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The Take-up of Neighbourhood Planning in England 2011-2015

**Gavin Parker,
Real Estate and Planning, University of Reading**

Abstract

Exploration of how neighbourhoods and others have responded to the UK government's localism agenda in England, and specifically towards Neighbourhood Planning (NP), is important given that NP is a prominent part of that policy agenda. It is also of interest as the ramifications emerge for planning practice in the formal introduction of statutory plans which are ostensibly led by communities (Parker et al, 2015; Gallent, 2013). There is a necessary task to provide critical commentary on the socio-economic impact of localist policy. The paper explores the issues arising from experience thus far and highlights the take-up of Neighbourhood Planning since 2011. This assessment shows how a vast majority of those active have been in parished areas and in less-deprived areas. This indicates that government needs to do more to ensure that NP is accessible and worthwhile for a wider range of communities.

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The Take-up of Neighbourhood Planning in England 2011-2015

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Introduction

Experimentation with forms of ‘new localism’ has been a feature of UK governance arrangements for a generation. These have reflected a desire to reformulate state-society relations and the relative engagement and control exercised between the centre, the local, the neighbourhood and the individual (often with the latter cast as a consumer of services). Exploration of how neighbourhoods and others have responded to the UK government’s localism agenda in England, and specifically towards Neighbourhood Planning (NP), is important given that NP is a prominent part of that policy agenda. It is also of interest as the ramifications emerge for planning practice in the formal introduction of statutory plans, which are ostensibly led by communities (Parker et al, 2015; Gallent 2013). There is also a necessary task revealed in the above; to provide critical commentary on the socio-economic impact of localist policy.

Furthermore, when we acknowledge the strands of planning thought that have urged a more decentralised and collaborative approach to planning over the past 25 years or so, we may regard Neighbourhood Planning as a product of *both* the neo-liberal policy agenda that has become dominant in the past two decades (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013; Fyfe, 2005) and a result of a widespread practical dissatisfaction with planning processes and public engagement in the UK, since before the 1969 Skeffington report on people and planning. Such trends have thrown town planning into a ‘long crisis’ and prompted politicians and theorists to consider a reformulated spatial planning and embark on experimentation with more open, transparent, equitable and inclusionary planning features – as well as maintaining a planning system that delivers needed development.

Without developing a full history of the development of Neighbourhood Planning here (Smith, 2015; Parker, 2014) it is relevant that the prevailing conditions after the 2007-08 financial crisis, and the subsequent property market crash, conspired to ripen conditions for the Coalition (2010-2015) and the subsequent Conservative administration (2015-2020) approach towards planning in the UK. This is an approach that claims to empower through a localist rescaling while also dismantling significant parts of the planning system. This latest attempt at deregulation and streamlining of planning was justified by the Coalition government on the basis that planning was an ‘enemy of enterprise’, as proclaimed by Prime Minister David Cameron in 2011. The planning system was viewed as too bureaucratic and cumbersome for all stakeholders. The reformulation of planning under the Cameron-led administrations has also drawn on a rhetoric of freedom, individual choice and the benefits to be derived from development; which are steeped in a market-based liberalism (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013). Such attitudes and attendant changes are likely to reconfigure how, what and where development takes place and what and how policies are agreed. It is legitimate to argue that a new geography of planning has been ushered in since 2010 with the new institutional and administrative arrangements. Neighbourhood Planning is still emerging as an active component of a shift in ideological, process and outcome terms as part of the reforms. In particular here, the likelihood of take-up and basis for engagement with planning issues across the thousands of very different ‘neighbourhoods’ in England is a moving target, yet there are already identified issues in terms of unevenness and equity concerns, as well as the terms of engagement which shape the possibilities of NP and its burdens for potential participants (Gunn et al, 2015; Parker et al, 2015).

Conservative Party thinking in regard to neighbourhood scale planning was expressed in its early form in their *Open Source Planning* green paper published prior to the general election of May 2010. This set out a vision for a reoriented planning system where: ‘local people in each neighbourhood...will be able to specify what kind of development and use of land they want to see in their area’ and also claimed that such an approach would ‘lead to a fundamental and long overdue rebalancing of power, away from the centre and back into the hands of local people’ (Conservative Party, 2010: p2). As we will consider below it is doubtful that a fundamental shift has yet taken place but the focus here is on what *has* happened, where and for whom thus far.

