What If?
A Narrative Process for Re-imagining the City

Participation: What for?
What do we think we can achieve with community engagement and participation? Why do we believe in ‘creative’ consultancy? It is a process where success hinges totally on those people you can reach and that you can entice along to events. How can it be democratic when there are large swathes of people who cannot, or will not participate, who think their voice cannot be heard? When the project concerns large numbers of people or whole communities, we tend to hide ourselves in layer upon layer of consultation, a plethora of community events until we feel something has happened. The process can be good; it can often be chaotic; but I believe we need to engage boldly and creatively with the ideas it can inspire.

This chapter suggests narrative as a form of inspirational engagement during a long and often frustrating process – a device to help us develop a set of background ideas, an identity for a place – a ‘there’ for somewhere that was not there before. This paper describes an ongoing project for the regeneration of North Sheffield in South Yorkshire, an area with 50,000 inhabitants, a tenth of the population of Sheffield.

Southey and Owlerton comprises six neighbourhoods but is largely one enormous housing estate, with run-down local centres. Laid out in the 1950s it has a curious semi-rural/urban feel; effectively garden city planning. The communities are well established with large extended families who have been on the estate since it was built. Recently a new set of residents, young families with single parents and no employment prospects, have been placed there. Although a familiar scenario, the problem is exacerbated due to the area’s remoteness from the city centre. Transport links are poor and the hills do not help.

Most of the neighbourhoods have been neglected over the last 20 years during the period of falling unemployment due to the contraction of the steel mining industries. It is an area of multiple deprivation. The physical condition of the houses and the green spaces has declined. They are also remote physically and psychologically from the city centre. Many, however, are in beautiful natural settings, surrounded by ancient woodland or with long views to adja-
cent hills or towards the city centre. Community networks and tenants organisations are very well developed in Southey and Owlerton. There are approximately 200 different groups, and some of them are highly politicised.

Faced with the task of this urban transformation the Southey and Owlerton Area Regeneration Board (SOAR), commissioned consultants to prepare a physical development framework plan for the area. This top-down and relatively unimaginative report suggested mass housing demolition and the development of pockets of private developer housing. The report had some sensible suggestions but was very contentious. After vociferous objection local residents and SOAR unceremoniously rejected it.

The regeneration board recognised a number of difficulties with the first plan. first, because of the size of the area the proposals were extremely diagrammatic, there was no detail at neighbourhood level, the plan had no visual information other than diagrams and this limited its potential to communicate ideas. It was formal and rational, like the analytical, engineering-based infrastructural planning of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; an archaic process that continues to interpret social problems in quantifiable and physical terms. finally, local people had not led the process.

The regeneration team had a major rethink and embarked on an experimental process, developing six individual neighbourhood strategies with full engagement with the communities and tenants’ associations, that would lead ultimately to the framework document for North Sheffield. The process was experimental in the way they used consultants to fill gaps in expertise in the neighbourhood and council team rather than handing it over to consultants. These gaps centred on new methods of engagement with local people and developing and communicating the ideas of the different communities. Miranda Plowden describes the role of planning in the framework document.

Today there is a recognition that cities need to embrace social, environmental and economic issues and to cope with periods of dramatic change. To do this they will need new tools that make connections between problems, rather than separating them into boxes, that open up new ways of looking at issues and that respond to the personal, the local and the everyday, as well as the strategic and the visionary.

Multilayered narratives ranging from an image of the whole city right down to personal stories of residents in the communities underpinned the whole process. Some narratives were developed by the team after consultation and then presented back in ‘loose’ form to the community for their input again; some were generated directly by the community. All were treated as part of a story about the area that would resonate with the largest number of people, from the policy-makers at national level to the community ‘stakeholders’ and residents at local level.

Narrative

Narrative in the context of the SOAR project is both active and forward-looking – involving the construction of narratives of the future through storytelling and scenario playing, but also more passive and descriptive – the uncovering or representation of personal and social lives within the city.

