

# Learning lessons from Rufopoly as a participatory tool, November 2011 to March 2015

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## Work Package 1 Report

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## 1. Introduction

This report synthesises the knowledge, ideas and experiences of key participants who have been involved in the design, facilitation and playing of the Rufopoly game. It is a 'learning lessons' exercise which evaluates the board game version(s) in pursuit of suggestions for how the game format could be strengthened and transformed to produce an effective multifunctional and participatory resource. This report informed directly a series of interactive workshops in Wales, England and Scotland in the second half of April 2015.

The specific aims of this report are to:

- draw out the lessons from past experiences and outcomes of Rufopoly games played between November 2011 and March 2015 to inform a comprehensive and in-depth evaluation of the tool in its current format;
- assess the needs of different stakeholders who have or might use Rufopoly as part of their work, learning, staff development or community activities; and
- further investigate and develop thinking of how a game format can maximise participation and understanding of complex governance issues.

The report uses critical reviews of past experiences from 2011-2014 with the addition of a bespoke survey and group discussions for this project carried out January to March 2015. The viewpoints of the game designers, facilitators and participants were all obtained through critical reflections. The full set of resources for this are detailed in Appendix 1. While we draw primarily on UK experiences of Rufopoly, we have also initiated international adaptations of Rufopoly in Sweden, Australia and America.

## 2. The Rufopoly game as designed and played in its 'original' format

Rufopoly was an 'accidental' output from a RELU-funded research project in 2010-2012 on '**Managing Environmental Change at the Rural-Urban Fringe: Reconnecting Science and Policy with the Rural-Urban Fringe**'<sup>1</sup>. It was conceived by the project team in a collaborative effort as an effective and fun way of representing and communicating the complex research undertaken for the project, enabling participants to engage with the primary data collected in a decision making exercise. The board game was initially showcased at the RELU conference - "Who Should Run the Countryside" in November 2011 and soon caught the attention of the national press, professional bodies, local authorities, and community groups. Since then it has made numerous appearances across the Midlands and beyond and has won an RTPI West Midlands Planning Excellence prize in 2012.

Rufopoly is an interactive game that enables players to journey through the fictitious county of Rufshire, which is under constant change from pressures for development and new opportunities generated by the region's growing population and changing governance. The purpose of the game is for players to answer questions relating to the themes of the project (Values, Connections, Long Termism and Spatial Planning & Ecosystem Services), as randomly determined by the throw of a dice. This journey of discovery enables players to experience rural urban fringe issues at first hand that were encountered by the project team in workshops and visioning exercises. The game is usually supported by a facilitator to help enable initial group discussions, to then encourage/cajole individuals to note down their answers and supporting justifications. This audit trail of answers then provides the only evidence source for each player to devise their own vision for Rufshire. Following this participants then (time permitting) identify and discuss the barriers and opportunities facing the realisations of their visions.

Rufopoly is currently presented as a folding board game with a variety of shaped counters, post-it/sticky notes on which to record answers and two dice to be thrown to move around the board.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details, see the RELU-RUF project website: <http://www.bcu.ac.uk/research/-centres-of-excellence/centre-for-environment-and-society/projects/relu>

### 3. Findings from Rufopoly games played 2011-2015

The points raised by creators, facilitators, researchers and users are grouped into generic themes as far as possible and largely draws upon the respondents' own words but individuals are not identified.

#### 3.1 Strengths

##### The power of the dice

Making Rufopoly a dice game was a conscious decision. The die sets the agenda and represents the somewhat ad-hoc nature of participation and 'voice' in decision-making. Not everyone has the opportunity or access to influence every decision. At the same time, the die produces the unexpected and crucially, for our purposes, enables people to accept questions on topics they may not normally encounter. Thus unfamiliar questions and problems outside a player's usual comfort zone is part of the playing environment.

The ability to make a journey around the board in a transition from urban to rural environments using a die was seen as a core strength of the game. Not having to answer all questions also makes the game an 'appropriate' length (but could be extended by using one rather than two dice). One player commented:

*"Takes about the right length (30-45 minutes)"*

##### A safe hypothetical space for discussion and conflict management

The fact that "Rufshire" is hypothetical and yet the board is constructed from real aerial photographs was seen as important in its success with participants.

*"The complexity of the landscape is not constructed (so people come to realize how messy the urban fringe is), and yet it is an anonymous place which opens up for a more generous debate on general principles."*

*"[Rufopoly] is very concrete and illustrates different spatial planning issues in a concrete way which can be very useful for those who are not planners."*

The various planning scenarios and challenges were tangible and real-life yet, at the same time, automatically enabled players to suspend their fixed views as it was "just a game". Here the notion of a 'safe' space became critical to many people enabling participants to move away from pre-set official positions. The heavily visual framing of Rufshire enabled participants from very different backgrounds to understand and engage with a wide range of governance issues and through the process of group discussion and individual decision making, understand the complexity of choices that have to be made with some appreciation of the trade-offs involved.

*"We found that the principal strength of using a game platform such as Rufopoly is that it places delegates to a planning workshop outside of their normal frame of reference and engages them in an exercise that requires them to think from an interdisciplinary and less parochial perspective. In this respect it is similar to role play although arguably has the added strength that the use of scenarios is probably slightly less engineered."*

*"To help people practice taking decisions based on multiple strands of evidence and how these will change in terms of different players and contexts. Creating spaces for such discussion can help people understand how spatial planning and decision making works or could be improved."*

*"Liked it because you don't have a history/connection that colours your view. Then do it in a known area where you assume less and have more knowledge."*

The importance of the group discussion followed by the individual decision making was also seen as an important facet of Rufopoly as a dialogue tool opening participants' eyes to other dimensions within a given scenario so they can better understand and appreciate other viewpoints than their own traditional role/view.

*“It creates a positive atmosphere for good discussion and dialogue.”*

The ingredient of fun was also seen as most important in that the process engendered helping people move more readily away from the traditional conflict situation that besets these often messy and wicked problems.

*“From my perspective, the main strength of using games like Rufopoly is that it involves working as a loose group towards a focused task which is not threatening (in fact it is fun) because the prime focus is on the board, avoiding much of the confrontation and contestation that happens when individuals with differing personalities and power interact directly. Interactions in Rufopoly are more indirect and oblique. In addition, the game can be played with very limited prior information and knowledge since all the main ‘data’ are provided on the board, so there is less chance of individuals feeling they might make a fool of themselves due to ignorance. In that sense, I would say Rufopoly is highly democratic.”*

*“[It] encourages cross disciplinary working.”*

*“We have enjoyed playing the game and hope to continue using it as a dialogue tool in the future in Malmö.”*

### **Moving outside comfort zone and ‘soapboxes’**

The use of the dice in combination with a hypothetical Rufshire prevents people engaging solely on their own agendas and issues and forces them to think outside their usual ‘box’ based on limited evidence. It also widens the views of the player to the range of opportunities in terms of interventions and outcomes beyond the ones that they may normally consider.

*“It made me think of things I wouldn’t normally think of, or have to think about”.*

*“[Rufopoly can play a useful] role in helping membership of local groups avoid single issue focus.”*

*“While playing a game people are open to trying out different ways of thinking. It gets them out of their normal working mind set and allows them safe space to experiment.”*

*“I liked the question where it stopped all the players. All players had to answer one question together and discuss options - it was interesting, the negotiation, different thoughts and backgrounds came to the fore there.”*

Whilst only used on a few occasions in the games that have been played, several participants valued the role playing aspect where each player adopts a specific professional/stakeholder role to help understand different points of view and how this affects trade-offs in decision-making.

*“The role playing aspect of Rufopoly is the strongest asset. Requiring people to develop a specific policy base / play a specific role, often against their personal views, was very interesting. This should be retained at all costs.”*

*“The game provides a spatial awareness beyond the specific site under question; you are looking from a much higher perspective.”*

### **Formulating the vision**

Playing Rufopoly brings out a range of potential responses from the different political, social, economic and environmental challenges made on a given journey across Rufshire. The process of forming visions only based on the past answers/decisions and justifications exposes players to some degree of cumulative impact of their decisions enabling them to spot inconsistent and divergent answers, reflecting the messiness of the rural-urban fringe itself. Our current approach of requiring people to design visions and then consider the opportunities and barriers to realising those visions helped people to think critically about how their visions might be realised.

