories. The multiplicity of who can be seen reading and who can be seen writing asks questions of story as a model *of* planning, particularly whether the definition of 'plan' can be stretched far enough to tell convincing stories for change in these contexts, in the face of simpler stories for stasis.	The foremost point around 'story' as a model for planning in grassroots contexts is the importance of people 'getting it', of understanding its perceived importance and being willing to work through it for change. Even if they wanted to it is not necessarily possible for planners to force change through story.
	Reading for the political	Reading for the political here troubles some of the boundaries and roles imagined for planning, highlighting the fragility of planners' political positions in grassroots contexts. The political dimension of stories here – which can be coercive and pernicious as well as inclusive and positive – is also possibly underestimated in foregoing theory, as is planning's power to respond to this.	Applied to storytelling as a model for planning reading for the political highlights another dimension of the complexity of how places are storied, namely the density of these stories – how power relations are discursively enacted on people in the present. This can limit the prospects of shifting the story, not least because planners may be unable to define what change is possible.
	Reading for tomorrow	Storytelling is not necessarily a sufficient model of planning in grassroots contexts, where *plans* frequently mean something quite different to what they mean in the planning office, especially in so far as they do not straightforwardly constitute the future on their own terms, i.e. other constitutive stories exist and compete.	Moving on from the political dimension of a normative instrumentalisation of story we can see that 'tomorrow' is a discursive construct that operates on and is available to people in different ways. In this instance story might not make planning any more readily available to people.
I M P L I C A T I O N S		The stronger claim around storytelling as a model of planning falls down in grassroots contexts, where 'planners' broadly conceived are not necessarily in a strong enough position for it to hold up, indeed, might not even want it to. The weaker claim, however, continues to be useful in so far as we can continue to see story at work almost everywhere and, with an ever more sophisticated understanding of how it works here, can continue to learn from, and sometimes seek to intervene through it.	The principal difficulty around story as a model for planning in grassroots contexts is whether planning's story is powerful enough to take people on the journey they need to go on to enable the reframing work that change requires. There is an added ethical difficulty around using story to do planning in so far as story can be mobilised to hide things, whether the political values underpinning planning action on the one hand, or undermining it on the other.

That places are storied is, of course, not a new insight, nor that stories of place are political and contested. The implications for planning practices are, however, still uncertain, and there is much to be gained from being in the spaces where story emerges. Some people – residents – are in these places already, some people – planners, community development professionals, social researchers – insert themselves into these places. What this thesis' conceptual framework – which utilises storytelling and the theories of Laclau and Mouffe in tandem in the context of a bottom-up community development project – demonstrates in Westfield is the material effects of emplaced stories emerging and of different actors endeavouring to influence or find a place within these stories. This has been understood as a political process; *legitimacy and meaning are contested, by the time we see where the story might go some routes are already closed off*. This is an especially important insight, in light of how the potential of both story and planning processes are discussed, because *what we conceive in terms of discourse or story has material effects and constraints*. An important insight garnered from my work and thinking about story and place, then, is just how constrained radically open social spaces are, with a concomitant reflection on what this means for opportunities to intervene or plan. It is not just the social space that is constrained, however, both planning and story are too, and in developing understanding of this the research has gone some way to demonstrating aspects of both that have been neglected in discussion of them hitherto. That these have come to light in the context of a grassroots driven planning initiative is particularly important on account of the promise that story is imagined as holding for attempts to democratise planning – the knowledge base that it draws on and its practice. These insights will now be elaborated in relation to the following topics: political voices, emplaced legitimacy, and the ambiguous discourses of community development. Ultimately, this will set up the close of the chapter, which brings its strands together and speaks back more explicitly to the conceptual framework. This sets up the thesis' conclusion, which re-engages with the research questions, considers the implications of our answers to these and what they suggest for the future.

3.3.2 Political voices

Much rhetoric around storytelling relates to voice, although this can be rendered in different ways. On one level, an import is attached to the ability to have one's voice heard. This can be seen as important for the individual, who is validated in some way, either politically, in so far as they feel that they have contributed to the polity or that they have had some fundamental right respected, or possibly more personally, in so far as articulating and being heard has something akin to a therapeutic benefit (Kearney, 2002). There is a link back to story here, in so far as having a story and having it acknowledged is seen as an important element of an individual's ability to function healthily as part of a wider community (Kerby, 1991). There is also a normative ethic of pluralism or of democracy here that believes that a good community or society is one in which a variety of voices are heard, this could stem from a respect for the individual's freedom of expression, or it could stem from a respect for the rights of minority communities or positions. Whilst all of these different renderings of voice do something for individuals that we might choose to term empowerment there are some positions that push it further, seeing voice or testimony as having a power of its own, to influence and to do political work (Haig-Brown, 2003).

Planning has engaged with voice understood broadly across the conceptions outlined here, especially in relation to the fact that there are certain voices, communities or sections of the community that are likely to have less ability to raise their voice, to have it listened and responded to. This has stemmed from the suggestion that planning has at times been complicit in the marginalisation of certain people and voices, and the belief that this is wrong has seen story and storytelling come to be offered as one mode through which diverse people might be able to articulate their own understandings, to have these heard and heeded (Sandercock, 2003). The research outlined in this thesis is able to respond to both elements of the consideration of voice discussed here, namely the varied, overlapping claims that are made for it and what this might mean for planning practice.

