Learning from the Werrington Fields Story:

A proposal for a National Public Assurance Framework

Complex public decisions cannot be reduced to compliance checklists—they require transparent exploration of competing narratives, relationships and emerging consequences.

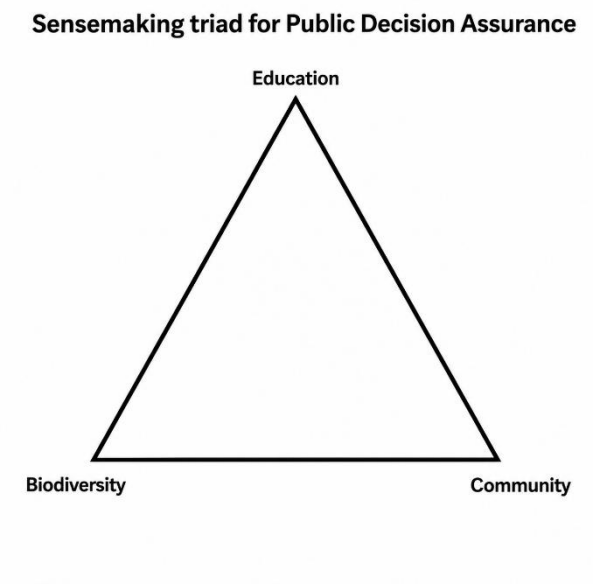
In my recent Inquiry Report based on the Werrington Fields case study, I identified a significant weakness in current public sector decision-making.

Local authorities have statutory responsibilities relating to three broad domains:

- **Education**
- **Community**
- **Biodiversity**

Although each of these may be considered during the preparation of a report, there is currently no simple way of seeing whether the final decision gives balanced consideration to all three. Important evidence can become buried within lengthy reports, technical appendices and officer notes, making any imbalance difficult for councillors or the public to recognise.

I therefore propose the introduction of a **Sensemaking Triad for Public Decision Assurance**.



The Sensemaking Triad is the visual output of a structured sensemaking process designed to improve the transparency and quality of complex public decisions.

The triad is not just a triangle but a three domain decision space.

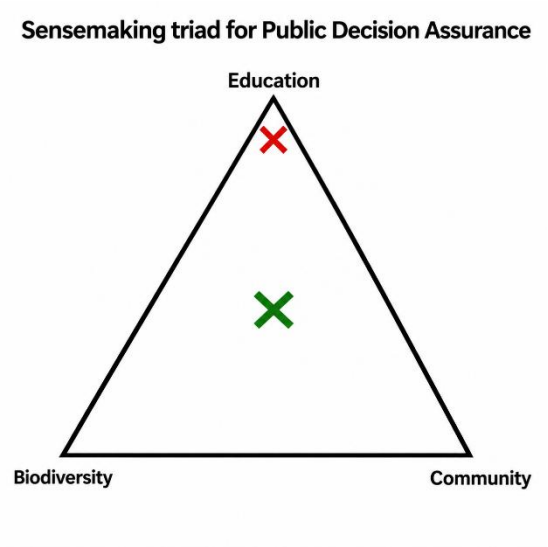
Author: Ron Donaldson ezrond@gmail.com

Rather than acting as a compliance checklist, the triad provides a visual representation of where a proposed decision sits in relation to the three public interests.

It encourages decision-makers to ask not simply *"Have we followed the process?"* but the more important question: **"Have we understood the system?"**

Drawing on the work of Dave Snowden and Sensemaker, the triad encourages decision-makers to explore the interactions between Education, Community and Biodiversity before making irreversible decisions.

In the Werrington Fields case, the decision (in my personal opinion) would have been located close to the **Education** apex of the triangle (Red cross), indicating that educational considerations dominated while community and biodiversity considerations received comparatively less weight. The green cross would represent a more balanced decision. To allow variation of positioning the green X could be a small cloud if everybody broadly agrees, or a larger cloud to show variation.



This does not mean that the decision was necessarily wrong. Rather, it makes visible the balance of considerations that informed it.

The framework could be completed in four stages.

Stage 1 – Decision Makers

Officers and decision-makers place the decision within the triangle and provide a short narrative explaining why they believe that position accurately reflects the evidence available.