*“My vision is certainly not what I would have identified if you just asked me from scratch before playing this game.”*

*“My decisions are all over the place. Pretty inconsistent for a councillor!”*

### **Educational and learning role**

Rufopoly has been applied in a range of professional and educational ‘learning’ contexts; schools, universities and public engagement activities. Playing Rufopoly does not necessarily require much prior knowledge as long as players have the ability to decode the features, shapes and colours on the game board (aerial view / aerial photo ‘map’). The consideration of future land uses within an urban-rural fringe setting that is facing various development pressures was seen to be both topical and engaging capturing the key battleground that currently defines much planning activity.

*“... I think it’s a fantastic education tool (high school geography, uni and TAFE land use planning, sustainability, geography courses etc.). In terms of real life, it could be good as an ice breaker (as RUFopoly, not a tailored localised version) to deliberations about trade-offs prior to a facilitated session regarding real life trade-offs in a real life setting.”*

*“[Name] and myself both thought that RUFopoly was an interesting tool that could be used for engagement purposes, both with community groups, students and elected members.”*

*“I have played Rufopoly with groups of school pupils and higher education students. One of the most fundamental motivations of playing the game with these groups was to encourage them to think critically about development decisions and to consider the various perspectives of those stakeholders who have a vested interest in what happens at the urban-rural fringe. In addition, I see the game as an effective tool to facilitate discussion between different group members; the format of the game really helps to ‘break-down’ barriers and, in some cases, reduce any ‘inhibitions’ people might have about making contributions in (sometimes unfamiliar) group scenarios.”*

Another benefit of the game is that it helps develop a range of personal skills such as teamwork, discussion, conflict management, justifying opinions and lateral thinking. It also builds some knowledge about land use and conflict so it fits in well with core geography curriculum work done at secondary school.

Whether for schoolchildren, students or publics, Rufopoly was valued for its simple unpacking of complex planning issues using real life scenarios within a managed deliberative process. This in turn then enables teachers/professionals to interact more meaningfully with colleagues on planning issues where follow-on engagement activities such as local or neighbourhood plan consultations might benefit.

*“I found the game really helped me to learn a lot very quickly and easily about the challenges of planning in the rural-urban fringe. Partly I think this is because it combines visual learning via the board (which is my primary learning preference) with kinaesthetic learning via the game-play process. I felt like I learned more from my brief time playing Rufopoly than I’d learned from most of the (largely impenetrable) journal papers I’d read on the subject.”*

The demystifying of planning jargon was important in the game format; there was recognition that the scenarios were useful in communicating many of the ideas and concepts behind the Ecosystem Approach and Spatial Planning. Rufopoly was seen as a ready-made and accessible vehicle where concepts and jargon was replaced by challenges and opportunities that were inclusive and fun with real educational value.

*“Rufopoly could definitely be used in teaching situations to highlight and discuss some problems in relation to planning and decision making. - A fun way to get an understanding of and discussing processes.”*

*“My work role involves teaching large classes. Rufopoly is a great tool which helps to get across some of the abstract concepts in a more practical manner. It has proved invaluable with BSc/BA Geography, BSc Environmental Management and even BSc Environmental Health students. - From*



*discussing ideas around guerrilla gardening, to the role of planners and ecosystem services, it is a versatile tool. Rufopoly is very flexible and can be adapted easily in my various classes.”*

### A flexible and adaptable tool

One of the positive things about the game is that it is flexible and can be adapted to fit different contexts. There is not just one way to play the game and the BCU team experimented with a range of adaptations to fit specific audiences, participants numbers, time constraints, training objectives etc.

- **Adapting start and finish:** The game can be played with or without the entry question (which asks the player to choose the type of new development, ranging from urban extension, growth of villages, a combination of the two, to new settlement) and exit question (using the answers to create a vision / derive key planning principles).
- **Adapting group element:** The most common format was for a group to share a counter and all answer the same question with time for group discussion, individual reflection and then informed personal response to the question. A further adaptation is to encourage a joint/agreed response where possible (i.e. encouraging but not forcing consensus).
- **Adopting roles:** The game can be played being oneself (personal and/or in a professional capacity) or adopting a specific allocated stakeholder role. In some contexts the players already represent a range of different contexts and perspectives and then an additional / different role is not necessarily advantageous as players benefit from sharing those informed different perspectives (e.g. players commented on this benefit when playing with colleagues from different sections or groups). On the other hand when professional or students from the same background play, diversifying roles and the ‘forcing’ adopting a different lens to view the challenges was seen to be really helpful.
- **Adjusting time played:** Rufopoly is usually played with two dice where the first throw is with one die (to enable landing on field 1) and then with two dice to speed up the game (usually 4-5 fields are landed on with 28 possible fields) lasting about 35-45 minutes depending on the time taken to discuss each question and whether or not entry and exit questions are included. The game can have an additional round or played with one die throughout if a more varied and slower journey is preferred.
- **Adjusting / improving questions:** To date we produced two versions of Rufopoly with the newer version incorporating different entry questions and significant changes to some of the board’s questions in response to feedback from players and facilitators. To meet specific the needs of different contexts, there have also been one-off versions created such as LEPology for the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership with more economic growth type questions. A further degree of flexibility was added in developing Plainsopoly (an American version of Rufopoly developed by Jess Shoemaker) by printing the board without the questions round the edges and instead producing question cards which could be combined, individually amended and the set changed/extended more easily without having to reprint the whole board.

### Playing is fun and inclusive; different to a ‘normal’ workshop

Playing a game can be a fun and novel way of thinking about important and complex issues. Using Rufopoly is different from the ‘usual workshop’ formats. Perhaps surprisingly, its use as an old-fashioned game was seen almost unanimously as a point of strength with very few wanting to see it developed as a digital online game. The very fact that everyone gathered around the board within an atmosphere of playfulness and informality was seen to help the positive assessments. Being different, communicative, inclusive, informative and fun were the commonly occurring attributes given in debriefs and feedback. An additional advantage is the relative simplicity of the game. Rufopoly was seen to be easy to grasp, and this helps make people comfortable to play the game.

*“Like it cos it is a game, I mean it’s fun [...] original [...] we spend our lives going to workshops! [...] The gaming element is excellent. But that brings its own problems, the game to what end. For example, how do you win the game? I think it’s about the right length, the questions are pitched in relation to the material quite nicely.”*



*"[The] general public can relate to something like this; would get them involved in higher level strategic planning for their area."*

Rufopoly was seen as a useful tool helping with engagement and satisfaction of students and professional publics.

*"They [students] want edu-tainment, not lectures. It's learning by doing and learning from others in a fun environment."*

*"[A key strength is the] possibility to sit down with different actors and perspectives and hopefully start negotiating planning issues concerning the rural-urban landscape. Even though no actual planning situation will be solved during the game, it raises important questions that make one more aware of the complex situation."*

### The power of facilitation

Facilitation is a two edged sword and acts as the key transition zone from strengths to weaknesses of the game. At present the game relies heavily on facilitators; perhaps too much? They act as briefers on the rules of the game, assist with any interpretative issues on the board; e.g. the environmental designations in the area, specific difficulties with any questions, timekeeping and providing prompts for players to record their decisions and note explanations and justifications. This facilitation role was seen as useful and effective but with a caveat.

*"It has been commented to me that such facilitation is helpful in enabling people to get the most from the question. This is equally worrying."*

Initially we allocated one facilitator per player so that the player could just focus on playing and considering the question rather than having to write down the answer and explanations. Later, to be more staff-efficient and allow playing with larger groups, stimulating the group discursive element, a facilitator would help support one or several games, each on a separate table with a group of players around each board. The level of experience by the facilitator and some knowledge of the rationale and reason for certain rules of the game, was also seen as important as facilitation could be confusing rather than clarifying if a facilitator was not properly briefed or decided to add their own interpretations.

## 3.2 Weaknesses

### What is the purpose of Rufopoly?

A commonly occurring critique from participants was that they did not feel sure of their role as they entered Rufshire and what the tangible purpose or practical impact of the game was meant to be. The game focuses on thoughts and talk rather than dealing with the complex reality of implementing better 'solutions'. There was seen to be a clear gap here that the game format did not really engage with. For example, multi-functionality in theory is much easier than applying it in practice. There is a gap between what people would ideally like to do and achieve and actually manage to do as part of their job. Also, some commented on the fact that potential players who may not see the virtues of getting out of their habitual space/siloes in dealing with issues and hence would get little out of playing the game.