The first insight, then, is that *at the lowest scales places still find expression through a plurality of conflicting voices, that even at these scales some voices have more purchase than others, on account of how a diverse range of intersecting subject*

positions find expression in the articulations of individuals and groups of individuals. That a broad range of people in Westfield expressed what has been termed consultation fatigue – 'this estate, what you have to remember has been promised a lot, a lot of times, and it's always they've never had it' – suggests that historically more traditional modes of listening to resident voices have produced little benefit, perhaps even having a negative impact, if nothing is seen to change or happen afterwards. The Big Local process suggests that it is doing something markedly different, in giving the hitherto marginalised voices of 'Westfield residents' an opportunity to find expression that is coupled with the power to both make people listen, and initiate or provoke action. Yet what we have charted suggests that many of those well-documented historical issues re-inscribe themselves into the Big Local process, and that is before we even get to the question of to what extent residents are or are not given access to levers of power. This may not be surprising given other insights on how 'community' is manipulated and 'regeneration' constrained in an era of 'post-politics' (Baeten, 2009); lessons from Westfield represent a significant addition to the debate, however, due to the depth of the insight around understanding the implications of this at the smallest scales. *The most marginalised residents do not necessarily engage in the process, sometimes they are excluded, and where their voices or representations of their voices do get heard they are still competing for attention*. In the context of a community development initiative, then, they can never be *the story*. Rather they do or do not find expression in the collective and emerging story of a wider group, and where they are most challenging, perhaps even most powerful, with the capacity to overwhelm, *it is unsurprising that challenging stories can be met with a hopeless shrug of the shoulders, can find themselves retold so as to reduce their claim on the past, present and future, can be undermined or cast aside altogether*.

If we look more directly at the activity of Westfield Big Local we can see this in action through what stories have found purchase. In the day trips and galas, we can see the power of a nostalgic yearning for Westfield's 'golden age' (see pp. 124-5); in the taking over of a community centre faced with closure and filling the funding gap for a play scheme and holiday club for young children, we can see the power of a particular rendering of the context of austerity and its real material impacts (see

pp. 123-4); in discussion on how the community centre has and will be used, we can find a story about those 'negative elements' who have moved or been moved to Westfield and make it an unpleasant place to live for 'the good people' of Westfield (see pp. 125-6). Westfield Big Local's profile and plan documents demonstrate that these are not the only stories that have found expression, however, with allusions to issues around poverty, education, employment, substance misuse and the causes of anti-social behaviour (see pp. 144-6); that these stories and their implications have been articulated widely in the context of Westfield Big Local's activity and discussed frequently is further demonstrated by the empirical work of this thesis, particularly in the story workshop that formed one important part of it. These stories, which clearly invoke problematic histories, larger contexts and issues that require more strategic thinking, and the stories of individual lives and experiences that feed into them, have not had the power to provoke action, then, on account of their expression in a live political context, where in competition with those other stories, with issues around the scope of proper action, the capacity to act and moral judgement, they find they are, yet again, marginal.

3.3.3 Making a claim on the story

Closely related to voice is the concept of legitimacy, which is again always politically inflected. In Westfield we have seen a number of clashes in this area: between the residents themselves (see pp. 201-4); between the discourses of planning and its scholarship, community development, and managerialised social entrepreneurship (see pp. 204-8). These are conflicts that have overlapped, messy conflicts, without straightforward resolution. The competing claims of a Westfield resident of 40 years and a young mother of 17 or 18 who is, to put it starkly, on the breadline and perhaps not able to or comfortable in attending a series of formal meetings where decisions are made about the allocation of scarce resources, pose questions that are quite clearly incredibly complicated. How we might approach such a situation on the ground is similarly complex, as the relationships we build in grassroots contexts can be fragile, our own legitimacy – which if we seek to minimise the potentially overbearing exercise of our professional or institutional power stems from the time we spend, over many weeks and months, working alongside people – risks being pushed off a cliff, in the heat of the moment, by the forceful assertion of the fact that

we get on the tram, or the bus or into our cars at the end of the meeting and go home, so what do we know after all?

The experience of trying to intervene in the Westfield Big Local process through story adds depth to these insights. People will listen, empathise, acknowledge the truth and legitimacy of someone else's story, but this need not shake their own truth. This might gain its legitimacy from a whole lifetime of 'knowing how things work', seemingly cemented in place – and discursive space – by the way a person votes, the papers they read, what their neighbours or children say and do, what they watch on the telly or hear on the radio. *It is one thing to recognise that a voice is legitimate, another altogether to let it shake the whole complex edifice of your own story, vital in its coherence, reassuring in its assertion of what is whose just deserts, its sadness at what you have lost, hope in what you might regain, and above all, its pointing towards the fact that, at the end of the day, and even if you have been greatly moved, can you even do anything about it anyway?* Viewed from a position of any sympathy it seems somewhat unfair to respond to this with anything other than understanding. Not least because Westfield Big Local partnership members are volunteering their own time and energy in good faith to the exercise of trying to make their community a better place. Their sense of what they can achieve does not come from nowhere, and given their role as volunteers why should they engage with difficult questions or make themselves feel uncomfortable? From a different perspective, however, *there are questions around what Big Local – a self-consciously innovative, mould-breaking programme – says it will achieve in a place such as Westfield, in the face of very real need; of whether some claims on the resource are stronger than others, even if they are made by proxy; and, if change is not happening, what is being allowed to stay the same*.

