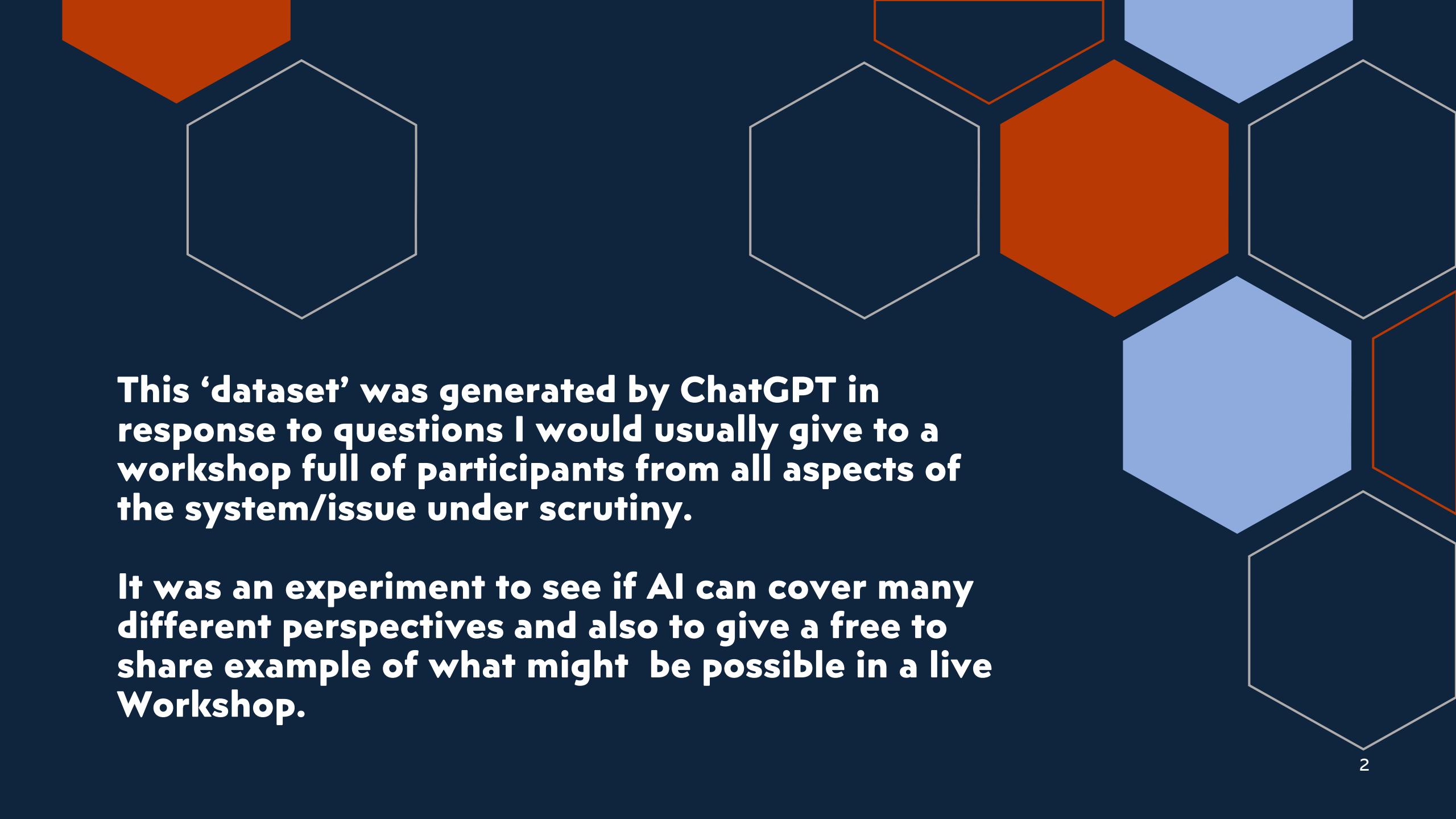


Participatory Narrative Inquiry

Ron Donaldson

Narrative Ecologist





This 'dataset' was generated by ChatGPT in response to questions I would usually give to a workshop full of participants from all aspects of the system/issue under scrutiny.

It was an experiment to see if AI can cover many different perspectives and also to give a free to share example of what might be possible in a live Workshop.



In a live workshop every event/idea/thought would be written on a separate hexxy so that they can be moved around and further analysed and clustered, but for simplicity, here, they are all presented on a single hexxy.