So, while the political and theoretical ramparts of Neighbourhood Planning are clearly important to understand and reflect upon, it is how NP has been taken up by communities

across England and what this demonstrates about this non-mandatory, voluntary approach to statutory planning and the government's approach to planning overall that is the focus here. With that aim in mind an overview of the evolution of the Neighbourhood Planning initiative in England, including the location and types of active areas, is outlined. The study conducted by Parker et al (2014) provides some insight here also, as does the subsequent critique of the user experience of Neighbourhood Planning (see Parker et al, 2015) and these sources are drawn upon in the narrative, along with some contemporary critique. Thus the chapter builds a review of the first four or so years of the Neighbourhood Planning experiment by setting out a brief contextual précis, before detailing the profile of NP activity in England 2011-2015. The essay concludes with a short critical assessment. Firstly some reflection on the healthy scepticism that has been expressed about the government's localism agenda is briefly rehearsed below in order to frame the chapter.

Neighbourhood Planning, Neo-liberal Localism and Uneven Development

Despite receiving considerable attention by the academic and professional practice communities, NP has continued to divide opinion and generate critique. Such divisions centre on the ideological credentials or make-up and significance of this policy initiative as well as its limits and potentials to develop capacity and widen practical empowerment (cf. Bradley, 2015; Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015). There are more specific questions of design and useability of the Neighbourhood Planning tools that also require scrutiny, given that both of these are likely to influence the take-up and benefit derived from Neighbourhood Planning and the planning outcomes of the 2011 Localism Act.

Neighbourhood Plans, specifically Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs), were posed as one tool created to give expression to a group of 'community rights' expressed in the 2011 Act (DCLG, 2013). These rights were claimed to provide a 'powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community' (DCLG, 2012b: para. 184). The tools included the right to produce a plan for the neighbourhood (the NDP), or a Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) - which is a site specific approach to simplifying planning permission. Thirdly Community Right to Build Orders (CRtBO) with a similar function to a NDO, may be created where a community wishes to develop a particular site (see DCLG, 2013). A 'Qualifying Body'; either a Town / Parish Council or a specially

constituted and designated Neighbourhood Forum leads on this activity (see Davoudi and Cowie, 2013).

What constitutes the ‘right’ type of development and how it is determined was to be hedged somewhat by Neighbourhood Plans being subject to various tests; including their ‘general conformity’ with higher level plans in a classic policy hierarchy. National policy insist they should also be growth positive and the content could only be germane to land-use planning. Such conditions or system constraints bound the scope for Neighbourhood Planning content and have prompted concerns both about the ability of neighbourhoods to effect change on their own terms and about possible impacts that such regulation could have on participant motivation. Also significant has been controversy surrounding the internal capacities and distribution of social and economic capital, time and skills needed to draw upon NP rights effectively. Similarly, governmental assumptions about (inclusive) take-up have been questioned. In such a context Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) envisaged that communities would benefit or respond differently and in an uneven way to the government’s localism agenda, with neighbourhoods ‘sinking or swimming on the tides of localism’. This assessment was based partly on the experience of participatory opportunities in the past and given known variation in capacity across localities. Furthermore the most organised and articulate i.e. those able to mobilise and draw on networks of social capital, would be most able to manipulate the new environment to serve their own ends and, in the terminology deployed by Lowndes and Pratchett, to leave others ‘adrift’. Such a situation is recognisable in concerns expressed about Parish Plans and community-led plans operated in the past (Parker, 2008; Parker and Murray, 2012).

Clearly NP has been difficult for some communities to grapple with as Gunn et al (2015) highlight and as discussed in Parker et al (2015). It was envisaged that unevenness of take-up and possible inequitable outcomes could well result. It was feared that some areas would be left to take poorer quality or higher levels of unwanted development, miss out on opportunities to facilitate needed development in their own area, or otherwise to shape their environment through their own deliberations. Indeed the anticipation was that some would not be able to draw on resources that enable process benefits derived from working together, the establishment or refiguring of links with the Local Planning Authority and others, and the

benefits of developing understandings of planning and development more generally that NP activity might facilitate.