A narrative can be constructed or understood in many ways. James Holston talks of city surfaces telling stories – cities are full of stones in time: ‘their narratives are epic and everyday… they tell of migration and production, law and laughter, revolution and art’. City narratives as a result are ‘both evident and enigmatic, knowing them is always experimental’.

Dolores Hayden reminds us that narratives ‘locate us as part of something bigger than our individual existences, make us feel less insignificant, sometimes give us at least partial answers to questions like who am I? Why am I like I am?’ Memory locates us as part of a family history, community as part of city building and nation making. Specifically storytelling with the ‘shapes of time’ uses the forms of the city, ‘from the curve of an abandoned canal to the sweep of a field of carnations’, to connect residents with urban landscape history and foster a stronger sense of belonging.

David Harvey, the cultural geographer, warns us that the popular approach to regeneration in New Urbanism, with its concepts of neighbourhood and community and urban village, is woefully inadequate to deal with unemployment and deprivation because it often lacks the narratives of history, collective memory and identity that make a place. It ‘builds an image (only) of community and a rhetoric of place-based civic pride and consciousness for those who do not need it, whilst abandoning those that do to their underclass fate’.

Architects’ narratives tend to be positive: we tend to put a gloss on social issues and want the world to be a better place with our help. To find alternative narratives of the city, one has to look to the Situationists in the 1950s, or today’s psycho-geographers such as Ian Sinclair who challenge the idea of the perfected and confident city and introduce readings that engage the views of the community and its inhabitants.

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1. The team comprised Sheffield City Council officers, a community enabler, arts regeneration specialists, a landscape architect and myself an architect, with the Sheffield School of Architecture diploma students participating during a six week ‘live’ project.

2. Extract from the framework document written by Miranda Plowden, the Regeneration Officer for North Sheffield working for the Inclusion Unit in the Chief Executive’s Department of Sheffield City Council, who led the whole project with clear thinking and insight.

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What the methods and techniques of psycho-geographers...
give us are multiple narratives of the city that intersect and overlap, connecting people to places and to each other. These are not likely to generate the creation of space, but instead help us see the city anew and take on board the stories of those we do not understand.

We need to understand and be exposed to the existing narratives for a city or a community to allow us to make new narratives and to raise those issues that remain covered.

What most agree is that any narrative of the city is a shared process. It demands a willingness to listen and learn, to focus on a ‘shared authority’ and to be at the core of the engagement with community. It takes a great deal of research, community involvement and inventive mapping to find those narratives.

Charles Landry in The Creative City talks of narrative communication. ‘Narrative communication is concerned with creating arguments; it takes time and promotes reflection, its “bandwidth is wide” as its scope is exploratory and linked to critical thinking.’ He distinguishes this from iconic communication, which triggers a response and has a highly focused purpose. An example he uses is that of Common Ground’s river-based songs for London’s riverside communities. They used a participatory event about the songs as a springboard to enable people to meet and link with cultural and political regeneration and preparing the ground for other issues once commitment and motivation has been enhanced. Landry stresses: ‘The challenge of creative urban initiatives is to embed narrative qualities and deeper principled understandings within projects which have iconic power.’

In Sheffield the two are completely interlinked; the iconic event is a constituent part of a consolidated story for re-imagining; narratives are worked and developed and retold to become the process.

What we learn from the narrative process more than anything is that it breaks through professional codes, it appeals to the majorities – to lay people uninitiated in the private world of conventional architectural or regeneration ‘language’. Narratives are easily remembered and are bound up with memories. Almost everyone can place themselves somewhere within them ‘...opening a way for the imagination into the wilderness of a kingdom as yet unmade.’