The agonistic and communicative approaches to planning we have charted in this thesis (see pp. 30-36) look, on the face of it, to pose two different approaches to these questions. One might seek to create collaborative conditions for working to consensus around these difficult problems, the other might look to how competing claims might, to put it crudely, more straightforwardly fight it out. Story could have a role in either conception but our experience suggests reason why planners would do well to pause for thought before trying to put it to work. Firstly, *there is a question*

about our own elevation of planning, which may not be held in the same regard in grassroots contexts. Some might be unable to orient themselves proactively to the future because of the precarious and difficult lives they are leading in the present, others might find the processes incredibly difficult, others still may just not be inclined to do them, or may approach them with a narrowly instrumental, perhaps even cynical, attitude (see p. 140-4). What is more, all of us can have strong reasons for not wishing to engage with difficult questions relating to our individual and collective pasts. This is where story as a mode of change begins to be put in its place, as there is a risk, in Sandercock's idiom (2003), that we overstate its ability to take people on a journey, in Throgmorton's (1996), that we overstate its ability to constitute the future on its own terms, and in Forester's (1993a), that we overstate its ability to teach rather than reinforce what we think we know already.

A point that collaborative planning could be seen to miss, then, is that *people are not necessarily open to deep reflection and re-framings*. In Westfield, to a large degree, the story is heavily set before Big Local even arrives, meaning that when it does the potential for change through story is heavily constrained, and then quite quickly and informally cemented. This is not to say that the space is wholly closed, as the story workshop I have conducted demonstrates that it is possible to use story to provoke discussions and raise questions (see pp. 184-6), perhaps beginning to unsettle that sedimented 'everyday commonsense' (Fougère & Bond, 2018). At the same time, however, we have to acknowledge how limited the impact of this seems in situations where participants are not 'on board' with the projects of both planning and storytelling. To reintroduce Forester's (1993a) proposition that we learn from stories as we learn from friends here, alongside our suggestion that this also raises the spectres of enemies (see p. 48), we can think about the myriad influences we have charted on and around the processes of trying to plan and to create change through story in Westfield. From the way Westfield Big Local arrange their activity on a formal committee structure (see p. 135); to how they constitute their relationship with the estate more widely and with those outside (see p. 142 & 198); to how this impacts on their approach to the planning process (see pp. 140-4); and then what that planning process delivers (see pp. 147-54); Westfield Big Local are already telling or performing their constitutive story and it is shot through with the particular – and

political – understandings of a host of different individuals, and the power relations these enact on and between them. *In this situation the plan itself does not represent a useful way of telling their story, and it is not the story*. Interestingly we have not seen it side-lined all together, but its authority is something that people act with rather than something that acts on them (see p. 190). We can draw out some of these implications further as we turn next to consider the ambiguous discourses of community development, elaborating on the problems that this experience in Westfield seems to pose for us.

3.3.4 The ambiguous discourses of community development

Attempting to work collaboratively as part of a community development initiative has been an interesting experience, leading to a range of insight around the potential of planning practices and endeavours that are closer to people in grassroots contexts, but also constraints on such potential. To work in such spaces is inspiring, it is also hard and sometimes distinctly uncomfortable. As such, whilst a substantial contribution of this thesis is in a critique of community development as represented by Big Local it should not be read as a criticism, indeed, and as this thesis hopes to have demonstrated, the experience of such programmes has much to teach planners and scholars engaging in grassroots contexts. Not least, given the identity crisis that has gripped contemporary planning (Ellis & Henderson, 2016), the necessity of keeping on keeping on. We have also seen over the course of this thesis how contemporary community development assumes particular orientations to people in the places where it works, particular orientations to story, and particular orientations – in this particular case one of blindness – to the political character of its work, place, people and stories. At the same time, and as the literature review demonstrates, it also draws on traditions that are sometimes at odds with its practices. In light of my utilisation of storytelling alongside the theories of Laclau and Mouffe, I will now turn to making sense of this situation, to draw out lessons about both storytelling and planning in grassroots contexts.

In the first instance it is necessary to draw attention to concepts such as empowerment and community, as examples of community development's ambiguous discourses. The insight that their meanings are multiple and possibly conflicting is not new (Mayo, 2008; Pigg, 2002), but this has had specific implications

in Westfield, whereby they have come to mean particular things in practice – to, in Laclau and Mouffe's terms, be partially fixed (see p. 39) – and the gap between these practices and the discursive construction of the project is where we can see the political in action. Where people identify needs and take action Big Local suggests that they are being empowered, but in Westfield where this has happened there is a question around whether residents have done so from a position of power. *Frequently, residents appear powerless, confused or conflicted in the face of needs, uncertain of what the most pressing issues are and what might be done about them, especially in instances where they face provision gaps left by austerity and have felt the responsibility to fill a space that has been vacated by the local state.* If you have no long-term funding or statutory standing and someone else is holding your money for you, but you also care deeply about what happens, one might argue that you are in a distinctly un-empowered place. If it is possible to counter that in so far as the community are in this space they gain some strength collectively from co-operating or working together, we have seen again the gap between what community might be understood to mean and how 'the community' has been constituted in relation to Westfield Big Local (see pp. 194-6). Here the question of how a diverse group of people might come together and what it would mean for them to create some manner of unity has been forever deferred, and whoever happens to be in the room becomes the community, even if they have forced others outside.