The Werrington fields Story

Full report and appendices can be found here

ezrond.co.uk/publications/

Past

Fields enjoyed as valued public open space for decades.

Council pursued transferring land lease to academy.

Community objections raised over access, biodiversity and process.

LNRS identified site as Area of Particular Importance for Biodiversity.

Cabinet approved lease despite unresolved community concerns.

turning points that
are **observable**
events

Past

Security fence designed around approximately five hectares.

Fence installed, permanently changing access and landscape.

Questions emerged over planning, consultation and legal compliance.

FOI responses revealed limited evidence of LNRS consideration.

Case study developed to capture lessons for future decisions.

Past

School identified need for improved sports field security.

Alternative boundary and access options received limited public exploration.

Community use became increasingly restricted after fencing proposals emerged.

Wildlife corridor importance became central to local discussions.

Biodiversity Net Gain implications prompted wider public questions.

different stakeholder
perspectives

Past

Residents documented long-term recreational and educational use of fields.

National policy increasingly linked nature recovery with local decision-making.

Trust between community and decision-makers became increasingly strained.

Lessons extended beyond Werrington Fields to wider governance challenges.

Dialogue shifted from single fence to future of shared landscapes.

Past Positive Poss ibility

*where the story
could have turned
differently*

Fictitious events

Community and council explored options before final decisions.

Ecological surveys informed design before construction began.

Shared vision balanced education, biodiversity and community needs.

LNRS evidence shaped early planning and design choices.

Stakeholders co-designed solutions before positions became entrenched.

Today

The field feels disconnected from the surrounding community.

Access has reduced for many local residents.

Trust between community and authorities feels damaged.

Education and biodiversity seem unnecessarily in conflict.

People still care deeply about this place.

Current state

What can you see
happening and how
do you feel about it?

Today

Opportunities for collaboration appear to have been missed.

Wildlife concerns remain unresolved and uncertain.

Many questions still feel unanswered.

The future of these fields feels uncertain.

Everyone wants better outcomes, but sees different solutions.

Today

Different viewpoints

Discussion shifts to
why people
experience the same
situation differently

The school finally feels more secure.

Children have improved sporting opportunities.

Residents feel excluded from local decisions.

The process feels unfair despite good intentions.

Nature has lost space within the neighbourhood.

Relationships matter more than the fence itself.

Hell

If everything that
could go wrong, did
go wrong.

What might we see
happening and feel
about it?

Nobody trusts local decisions anymore.

**Nature continues disappearing from
everyday life.**

**Communities stop believing change is
possible.**

**Children grow up disconnected from
nature.**

Conflict becomes the normal way forward.

Hell

Everyone retreats into separate interests.

Decisions become less transparent each year.

People stop caring about shared places.

Opportunities for collaboration are repeatedly lost.

The same mistakes keep repeating.

Heaven

School, community and nature thrive together.

Children learn outdoors alongside flourishing wildlife.

The fields become a celebrated community asset.

People trust local decisions and each other.

Biodiversity is richer than ever before.

If everything that
could go right, did
go right, what might
we see happening
and feel about it?

Heaven

Access balances safety, learning and nature recovery.

The site inspires communities across the country.

Local people help care for shared green spaces.

Decisions are transparent, inclusive and evidence-informed.

Everyone feels proud of what was achieved together

Heaven

Conflict became collaboration.

Every voice helped shape the outcome.

Wildlife corridors are stronger and better connected.

Young people champion local biodiversity.

Schools became leaders in nature recovery.

A few more systemic
answers

Heaven

The community feels ownership without needing ownership.

Werrington became known for solving difficult problems together.

Nature, education and wellbeing reinforce each other.

The process became a model for other councils.

Future generations thank us for today's decisions.

Heaven

People feel hopeful about the future.

Everyone feels heard, respected and valued.

The community feels proud of this place.

Children feel connected to nature every day.

People feel they belong here together.

You have avoided
emotion. How would
people feel?

Heaven

People feel trust has been restored.

Residents feel ownership without exclusion.

People feel inspired to contribute.

The community feels resilient and optimistic.

People feel listened to before decisions are made.

Neighbours feel connected through shared purpose.

Everyone feels nature enriches everyday life.

People feel confident tackling future challenges together

Affordances

What affordances
(positive constraints,
opportunities for
action) exist that
might help get us to
our shared
aspirational future?

People already care deeply about these fields.

The school wants successful, thriving students.

Wildlife already provides a strong foundation.

Local knowledge exists throughout the community.