Narrative as a utopian process

We used our storytelling further in North Sheffield to create a ‘utopian’ process, an overarching narrative developed with the community that was as much to do with social and economic as physical development. It was based on the political, historical and local knowledge the community had communicated to us, combined with an ambitious visionary statement for the future – a soft utopia. However, we were wary of being considered too utopian. Throughout history utopias have sought to address problems experienced at a particular time. But they are not just part of deep history, they have persisted in various forms throughout the twentieth century. However, history both far and near teaches us that the days of empire building and grand narratives for cultures and countries are at best deeply problematic and even dangerous. Such visions have been riddled with contradictions and have failed society too many times to be taken seriously. They remain as a critique of society and a mirror with which to look at ourselves.

According to Dieter Hassenpflug postmodernity let go of the idea of utopia and its attempt to configure society. We are now more interested in spectacle, a-topia. He describes a-topias as real and at the same time without site, potentially everywhere and at the same time nowhere, whereas utopias create an image of a better life in the space and time of a nowhere we can recognise now.

The City of Sheffield has had its share of utopian visions, utopian housing schemes, city centre planning utopias, and lastly smaller highly politicised and anarchic utopias. Edward Carpenter, for example, the writer and ‘explorer of ways of simplifying life’ started an openly homosexual utopian community in the repressed climate of the turn of the century. It began as an eight-acre smallholding on the outskirts of north Sheffield at Milthorpe. It continued for fourteen years and inspired Ruskin’s later experimental project for a utopian community farm nearby. It responded to the ‘idea’ of Sheffield as a craft-based and productive city surrounded by a productive landscape. This idea of Sheffield still exists, and is relevant to the way the communities perceive themselves on the edge of Sheffield and to the notion of Sheffield as a place of production. This notion was also captured in the SOAR project and in the resultant Framework document.

Image, identity and a city-wide narrative

So can we reimagine a city or part of a city through narrative, propose a structure and a process – a soft utopia, a re-visions for the new century? Does a creative ‘meta-polemic’ have any validity at all? Have we lost the possibility to think, to be imaginative, on a city-wide scale? Not just in strategies that operate at city level, but in a consistent and creative narrative that is appropriate for planning a future for a particular place and particular people.

The closest thing to a ‘vision for a city’ is usually its marketing strategy, how the city is packaged to attract investment. Hans Mommaas in his essay ‘City branding’ talks of branding as a strategy to provide cities with an image, a cultural significance that will...
give added symbolic and economic value and exclusivity. A city’s brand can also serve to raise its status as a tourist destination or as a residential or business location. ‘City branding is associated primarily with the economically-inspired desire to position cities more positively in the midst of a scaled up, more mobile and flooded market of locations and destinations.’17

Branding a city or giving it an image or icon is usually an empty gesture in terms of the physical environment: it says little about the identity of a place. It can be useful for the external view but it is not relevant or recognisable to many. A city’s ‘image’ has always been important, but it needs constant attention to remain relevant. It has to be broad enough to encompass different interests and cultures. Also, it needs to look to unimagined futures and other possibilities.

Sheffield One, the development company charged with the regeneration of the city centre, wishes to create a ‘new’ vibrant city achieved through a knowledge-based development. This is a popular European objective. Their aim, and the city council’s, is to attract high technology and e-technology companies to Sheffield, in addition to retaining the talent emerging from the two large universities. This aim is not ambitious or specific enough to Sheffield; it is the same aspiration as most other cities and it does not prioritise quality and innovation. However, if this expectation of a high technology city is placed against another trend for a healthier, more natural mode of living and a more responsible attitude to the planet, we have an interesting, almost unique set of relationships. It has to be broad enough to encompass different interests and cultures. Also, it needs to look to unimagined futures and other possibilities.

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In terms of branding Sheffield is probably in the second league of World Cities. These cities are often post-industrial cities or have lost their focus. They are more approachable than the capital city or the region in that they are smaller, more understandable and have more coherent possibilities. However, they do not have the draw or the intellectual pull of capital cities. Often cities of around 1.5 to 2 million people, they include Malmö in Sweden and Portland, Oregon, in the US. Interestingly, they seem to follow similar themes that are important in their marketing and their image. Malmö is successfully developing a sustainable and ecological image that is making it notable at a European level, particularly with new housing and the community recycling schemes. Portland is becoming known as a ‘liveable city’ and is marketing itself as the ‘greenest city in the USA’ due to the linear network of urban parks and transport routes and in particular the forest park coming right in to the centre. Despite massive competition from other American cities, to the European eye it is impressive and ambitious. A local lobbying group managed to move a motorway to reveal the hidden riverside of the Willamette River. The impetus for change is coming from ambitious community groups.