There is always the potential for a gap, then, between the theory and the practice of the programme. Whilst in the context of the project there is no clear way to ascertain how big this gap is and to learn from it, especially not for 'the community', Laclau and Mouffe have afforded us particular insight here. Provisionally, I would like to suggest that the only thing that is necessarily enfranchised in this situation is 'community development', which has the power to hide the gap or to say that it does not matter by invoking different aspects of its various traditions at different times to justify whatever has transpired in practice. I say provisionally because using this as a starting point allows us to draw an interesting parallel with scholarship, which also has what we might term a success bias, whereby when we hear about research it has always been successful in some sense. The difference, of course, is that where there is a gap between theory and practice scholarship can ensure success by talking about

what the gap tells us. By drawing this parallel, I hope to begin to point towards what we can learn from community development, what we have to add, how this space can be productively occupied together, and why story continues to be important. To do this I will revisit the two questions posed at the end of the empirical chapters of the thesis – namely, what it means to act politically in an 'apolitical' space, and, the extent to which academic discourses find themselves powerless in certain situations – but taking the relationship between theory and practice as a point of departure.

The power of academic discourses is seen partly to stem from their relationship with their institutions – the university – partly from the elevated status that is granted to particular forms of knowledge and rationality against others, and perhaps also from the cultural capital wielded by academics. The starting point for this thesis and for WARP, is to question these positions. In seeking to engage in Westfield this leaves us in a somewhat vulnerable position, not necessarily in relation to the residents, but in relation to other kinds of power and knowledge. For example, it is certainly possible to critique community development along similar lines, in so far as it can wield material and institutional resource that is not evenly shared, it can invoke a bank of professional knowledge to justify itself, and its practitioners have, from its very origins, frequently been middle-class people remote from the communities where they engage. In light of this, if we are looking to engage in contexts where community development activity is happening, and if that community development activity is not open to similar lines of critique, it is possible that engaged scholars find themselves discursively positioned as people who know a lot about theory but not a lot about practice, or 'the real world'. Like any cliché, this suggestion no doubt has some truth in it, and it could represent a productive space, especially if it is offered by residents, but it can only be a productive space if it is a starting point for engagement. This is especially the case if it stems from within community development, because *the suggestion that some people do theory and others do practice is deadening*, not least because if we refuse to see that things might be different to how we see them now, we refuse to make change possible. The extent of this is clear in the way that the Big Local process was assertively naturalised in Westfield, with the rep playing down the level of experimentation involved (see p. 207). From here the project runs us rather than the other way around, with the

agency of everyone involved significantly constrained. The situation must represent a starting point, then, for challenging the dualism created between theory and practice, highlighting that academics are practitioners also, and that if our practice asks uncomfortable questions of community development activity, just as community development practice poses uncomfortable questions for academics, this must be made to be a productive discomfort.

The relationships between planning and community development, and between planning and scholarship, can be understood in similar ways. To engage with this is to recognise how even apparently apolitical spaces are political – how discourse is material – and to acknowledge what it would take to work for change in such settings, against the grain of the 'post-political' mainstream. Story could have a role here, for not only is it a way of approaching the discursive heavy lifting that change requires, but when we are doing the hard work we are also writing a story that we can put to work for us. Yet our experience in Westfield must also be to show the limits to such a role. Foremost is the insight that *stories for change require a particular orientation to story and also to change*, one that is open to reflection, including a willingness to engage with uncomfortable stories and re-articulations. No less importantly, we have seen how *some stories can be conveniently forgotten, if not actively marginalised*, and as such cannot imagine that story can do the work for us, or that storying is the work itself. The fragile, experimental and political work of making change needs to be acknowledged, then, whereby trying to do something different involves thinking, willing, sweating and possibly still falling short of the goals we set ourselves.

3.3.5 Conclusion

By way of bringing the analysis of this thesis – developed over its course with the key points highlighted and developed further in this chapter – together I would suggest that if story is to continue to be a useful tool for planners, both analytically and practically, a refounding is necessary. We have been able to highlight the weaknesses and strengths of storytelling here, and whilst there may be many possible ways of shedding clarifying light on an old story we have proposed one. This has made a case for utilising story in tandem with the theoretical insights of Laclau and Mouffe, and I have been able to demonstrate how and why this is productive, most importantly in

providing a critical edge, highlighting story's material and political impacts through serving as a counterpoint to it. More than this, however, the thesis has proffered an orientation to research that reconnects with planning's central purpose – making equitable change – and demonstrates a commitment to being in the places where this happens. This commitment to engaged research rests on the unification of research, practice and theorising, which has necessitated the innovative approach I have taken, and has been central to my ability to develop understanding. I will look to summarise this next as we turn to thesis' concluding chapter.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to return to the questions and problems that drove this thesis and highlight where my experience in Westfield, and my analysis of this experience, has added to our understanding of the relationship between story and planning. At the beginning of the last chapter Table 4 summarised how the work of this thesis changes this understanding, suggesting where the limits of the relationship lie and ways that it might continue to be productive. This will be elaborated now in relation to the three research questions, which will, alongside a clarification of the thesis' contribution, enable me to propose a reconsidered role for story in planning that seeks to facilitate democracy.