*"Better explanations of the game and its aim could be given beforehand. It was not too clear if the game was played in order to come up with new strategies or just highlighting and discussing different questions in a group."*

*"I think the game, as we played it, currently suffers from the haziness of the rules and its objectives. Some flexibility is understandable given the development phase the project is in. However, the trade-off is that there will be some confusion and dissatisfaction amongst players until these elements of the game are settled and participants have a clearer idea of what they're doing and what's expected of them. Suggest the next step could be to write a consolidated set of rules and see if a completely new/fresh group could play the game from beginning to end without a facilitator."*

*“As a ‘game’ participants might not treat their involvement seriously with any outputs that are of little value. Perhaps ‘scenario setting’ is a better term to use than ‘game’.”*

The facilitator asks players at the end of the game to construct a vision based on the answers they noted down – or participants are asked to exchange their answers and construct a vision for one of their co-players based on their written-down answers. This vision task was seen as good for surprising people about their answers but would formalising this step of creating a vision for Rufshire be sufficient as a tangible output for the game? Or is something different needed alongside or instead?

*“The biggest challenge has been the inevitable question: “so what? Now we have played the game, what happens next?” It has been a very useful tool to facilitate discussions on planning – but we have not (in the Swedish case) managed to integrate it with planning. There is a need to discuss how the outcomes of the game can be used to feed a discussion on a concrete planning project.”*

*“It didn’t quite feel like a game. It lacks elements of surprise, change, excitement and maybe competing. In a way the board didn’t add anything. We could have just answered the questions without it.”*

Several players commented that the game would benefit from having a challenge or goal to inform/influence the journey and thus the decision-making (i.e. the answers to the questions); some players suggested to add an ‘additional homes’ challenge as this is a typical and dominant issue in the UK. For example, one could ask at the outset of the game to have to find suitable space(s)/opportunities for at least 100 new dwelling units, including 30 affordable homes. The game did have an entry question relating to the different spatial options for the future development of Rufshire which could have filled this gap but unfortunately the answers to this question were not carried through to any extent nor did they condition the future responses. This led to some comments that this was a missed opportunity.

*“... the core of the game – throwing dice, answering random questions, discussing the pros and cons of alternatives in a group – works well enough but I feel the beginning and end of the game need tightening up. I think I understand what the entrance questions are doing, but there is a lack of precision (and/or illustrative examples) in the description of what’s required, and some players will wonder why they’re doing it. As an end point (goal?) for the game, the vision statement is also problematic; perhaps more so. I think the end point, whatever it is, needs to be better grounded to what has gone before.”*

*“[The] entrance questions/statement were good; but could other assumptions also be tested?”*

### **Lack of accountability to decisions made**

There is currently no process for holding people accountable for the decisions they make. This was raised by many groups and there was strong support to explore explicitly the implications of previous decisions made. Here the idea of mapping decision pathways was raised as a possible way forward. If the game was to standardise the type of answers using multiple choice, we could actually try to define the implications of particular answers on answer cards which then help people to understand a key gap in participatory planning. Thus if you say no to a specific option, what then happens? This could potentially be very complicated due to the interlinkages and nested effects, so the challenge would be how to integrate accountability without slowing the game down or making it overly complicated. The previous point made about the failure to utilise the entry question in this manner is also extremely pertinent here.

### **Fixed format doesn’t meet different scalar needs**

The map and questions on the current board game version are fixed, offering a limited number of scenarios (28) and thus the board is also its limitation. Each of the 28 squares is limited to one question and designed to relate to this particular square. For some audiences the fixed questions around the edge were a restriction on the potential issues that could arise and also limited the location of potential solutions. Suggestions to overcome this included to simply number the fields (and not print the questions on the board) and develop a set of ‘cards’ with numbers to suit the scenarios under investigation. This was the favoured approach of the

Plainsopoly adaptation in Nebraska. In addition a trivial pursuit type approach could be used with several different or related scenarios per square (some of which could also extend to other parts of the board, not just the specific square with the question).

A further criticism concerned the game operating at a sub-regional scale at the expense of the neighbourhood scale and community perspective. The existing context of the rural-urban landscape was felt by some to be too disembodied and not personal enough. The game needed to evolve to address current challenges that are real for people in the locations in which they live - a kind of the board game equivalent of 'forum theatre'.

*"Questions weren't often relevant to the ones we have to deal with."*

*"We had to adapt quite a few questions to fit the Swedish context as there are differences in national planning regulations and cultural attitudes to development."*

*"One issue to consider is that most neighbourhoods are smaller than the Rufopoly county or "sub-region" so it requires a certain broad-mindedness and willingness for an NP [neighbourhood planning] group to engage at this level."*

*"... its board is not easy to edit, so the examples and context it outlines has to be the one used. In most situations a slightly more context-specific board would be ideal, but expensive and time consuming to recreate each time."*

*"... the game could be made more relevant to the ecosystem work by changing some of the rules and information/framing around ecosystem services/benefits and principles."*

A positive suggestion was to make a whole series of blank boards reflecting different settings and landscapes could make the game much more useful and flexible. This included international, global, city, coast, upland, rural, urban and neighbourhood areas, each with their prefix, e.g. COASTopoly; URBopoly.

### Visual bias

The discussion of most questions in the game tends to focus only on what is visual in the square to which the question applies and in some cases this can be misleading; there may be important socio-cultural, economic and environmental issues that remain hidden. There is, therefore, a key challenge in trying to go beyond the visual, moving away from people just focusing on the landscape. There could also be problems with people trying to decipher just what was in the landscape due to the resolution and scale of the image. This suggests that another layer of information may be needed which somehow needs to be presented without being too cumbersome, complex and time-consuming to produce and use. Simply extending questions is not an option as comments highlighted that many questions are already quite wordy and long.

The game currently lacks information on these hidden aspects. There is a need to have some useful background context and statistics around the board. By removing the questions this creates space to enable some background data to be visible about Rufshire that can help in the understanding of the area. An earlier attempt to provide some background on separate posters and sheets was not particularly popular as some found this too clunky and preferred to concentrate on discussing questions rather than reading several pages of background information. One player commented that *"Too many layers of information that might exclude people with less planning experience"*. So, the right format and amount of additional information to be of maximum help without being off-putting needs careful thought and debating.

### Where are the power relations?

The political context of real places is largely absent in the game; specific laws and regulations or 'typical' political leaders do not feature in the game at all. This simplicity is attractive but also seen as a potential shortfall as the evidence on which to base decisions is highly limited and power relations and constraints largely ignored. In reality these can be key considerations, so it does boil down to what the purpose of the game is.

*“It is easy to be altruistic with answers in the current format.”*

*“If the ‘game’ is to be used in a formal manner, then the plan board and scenarios must be directly relevant to the subject area under review.”*

### Impotence of themes (Spatial Planning & Ecosystem Services, Values, Time, Connectivity)

The themes used on the board (making connections in grey-green-blue infrastructure planning; values & decision-making; long-termism - temporal perspectives; spatial planning & ecosystem services – each with a specific colour code and seven questions allocated) appear to have little utility in the way people engage with the game or use results (this includes the facilitators). Do people need to know? If so why and how does it help them navigate the game? In our experience not many players ‘see’, write or talk about their values. Thus they remain hidden. We need to consider whether to continue using themes and if so how we then build on these explicitly before, during and after the game itself. At present there is a clear consensus that they have no real role. Again this does represent a missed opportunity given that these themes are built on the conceptual framework of the original research itself (Scott et al., 2013)<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, the spatial planning and ecosystem services theme is not well understood and raises more questions than answers. Based on an improved conceptual framework for our rural-urban fringe work (unpublished) we would now replace that with equity. We therefore advance the view that **values, time, connectivity** and **equity** represent a powerful set of concepts that can be used as a common vocabulary to unpack spatial planning and ecosystem services thus enabling people to engage with heavily academic concepts in a more assessable and meaningful way.

Striking a balance between providing some context and too much information is a tricky challenge.

*“in the Swedish version, we have reduced the information to a minimum. Also, we have removed the four themes (long-termism etc.) in order to make the game easier to grasp.”*

Improvements from the survey responses revolve around the adoption of a kind of trivial pursuit approach where for each square there is a question on each of these themes. So this raises the option of people actively engaging with these concepts as part of a learning experience. This could be randomised by using a four-sided colour-coded die which determines the theme to pick for a given square. The South Downs National Park adaptation of Rufopoly used this technique within their local plan exercise, though not relating to themes but for choosing the specific geographical area.