There are other factors out of any individual or group's control to be considered too; including local authority attitudes and support to NP; which appear to have been somewhat mixed. The possible disincentivising effects of bureaucratic rules and procedures are also relevant here (i.e. the framing of Neighbourhood Planning, which is designed largely to ensure policy conformity as mentioned above, see Parker et al, 2015). As such the system as adopted in 2011-12 has required neighbourhoods to conform to the strategic policies of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the relevant local plan, national designations and other elements of EU regulation and further procedural detailing under the NP regulations issued in April 2012 and subsequent iterations (UK Government, 2012; Parker et al, 2015). In this regard DCLG (2012a) had identified early on that if Neighbourhood Plans were given free rein, i.e. that if constraints were not present: 'such a system would be unworkable - in that such plans would be likely to undermine important strategic policy objectives such as provision for infrastructure' (DCLG, 2012a: p4). In relation to the focus on development and growth, the limited scope for action or challenge is also established firmly: '[n]eighbourhood plans and orders should *not promote less development* than set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies' (DCLG, 2012a: para. 184, my emphasis) and the Neighbourhood Plan must contribute to achieving sustainable development. Any reflection on the success or otherwise of NP must take into account wider changes to institutions and structures of planning initiated by government as the experience of Neighbourhood Planning is clearly impacted by such discontinuities.

Neighbourhood Planning is voluntarily embarked upon – it is non-mandatory - but the Plan becomes a statutory planning document when successfully completed. Gaventa (2004) developed a typology of participation spaces which provide a differentiation based on who and how engagement has been designed and for what ends. Under this schema Neighbourhood Planning may be viewed as an 'invited space' of participation; one that is designed by government and bounded with a limited scope or freedom for participants. It also relies on the motivation and organising capacities found within the neighbourhood in order to effectively respond to this 'invitation'. It is important also to note that the rhetoric surrounding the introduction of NP appeared to downplay any such asymmetries of

knowledge and capacity, or other differences existing one neighbourhood to another. Overall the basis upon which Neighbourhood Planning is founded is underpinned by a belief in government that local people have sufficient interest in planning to invest time and energy and, moreover, to do so over a sustained period. Ultimately this undertaking is significant and could involve a (possibly continuous) cycle of preparation, adoption, implementation and review of NDPs. This has been backed up with incentives such as neighbourhoods receiving a percentage of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts (see Smith, 2014). This assumed willingness on the part of (all) communities to not only engage with planning, but to *lead* planning activity for their own area, despite uneven capacity and limitations of scope and ambition is a wilful orientation of NP that presupposes or prefigures a significant culture change in planning – centrally involving the ‘control shift’ that the Conservative Party wish to achieve.

Thus efforts to think about the role and potential of the community to shape and to contribute to local policy and agenda setting has occupied many academics and policymakers from across the social and policy sciences. Many have argued that structures, processes and skills for more inclusive and ‘collaborative’ planning are needed for a legitimate and effective planning to be fostered. Yet for others the premise that conflicts can be pacified by the ‘opening up’ of the public sphere and through dialogue people with different interests to make decisions about issues that affect them is naïve (Bradley, 2015; Parker et al, 2015). Some see this as a robust way to organise planning if it is to help deliver sustainable development *at scale* and remain a tool for progressive change. Either way planning decisions and outcomes are simultaneously site specific; they are of local import as well as contributing to regional and national needs or aims. As such they are distributive in effect and therefore political in nature.

Thus another key contextual issue which forms an important backdrop to NP is the rescaling and reprofiling of planning seen through the simultaneous dismantling of the regional planning approach after 2010 and the paring back of national planning policy in England, while also maintaining an absence of a spatial plan nationally (RTPI, 2012). This highlights a rather ambiguous or even schizophrenic attitude on the part of government towards planning and moreover, towards planning led by the public sector; with the localism agenda encouraging engagement ostensibly for *all* neighbourhoods while creating conditions for

further private sector planning activity (Parker et al, 2014; Raco, 2013) and furthermore it appears *practically* inaccessible for many.

Clarke and Cochrane (2013) point out localism is an imprecise term variously claimed as a solution to efficiency, equity and democratic deficits in governance and involves a number of disparate elements. Expressions of localism can thus be taken to refer to any single one or combination of those:

'It brings geographical understandings about scale and place together with sets of political understandings about decentralisation, participation, and community, and managerialist understandings about efficiency and forms of market delivery ... It is often intentionally associated, confused, or conflated with local government, local democracy, community, decentralisation, governance, privatisation, civil society etc. for political effect' (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013: p14-15).