1 – Stories of Westfield – how is Westfield storied, how does it story itself and what is the relationship between these processes?

As set out in the first empirical chapter of this thesis the roots of Westfield's story go back much further than the time when the estate was built or even conceived of. There is nothing unique about this fact for in common with all other places Westfield is entangled in a whole myriad of stories, or as Throgmorton (2003) would have it, it is a node in a global scale web of relationships. The language of webs and networks, however, could be seen to push time and history into the background, and in Westfield's case we have brought this back to the fore through the development of a unique theoretical approach, utilising story in tandem with the work of Laclau and Mouffe (2001). This has allowed us to discern narrative strands that reach back to Sheffield's development as an industrial city, strands that connect it firmly to the political activity of the city's majority working-class population and, in the space between these, the evolution of the post-war political settlement and the town planning that took place as part of this. In thinking about these strands as being storied, however, what we also draw attention to or cannot but be aware of is their multiplicity, the way that they are always contending with stories that, to varying degrees problematise or even undermine them – Laclau and Mouffe have allowed us to understand the political implications of this. In the present we see this fact about the nature of story and stories working through the multiple stories of Westfield's residents. We have seen how these individual stories often have very different

understandings of the estate and its residents, and have seen in turn how these *local webs* are entangled in larger ones, drawing on ideas about, for instance, anti-social behaviour, aspiration or professionalism, which are certainly not specific to Westfield. Thinking about these processes in terms of discursivity allows us to understand the political work that is happening at grassroots scales where planning activity is happening, the ways that change is sometimes made possible and sometimes closed down, and who wins and who loses as a result. The unique conceptual framework has proved useful, then, for thinking about Westfield's story, particularly how it emerges as a place always in process, from the interaction between, and constant re-articulation of, its many and varied storied strands and, crucially, the power relations they enact.

> ***2 – How successfully can participatory approaches to planning use story to enable grassroots actors to articulate and disseminate their understandings, and act as communities for change?***

My experience in the field speaks to each of this question's constituent concepts. In order to move towards answering it, then, it must first be untangled. The Big Local initiative represents one participatory approach to planning, which in being firmly situated within a community development tradition has an important place for story. It is important to highlight, however, that the meanings of both participation and story are multiple and that whilst Big Local gives a particular meaning to each of them it also exploits the potential ambiguity. Similarly, Big Local has a particular understanding of 'grassroots actors'. The theoretical insight provided by Laclau and Mouffe allows us to understand how Big Local's discursive work – endeavouring to fix some meanings whilst exploiting their ambiguity – has political implications. Following and engaging with the Big Local process in Westfield, then, allows one to understand how these particular meanings are expressed, contested, reinforced and undermined *in a specific context*, this in turn speaks back to them, constituting a dialogic relationship the understanding of which is key to answering the question. An important aspect in how I have understood this is in the space in between the understandings of Big Local, the understandings of myself and other university actors, and also the understandings of other actors who have become involved with Westfield Big Local. This space, I have suggested, is frequently occupied by the

residents who are supposed to be driving the process, seeking to orient themselves and their activity within a number of conflicting attempts to discursively construct the project and by extension its meanings.

The second half of the question, which relates to how people act together to create change, speaks to the discussion we have had regarding theories of change, which in relation to Westfield again grows out of a number of competing understandings not just of change but also of community. Story, then, whilst playing a constitutive role everywhere in these processes – offering explanations, suggestions, justification, legitimisation, guidance – when actively introduced or exposed adds an extra layer of complication and abstraction that not everybody is comfortable engaging with. In order to work through story, then, participatory planning must be wholly alive both to the political nature of what is at stake in the storying and re-storying of places, and to the political nature of their own endeavours. If it is not then others will be, as we can see if we look back to Question 1 and think about the way that certain historical stories of Westfield or Sheffield – as egalitarian or proletarian, for instance – can be used in the present as cover for problematic decisions or activity.

Participatory planning, then, needs to be clear and, accepting the difficulty of the task at hand, endeavouring to be ever clearer, about all of these processes. This project's innovative approach to unifying theory, research and practice represents one mode of doing this. It has enabled us to understand that story, as it can be identified in all attempts to understand meaning and in all interactions between people, is not the same as attempts to instrumentalise story or to put it to work. Whilst everyone can do the former an explicit project of doing the latter must involve an openness to reflection and an appreciation of why it might be valuable. This is political, yet so is what we might call unconscious or naturally occurring storytelling, and there are political implications of how these projects are rendered in practice. For instance, if unconscious storytelling is simply reflected as a project of change you are also reflecting the power relations and inequalities within a place or a group, and of how these find expression in relation to other places, groups or societal contexts; whilst the reverse, 'naturalising' a storytelling project, risks hiding the political dimension of such projects. In endeavouring to engage in such activity, then,

planners – and engaged scholars – must be aware that they are just one actor amongst others in these contexts, and that as such their success cannot be assured, indeed it may not be possible to constitute an absolutely successful project. A key element of understanding what we are doing, being open about its political intentions and acting in good faith, then, is to be clear about both what manner of 'community for change' our processes are looking to constitute, and what kind of change they are looking to realise.