### Lack of strategic planning questions

There was significant concern that questions tended to focus on a single development issue in each square but lacked any strategic, overarching planning questions targeted at Rufshire as a whole. This was present in the entry question where participants had to select a suitable spatial option for the development of Rufshire. However, this itself attracted significant negative feedback as it was not used to inform or affect subsequent answers.

One suggestion to address this strategic deficit was to introduce some questions in squares that are white space (no landscape) that affect all of Rufshire and where optimal sites for various land use activities have to be identified. Answering such question may obviously be more time consuming but the lack of development plan type questions limits the types of questions being asked and further hides a core area of planning work.

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<sup>2</sup> Scott, A.J., Carter, C.E., Larkham, P., Reed, M., Morton, N., Waters, R., Adams, D., Collier, D., Crean, C., Curzon, R., Forster, R., Gibbs, P., Grayson, N., Hardman, M., Hearle, A., Jarvis, D., Kennet, M. Leach, K., Middleton, M., Schiessel, N., Stonyer, B., Coles, R. (2013) Disintegrated Development at the Rural Urban Fringe: Re-connecting spatial planning theory and practice, *Progress in Planning* **83**, 1-52.

### Imperfect and inflexible set of questions

There were concerns voiced over the inflexible, overly-verbose and sometimes complex questions which could limit constructive dialogue and 'playability' of the game. For example, once the game has been played, what are the incentives to play again? A more flexible set of question cards and/or flashcards could incorporate a wider range of issues and might help to ensure different game scenarios, greater dialogue and, ultimately, more considered group decisions.

*"The biggest problem was how questions were asked. The questions were in some cases complicated and related to complicated situations that were sometimes unknown to the players. Especially the open ended questions were difficult for anyone who hasn't worked with these kinds of questions."*

*"Too many layers of information that might exclude people with less planning experience."*

*"... some clunky expression and editing of questions needed."*

*"some questions [are] too long."*

The game designers also acknowledged that the level of scrutiny was not as thorough as it could have been reflecting the game as an initial act of inspiration and additionality rather than a planned and budgeted for output.

### Lack of capturing people's baseline visions and views

People come to Rufopoly with a certain set of viewpoints and baggage. This could be labelled a 'baseline' but we do not know or explicitly capture this baseline in the game in any shape or form. Also, some participants may actually find it really hard to formulate/express their values. However, one could speculate that this baseline is perhaps as valuable as the group discussion. Could we track whether the group discussions have in fact influenced an individual's answers or possibly even their deeply held views? It might be useful to try and capture the current views of people at the outset by the establishment of a pre-game vision for their local area and then comparing that against what they create for Rufshire. This would provide an interesting measure of the impact and bias of the journey they had experienced.

*"... problems with declaration of values at the beginning?"*

*"For average person declaring values is challenging."*

### Facilitator dependency

The need and 'position' of the facilitator was seen as both helpful and as a hindrance, as illustrated in the following comments:

*"The only limitation is that it needs to be facilitated by an expert and can only be done in a physical form, which limits the extent to which it can be played. However, I do not think that an online version of the game is a good idea, given that the learning occurs primarily through the interaction with other players."*

*"Too little focus on the most interesting part, the discussion in the groups about the answers. I also think that the observers disturbed the relaxed feeling of playing a game."*

Writing down answers may be seen as important aspect in ensuring reflectivity and capturing explanations, but players often needed some encouragement to do so rather than naturally taking to the task. Indeed, it was clear from a facilitator point of view that there were consistently great discussions going on but this was lost in the final individual translation to the post-it note.

*"Writing down opinions and answers took time and slowed down the dynamic of the game."*



### 3.3 Suitability for different contexts

The survey had a dedicated section on the suitability of the Rufopoly game (and interactive games more generally) for different contexts to help gauge suitable purposes and objectives. Some of the comments received strongly relate to the strengths and weaknesses as presented above and here only additional points are captured as well as a summary of findings presented. Section 6 (Appendix 2) lists the specific explanations provided by players and facilitators for each of the different contexts/purposes probed.

Rufopoly was seen as effective and having greatest impact in terms of providing a **neutral space/context** for **exchanging views**, discussion and **reflection** on planning / development issues for urban, rural and rural-urban fringe areas. Another key strength and high impact was seen as due to it being a **fun** game to play, different to other workshop type activities commonly encountered by professionals. Its current strengths in terms of **informing decision-making** was perceived largely in terms of enabling considering a planning challenge from various perspectives and in a deliberative space. This is an area that could be further developed in future versions/tailored game platforms or through appropriate provisions as part of a 'toolbox' accompanying the existing game. Similarly, only some saw the game, or such interactive platforms, as suitable for **consensus building**. If this element was a desired outcome/purpose of the game, then this would need to be more carefully engineered and integrated into the philosophy and rules of the game.

Additional points that were raised about interactive games, such as Rufopoly, were that they have a **novelty factor** (this then has implications if such games were 'mainstreamed') and the potential **creativity** sparked by engaging with an unfamiliar format such as this interactive gaming platform. Such games are also seen as effective in facilitating **speed learning** on the topic, themes and challenges of the game.

In terms of existing **groups of players** and potential **new audiences**, in most cases we have played Rufopoly using groups with a common interest. In so doing we are missing the diversity of views and indeed opposing views that make up a given planning situation. Due to this we have not had much experience of diverging views and how conflict is actually played out in a hypothetical space. In this project we also do not have such diverse group and suggestion was made to need to bring people together of different views to test how well the game performs under those conditions.

It is interesting to note that some **undergraduate students** struggled or did not enjoy playing Rufopoly (whereas most **school children**, **postgraduate students** and **professionals** enjoyed it and got something out of it). This seems to relate to the importance of the player's mindset, motivation and confidence regarding decision-making and facing new challenges/tasks and obviously will affect the experience and potential to benefit from playing the game.

Importantly, there is a **geographical dimension** to consider in possible future developments of the game. The game was developed specifically to represent a reasonably typical inland lowland rural-urban fringe (even though some hills were part of the area). While some found this a suitable general baseline (even in South Australia) others found the geographical setting too remote to their own circumstances/needs. So depending on the audience, other specific boards or additions to the existing game board would seem appropriate to extend the game's potential usefulness. For example, we may wish to include coasts and other features. We could create PDFs of hypothetical areas that can be downloaded and printed via a web link. We currently have RUFhsire, and extensions may include COASTshire, HILLshire, BIOshire COMMUNITYshire, URBANshire, RURshire to allow a hypothetical option to be selected.

### 3.4 Suggestions for future development of the Rufopoly board game

Building from the critical assessment above we move to actively consider ways forward. A number of themes are developed which emerge from both the survey and discussions. There is an element of repetition here but we have prioritised those that appear to have most traction amongst the respondents and core project team. Of core importance is the need for this section to stimulate and provoke responses to the workshops as part of Work Package 2.

**The aim of the workshops is to identify any additional needs and gaps.**



## Identifying the needs and participatory gaps for exploitation

Under this ESRC Knowledge-Exchange grant we are keen to explore how the Rufopoly resource can be improved as a participatory tool to add value and not merely duplicate what already exists. In many ways it is important to understand Rufopoly as a catalyst for further development not simply to just improve the narrow game itself but to think creatively around how to meet the needs of those who engage in participation; the publics and the stakeholders and how to help both the usual and unusual suspects engage with challenging issues. In the workshops to be held in Birmingham, Aberystwyth and Edinburgh there is an agenda item on identifying participatory needs and gaps.

The following points emerge from our responses to date. A key prompt here is whether you can identify any further specific needs from your own agency perspective.

- To enable people to better understand the implications of a decision or viewpoint in terms of the direct and indirect impacts.
- To enable people to engage on issues across a variety of scales and not just one; e.g. the sub regional.
- To enable more effective consideration of strategic planning issues particularly with regard to local plan making and consultation.
- To add more emphasis on alternative urban growth options within a region-wide context.
- To add challenges as happen in real life, such as more emphasis on natural hazards and/or political factors.
- To add questions about preferences for alternative development control policies relating to particular themes (e.g. water catchment protection, farm diversification, character preservation), or the nature of considerations that should be included developing such policies (e.g. strategic considerations, technical/scientific, equity/justice, commercial, employment, infrastructure).
- To engage with both usual and unusual suspects.
- To use engagement as a deliberative process rather than as a one off tick box and to use the results to inform policy processes and decision making.
- To provide enough good information and evidence for people to be confident to become engaged.
- To add more emphasis in questions on the adequacy of available information and the information needed to make a sound decision.
- To provide a safe environment for more sensitive discussions to help overcome trust and language deficit issues from competing parties and the media.