Given the above it is unsurprising that some have viewed Neighbourhood Planning as an instrumentalist tool to develop buy-in to new development as part of a neo-liberal or neo-communitarian agenda (cf. Fyfe, 2005). This approach has been given encouragement by work such as the NPHAU (2010) research on public attitudes to housing, which showed that views about new development became more positive, for example; when such development was designed well. The same study also found that there were differences in attitude depending on age and whether respondents were already homeowners. So such findings have acted to encourage a particular set of governmental technologies organised to encourage positive views about development and associated planning outcomes. We may read NP therefore as both an expression of a specific governmental agenda and the product of a longer standing process, whereby theorists have sought to address a perceived lack of engagement and ownership of planning processes and decisions. This has developed momentum as policymakers have learnt from a legacy of community engagement and community empowerment initiatives including regeneration partnerships, parish planning and experimentation with area committees and community forums in the 1990s and 2000s (see, for example: Newman et al, 2004; Bailey and Pill, 2015; 2011; Parker, 2014). However successive governments have also responded by adjusting policy design to *appear* more inclusionary and empowering - as long as it is likely to deliver the type of outcomes required as part of what has come to be termed 'neo-liberal localism' (DeFilippis, 2004; Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013; 2015).

Planning at the neighbourhood scale: NP diversity, complexity, take-up and navigation

In terms of the take-up and distribution of Neighbourhood Planning under the 2011 Localism Act, the momentum was initially rather slow. Given the above factors and elements of critique reserved for localist policy thus far, there is value in exploring how a variety of 'localisms' are emerging, given the specific circumstances of different areas, different capacities and varying interpretations of localism.

DCLG estimated in 2012 that Neighbourhood Development Plans would cost £20,000 to £86,000 per plan (DCLG, 2012a) and each Plan reaching completion has triggered a 'burdens' payment to the relevant local authority of £30,000 per Plan. Ostensibly this was to offset their costs including the administration of the neighbourhood referendum. Despite such arrangements it is likely that NP costs have been underestimated because the full costs are quite difficult to disentangle. A number of elements would need to be considered, including: engagement costs; volunteer time; consultant time; local authority officer time; referendum costs; plan production costs and other incidental costs (e.g. room hire, materials). Some of these cannot be accurately discerned or priced and there is a suspicion that the estimated average costs, while attempting to account for the elastic nature of NDPs (i.e. they may be more or less ambitious in terms of policy breadth and may cover a larger or smaller population), do not give a clear picture of actual costs. Feedback from respondents in the Parker et al (2014) study indicated that invariably a large amount of volunteer time had been expended but was not recorded or costed. Clearly cost obstacles could practically exclude some communities or groups within neighbourhoods.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) Select Committee Report of December 2014 on the effectiveness of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), raised a number of points on Neighbourhood Plans. Neighbourhood Plans were strongly supported in principle but it was recognised that they should not become the preserve of the middle classes or of the rural middle class – given that the early wave of NP activity was dominated by rural (parished) areas (Turley, 2014; Parker et al, 2014; Defra, 2013). Given such concerns consideration of how national government, local authorities, private consultants and other support or intermediary organisations have acted to shape the implementation and form of Neighbourhood Planning is a research topic that clearly needs attention. Particularly there should be interest in those Plans which are formulated (and

abandoned) in urban neighbourhoods and the wider geography of NP in terms of take-up and experience. The latter is explored below alongside a commentary on how others have facilitated NP activity thus far.

Table 1: Take-up and Progress of Neighbourhood Planning Areas (August 2015)

Neighbourhood Plan Activity	DCLG Forecast take-up	Actual NP take-up	Number of NPs to referendum
Spring 2013	762	511	1
Spring 2014	1143	1000	8
Spring 2015	1524	1400	60
Summer 2015	n/a	1500	80

(Source: based on DCLG, 2012a and successive ‘NP notes’ produced by DCLG)

In 2012 NP was mainstreamed beyond the Frontrunner areas and support funding in the period 2012-2015 was offered for Qualifying Bodies on a first come, first served basis, rather than using any form of priority based approach. A latter orientation could have directed support based on need or, for example, where there was difficulty in mobilising inclusive engagement. It is notable that from April 2015 DCLG did adjust their approach to NP support and adopted the idea that some areas needed to be prioritised. They have done this by directing some funding support towards ‘priority areas’ i.e. ‘typically be those with neighbourhood forums, in deprived locations, high growth areas, or areas with populations over 25,000’ (Moore, 2015: no page).

In 2011 four groupings of agencies were engaged initially to provide advice and assist those involved in NP i.e. CPRE/NALC, Locality, Planning Aid/RTPI and The Prince’s Foundation. The resources provided were mainly for training, advice and direct support to Frontrunner communities. The multi-agency approach was found to be problematic in that the four different organisations were offering different approaches and forms of advice and guidance; some NP groups were listening and responding to more than one of these and ultimately this acted as much to confound than supplement knowledge or practical progress. The next support tranche saw one consortium led by Locality with Planning Aid England/RTPI and a grants plus direct support offer was made available to groups that applied for support. Overall central government has committed around £40m for NP in the period 2011-2018 (in three tranches), as well as establishing a team of DCLG civil servants to support Neighbourhood Planning.