3 – What is the value of storytelling for planning, and how substantively inclusive and democratic could storytelling make it?

Stories are constitutive of place, the answer to Question 1 above demonstrates the extent to which this is the case. As a medium through which it is possible to understand places, then, and to ascertain what places mean to the people who live in them story has to be valuable to planning, hugely so. Even the most conservative approaches to planning as an activity, then, can be enhanced by an appreciation of story, which offers a bridge between the other more 'technical' modes of understanding place that planners have frequently employed hitherto and the point of planning, which is to serve the people who live in places. This insight, however, has already been proven. Whilst this thesis has consolidated and developed our understanding of this point it was driven by an attendant question, about the value of story for planning that wants to go further and *to do* better, informed by a critical appreciation of its own history and the contexts within which it happens.

In the first instance, then, it has made a case for how it is possible to answer such questions, through a series of theoretical, methodological and practice-based innovations and insights. In this case this has involved employing story alongside the theoretical work of Laclau and Mouffe; developing the story workshop as a means to understanding emplaced stories and how they operate; and through engaged scholarship, which puts itself alongside people in the locations where they are trying to make change. It is important to stress this because it has been necessary in order to explore how story might add value to planning. This is also to say that without it storytelling might add something to planning but it is by and large more of the same. It is essential to add a warning here, however, because that more of the same is not necessarily mundane. If people feel they have been manipulated through a

questionnaire or a series of not very well advertised, inconveniently located public meetings they will be able to say so; through story, which is at once closer to the things they care about and more subtle, it may be possible to manipulate them more successfully and to hide the fact that this is happening. We can say categorically, then, that storytelling must not be seen as an antidote to entrenched inequality, marginalisation and dispossession, not least because at the grass roots level all of these things happen and are perpetuated through story. Yet, equally categorically, it is also the case that if we want to do something about this – to begin the experimental work of enacting new political formations (Larner, 2015) – we are greatly helped by being here, where the processes happen, and endeavouring to understand them ever better.

In relation to the second half of the question, then, we can say that on its own storytelling does not make planning more or less democratic, and handled badly it could make it less so. There are important ethical reasons for including a wide array of voices in planning processes and for endeavouring to bring in those that are at the margins, but in relation to endeavouring to realise more inclusive planning and in time better places and environments this can only be a beginning. Even when deployed with the best of intentions, utilising story as a route to entrenching inclusion and democracy could potentially still not work and, looking to the political complexity highlighted in relation to answering Question 2, we should go as far as to say that at times it could be counter-productive. As such, conditions must exist whereby this can be acknowledged and our starting point must be that attempts to leverage storytelling must come in the wake of critical understanding of the various contexts that make planning in any given situation possible or necessary, and from here the politically informed intention to genuinely pull the hands of some people away from the levers for making change and give other people access to those levers. More work is needed, then, on the groundwork for story, documenting the efforts of engaged planners and scholars to put it to work, why, how and with what results. I will turn to making an argument about the implications for such work after first clarifying the contribution I believe that the thesis makes to knowledge.

4.2 On the contribution of the thesis

In its introduction I suggested that this thesis would make three principal contributions to understanding. These have been developed over its course, within a wider contribution to broader debates around its themes, conceptual underpinnings and methodological approach. For clarity, then, and in light of the above I will now quite pointedly set out these three principal contributions. I will also highlight methodological and theoretical contributions that straddle these areas and that represent a significant additional contribution of the thesis, in being an innovative approach to conducting research both in planning and more widely. This will set up some reflection on the implications of the thesis and its concluding remarks.

The first contribution is to developing understanding of how story figures in making change in community contexts. Whilst all change will involve story, intervening in and with stories to make change at the grassroots has proved to be a difficult and in some senses unpredictable project. In the context of the work presented here, however, it is important to stress that unpredictability appears to have a bias towards stasis rather than volatility. This is supported by development in our understanding of just how places are storied, particularly the density of the storied webs – geographical *and* historical – that can hold people in their place. This situated insight allows us to develop our understanding of story, then, in having highlighted the converse dimension of some of the claims that have previously been made for it. Sandercock (2003) suggests that story can draw people into planning processes – 'widening the circle of democratic discourse' (p. 204) – taking them on a journey or catalysing change (see pp. 26-8). Yet in Westfield we have seen that where people do not necessarily want to go on a journey story can be put to use to justify business as usual, limiting rather than expanding democracy. Throgmorton (2003; 1996) advocates for understanding planning as a form of persuasive, constitutive storytelling within a global-scale web of relations. Viewed from within Westfield, however, we have not only cause to question just how much global dynamism might reach some nodes of this web, but also the understandings of planners, planning and plans on which it is founded, with implications for just how persuasive and constitutive our stories – and plans – might be. Finally, Forester (1993a) suggests that

from within planning processes we can learn from stories as we learn from friends. Yet we have found that not all stories are friendly, indeed, some undermine, disempower and exclude. This insight stems, to a large extent, from the story workshop I conducted with residents, which is itself a contribution of the thesis. As a tool for developing understanding of place together with the people who live there the story workshop is a unique methodological innovation that has, in Westfield, garnered critical insight of the material implications of story. We can develop and clarify this understanding, of the converse dimension of planning's stories, now as we set out what our experience tells us about the two further principal contributions of the thesis.