## Capturing group discourse

One key issue with the current game is that the quality of the debate and interaction amongst the participants is not captured. This is important given the reductionism that may occur when an individual writes down their answer and justification under time pressure. Whilst this might indeed be valuable in an academic context there are real problems with the wider mainstreaming of such activity given the obvious resource and time constraints. As a facilitator commented:

*“As part of the process to me hearing the group discussion is an amazingly valuable and rich source of data. Yet nowhere is this effectively captured. Crucially in what we produce there appears no way to catch the group dynamics that lead to an individual or indeed, with more time, a consensual viewpoint. Thus they do not really identify the tool as actually addressing specific needs and agency priorities. I feel we need to be able to state upfront how the resource kit will actually help address certain key priorities.”*

## Rethinking the introductory question and embedding dependency

The introductory question performs a vital function for participants in setting the scene and tone of the game and yet has not really lived up to its potential value. There have been changes in the versions of Rufopoly and its national and international adaptations with the current versions generally skipping / missing an entry question to go straight into the core questions. In the first edition of Rufopoly players were asked to select

from one of several spatial options for the future development of RUFshire and this changed in version 2 to a visual representation of options including; a new town, urban extension; green belt extension; rural development options. The current version dispensed with the spatial options altogether asking people to locate themselves somewhere in RUFshire based on their current living and working arrangements. In this way people could react to any questions that impacted on where they lived or worked as they would in real life. The idea now was to get people to have a stake in the hypothetical space. In all cases participants largely felt that the introductory question did not relate to the remaining questions or the process of playing the game. Some of these comments are included below:

*“... imagined if we'd given different answers in our groups that it would take us down different routes but it didn't.”*

*“The introductory question is the big issue that most Local Authorities face at the moment... which the government hasn't been able to crack... national house building especially in green belt and the urban fringe and most of the questions we got into were the nitty-gritty that authorities face every day... there was a gap between the big issue and the small.”*

*“after the first question it then wasn't tackled because all the other questions would normally apply even if there was no housing growth pressures on the area... all the rest of the questions would still apply. But what weren't jotted down - how does the big question really impact on these areas so St RUF should have said you need to accommodate 400 houses as part of the joint planning...”*

*“... think that the gap could be very usefully bridged by the facilitator. For me, I liked the open question because it set the overall strategic policy context within which you were having to respond but what would have been really helpful especially, with community groups, is you need to have that push factor all the time - you might want to do that but you can't because it doesn't fit your preferred option or if you are going to be true to your preferred option then...”*

Ironically the value of the spatial options question was clearly recognised and this perhaps offers a clear option for the future improvement of the Rufopoly resource and, in particular, starts to embed some dependency on any preferred spatial option that people or a group choose. Based on that answer there is a potential opportunity to give people a set of guiding parameters for all future questions they encounter. Alternatively rather than limit people from the first answer you could:

- Force players to stop part way through the game and return to the bigger question.
- Create different pathways through the game reflecting different visions.
- Group the game where individuals play a different role – e.g. historic conservation, biodiversity, economic development etc.
- Create a more tactical game where people play from different spatial option perspectives which are assigned rather than chosen.
- Create a mini strategic environmental assessment/sustainability assessment process with dedicated roles assigned to each player to help agree ways forward that meet EU obligations.

### **Adopt specific role / professional remit**

The survey responses tended to favour a role playing exercise to help maximise learning opportunities particularly where there were like minded groups playing.

*“... one variation on the counters is to have six different people - a landowner, developer, politician, 'cos as the politician goes round they may compromise their own values... landowner has personal interest, the planner, the swampy type... That would make people question their own values. Would have to play it as a group...could fashion counters that looked like these people!”*

*“Wouldn't have to have debate as went round board... Give people role to play... could play individually and then feedback or play as a group and discuss each question from all viewpoints”.*

Players could be tasked to play the game assuming a specific role; the role play would then consist of several players journeying through the rural urban fringe debating a response for each of the fields that the dice lands on. However, the roles would have to be defined quite carefully, perhaps using role playing cards with some key values and character traits to enable the role to be played through all the game's questions. In the group discussions we had volunteers who were willing to write these roles based on their own experiences. Whatever option was agreed here there was a compelling need to make it short, snappy and engaging.

*“Quite difficult to work with clients from house builders, greenfield, relating to the whole housing need aspect, people coming into a consultation. We're moving more into interactive exhibitions, getting them thinking about a site. Reality is: people are very upset about what is going on in our area. Trying to make people think about range of issues. If development went ahead, what may they gain? So it would need to be more site specific, short and snappy. People have quick look round, and then want to go... Needs to be quick and informative. Couldn't get them to read background material – few points only...”*

*“... think it would be useful to get people to think about different challenges. They are there because it affects them in their lives. They are local people.”*

*“I'd like to play it with some development management officers to work through how you set policies in a wider context and to get a broader debate and positives and negatives of specific applications in a wider context. Think it would work very nicely.”*

### Building in a competitive edge

The issue of how to win or have a more conclusive end to the game featured in many group responses. As it was promoted as a game it was felt that the purpose of the game should be to somehow win or at least get an indicator of 'success'. We had already encountered issues with a lack of clear purpose so this might actually exacerbate the lack of any clear outcome from the exercise. This raises challenges of how to score each question perhaps using an expert panel, for example, or even to have a card that you pick up depending on the type of answer given that acts as a consequence card. One participant highlighted how the game Forbidden Island actually relied on a group ethic and cooperation to actually win the game and escape the island which promoted significant debate about process and outcome. Given the number of responses here there is a clear need for further thought on this matter.

One interesting aspect to the issue of competition lay within the two neighbouring local authorities in Rufshire itself. Participants felt that the tensions between the two district councils (URD and RUF) had not been fully explored or exploited and yet this was seen by many to be a fact of life in local authority governance. Crucially, there were no questions addressing cross-boundary issues. This was seen to be a potentially key aspect given the English “duty to cooperate” requirement and the normal cross-boundary interactions. There was clear scope for more boundary interface type questions or even role playing of elected members.

### Hypothetical versus real place

Participants had differing views on whether the base map should be hypothetical as it currently is (set in Rufshire) or represent a real place. This was felt to largely depend on what the purpose of the event or workshop was. If it was to be used to prompt debate or an ice breaker at start of a consultation, then the hypothetical version was seen to work best to ‘take the heat out of a situation’, ‘open up debates’ and encourage people to think about balancing needs. In many ways this may be a false dichotomy because there is power in both and Rufopoly could be used as a two-step platform where the hypothetical spawns into the real. It is not about one or the other; instead the key lies in creative thinking and emerging workable ideas and solutions to existing challenges that start with a game but can then be explored and implemented for real.

*“... feedback from players suggests there is a tension between, on the one hand, an anonymous game situated on a hypothetical landscape and, on the other, a game that seeks to address the particular issues of a particular setting and has been contextualised for that purpose. Some players*

*saw the merits of the former as a general learning mechanism; others seemed to want their organisation's 'problems' fully embedded into the game."*

*"From a community perspective, they are interested in their place, so it would need to be their town, the geography would have to be right."*

However, there remained distinct views on how far the game could be used with the public reflecting issues of capacity, and understanding. It raises the question of who the game and ultimately resource kit is for.

*"... it's an educational tool for the community, it can be part of that skill building for themselves before the neighbourhood planning process"*

*"... first stage of an iterative process"*

*"... seems to be aimed at people who have a good handle on what it is all about, or people who have a lot of time to work it through. Neither of those apply to a consultation"*

*"... would need good facilitation to make it work"*

*"... can see how to use it to help people understand tensions but not for understanding community scale planning"*

*"... neighbourhood planning level... is it too much for your average neighbourhood group? Needs to be a simpler version, scaled down"*

### **Maximising adaptability**

The theme of improving the game's geographical adaptability was commonly encountered. This worked across different scales and land use types. There was consideration of a suite of boards that could be downloaded and printed to enable a whole suite of landscapes with question design embedded as an integral part of the learning experience. The issue of scale interestingly could come right down to an individual building.