It is notable that little comment was passed on how local authorities, as partners, in Neighbourhood Planning were likely to respond to the national government agenda – largely because assumptions about their role were wrapped-up in a ‘duty to support’ NP that the Localism Act imposed on local authorities. In terms of the private sector there was also little overt recognition that so many communities would turn to planning consultants to help prepare their Plan, although the rounds of NP programme support offered by government actively invited private consultants to support NP groups. Parker et al (2014) found that around 70% of active Neighbourhood Planning areas had drawn on private consultants in various ways - but critically to assist in (re)writing policy in many cases.

England is administered by 326 second tier local authorities who act as the planning authorities (the LPAs). These are supposed to support the production of NPs, and then incorporate or ‘make’ the finalised Neighbourhood Plans under the provisions of the Localism Act 2011. It is estimated that around 15,000 neighbourhood areas already exist, or could conceivably be formed in England - assuming a conservative average of around 40-50 ‘neighbourhoods’ per local authority and taking into account that there are over 10,000 parishes already in England and more than 600 wards in London alone. Parish and Town Councils are predominantly located in rural areas and operate according to historic boundaries. West Berkshire Council for example has 63 town and parish councils, while the predominantly rural Herefordshire had 91 areas active in Neighbourhood Planning by Summer 2015. Urban local authority areas may have fewer neighbourhood areas each and in such areas subdivision by political ward exists but those boundaries may not necessarily equate with NP areas and in these urban/non-parished areas a new Neighbourhood Area is agreed and a Forum is constituted - although there have been numerous difficulties with this part of the process (see for example; Davoudi and Cowie, 2013; Parker et al, 2014). This stems from difficulties in agreeing boundaries internally amongst competing groups who claim to be the legitimate representative body to constitute the Neighbourhood Forum, as well as prolonged wrangling with the LPA in some areas and over territorial claims with adjacent neighbourhoods in some cases. This means that after five years around 10% of possible neighbourhood areas had embarked on the NP initiative and this corresponds to the Government’s claim in February 2015 that existing areas who have taken-up Neighbourhood Planning account for about 6 million of the population (DCLG, 2015).

Early commentators foresaw that NP in particular could become a tool for NIMBYs and that the likely take-up of Neighbourhood Planning and the scarce resources allocated to its

support, would see it taken-up by articulate rural communities looking to resist new development (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013; Layard, 2012). There may be some substance to this in the profile of very early adopting groups but subsequent work has indicated that attitudes have been changing and other types of neighbourhoods are now embarking on NP. Figure 1 shows the overall take-up of NP by region and Parish/Forum as of August 2015. This indicates a larger number of areas active in the South of England (South East and South West = 41% of take up).