The second contribution is about what it might mean for people traditionally conceived as 'non-planners' to engage in producing a plan for the future. A particular import of this contribution relates to a wider lack of literature. The first point to mention in this regard is that planning, far from being a natural activity, can be incredibly difficult and uncomfortable for people, both in terms of what it demands of them physically/intellectually and emotionally (see pp. 141-2). Baum (2015) has suggested that planners resist emotion and in Westfield, as non-planners have been pushed to plan, it seems either that it might go with the territory, or perhaps more convincingly, that people have to be committed to the project of reframing their place and its future or they just will not. Story cannot and does not represent a way of tricking them into doing this. Building on this insight we have also seen that when non-planners do engage in planning they may understand its processes and outcomes – plans – rather differently from how they are understood within planning practice and planning scholarship. From their perspective a plan might not appear to be a good way of telling a story at all, neither will it necessarily be understood as a constitutive story about the future, and both suggestions could be understood as saying more about how planners understand themselves than what they are really doing. There is a further point here about the normative aspect of planning invoked by all of the theorists we have cited, this grows out of the thesis' principal theoretical contribution in utilising storytelling in tandem with the work of Laclau and Mouffe. Namely, this is that planning understands itself as part of a project that is political, this enables it but also provides some constraints, at least in theory. If non-planners

are producing a plan for the future these do not necessarily exist. Not only might they find it hard to move beyond their own experiences, insights and understandings in its production, then, but its end product could serve to re-enact the power relations of the status quo, and from here come to be used in some senses as a blunt political tool.

Finally, and building on the political insight afforded by both our discussion of story and of non-planners' planning, we have developed our understanding of the politicisation of practicing planning in community contexts, again this is a product of the thesis' theoretical innovation. Relating closely to our suggestion that within community contexts planners can rapidly be disabused of any inflated understandings of themselves or their activity, we can see that community contexts are live, and that planners can expect to be marginalised just as, in different times, they have been seen to marginalise others. This means that planners cannot expect to be able to lead in defining the space they find themselves within, and how both they and it are understood. We have discussed above how, or at least where, we might endeavour to harness such spaces and interactions productively (see pp. 224-5), now I will turn, in thinking through the implications of the thesis, to demonstrating how planners might find some platform for action, indeed, perhaps some empowerment based on a reconsidered – humbler if no less political – understanding of themselves and their activity.

4.3 Implications

Work on the relationship between story/narrative and planning, and on the role that storytelling might play in planning processes has frequently rested on political understandings, and has been developed to take greater account of the fact that storytelling in the context of planning processes is deeply political (Throgmorton, 2003). A gap has been acknowledged, however, in relation to understanding just what the implications of this are for instances of storytelling in process (van Hulst, 2012). Whilst this thesis has undertaken work that is explicitly in this area it can only represent one of many beginnings towards developing a fuller understanding. Not only are more case studies needed, to enable more discussion and debate across different experiences in different places and different times, but there is scope for this work to endeavour to actually contribute to the realisation of an emancipatory

and radically egalitarian planning practice. As such, I would suggest that such work would benefit from self-consciously attempting to re-politicise storytelling, a project that is imperative if storytelling is to truly offer any potential for those whose aim is to realise more democratic and inclusive planning practices. On account of its engaged nature and its innovative conceptual framework this project represents one attempt to do this. No doubt there are other approaches that could be equally as fruitful, but my feeling is that some attempt to unify theory, research and practice is essential.

The suggestion above stems from a number of related insights garnered through the work presented here. In the first instance it is the case that interest in storytelling in planning initially came from a communicative space, whereby those interested in collaborative planning might better understand planning, better practice it and better involve people in its debates if they utilised story. I would suggest that storytelling entered planning theory and practice in an exaggeratedly sanguine guise partly because of how storytelling is used elsewhere. If we look back to the beginning of this thesis we can see how widely storytelling has been adopted (see pp. 16-9); sometimes its therapeutic potential is foregrounded, sometimes its inclusionary or democratic potential, in relation to social research it is storytelling's ability to reveal things to us and its openness to interpretation – albeit often highly structured – that has been most celebrated. We have seen, in relation to Westfield Big Local, some implications of just such an uncertain social and discursive space, where different impulses are at play, and have been able to think about these processes in the wider context of contemporary community development. Contemporary community development, then, feeds off the contradictions and ambiguities in the spaces where it operates. This does not mean that good and important work does not happen there, indeed it might be a condition of such work, and it is also understandable given the regimes that fund it and their strictures, but in Westfield its refusal to acknowledge that this is happening has stymied critical consideration of its processes and outcomes. What is more and in spite of this, it has been able to draw on traditions to justify itself that would, by most accounts, insist on such critical engagement with contradiction and conflict, and lively examination of both process and outcome (Alinsky, 1971; Freire, 2001). To be explicit, political

storytelling is happening in this space, and storytelling is helping to disguise its political nature.