Stage 2 – Stakeholder Perspectives

Representatives from each of the three domains—Education, Community and Biodiversity—independently position the decision and explain their reasoning.

Differences between these perspectives become valuable evidence rather than disagreement to be hidden.

Stage 3 – AI-assisted Sensemaking Review

As I did in my Werrington Fields Story Report using ChatGPT, an AI system analyses the publicly available reports, consultation responses, legislation and supporting evidence before asking questions such as:

- Which evidence supports the current position?
- Which evidence contradicts it?
- Which statutory duties are well evidenced?
- Which perspectives are under-represented?
- Which assumptions have been accepted without challenge?
- What important knowledge appears to be missing?
- What additional evidence or actions would move the decision towards a more balanced position?

Rather than producing a pass or fail judgement, the AI functions as a sensemaking partner, highlighting blind spots and prompting deeper consideration before the decision is finalised.

Stage 4 – Public Transparency

The completed triad is published alongside the Cabinet report or decision notice, allowing councillors and the public to see immediately how the different statutory responsibilities have been considered.

The framework does not determine what decision should be made. It provides assurance that the competing public interests have been explicitly examined before elected members exercise their democratic judgement.

A useful analogy is the dashboard warning light in a motor vehicle. The warning light does not tell the driver where to travel or whether the journey is worthwhile. It simply indicates that one aspect of the system requires attention before continuing safely.

Similarly, the Sensemaking Triad does not make decisions. It makes the trade-offs explicit. Sometimes a decision should be 80% Education in others almost entirely Biodiversity. Explicitly justified decisions.

Although inspired by the Werrington Fields Inquiry, the approach could be applied to virtually any public decision involving competing statutory responsibilities. Whether considering land transfers, planning applications, education policy, transport

infrastructure or environmental management, the framework provides a simple visual indicator that encourages better sensemaking, greater transparency and more balanced public decision-making.

At the moment, the **X** is a subjective assessment. We could define a simple protocol for placing it. For example:

- **Evidence**: How much reliable evidence supports each domain?
- **Voice**: How well were stakeholders from each domain represented?
- **Duty**: How completely were statutory obligations addressed?
- **Future**: How well were long-term consequences considered?
- **Interactions**: not simply how good is biodiversity but how does biodiversity affect education, what unintended consequences arise?

The X would then represent the centre of gravity of those four dimensions rather than a personal opinion. That would make it more reproducible across different councils, different assessors and different AI systems, while still leaving the final decision entirely in human hands.

The novel contribution here is not the triangle itself.

It is this sequence:

1. Multiple domains each locate the decision independently.
2. AI challenges the assumptions behind each position.
3. Differences become evidence rather than conflict.
4. The rationale is published.
5. The same framework is revisited after implementation to compare expected and actual outcomes.
6. The resulting knowledge feeds future decisions.

That is a complete **public sensemaking assurance cycle**, not simply a visualisation tool. In other words, the triangle is just the dashboard. The real innovation is the governance process behind it.

My vision is that: ***No significant public decision affecting biodiversity, communities or public services should be made unless the interactions between those interests have been explicitly explored, challenged through AI-assisted sensemaking and published before the decision is finalised.***

Author: Ron Donaldson ezrond@gmail.com

The triangle then becomes a visual summary of the quality and distribution of the knowledge that informed the decision, not just the balance or a score of the decision itself.

This creates a feedback loop. After implementation, the same framework could be revisited after 6 months, 2 years and 5 years to compare predicted outcomes with what actually happened. Both the decisionmakers and AI would learn from those differences, helping improve future public decisions rather than simply auditing past ones.

This could help move AI in local government away from automating administration and towards improving the quality of public sensemaking.

Ron Donaldson
Narrative Ecologist
July 2026

ezrond@gmail.com

Every public decision creates a story. Those stories shape trust, relationships and future decisions. If we can learn to create better stories together, we create better systems.

Changing systems by changing stories.
More stories like this. Fewer stories like that.

Author: Ron Donaldson ezrond@gmail.com

Author: Ron Donaldson ezrond@gmail.com