*"I would love some mechanisms for more three-dimensional and interactive building of an ideal landscape. It would also be terrific to introduce mechanisms to feel or visualize more of a 'cause and effect' from game question decision-making more directly."*

Drawing on the experience of the South Downs National Park (Spatial Portrait) and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (Spatial Plan), there were seen to be clear benefits of using actual plans and scenarios with the appropriate words of caution being applied.

*"We simplified the game having just a 6 coloured die and regular die, 6 sites across the NP specially selected for the range of issues that they address at different spatial scales, and 6 numbered questions per site. Players rolled both dice and the colour determined the site and the number the question within the site category. We applied a time limit of 15 minutes to come to consensus in responding to the question".*

There were also some very helpful suggestions on how the game could be applied in different contexts and with a variety of audiences. These are listed below:

- Development of an adult educational course around RUFopoly where the tutor uses it to create informed citizens who understand more about where they live. Could see that happening in communities very effectively.
- Useful training tool for planning committees (elected members specifically).
- 6<sup>th</sup> form A-Level Geography – may need to consider the way the information is presented, think about what's on the syllabus.
- Possibility of a children's version.

- Useful in Geography degrees too, useful for exercises around planning, environmental stewardship etc.
- Would be interested to see it translated into a different context e.g. river catchment areas. To make decisions about habitat, tree planting, also relating to the planning system and decision making process.
- Could build a bank of questions for different situations. Could relate to a much wider breadth of themes e.g. RELU themes and projects.
- Suggestions of urban, coastal, upland as 'extension packs' or multiple versions of the game.
- Could consider variations that were not just driven by the questions. For example, considering the implications of different options on the same space. Would be good to have mixture of community groups to discuss the issue – could use monopoly type houses, hotels and even skyscrapers! Would encourage players to consider the distribution and development within a functional landscape.

### The need for greater information and evidence

One common suggestion was the need to provide better evidence and information to inform the answers to questions, particularly if players were to go beyond the simple but potentially misleading visual dimension which currently dominates responses. This could more easily be done in a computer-based version using 'zooming-in' and 'zooming-out' functions but equally there was an opportunity if questions currently around the board were removed and incorporated into cards enabling the space to have social, economic, environmental and generic evidence in the form of highlights. Furthermore, there was also a need to help unpack some of the designations and zones currently on the map explaining the status and features of the designated areas (e.g. SAC, Green Belt and AONB).

Rules could also be put on the board and simplified with a mission or target to make the game more realistic and purposeful.

### The final output

A consistent theme throughout was the need to have a clear purpose and goal of the exercise. In many ways to date this has been a core failing and there is an urgent need for more attention on the final output of the game. In particular how do we get usable data from participants about collective visions, policy obstacles and opportunities, and game experiences?

*"In my experience, the writing and discussing of the final vision statement, followed by the discussion of policy parameters, is a little clunky and its success depends a lot on the quality of the facilitator. Clearer objectives, instructions, and outputs for the final 20 minutes of the game would be ideal."*

There is a clear need to ensure that all activities lead to an end purpose; the goal of the mission. As the quote illustrates it may all too easily lead to an interesting question with the "so what?" hanging in the air. The success stories to date of the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership spatial plan and Nebraskan case study in a river valley provide an important lesson of the game being used and targeted within existing plan processes as opposed to being a bolt on at conferences or annual events or merely seen as an interesting information briefing. It is identifying the commonality in needs and opportunities of using the game that is crucial to its future evolution.

### Educational aspects

The power of Rufopoly as an educational tool was widely recognised both in the context of higher education and as a learning tool for stakeholders and professionals. This took a variety of forms but the issue of group discourse, debate, discussing trade-offs and decisions were all seen as positive ingredients.

*"Value for me is the debate and discussion around the issues. Would [have] liked to have done questions as a group, or in pairs, so you get that discussion around an issue cos I am interested in the decision making process that people go through, what they trade off... As an individual you can*



*be convinced you have done the right thing but that could be lack of knowledge, own value systems... having that dialogue and debate with another person is really valuable.”*

It was interesting to note how the process of question design was actually seen as a powerful learning exercise in itself. One can get all too fixated with the playing of the game rather than its actual design. This is where the village appraisals methodology might offer some useful lessons in how local communities were able to select and adapt questions from a centralised survey bank to their own context. There needs to be clearer recognition of a group designing the whole process from the start. The role of guidance is crucial to facilitating this and maximising the learning.

*“Keep it as it is – it is essential that the game is a physical board game rather than an online game, to retain the learning benefits that it provides. I suppose you could create different rural-urban fringe scenarios and types of hypothetical places, but I don’t think that would add significantly to learning. The issue is more about coming up with some sort of model that can get the game out into practice more often, for example some sort of business model that could be attractive to consultants who could gain financially by taking it out on the road, so incentivising its greater use?”*

### **A computer based platform**

Even though the current board format of the game is somewhat inflexible and can be awkward to transport and stick-it notes can get messy or lost, only some players saw any advantage of using computer based formats. Still, some saw the potential for layering of information, zooming between scales, change of background/map and such like as highly attractive and a strength if using a digital platform. In addition, a digital format may attract younger generation players and some unusual suspects to play.

*“It is a physical game, the more information you add the more complicated it gets and I think one of the advantages of an online game is you can stage the game, far easier online...”*

Hence even if not feasible to develop under the current project grant, given the predominant move towards more e-learning type tools and platforms and the extent to which a board and paper game format could easily become extinct, developing Rufopoly as an app or on-line / cloud-based game deserves some consideration.

*“I’m not sure that physical game boards of paper or card are the future. If the game could be developed into a tablet-based application, with all the advantages of e-links to other information and the potential to change the layout and arrangement of the problem (perhaps players could customize their own location?), the game might be more accessible and attractive to a wider and younger audience. Move towards a more dynamic and interactive e-format.”*

The project team have actively considered developing a computer version of Rufopoly. One of the concerns which the team have noted is that in an online version, there would be no facilitator and they felt this would result in a loss of detail and lower levels of discussion. The potential for a computer-based and/or online version was floated to participants to gauge their feelings and ideas on the matter:

*“Could in an online version go even further... where player’s decisions impact on each other, like second life!”*

*“I think that the real learning to be got out of this is through discussion that takes place over the choices and responses to challenges. I think to do it in isolation would miss this learning opportunity.”*

*“... as a group game, ok, but as an individual...could you score answers so you see the repercussions of decisions? ...”*

*“... if it was online it would be a different sort of experience. There is a lot of value in how it is now.”*

*“I think you could move it along with consultation methods using thought boards, you answer your question and then put your post it for others to see. At certain points, stop and discuss more widely,*



*important for others to see the different issues and viewpoints. That may encourage more discussion.”*

## Promoting multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary thinking

At present Rufopoly was seen to be premised heavily on planning and environmental issues at the expense of economic and social agendas. There was a potential strength recognised in broadening its appeal more explicitly helping different bodies across the built and natural environments understand each other’s views and roles in policy and decision making. Improved scenarios could help focus people’s expectations from the outset and therefore help inform briefs for strategic projects, managing client expectations through creating an effective landscape and place linkages between different disciplines and professions (e.g. engineering, surveying, construction, architecture). In particular, understanding client requirements and how that fits with a local authority’s planning aspirations and policies within various different scenarios was seen to be very useful, helping people to break out of their silos. It was also recognised that having the capacity to work across different scales was key to developing more integrated perspectives.

The interdisciplinary nature of the game also played into those agencies and interests who were using the ecosystem approach in the development of policy. It was felt that the principles therein which were complex and jargon ridden could be explained and operationalised within this type of game format. Natural Resources Wales were clear of its potential in their terms.

*“A key challenge for us is to develop the Welsh Government’s Natural Resource Management policy from the principles and practice of the ecosystem approach – raising awareness and enabling policy colleagues and NRW senior management teams to understand what this is and how it can be delivered in the field; ways of making integrated natural resource management decisions; stakeholder dialogue, gaining consensus etc. Playing games like Rufopoly can help people engage with and get into this space. The game could be framed around the ecosystem approach and with discussion adapting some of the rules.”*

From a university sector perspective Rufopoly was also seen as a powerful visual metaphor for the redundancy of rural and urban terms and concepts to one that focuses beyond simple and crude divides.