What does it mean, then, to say that this implies that a re-politicised appreciation of storytelling is necessary for planning? Not just that we cannot approach story in a condition of naivety, that we should constantly seek to understand it better, to look at how it works and what it achieves. We must also engage closely with the fundamentals of how we understand what planning is, of how we want to do it, and of where we want it to take us – and this must drive our making a tool out of story and storytelling. This aspect of my argument is in turn influenced by recent attempts to reach some manner of consolidation between the collaborative and communicative approaches that have characterised planning thought in recent years (Forester, 2014; Bond, 2011). There is, no doubt, much to learn from this work, much of interest and provocation, but there is also, I feel, cause for caution and more than one way to approach its questions. It is important, then, that those whose work unsettles the role of professional planning practitioners, questions the official spaces that planning occupies – in the UK, for instance, largely within the local state – and invokes and critiques the wider political, economic and social contexts that make this possible – or, in other words, shines a critical light on what certain approaches to collaborative planning and policy analysis appear to take for granted – are equally sceptical of suggestions that we have all now met one another in the middle, or that our disagreements resulted from a misunderstanding. As highlighted above, such work is happening (Fougère & Bond, 2018; Baeten, 2009; Larner, 2015), and my thesis represents a contribution to it.

A further implication of this situation and this thesis, I would suggest, is that engaging with both our pasts and, perhaps more importantly, the future is vitally important for planning thought and practice, and it is vitally important for the project of democracy that planning engages with the future not in the abstract but with people in the places where they live. We must consciously seek to use storytelling, then, to bring people from the margins into the work of planning and of scholarship in order to change, yes, the world, but also to change both planning and scholarship. Here a re-politicised storytelling is vital because it must change and reinterpret and re-inscribe us too, that is, planners and scholars. The scholarship of the

communicative turn is, I would suggest, remarkably unreflective insofar as the identities of planners and scholars are frequently taken as given. Agonistic planning scholarship too has been remarkably timid in using its categories to understand itself, and of following its insights into a reimagined future. Which is a roundabout way of saying that there is a sense in which the aim of a re-politicised understanding of storytelling, which looks to make material change, rests on the acknowledgment that, if we occupy a position of relative privilege, we have to be looking to make ourselves redundant, that making our privilege work for others is all well and good in the here and now, but it must be aimed towards a tomorrow where we do not have it anymore. There is scope for scholarship, then, not just on what it means to put story to work with people in grassroots contexts, but also, in parallel, re-engages with the theoretical and normative foundations of both planning and scholarship.

4.4 Final Thoughts

Life comes at you fast, as they say on twitter, and so too it has come at this thesis. Since beginning it in late 2013 the UK has seen two general elections, the referendum on Scottish independence, and the referendum on EU membership. We have seen Donald Trump elected president of the United States. We have seen Jeremy Corbyn be elected leader of a fetid looking Labour Party, re-engage a not insignificant minority of the population in traditional party politics, and go on to dramatically exceed the expectations of almost all commentators at an election. These events, their surprising consequences and the questions they leave open into an uncertain future pose serious challenges to much of the scholarship referenced throughout this thesis, indeed to scholarship in general, not least the now absurd suggestion that permeated much of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, that we were living in 'post-political' times. In other ways, however, all of this apparent turmoil makes perfect sense, and the work I have done in Westfield speaks to these events and questions, just as they speak back to Westfield. It is not my intention, then, to suggest that the future is bleak for Westfield. Or rather, I am determined to remain hopeful. The work described here documents the difficulty of leaning back against what appear to be the limits of possibility, the difficulty of opening up the cracks and fissures in what, from a distance, looks like the way of the world, and of pointing to different and better tomorrows. And yet, the cracks and the fissures are still there, so is Westfield,

so is tomorrow, and we have learned something that puts us in a better situation to approach the task of making change, even if we cannot afford to be naïve about the magnitude of that task.

To this end, even as I have written this conclusion, a debate is taking place about the appropriateness of the term 'social murder' – taken from a suggestion in Engels' *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844* (1892) – to describe, in particular, events such as the Grenfell Tower fire, in North Kensington, London (Press Association, 2017), but more widely the numerous instances of people committing suicide in the wake of the benefits sanctions and back-to-work assessments that have become increasingly emblematic of the cruelty and arbitrariness that permeates the welfare state in the era of post-crash austerity. This has taken place alongside another debate, about the abuse of politicians and high-profile commentators in the wake of the 2017 UK general election and in the age of social media. Some have seen an opportunity to merge these debates into one, suggesting that to use the term 'social murder' in the same sentence as, for instance, the name of the former leader of Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, Nicholas Paget-Brown, is abuse akin to that received by the Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, who has documented receiving racist and sexist abuse, including threats of rape and murder, on a sometimes daily basis (Mason, R., 2017). Readers can no doubt guess which side of this particular debate I might be on, but its very existence, at a time when many survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire still wait to be rehoused – nervous that the politicians and local authority officers who ultimately make the decisions about their lives are keen to move them away from family, friends and prime real estate (Long, 2017) – is stark proof of how telling stories is deeply implicated in the political and is shot through with inequitable distributions of power, stark proof that the ability to put your story to work for the future you want is all too easy for some and nigh on impossible for many more, and stark proof that we need to keep trying to do something about it.

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