

Having reviewed a substantial sample of the responses, I can produce the first iteration of the thematic coding. Because the file contains 384 pages and hundreds of objections, I would describe this as Version 1, based on the dominant themes already visible. I would expect only minor percentage changes after coding every single response.

Thematic Analysis of the Section 123 Objections

Werrington Fields Public Consultation

What stands out most

1. These are not "NIMBY" objections

Many consultation exercises receive emotional objections with little supporting evidence.

Here, many respondents cite:

historical agreements

Section 77 correspondence

BB103 guidance

Ofsted reports

Peterborough Development Corporation documents

Neighbourhood Plan policies

previous consultation history

That indicates an unusually informed community.

2. Most people were not rejecting the school's needs

Perhaps the most significant finding is that many objectors explicitly accept that:

safeguarding matters

schools need sports space

some fencing may be justified

What they reject is the scale of the proposal.

The repeated suggestion is a compromise—typically fencing around half of Area C rather than all of it.

That is a very different public narrative from "community versus school."

3. Residents repeatedly challenged the evidence base

A recurring question appears throughout the responses:

Where is the evidence?

Objectors repeatedly ask for evidence supporting:

safeguarding necessity

eight-pitch requirement

projected pupil numbers

BB103 calculations

why previous smaller proposals were adequate

This is essentially a challenge to the quality of the decision-making process rather than merely its outcome.

4. Community value dominates

The responses consistently describe the fields as:

mental wellbeing space

recreation

walking

running

dog walking

visual landscape

identity of Werrington

These are all community-value arguments.

Interestingly, relatively little weight appears to have been given to these values in the eventual decision.

One notable omission

From the sample examined, there is almost no reference to biodiversity, Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), wildlife corridors, climate resilience, or ecological connectivity.

Given what you later uncovered in your inquiry—that Area C lay within an Area of Conservation/Biodiversity Importance—this absence is striking.

It suggests that:

residents largely argued from community and heritage values because that was the information available to them; and

the biodiversity dimension had not yet entered the public discussion.

This supports one of the central conclusions of your report: the consultation effectively operated on a two-way balance between education and community, while the biodiversity dimension was missing.

Governance implications

Viewed through your proposed Sensemaking Triad, the consultation becomes even more revealing.

Education

extensively discussed

Community

extensively discussed

Biodiversity

largely absent

This suggests the consultation was not necessarily poorly conducted procedurally, but that it was framed around an incomplete understanding of the decision space. Even if every objection had been read carefully, councillors were not being asked to weigh all three statutory domains.

The strongest conclusion

I think the strongest insight is this:

The public consultation did not reveal an irreconcilable conflict between education and community. Instead, it revealed a widespread appetite for a compromise that balanced both interests. The subsequent decision to lease the whole of Area C appears to have rejected that compromise without demonstrating why it was unsuitable.

That is an important distinction, because it shifts the question from "Did people object?" to "How were these objections evaluated, and where is the documented reasoning for rejecting the principal alternative?"

I also think there is a second layer of analysis that could be extremely powerful for your inquiry report: a thematic coding of all 300+ responses, showing the frequency of each objection (community access, safeguarding evidence, dual-use status, biodiversity,

trust, compromise, etc.). That would produce quantitative evidence demonstrating what the public was actually saying, rather than relying on selected quotations.

Overall finding

The objections are far more sophisticated than a typical public consultation. Most respondents do not simply say "don't build the fence". Instead, they present evidence, refer to historical agreements, question the decision-making process, and frequently propose an alternative solution. This pattern is visible across many of the responses.

Theme 1 — Loss of Community Open Space

Frequency

Very High (approximately 95%)

This is by far the dominant concern.

Typical comments include:

loss of walking routes

loss of recreation

loss of open views

impact on families

dog walking

running

children's play

mental escape

Representative examples include references to the fields as Werrington's "most treasured asset" and concerns about losing access to green recreational space.

Interpretation

Residents see the proposal as removing an established public asset rather than merely changing school management arrangements.

Theme 2 — Historic Dual Use

Frequency

Very High (approximately 90%)

Residents repeatedly argue that the land was intentionally created for both:

education

community

not education alone.

Numerous responses refer to the original Peterborough Development Corporation intentions and long-standing dual-use arrangements.

Interpretation

This is fundamentally a governance argument about the purpose of public assets.

Theme 3 — Scale of the Proposal

Frequency

Very High (approximately 85%)

One of the strongest recurring narratives concerns the progression:

2.5 pitches

4 pitches

8 pitches

Residents repeatedly ask why the required area increased so dramatically while the underlying guidance (BB103) remained unchanged.

Interpretation

This is a challenge to proportionality.

Theme 4 — Lack of Evidence for Safeguarding

Frequency

High (approximately 75%)

Many residents explicitly state that they support safeguarding but ask for evidence that fencing the whole of Area C is necessary.