*“I struggle with a planning practice (and legislation) which is stuck in rural-urban divides, and a planning discourse which focuses entirely on discussing urban values and densification on the one side, and how to curb urban sprawl and protect farmland on the other. Rufopoly provides a base for debates beyond these divides, and brings forward the complexity of the urban fringe.”*

## 4. Options for the Rufopoly Resource Kit

**This is where we want workshop participants’ comments. This next section should be seen as an agent provocateur.**

### 4.1 Overview

This final section outlines briefly some basic strategic options for consideration at the workshops. It is drawn from the preceding analysis but also tempered by the pragmatic limitations of time and resources available for the project. It also builds directly on the resources and experience we have within the project team that our final product can build upon. Crucially, the options presented are a starting point only and they are not mutually exclusive; rather they can easily be hybridised as people see fit in the workshops.

It goes without saying that the future evolution of the game aims to address/ overcome the core weaknesses raised previously and build on existing strengths. Thus the purpose of this section is to highlight the bigger picture within which we can then start to drill down to address the deficiencies and opportunities.

### **Option 1 - Building the Rufopoly resource kit around the potential case studies of our key partners**

This option starts with the end user and considers who the resource kit might usefully be for. Within our project team we have participants who are operating at a variety of scales devising, preparing, implementing and reviewing national guidance and legislation, preparing local plans, neighbourhood plans, geography and built environment curricula, masterplans, designations and area strategies. It is logical therefore to select those case studies that can be resourced to devise a suitable tool format to meet their specific needs. We have the ability to use the experience of the adapted Rufopoly pilots that have been undertaken in Sweden, Nebraska, South Downs National Park, South Australia and the GBSLEP but the key will be to produce separate versions with a clear identity in order to signpost explicitly what and who the resource kit is for and to address the purpose of the game from the start. Thus we can see a demand for producing, for example, a neighbourhood plan resource or a local plan resource.

### **Option 2 - Developing a web portal for guidance and support**

Crucial to any iteration of Rufopoly is the need for improved information that can replace the current role that is performed by the facilitator. There was significant concern expressed over the dependency culture of the facilitator and how they might actually bias a particular table by interpretation and information given that other tables might not receive. Therefore, there is an opportunity to build a consistent and easy to read set of guidance notes that supports a potential user through the various stages of devising, designing, playing, capturing and evaluating a participatory process and its associated outcomes. We are able to draw upon our award winning NEAT tree schematic from previous research work. <http://neat.ecosystemsknowledge.net/>. This provides a guided framework to help a user navigate different stages and uses simple staged guidance in the form of an adapted policy cycle. By producing this kind of output we are embedding the question design stage into the process that participants use thus enabling a greater stake and helping maximise the learning opportunities. However, it is anticipated that some basic degree of interaction is needed with live support where necessary.

### **Option 3 - Issues based resource kit**

This option looks at the issues rather than the case studies as identified in option 1. These may be identical but in many cases will target some of the pressing difficulties in the process of participation itself. These were previously identified as engaging with unusual suspects, understanding the direct and indirect implications of particular viewpoints and decisions in terms of their individual and cumulative impact and building an effective deliberative process that is used in policy and decision making. The challenge here would be to build and adapt the resource kit to these rather “wicked” issues and then apply it within the case studies thereafter. This has the advantage of addressing the key difficulties in participative tools from the outset but then may struggle to have the necessary flexibility and case specificity for the case studies themselves.

### **Option 4 - Building an e-type platform and game**

There was a clear need identified for more versions of the landscape that capture different settings and environments and different scales. The current version of Rufopoly is built from three real landscapes that have been stitched together to create Rufshire. Given the demands for different types of format there is a clear opportunity to build the different jigsaws from which people can start to populate and design their own questions. In this option we continue with the hypothetical landscapes reflecting the views we have captured thus far. The idea is that each is transformed into a PDF for download with a 28 square ‘snake’ for people to make their journeys. Whilst there were concerns at the size of the resultant maps this does seem to be the most cost effective way for people to secure a base map. From the base map we would then encourage people to design their own questions and play their own game with again web based guidance being used in an interactive platform.

To help with this we seek to emulate the village appraisal exercise where we design a question bank that is carefully moderated and approved from which people some have limited room for adding or changing questions. The questions could reflect the four revised core themes (equity, values, time and connections) given their potential value in connecting across the jargon filled lexicon of ecosystem services and spatial

planning or any other themes as identified. Following on from previous research, we can build upon the conceptual framework developed by Scott et al. 2013<sup>3</sup>.

Given the limited financial resources for this project there might be some scope for a small programme that enables people to upload their data and reports from exercises that will provide a live Rufopoly archive which ideally should be publicly accessible. The financial viability and updating of an archive raises serious legacy issues however. Despite the e-platform we are still recommending using the board format from printouts.

#### **Option 5 - The real place**

This option merely replicates option 4 but with an onus on using real life areas as opposed to hypothetical ones. Google earth enables people to print out their real areas so with supporting guidance from ourselves the whole Rufopoly process can be designed from scratch without the need for any expensive software.

#### **Option 6 - The winner takes it all**

This option looks at developing a more fixed format game where all questions are multiple choice with the options chosen leading to defined pathways with the respondent tied to the legacy of the decisions made. As these pathways emerge there can be some qualitative and quantitative comments that give an update on how sustainable the decisions are or how in keeping with current government directives they are for example. The key point in this scenario is that that game has some expert-based assessments on questions that help provide ongoing feedback to participants as they make their journeys. This does enable a competition based approach with winners if so desired.

#### **Option(s) - X What has been missed?**

## **4.2 Overcoming the 'so what?' syndrome**

This ESRC project was submitted on the observation and reflection that whilst many people enjoyed playing Rufopoly there was always the 'so what?' hangover question relating to what happens when people go back to their own work roles. Whilst there has been some success with projects such as in Nebraska and the GBSLEP, there remains a vexed question of how we progress beyond the initial novelty and fun factor to produce a genuine participatory tool and resource that has the capacity to make an impact on policy and decision making at a variety of scales. This is why this project was born and why you are key to helping us unlock that conundrum. The report through its coverage of strengths, weaknesses and ideas has identified some of the key thinking that lay behind its development and played games to date. The workshops now will feed off the creativity, responses and provocation contained in this report.

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<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2

## 5. Appendix 1: Resources and reports used

Rufopoly games played with feedback or report:

1. Adelaide, Australia (spring 2015)
2. Defra (spring 2015)
3. Mott MacDonald (spring 2015)
4. RTPI (spring 2015)
5. Scottish Government (June 2012; spring 2015)
6. Staffordshire County Council (spring 2015)
7. Swedish event (2014)
8. Gaywood Valley EU Interreg SURF Project Officers Masterclass, Kings Lynn, England (July 2012)
9. RELU-RUF Project Stakeholder-based evaluation event (May 2012)
10. Staffordshire (May 2012)
11. Members of Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership (GBSLEP) and Worcestershire LEP (September 2012)

Rufopoly-derived games played with feedback or report:

1. Plainsopoly (several games in 2014)
2. SDNP-GI (October 2014)
3. Adelaide / South Australia (March 2015)

Survey responses from creators and facilitators of Rufopoly and derivated games:

1. David Adams
2. Claudia Carter
3. Ray Drabble
4. Mark Everard
5. Paul Gibbs
6. Mike Hardman
7. Karen Leach
8. Mattias Qvistrom
9. Alister Scott
10. Jessica Shoemaker
11. Matthew Smith
12. Ben Stonyer
13. Ruth Waters

Survey Responses from Players:

1. Jens Bengtsson
2. Stina Bodelius
3. Russell Elliott
4. Anne Liddon
5. Robert Matley
6. David Raffaelli
7. Mark Reed
8. George Reiss
9. Steve Spode
10. Malmö City-HN

## 6. Appendix 2: Specific comments relating to suitable contexts for interactive games such as Rufopoly

Listed below are the comments received from the survey on the specific contexts an interactive participatory game can be useful and supporting explanations

**To inform decision-making**, because

- it encourages players to consider the 'what if?'
- it is democratic.
- it has a place within authorities to get officers to view matters from an interdisciplinary and less parochial perspective.
- it helps crystallise issues. Helpful in forward planning.
- it allows people to look at an argument from more than one angle.
- real information could potentially be 'loaded into the game to permit 'real' simulations.
- it helps share different perspectives.
- it can present a broader view or stimulate broadening of views and provide learning.
- helps participants to understand the range of issues
- it brings in different perspectives and value systems on issues that are more commonly determined in a narrower expert/top-down way.
- I find more novice participant groups learn quite a bit about land use challenges on a larger scale from the game. More sophisticated participants probably learn less, although there is always value in hearing the opinions of others.