National policies increasingly support nature recovery.

Affordances

Many organisations share similar long-term goals.

Volunteers are willing to contribute time.

The site offers space for multiple uses.

Good ideas already exist elsewhere.

Partnerships can achieve more than individuals.

Affordances

Everyone values children's wellbeing.

Everyone values a healthy environment.

The community includes many skilled people.

Funding increasingly supports biodiversity projects.

Evidence can guide better decisions.

Closer to the
Werrington Fields
context

Affordances

Dialogue can rebuild trust.

Shared stories reveal shared values.

Small successes build confidence.

**Existing footpaths connect people
and places.**

**The LNRS provides a shared strategic
framework.**

Disaffordances

What disaffordances (conditions that make it harder or discourage people from acting) will get in our way

Trust between stakeholders remains fragile.

People protect positions instead of relationships.

Short-term pressures outweigh long-term thinking.

Important voices remain unheard.

Policies encourage organisational silos.

Disaffordances



Fear discourages experimentation and innovation.

Resources remain limited and contested.

Past conflict shapes present decisions.

Different priorities create unnecessary competition.

Success is measured too narrowly.

Disaffordances

Consultation happens too late.

Evidence arrives after decisions.

Legal processes discourage collaboration.

Nature becomes someone else's responsibility.

Communication creates misunderstanding.

Particularly relevant
to this case study

Disaffordances

People assume compromise means losing.

Uncertainty delays positive action.

Systems reward avoiding risk.

Organisations optimise their own outcomes.

Past disappointments reduce participation.

Experiments

Trial shared stewardship for one season.

Test new community access arrangements.

Create a joint school-community working group.

Run annual biodiversity discovery events.

Monitor wildlife with local volunteers.

What 'safe to fail' experiments could we try?

Experiments



Pilot outdoor learning with community participation.

Share ecological data openly.

Celebrate small successes together.

Review progress every six months.

Learn before scaling successful ideas.

Adjacent Possibles



Share stories before sharing opinions.

Walk the fields together.

Invite one new voice.

**Publish existing ecological evidence
openly.**

Celebrate something already working.

Which experiments
would require the
least energy and take
the least amount of
time?

Adjacent Possibles



Meet outdoors instead of indoors.

Ask children what matters.

Learn one neighbour's perspective.

Reconnect people already willing.

Start with willing volunteers.

Early signs



**People start talking with each other again.
Small disagreements become respectful conversations.**

New volunteers begin stepping forward.

Children spend more time outdoors.

Wildlife sightings become more frequent.

What might be the earliest signs (weak signals) that we are making a difference?

Early signs



People share more hopeful stories.

Organisations begin working together.

Meetings feel more constructive.

Ideas spread without persuasion.

Trust slowly begins returning.

Weak signals



People ask questions instead of making accusations.

The language becomes less polarised.

More people attend community events.

Young people start leading activities.

Local successes attract wider interest.

Weak signals
particularly relevant
to Werrington Fields.

Weak signals



Decisions reference shared aspirations.

Nature becomes part of everyday conversations.

People smile more when discussing the fields.

Unexpected partnerships begin forming.

Small changes inspire bigger ideas.

Impossible Transform able

Create me some
counterfactuals –
things that could be
done but seem
impossible

Every stakeholder trusts each other's intentions.

The fence becomes unnecessary.

School security and open access fully coexist.

Nature becomes the school's greatest classroom.

Every decision earns unanimous support.

Conflict becomes curiosity.

Everyone shares the same evidence.

The community co-manages the whole site.

Impossible Transform able



Children design the future together.

Every organisation shares one common purpose.

Funding is unlimited for nature recovery.

Planning rewards collaboration above compliance.

Every meeting happens outdoors.

Nature gains value without losing access.

The site becomes Britain's leading living classroom.

TRIZ Ideal final results

TRIZ impossibles
that deliberately
violate assumptions
and often trigger
breakthrough
thinking

The school is secure without excluding anyone.

Biodiversity thrives without reducing education.

Everyone feels ownership without anyone owning the whole solution.

People naturally care for the fields without being asked.

Counterfactuals

DfE and DEFRA agree never to litigate against each other.

Biodiversity becomes government's highest national priority.

Every public decision values future generations equally.

Councils rewarded for collaboration, not procedural compliance.

Planning assumes community partnership unless proven impossible.

If this were true what else would become possible?

Counterfactuals



Nature has equal legal standing with economic interests.