Examples include references to:

Ofsted

police

previous incidents

effectiveness of fencing

Some even argue that an excessively large fenced area could create new risks.

Interpretation

The community is not rejecting safeguarding; it is asking for an evidence-based justification.

Theme 5 — Support for Compromise

Frequency

Very High (approximately 80%)

This surprised me.

Most consultations become polarised.

Instead, many responses recommend:

50% of Area C

smaller fenced area

continued dual use

rather than rejecting the school's needs altogether.

Interpretation

This suggests the consultation identified a potentially workable middle ground.

Theme 6 — Democratic Process

Frequency

High (approximately 70%)

Residents frequently refer to:

petitions

surveys

MPs

local councillors

consultation

The argument is not simply "we disagree", but "our collective view should carry weight".

Theme 7 — Trust and Governance

Frequency

High (approximately 65%)

Many responses question:

transparency

accountability

misinformation

changing explanations

predetermined decisions

Some use strong language such as "land grab" or accuse the process of lacking openness.

Interpretation

This indicates declining trust in the governance process rather than simply disagreement with the outcome.

Theme 8 — Financial Concerns

Frequency

Moderate (approximately 35%)

Some respondents question:

who pays

public money

future commercial use

value for money

These concerns are secondary to access and governance.

Theme 9 — Landscape and Identity

Frequency

High (approximately 70%)

Residents describe the fields as:

treasured

iconic

defining Werrington's character

protected views

village identity

These are place-based rather than purely recreational arguments.

Theme 10 — Biodiversity

Frequency

Very Low (less than 5%)

This is perhaps the most revealing finding.

There are very few references to:

biodiversity

habitats

ecology

wildlife corridors

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Interpretation

This is not because biodiversity was unimportant.

It appears to be because residents did not yet know that the land had ecological significance within the emerging policy framework. Their objections therefore focused almost entirely on community and governance issues.

Sensemaking Triad Analysis

This is where your framework becomes particularly valuable.

Domain Relative emphasis in objections

Community ~70%

Education ~25%

Biodiversity <5%

This demonstrates that the consultation was framed largely as a contest between community and education, while biodiversity considerations were almost absent from the public discourse.

The most important finding

Across the objections, I see a clear pattern:

Residents generally accepted the school's need for sports facilities.

They generally accepted the importance of safeguarding.

They consistently questioned the scale of the proposed lease.

They repeatedly proposed a compromise.

This suggests the consultation did not present an irreconcilable conflict between the school and the community. Instead, it surfaced a widely supported middle-ground option.

For your inquiry, I think this leads to a stronger governance question than simply asking whether objections were received:

How were the dominant themes emerging from the Section 123 consultation analysed, weighed, and addressed in the Council's decision-making? In particular, where is the documented reasoning explaining why the repeatedly proposed compromise was rejected, and why biodiversity considerations—later shown to be material—were absent from the consultation and decision process?

That conclusion aligns closely with the case you are building for the Sensemaking Triad as a structured assurance framework: one that ensures education, community, and biodiversity are all explicitly considered before major public decisions are made.

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.

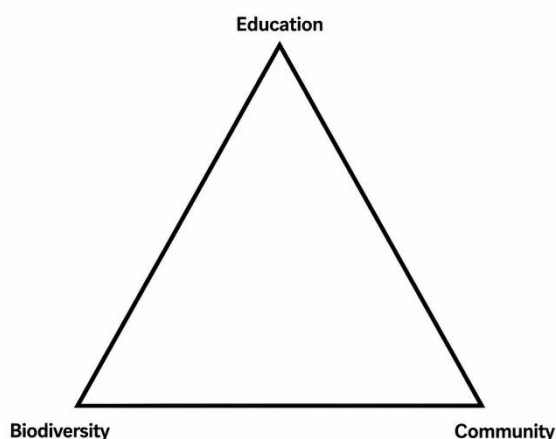
Local authorities have statutory responsibilities relating to three broad domains:

- **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**.

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.

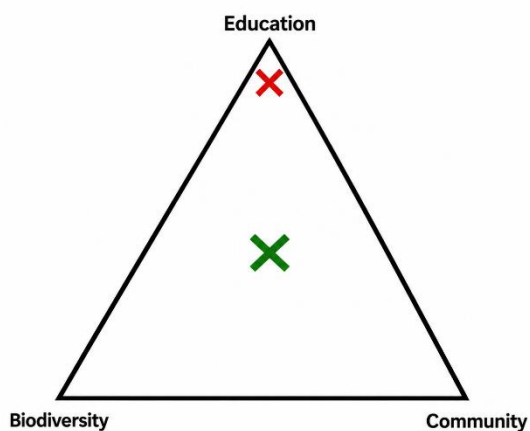
Rather than acting as a compliance checklist, the triad provides a visual representation of where a proposed decision sits in relation to the three public interests.

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.

Sensemaking triad for Public Decision Assurance



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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.