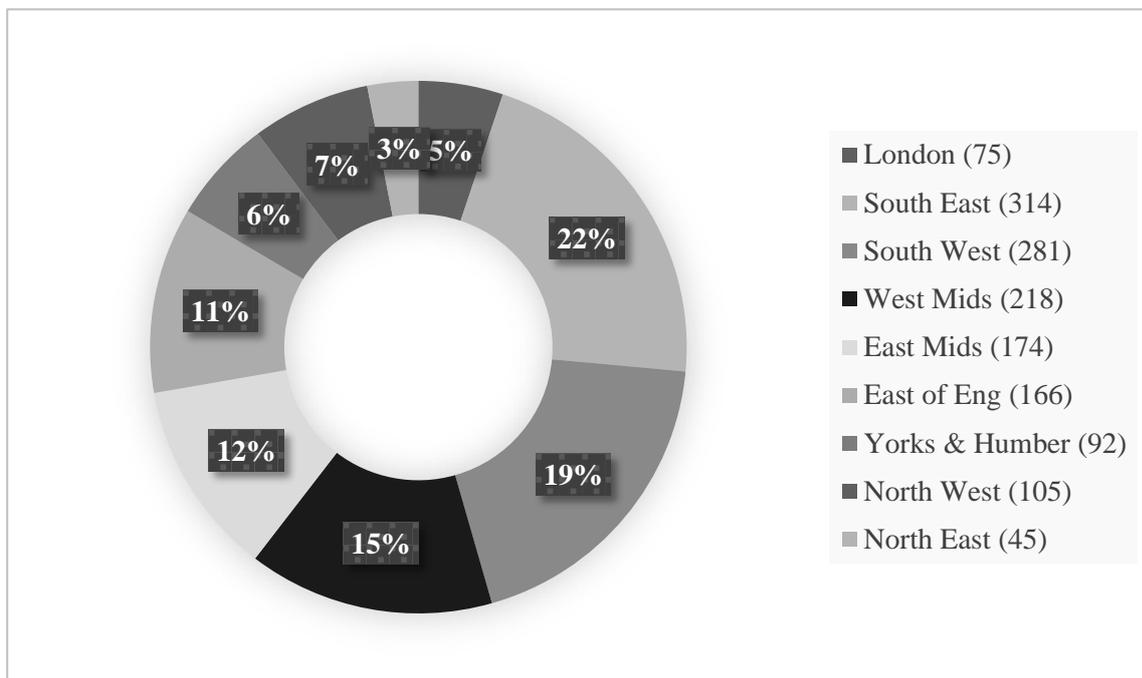


Figure 1: Overall Take-up of Neighbourhood Planning by Region (August 2015)

Thus the overall take-up since 2012 has shown 1500 groups entering the process and 1470 Qualifying Bodies had been formally designated by August 2015. The overall cohort of 1470

shows that the great majority were in parished areas with only 137 (c9%) in Forum areas. There was a slow adoption of NP early on and five 'waves' totalling 230 Frontrunner communities had commenced NP through 2011/2012; there were 13 started on this basis in London alone, by Spring 2013 only around 500 had embarked on Neighbourhood Planning - a net increase of only 270 groups. The take-up year on year shows that while many have initiated the NP process far fewer have progressed to the final stages (i.e. referendum), see Table 1. The numbers completing the process by 2015 was a considerably lower figure than initially envisaged, since the estimated time to complete a plan had been around two years. Only 80 neighbourhoods had successfully progressed to the referendum stage by August 2015 (Table 2). Notably more than a quarter of all Local Authorities (28%) had no Neighbourhood Plans in progress at all (91 of the 326) by August 2015. Prior to 2012 some LAs had recommended neighbourhood areas to be Neighbourhood Planning Frontrunners on the basis of interest shown.

Recent research with participants from 120 NP Qualifying Bodies (Parker et al, 2014) also highlighted a stronger take-up in the parishes of southern England with many early adopters enjoying a history of active community planning in the past. There is an argument to be made that in many cases such Plans may be less needed if the enterprise is to be judged against the government's growth agenda and the recognised housing crisis; which requires many thousands more houses to be built year on year than actually achieved. Given that many rural / parished areas are unlikely to be able to accommodate large numbers of housing or other new significant development, there may be some substance to that point. Equally in such areas where large scale development is feasible NPs may not necessarily be the appropriate tool and may not 'keep up' with the speed of change (e.g. number of planning applications / decisions) generated in such areas. Moreover larger urban extension type schemes are traditionally conceived and implemented by higher level authority - with scope instead for local detailing and refinement, with or without community engagement, after the principle of development is established. This reflects the perceived difficulties of reaching consensus or managing land and property markets prior to plan publication and when dealing with large scale long-term projects, which quite possibly cross administrative boundaries. It does also highlight whether more attention needs to be paid to areas where development is more needed or appropriate when judged against broad sustainable development criteria and the limits of the localist approach exemplified by NP.

The extra administrative obstacles faced by urban neighbourhoods relating to Forum and Neighbourhood area (boundary) designation provide part of the explanation for (s)lower uptake in non-parished areas. These factors are exacerbated by well understood difficulties associated with more fluid and more diverse populations in urban areas. This implies the need for a more sophisticated approach to engagement. However in some urban areas there are signs of greater uptake and support – Leeds for example had 23 active Neighbourhood Planning areas active by Summer 2015 and London as a whole had 75 (68 Forums) Qualifying Bodies designated (see Table 2).

Thus Table 2 shows that of the 80 Plans that had passed referendum by August 2015 most were in parished (rural) areas with only five in Forum areas. In terms of regional take-up we can see that almost half of those passing the referendum were located in the South-East of England. The wider cohort however is spread more healthily across England with 800 groups outside of the South East, South West and London; who had 670 qualifying bodies registered between them (as shown in Figure 1).