Portland is a useful comparison to Sheffield – they are both surrounded by hills and have an industrial past – though Portland is also a port. In Portland grizzly bears come into the city centre; in Sheffield roe deer and foxes make their way to the centre, by way of the linear parks and routes from country to city centre. Where Portland and Malmö differ from Sheffield is in their ambition. Portland, perhaps because it is an American city, has managed to change its image and carry out ambitious projects we in Britain can only dream about; our top-down planning processes and limited ambitions restrict the development of visions that can be developed through both institutional and community-based processes.

Mention Sheffield to someone who lives in London or Paris and the image, from films such as the Full Monty, will most probably be one of a rather sad, grimy, industrial, or rather post-industrial, city. It is seen as poor, somewhere in the middle of England and surrounded by a nondescript landscape. Of course in some ways these views are accurate – what is most inaccurate about this mass of externalised images of Sheffield is the varied topography and the dramatic landscape of the city.

The relationship between nature (landscape) and technology (innovative industry) is particularly apposite to Sheffield, whose great strength and raison d’être historically is based on its topography. Sheffield has seen extraordinary change over the past 1000 years due to the relationship between technology and the land form. It was at the centre of the first wave of advanced technology in the Industrial Revolution. The rivers and the valleys harnessed power and drove the bigger and bigger production base for steel.

It is this relationship between nature and technology that we used to provide a theme for a narrative strategy in order to give the whole of Sheffield a new image. To find a base to explore such a vision the starting point has to come from a wide range of disciplines describing processes apposite to twenty-first century society; processes that allow an over arching vision on one hand and an interest and involvement in the most minute detail of personal experience and community needs on the other. These processes include exploring the dialectic of nature and technology, looking at the city as landscape – the topography and topology – understand-

ing the ecology and developing sustainability. Also, it demands encouraging a more feminised city, one where the needs and voices of women are visible, exploring new forms of practice and using and understanding the political processes. Sheffield needs to capitalise on the factors that make it a unique location to dwell in, exploring a sense of a distinct geographical place as well as other local, cultural, historical and social differences. This also involves engagement with topographical, meteorological, seasonal and diurnal cycles.

Sheffield’s success depends on developing this high technology future as a distinct ‘valley’ or cluster or region, a ‘silicon valley’ in the north of England. These highly successful concentrations of expertise encourage a new type of regionalism and distinctiveness. Peter Hall, in an interview discussing the Ruhr valley, supports this view:

I don’t believe the world is simply becoming one world, local interactions between people, talking to each other, people sharing each other’s thoughts, people working on problems together is likely to be far more effective. It is still far more likely that you get effective results if people are able to communicate on a day-to-day basis – people are far more likely to interact creatively over short distances.18

A key issue in the success of a city is its ability to build and maintain successful existing neighbourhoods in the suburbs of the city. So North Sheffield, or Southey and Owlerton as the area is known, is instrumental to the success of the whole city of Sheffield. The population here forms a large part of the population of the city and the economy of the city is therefore dependent on the success of Southey and Owlerton. The SOAR team explored this broad thematic idea to describe an ecological city landscape, one that builds on all its assets to build a sustainable future through its history, its people, its politics and its economy and through the physical environment.

The overarching themes

History and politics
Sheffield’s past is a political one, and it is still suffering from political acts in its recent past. Potent symbols of Sheffield are evident in the physical form of the city. It was heavily bombed because of its industry in the war and it was marginalised in the 1980s and 1990s because of its politics. It became a poor northern city, like many others in the same post-industrial predicament. But Vulcan still

The city centre sits on a raised acropolis in the central valley surrounded by seven hills. In order to strengthen this image the city centre could be higher and denser, more city-like. Second, the hills need to be more identifiable from the city centre, something that gives them a specific image.