Every policy tested against long-term ecological resilience.

Departments share one budget for shared outcomes.

Every public body measures trust as a key outcome.

Children have a statutory voice in local land decisions.

Counterfactuals



The Treasury values thriving ecosystems as national infrastructure.

Every school becomes responsible for local nature recovery.

Government rewards prevention more than crisis response.

No organisation can optimise at another's expense.

Every public meeting begins with future generations' interests.

Even more
provocative ones

Counterfactuals



Every hectare delivers education, biodiversity and community together.

All departments share one definition of public value.

Land ownership never determines public benefit.

Planning starts with possibilities, not permissions.

Success means leaving places better than we found them

Narrative Ecology Workshop

This workshop could be run wherever there was a need for community or cross organisational engagement.

Not every step needs to be included they are here to give examples of what is possible

.Stories (past and present)

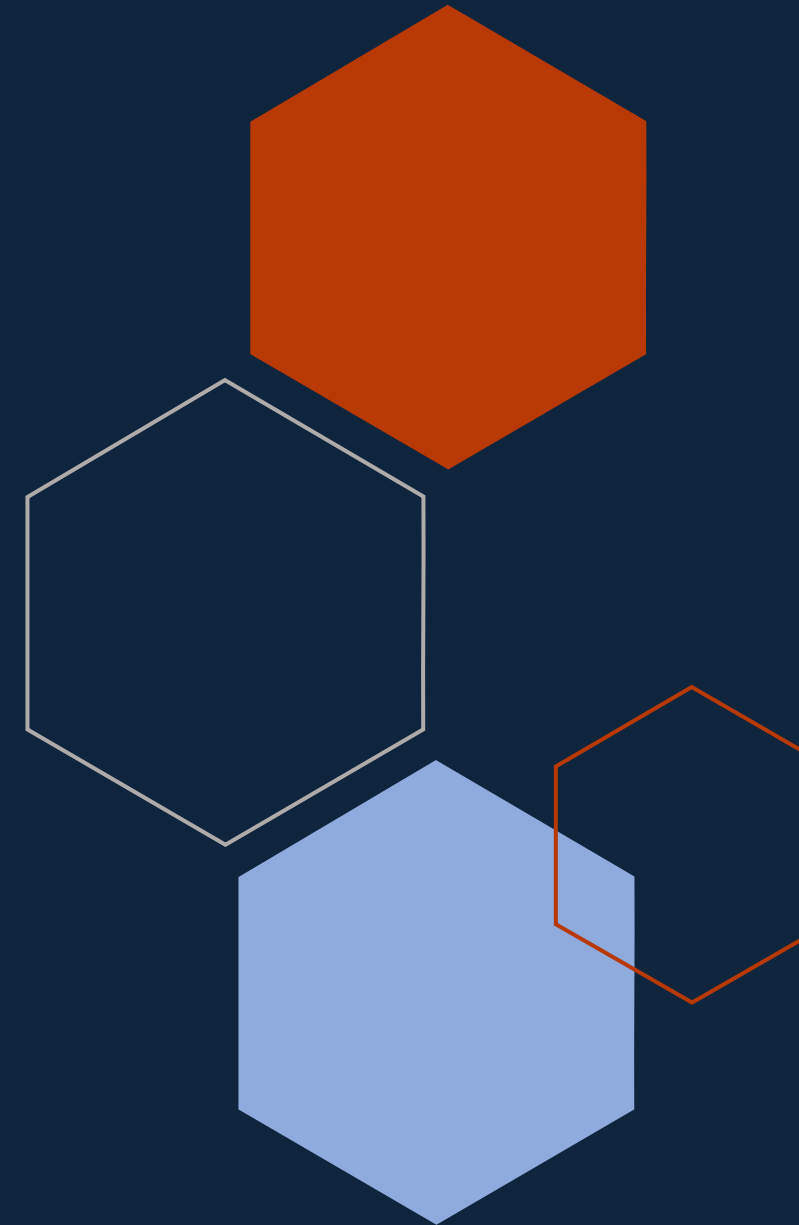
Attractors (heaven and hell)

Constraints (affordances and disaffordances)

Counterfactuals (break the assumptions)

Adjacent possibilities (low-energy next moves)

Weak signals (watch for emergence)



A decorative pattern of hexagons in various shades of blue, orange, and white, arranged in a honeycomb-like structure on the left side of the slide.

Thank you

Ron Donaldson

ezrond@gmail.com

ezrond.co.uk/publications