**To exchange views (hear other perspectives on a topic)**, because

- everyone has an equal voice and usually airs it!
- the game format enables and encourages interaction between players, and asks players to think deeply about the issues. In this way, I learned about issues to a depth that might not otherwise have happened, and found the contrasting responses and views of other players particularly informative.
- of the focus on the board rather than confrontational interaction: you don't even need to make eye contact!
- students can understand that not everyone shares the same view and approaches scenarios in different ways.
- it's an interesting way to bring up topics and it could be discussed in a rather relaxed and unpretentious way with people from different departments.
- the game enables a playful approach to complex and sometimes infected planning situations.
- it does offer a less threatening environment in which opinions that may be quite polarised can engage in a constructive discussion.
- the civil dialogue produced by the game is absolutely one of its greatest benefits in my mind.
- it allows people to play alternative roles. Helpful in exhibitions / workshops.
- this is one of the strengths of Rufopoly: it could be an eye-opener concerning the complexity of the urban fringe. By doing so, it might affect decision-making too.
- important to understand the whole picture in planning process.
- the game allows for participants to discuss their perspectives/views – though care would be needed to ensure that all participants got their views across.
- people are happy to give views on what is a made up case.
- there is no right answer and everyone's view is valid.
- non-confrontational way of bringing different viewpoints together.
- multiple perspectives can lead to unforeseen win-win innovations and better-accepted/more resilient outcomes.

**To discuss issues (facilitate better understanding of and issue and different perspectives on it)**, because

- the game format enables and encourages interaction between players, and asks players to think deeply about the issues. In this way, I learned about issues to a depth that might not otherwise have happened, and found the contrasting responses and views of other players particularly informative.
- of the focus on the board rather than confrontational interaction: you don't even need to make eye contact! Also, players who are reflective might well not reveal that their understanding has changed until some time after leaving the game. Such time delays are what reflective learning implies.
- it helps to embed some of the more abstract concepts in a more practical manner.
- topics could be viewed upon from a new angle, or at least different from the one in a normal working context.
- the game enables a playful approach to complex and sometimes infected planning situations.
- scenarios can be selected and specifically written to draw out particular issues.
- the civil dialogue, and listening to different opinions, is key.
- it allows people to play alternative roles. Helpful in exhibitions / workshops.
- it provides a playful forum for discussing issues which otherwise are too difficult to discuss.
- learn about others' perspectives and viewpoints.
- it may present situations not yet experienced, or present them in a different light.
- it is a non-confrontational way of bringing different viewpoints together.
- it creates a neutral dialogic space in which all have equal power to debate options and outcomes.

However, it may not always work (e.g. loudest get heard, the passive types just play along and nod/shake their heads).

#### **To help reaching consensus because**

- to the extent people engage, they will defend their views, but is it a true consensus is some participants shy away?
- it can get people to view matters from an interdisciplinary and less parochial perspective.
- consensus has been a key word in the Swedish version of the game, and the players have managed to reach consensus – when playing the game. Perhaps this will facilitate a consensus concerning actual places and actual planning projects, but there is a great leap between agreeing in Rufopoly and in the real world.
- sharing perspectives usually helps with this...
- people can talk through issues in a make believe case, talking about the approach rather than the real life political constraints.
- understanding others perspectives can help achieve this.
- it brings more perspectives and value systems into the room, if you can get those people in the room to start with (a meta-level challenge for Rufopoly!), and there is no automatic assumption as to who has power over whom in decision-making.

Some saw that this may potentially happen but not be an automatic positive or useful aspect:

- Perhaps, seeing someone else's view doesn't always mean consensus, but it may help reduce polarised views.
- Perhaps, but in a long-term perspective.
- May not always happen but again provides a "safe space" for discussion.
- Did not really use it in this manner, though could be
- Not convinced about that, although if consensus is reached, it might be a better one than one arrived at through face-to-face debate with all the power inequalities.
- I don't know that our Plainsopoly does this now, but I see a lot of potential here. Simply playing the game as a group first, before addressing any real-world group conflict, might help facilitate consensus building simply by enhancing group dynamics and group communication (i.e. greasing the wheels of dialogue). However, I also think the game might be used or experimented with more directly as a consensus building tool. For example, I could imagine playing around with tweaking the game to require each game table to reach consensus on each individual question, or on an overall vision, or something of that type.



### **To help reflect on issues (own and others' perspectives) because**

- it does provide a captive audience who are in the zone when an alternative approach is suggested or a converse opinion encountered. The problem solving atmosphere is more conducive than a sterile lecture.
- similar to one of my earlier comments, it helps them to understand different views/approaches to the scenarios.
- the game play is arguably less engineered than role playing and yet engages participants and requires them to consider others' perspectives.
- the open-ended questions provoke a lot of reflection, as does the group dialogue around them.
- the dialogue is very helpful.
- a player learns about others' perspectives and viewpoints.
- it makes you ask questions about your views when answering, although not sure it does this a lot.
- makes the issues concrete but outside a specific example which might be too emotive.
- the game format can be neutral, not automatically mired in the fixed views of contentious day-to-day challenges, so gives a different place to then reflect on local priority issues.

Some saw this more as a potential impact rather than an automatic or guaranteed outcome:

- Perhaps, but in a long-term perspective.
- Difficult to judge.
- Rufopoly is only as good as the information that goes into it. Bias may emerge if questions are not carefully generated.

### **To have a 'neutral' place/context to discuss tricky issues (opening up) because**

- Yes, this is important, similar to pGIS [Participatory Geographical Information Systems].
- Great advantage. Could be quite problematic if you would play the game in a real situation where the participants know all or some of the background info. Think one would be blocked by your own "solution" to a specific conflict. A neutral place opens up for consensus thinking.
- Definitely. They semi-hypothetical context is key here.
- Very important! If a real place is being discussed, then facts are easily centred upon: "I have lived here for fifteen years, and I know more about this place and what has happened, so..." Such debates marginalise discussions on strategies and principles.
- The game play is arguably less engineered than role playing and yet engages participants and requires them to consider others' perspectives.
- Third party / facilitator is critical to this, see point above [Rufopoly is only as good as the information that goes into it. Bias may emerge if questions are not carefully generated].
- Players do not get stuck in the "same arguments" when using a known place, removes many areas of conflict by using a neutral context.
- The context is not the one where the real decisions need to be taken, so similar conflicts can be brought up and people can understand things differently there (this is the other side to my comment above that sometimes it would be helpful to have context-specific Rufopoly)
- Being a game, allows people to try out different approaches and be open to experimentation.
- It is safe as it is not real.
- Makes the issues concrete but outside a specific example which might be too emotive.
- As I have articulated above [the game format can be neutral, not automatically mired in the fixed views of contentious day-to-day challenges, so gives a different place to then reflect on local priority issues.] the Rufopoly examples are conceptual and neutral, and also the power relationships depend on the roll of the dice rather than who is democratically empowered to exert their undemocratic views on the taxpayers who fund their wages!

Even though this aspect of 'neutral space' featured strongly overall in comments about the strength of the game, about a quarter of the respondents did not see this point as prominent or automatically given. One player explicitly stated that they were not convinced of its neutrality:

- “Not totally convinced it is neutral. These are necessarily contrived situations to which will have already formed views from their own bias and experience. Yes the angles and corners can be explored, so there is a context, but it’s hard to see that as a neutral place.”

**To bring some fun back into work** because

- it’s different; diversity and variety makes it enjoyable and memorable.
- yep! We need this. Top-down didactic attempts at forcing people to learn are employed far too much.
- it enables students to get hands on in the classroom environment.
- of the format. But it needs to be made more fun.
- we found that people enjoyed the exercise and would have happily spent more time on the Rufopoly based game.
- better than work!
- it is enjoyable and people really get involved!
- people are more likely to participate and be creative.
- these issues can be presented quite drily...
- the human brain learns more easily when people are enjoying themselves.
- we need new engaging ways to work in our teams etc.
- there isn’t enough fun and its value is often underestimated.
- it is a game, not perceived as ‘real’, but can in turn liberate creativity in deriving solutions.
- of course.
- yes – board game.

**Other:**

- Speed learning, about interlocking system effects of individual property choices and complex policy structures that influence landowner decision-making around land use.
- Because it’s different, people like to try it out.
- Helps to make participants think about things in a different way; it’s an unfamiliar format – moving people out of their comfort zone can be very creative.