The assets and attributes of Sheffield became a catalyst in the relationship between nature and technology – this became for us an appropriate citywide strategy for Sheffield that north Sheffield could be a part of.

Landscape as a tool to reimagine an area is a popular theme today. The Dutch architects MVRDV,19 in their polemic scenario, use ‘park city’ as one of four proposals in their regional plan for Rhein-Ruhr City. When the inhabitants of Essen were asked what they thought was beautiful about their city in the Ruhr they mentioned only the landscape and the amenities. In 2003 Will Alsop in his commission to look at Bradford uses the idea of the city as a park to rethink public buildings. In the North Sheffield Regeneration plan produced in 2001, the idea of park city becomes one part of a narrative for the area. These ideas were taken further with the intimate


19 MVRDV, the Dutch architects, described in MVRDV and H. Cantz 2002.
local knowledge of the use of the green spaces and the relationship and identity of them now. Early community engagement brought out the themes of industrial past and of landscape - mainly through the importance nearly everyone placed on views. Like Carpenter’s experiment and the smallholdings of the little mesters, like the ring of allotments today around Sheffield, the landscape is ever present here. Even in the nineteenth-century days of industrial grime and deprivation, Joseph Hunter, a historian and writer, describes Sheffield as ‘…so beautifully clothed with a forest verdure, the ground declining to the river Don’.21

This ‘world as landscape’ sensibility is not exclusively an English notion, but it is particular to the English ideas of the picturesque and the sublime, the key themes within the eighteenth-century landscape obsession. Lately this has been both a problematic and nostalgic image but David Matless22 reminds us that the idea of landscape has not always been nostalgic. From the inter-war period through wartime and reconstruction, landscape became central to a vision of England, modern and traditional, urban and rural, progressive and preservationist. Having identified a potential vision for the city and processes through which this vision might be negotiated, the team then developed specific aspects of the vision. These were then used as the starting point for informing and constructing the narratives in the participative stage of the visioning exercise for north Sheffield.

Specific aspects of a vision for Sheffield

A different attitude to the rivers and the water

Redefining the role of water, not only as an amenity for leisure pursuits but also as something more fundamental to the urban landscape, as a workplace or part of the living (home) environment. A different set of values could be developed based on an ecological viewpoint and this in turn could be incorporated into the design of the urban landscape. Power could be used in a different way, harnessing the rivers again.

The linear parks – park city

Sheffield’s greatest asset and a relic of its industrial success. The linear parks are an ecological and pleasurable way to reach the countryside as well as providing green corridors coming right into the centre of the city. If all the linear corridors were improved and connected Sheffield could become a truly ‘green’ city. Still polluted parts of the Upper Don Valley and other post-industrial sites can use new landscape practices to restore them and connect them to other linear routes. Through the process of pollutant removal people are made aware of their industrial heritage. The whole area is archaeology and provides multiple readings for peoples memories. The walk as narrative...

14.4 – Timber industry along the river, an image illustrating a possible timber mill as part of a collaborative new type of industry. An example of the type of images used in the participatory visioning stage. (Image by Alex Mingozzi)
part of the high technology revolution in the city. Sheffield could pioneer new disassembly plants for recycling cars and other by-products of our consumer society.

A knowledge-based, high technology future

The city’s aim to attract high technology and e-technology companies to Sheffield raises two key issues. One must be to radically increase the small moneyed professional and skilled population in order to provide a better economic base for the city. This asks the question – what would it take to attract those new citizens? – Make it the city to move to and be in; encourage the large numbers of students at the two universities to stay.