Table 2: Regional and Qualifying Body (Parish/Forum) Distribution of Neighbourhood Planning (August 2015)

Region (England)	NP to referendum: Parish / Forum / Total	NP Qualifying Bodies*: Parish / Forum / Total
London	0 / 2 = (2)	7 / 68 = (75)
South East	34 / 2 = (36)	299 / 15 = (314)
South West	9 / 0 = (9)	274 / 7 = (281)
West Midlands	9 / 1 = (10)	213 / 5 = (218)
East Midlands	8 / 0 = (8)	167 / 7 = (174)
East of England	7 / 0 = (7)	165 / 1 = (166)
Yorks & Humber	1 / 0 = (1)	84 / 8 = (92)
North West	6 / 0 (6)	83 / 22 = (105)
North East	1 / 0 (1)	41 / 4 = (45)
England (total)	75 / 5 = (80)	1333 / 137 = (1470)

***Note: of the 1500 who had embarked on NP by August 2015, 1470 had been recognised with qualifying body status.**

These statistics correspond with the concerns that many urban areas have faced extra hurdles in establishing Forums and in agreeing the neighbourhood area designation. This is also reflected in the numbers of Forums (5) that had progressed to referendum as shown in Table 2. In terms of the urban / rural classifications of the 80 passing the referendum, based on Lower Super Output Area (RUC11); 22 were in E1/E2 settings (rural village), 34 in D1/D2 (rural town) and 24 were in A1, B1 and C1 categories (urban).

In terms of the relative affluence / deprivation of those that had reached referendum by August 2015, according to their Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile group ranking, only a few (9) were from the lower two quintile groups (4th quintile = 7 and 5th quintile = 2), while 13 were in the 1st quintile. There were 22 ranked in the 2nd quintile and the 3rd quintile were the most numerous at 36 areas. The distribution of the larger group of Qualifying Bodies (n=1470) shows that less than 23% were ranked in the lower two quintiles (see Table 3). 308 were in the fourth and only 29 in the fifth quintile; leaving 77% in the top three quintiles. This indicates that initial concerns about uptake from disadvantaged areas also appears somewhat justified - although take-up across all regions shows a reasonable spread, but the take-up in the South East is markedly skewed towards less-deprived areas (also Table 3).

Table 3: Index of Multiple Deprivation breakdown of NP Qualifying Bodies

Region / Pop. (England)	IMD Q1	IMD Q2	IMD Q3	IMD Q4	IMD Q5	Totals
London (8.174m)	0	1	5	55	14	75
South East (8.635m)	67	165	67	15	0	314
South West (5.289m)	0	81	125	75	0	281
West Midlands (5.602m)	0	77	129	7	5	218
East Midlands (4.533m)	24	70	50	29	1	174
East of England (5.847m)	24	74	53	15	0	166
Yorks & Humber (5.284m)	0	22	8	60	2	92
North West (7.052m)	0	35	42	22	6	105

North East (2.597)	0	0	14	30	1	45
All (53.013m)	115 (7.8%)	525 (35.7%)	493 (33.5%)	308 (20.9%)	29 (2%)	1470 (100%)

Note: based on 2011 IMD classifications and 2011 Census. Q1 = least deprived / Q5 = most deprived.

The number of policies contained in emerging Neighbourhood Plans varies (DCLG, 2015; PAS, 2015; Turley, 2014) and some have argued that the policy orientation is quite balanced with both ‘protectionist’ and pro-development policy. Most Plans considered in the *User experience* research (Parker et al, 2014; 2015), had policies on housing and over half had allocated sites for housing. What remains unclear and somewhat hypothetical is what housing numbers would have been facilitated in any case and therefore whether NPs are actually increasing net housing numbers. Some Plans have sought to allocate more housing units in their areas than the local plan indicates but the picture is mixed and where a local plan is not in place the allocations in NPs cannot necessarily be said to represent net increases in development. There is a picture also emerging of other components of Plans relating to landscape protection and heritage protection and there are also a number of cases where proposed content is being ruled out by local authorities, consultants and or examiners if it is deemed not to be ‘land use planning’. Clearly more study on the process by which content has been shaped is required (see Parker et al, 2015) as well as a reflection on how ‘land use’ versus ‘spatial’ planning scope could be usefully reconceptualised at this scale, given that many other ‘place shaping’ issues are identified as important by neighbourhoods.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is clear that despite a significant level of take-up, particularly in the past two years, a slower rate of progress to completion has been achieved than government had hoped for back in 2011. This has prompted ways of ‘speeding up’ NP, most recently included in the Queen’s speech in May 2015 (The Prime Minister’s Office, 2015). Ironically the ‘light touch’ approach that had been advocated by government for NP regulation has apparently acted to create a degree of confusion rather than enable or expedite progress. The approach taken early on by government left neighbourhood groups feeling somewhat exposed and they have wanted more support and guidance (see Parker et al, 2014). Indeed the concerns expressed have also been more about ensuring that the Plans pass the examination stage and referendum; to then be robust enough to withstand challenge and testing by the development