Developing the neighbourhood strategies leading to the regeneration framework

The regeneration board SOAR and the professionals worked together with the community and ‘stakeholders’ to see whether a physical ‘identity’ and image from the city-wide narrative agenda was appropriate to help develop the social, environmental and economic regeneration plans for Southey and Owleron. Our working process incorporated new ways of working, talking and mapping all informing specific narratives for the neighbourhood strategies and the regeneration framework for the whole area. The new ways of working meant putting local people at the centre of a partnership with the council, other agencies, professionals and city-wide institutions. The council team included officers from each directorate so that important links could be made between issues. For example, the housing department for the first time worked with the parks department to look at the relationship between the problems in the park and the housing backing on to it, rather than fronting on to it. New ways of talking involved using artists and facilitators to open up the dialogue between local people and professionals. Participatory games and structured events surrounding personal experiences and memories used new types of visual information to test out ideas and help build the narrative from the repertoire of stories. New ways of mapping took as a starting point what local people told us about their neighbourhood from their stories. The information was recorded and mapped and used to further investigate and draw out themes missed out by conventional maps and reports. Favourite walks and special journeys, and the particular views that had important family events attached were recorded.

Each neighbourhood chose to consult and develop its strategy in its own particular way, but there were many common features that allow a generic narrative process to be recorded.

All the neighbourhoods used neighbourhood and guided walks, creative workshops, storytelling, visits and feedback sessions in the development of their own strategies. These events relied on the need for regular communication, careful judgement of how and when professionals should present their ideas and observations, and continual reassessment of the tools and techniques used. The process started with no preconceptions about what could come out of it in terms of ideas and stories. There were some themes
that were important to all of the neighbourhoods and there were some that were specific. Issues like the views, the problems with transport to other parts of the city, lack of community facilities, security, lack of child care, lack of health provision and healthy food available were common to most neighbourhoods.

Often the overarching themes could be related to the whole city. Ideas moved from neighbourhood level to area to city-wide level and back again, and a dynamic top-down bottom-up narrative began to appear. A particular game we played at a Parson Cross festival applied ideas to issues that had come out of the mapping and walks. We asked residents to make comments on a series of images that developed a narrative for a more sustainable future, with new forms of energy, refurbishment of their homes and other ideas to improve their environment. All the ideas were collaged on to the streets and parks of Parson Cross. They were loose, sometimes controversial and open to interpretation; they were not designs.

Work was bought together from the consultation on the wider ecology and nature of the area, what the opportunities for the residents were and how to create further opportunity. From this, taking a ‘step back’, some overarching ideas emerged, reflecting each neighbourhood in the wider area. These ideas, put together as a storyboard, would help change people’s perception of the area. It would highlight and celebrate the character of the place and hopefully encourage others to visit and make the whole area more visible in the city. This is summarised below:

A dynamic narrative for North Sheffield – Five big ideas
Although the ideas look primarily concerned with landscape, in

![Image board suggesting street side improvements.](Image by Louise Ciotti)

- **Park City** - all the open spaces could be linked to form a green web.
- **See and be seen** - the topography makes particular ridges and areas very visible; these need to be marked to make them visible throughout the city and to each other.
- **Identity from landform** - the vegetation patterns are distinctive and linked to the topography, grassy tops, wooded slopes and river valleys can give clues to the types of physical development.
- **From city to country and back again** - by joining up footpaths and trails distinctive routes emerge into the city centre and out to the countryside.
- **Green arteries** - these link the key open spaces with community facilities, emphasising the green parkland character of the city.
each case our concern was to make a connection between the natural and built environments and between the communities; joining the green spaces and key routes to centres of community activity, using built form to make the area visible to the rest of the city, reflecting the identity of each particular neighbourhood, and using the green web to support local facilities and enterprises.

Parkwood Springs:
The next stage in the development framework for north Sheffield

Shortly after the completion of the framework document for Southey and Owleron we were commissioned to develop a detailed community vision for Parkwood Springs, a largely landscape area partly inside and partly outside Southey and Owleron. This provided us with the opportunity to build on the techniques we used in the preparation of the framework document and to try out the ‘five big ideas’ narrative that emerged from the process. Would it work at a smaller scale? Would the communities around Parkwood Springs find the narrative and the approach relevant? (why should they be different from SOAR?)