industry. When communities who were participating in NP were interviewed it was clear that this self-selecting group who had opted to embark on NP (i.e. they were motivated to undertake NP, had stuck to the task and were largely from more affluent areas) still reported difficulty and viewed NP as burdensome. This has also meant that urban and more deprived communities have been slower to take-up or progress Plans or have been deterred by the burdens involved (see also Gunn et al, 2015) and the statistics prepared here highlight this.

The types of Plans, the communities they serve and issues they address has yet to receive enough scrutiny. As is clear from the assessment above the progress of Neighbourhood Forums (i.e. urban areas) has been slow. There are numerous groups who have reportedly stopped work on their NP and some have opted to use a different approach, for example North Shields Fish Quay in North Tyneside (a 4th quintile IMD area). This neighbourhood was also a 2011 NP Frontrunner who, after expending a lot of time working towards an NDP, formulated a supplementary planning document instead. Anecdotally other Forums and parishes have become moribund for reasons intimated above, and sometimes they are waiting for their LA to adopt their local plan - in order to give them more certainty about their policy locus, and perhaps in the hope of a more conducive support environment. The spread of activity detailed here does suggest that aspirations to build capacity that could see a wider range of communities taking a lead on planning are somewhat off the mark. Experiences thus far demonstrate that intermediary inputs from LAs and consultants has been critical for 'successful' NP activity. It is well understood that spaces to engage or take up 'rights' is not the same as the ability to realise such opportunities.

Clearly the audience for a Neighbourhood Plan is multiple – it needs to speak to the local authority, the development industry and to the community from which it has emerged. This has created some tension with core working groups producing the Plan and wanting the completed document to speak to their own community, and yet local authorities and consultants are also concerned that the Plan both conforms to the requisite 'basic conditions' and will be implementable - as well as 'binding' on developers. As a result some neighbourhoods have developed some understanding of the need for robust plans that are tightly worded - this has then led to a need to bring in others to assist them - around 70% of all NPs have required planning consultant input (see Parker et al, 2015). This is an understandable, rational response on the part of Qualifying Bodies, given the effort involved and potential impact on land holdings, the likelihood of planning permissions and impacts on

market viability and associated concerns that LPAs typically hold about planning appeals and resource constraints.

Governmental policy and strategies can produce both intentional and unintentional unevenness in terms of the socio-economic characteristics and actor behaviours. In planning terms the available tools to reorganise, redistribute or direct actors and resources spatially are seen as part of a wider toolkit deployed as part of strategies, or repertoires, of 'intentional development'. Public and other agencies implementing 'development' projects, programmes and policies with specific ends are understood in this way. Authors such as Bebbington (2004) also point to 'immanent development' in reference to processes of structural, political and economic change, such as the expansion of capitalism. This distinction has since been used to locate different types and conceptions of participation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004), and to stake out analytical agendas for development geographies. It has also been deployed to highlight the conditions under which progressive forms of livelihood and place transformation might be possible (Perreault, 2003). Given that the outcomes and experiences of NP thus far indicate several key things which remain to be debated and or researched further, including; examining the limits of Neighbourhood Planning and scrutinising who benefits and how in this operating environment. The quality of Neighbourhood Planning processes and transaction costs issues (i.e. time, value-adding, costs) are also important and consideration of how NP process benefits - around awareness raising and understanding of the need for good planning, and enabling needed development, is of value. This needs to be properly reflected upon and a re-orientation of NP may be necessary in order to raise levels of engagement and socio-economic development – both immanent and intentional - in areas that really need support to engage and where development and economic stimulus is most needed.

Therefore the support and use of NP will be of more benefit where it can have most impact. Notwithstanding this many other planning and development tools are also available already (see RTPI, 2011; Parker, 2012) and finding a creative way of including and enabling the use of these as part of a broader localist planning array is also a useful task. Furthermore NP should not be considered alone - the way that government orchestrate planning at the local and greater than local scales is also important; not least because of the impact this has on neighbourhood scale (statutory) planning activity in the mode discussed above.

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