Parkwood Springs is a vast scarred landscape, a largely redundant area of the city with many challenges. It also has moments of great beauty and importance; an historic graveyard, a beautiful river landscape, some successful businesses and small industry and a very popular dry ski slope, one of the biggest in Europe. The communities and stakeholders involved were diverse, ranging from the utilities providers such as British Gas (whose above-ground pipes cover the lower reaches of the site), to displaced communities (who still meet up after 50 years), to the friends of the historic graveyard. Two of the biggest owners of the site are the ski slope and the most controversial – the vast landfill site. The whole population of Hillsborough look on to Parkwood Springs and the site is ringed with housing.

The complexity of ownership, involved communities, stakeholders and issues indicated that the most important task of a participative approach was to break down conflicting interests and develop a consensus that everyone could work with. We now had an initial narrative for the city and the more specific physical narrative of north Sheffield to use as the basis for starting the process. The strength of the narrative themes worked well to encourage all the interested parties to work together. We developed a series of workshop events to encourage a variety of stakeholders to come and give their views on the long-term development of the site. Perhaps the most successful, however, was the launch of the visioning process at the Hillsborough Winter Fair – it imagined the first vintage of wine produced on Parkwood Springs and asked local residents to give their views and try the mulled wine.

This opened the discussion to the storyboards that suggested all the things that could happen on the site based on early consultation with the council, the stakeholders and community groups for what was needed. It also suggested a bold framework the ideas could become part of based on the five big ideas narrative for Southey and Owleron. It created swathes of different landscapes with leisure and sporting facilities dispersed within in the landscape. It made connections to the green arteries and connected the site to the city centre and to the countryside. It became part of the green web. Some of the visitors to the Winter Fair recognised the narrative ideas and appreciated seeing them visualised in the vision for Parkwood Springs. Comments were diverse. What was surprising is how many of the ideas suggested had already been tried on the site. Many of the allotment holders who had been present on Parkwood Springs for generations had tried growing grapes, for example. They did well if they were protected, but the wind was too strong.

The vibrancy of the event and the enthusiasm and knowledge that residents had of both Parkwood Springs and the wider area ensured many comments from all age groups. This gave us the ques-
tions for the more in-depth participatory events where a specific plan emerged. The process here, we are convinced, went more smoothly because we had a relevant framework, a story to underpin the development ideas for Parkwood Springs that everyone felt had relevance and resonance to Sheffield.

What if?

Planners and planning are changing. Leonie Sandercock, a Canadian planning academic, discusses new planning epistemologies leading to bottom-up – insurgent or radical – broader processes that now should take the place of top-down – narrower and more politised thinking. The problem is still that the planning processes are multilayered, with community-led action still at the bottom – there is a perception that it will not be visionary. What if policies developed ensured that there was effective corporate working at both strategic and project level and that the community lead projects were supported at regional, national and local level? That would be another story.

The SOAR team have had their framework document endorsed at local and city level. It represents where we are now; things might change and develop. We hope they will, for that is part of the process. The strategies developed comprise an ambitious programme of improvement and change for the whole area over a ten-year period. Now the ideas have been developed, they need to be implemented. The neighbourhood groups in each area, responsible for their own strategy have now been given executive responsibility to allow them to continue in crucial roles for the implementation of development projects in partnership with a corporate team of council officers and other agencies. A step change in design quality is being achieved by developing project criteria that ensures all projects (whether capital or revenue) involve participation, combine social, environmental and economic benefits and reflect the nature-technology identity. All physical projects will be tested against the five big ideas narrative and showcase new ways of bringing nature and technology together. SOAR have ensured that all projects would need to show how they help bring opportunities for training and jobs in new technologies, such as digital, cultural and environmental industries, and this will be incorporated into the scoring criteria for all bids to SOAR. This represents a large step towards a truly top-down/bottom-up regeneration process and hopefully a new story.

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