

## Emergent practices of localism

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## **Emergent practices of localism: the role and response of local planning authorities to neighbourhood planning in England.**

### **Abstract**

This paper examines the practices of localism that are emerging in Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) responses towards neighbourhood planning (NP) in England.

It argues that a lack of coherence within the localism agenda has enabled LPAs to rearticulate and re-signify key concepts, with three discernible practices of localism and responses to NP emerging: the deflective, the reactive and the integrative. The LPA have a critical role within the process and employ a range of technologies of government to govern the conduct of groups shaped largely around the role afforded to NP within their Local Plan.

Key words: localism, neighbourhood, planning, local authorities, governance

### **Introduction**

Neighbourhood Planning (NP) was introduced in 2010-11 as the flagship policy of the UK Government's Localism agenda. Communities were provided with the right to prepare a statutory development plan against which planning applications would be assessed. Thus, for the first-time, statutory planning could be led by others than the Local Planning Authority (LPA), and the planning system portrayed as a function that individual citizen planners can enact for themselves (Lord et al., 2017; Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2018).

At a conceptual level, the introduction and implementation of NP is used in this study as a mechanism to explore the spatial re-scaling and state restructuring associated with the broader localism agenda of the Coalition Government (2010-2015). When introduced, Government rhetoric promised a new relationship between central government, local government, communities and individuals; a shrinking role for the state and a greater role for society. Power was to be reworked and redistributed to other scales of governance with a renewed focus on the "local" (Wills, 2016).

These processes of state restructuring are associated with a shift from not only government to governance but, in the case of NP, governing *through* communities as increasing emphasis is placed on 'active citizenship' (Miller and Rose, 1990; Rose and Miller 2008, 88). The relationship between state and individuals moves from one of passivity and dependence to one in which individuals become self-regulating and, in this case, mobilised in alliance with political objectives to deliver economic growth (Miller and Rose, 1990, 28). This necessitates a new role for the state to facilitate rather than

direct the actions of communities (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley, 2014) with technologies of government employed that enable 'government at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990).

While the introduction of NP provides communities with the right (and power) to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), the policy is accompanied by a legislative framework and processes which establish the 'rules of the game' as the state seek to facilitate what is happening on the ground and govern through the 'conduct of conduct' of communities (Miller and Rose, 1990; Wills, 2016). The parameters for the preparation of NDPs are embedded within higher level policies including the National Planning Policy Framework and the Local Plan. This relationship is shown in figure 1.

'INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE'

The legislative framework and policy mechanisms bounding neighbourhood planning serve to ensure that economic growth is not inhibited (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2018, 236) with a primary aim of NP to increase the rate of growth of housing and economic development. It is assumed that communities will accept development if incentivised and given the opportunity to plan for their area (Gallent et al., 2013; Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014) and this in turn will lead to higher levels of development than would be achieved by the Local Plan (Stanier, 2014). This sets up the possibility that the LPA can be 'by-passed' with inevitable tensions arising due to the contradictory narratives within the agenda as it is promoted as a space for growth and a space for empowerment (Brownill, 2017a).

This research conceptualises NP within the framework of neo-liberal governmentality and extends the work of Newman (2013) and Davoudi and Madanipour (2013) by exploring empirically the technologies of government deployed by LPAs as they seek to govern the conduct of those engaged in NP.

This is aided by their role in the process as the LPA are provided with overall responsibility for the agenda. They retain democratic responsibility as the decision-taker (at key stages in the legislative process of preparing an NDP) and decision-maker when planning applications are determined. Furthermore, they also have a broad "duty to support" those preparing a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), with the national Planning Practice Guidance providing further guidance on how this may be offered in practice (DCLG, 2014). Thus, the LPA are considered an active partner with responsibility for sharing some obligation in the implementation of the process.

Whilst the LPA are afforded a role, there is an in-built flexibility and lack of prescription in how LPAs are to practically respond to NP and this is exacerbated by conceptual uncertainty surrounding the

objectives and narratives within both localism (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2014) and neighbourhood planning (Brownill, 2017a) as well as the specific requirements of the LPA within the process (Layard, 2012). Brownill (2017a) contends that this will lead to different forms and practices of localism emerging and there is some evidence within the academic literature of this with different types of and numbers of NDPs emerging in different areas (Parker et al., 2014; Parker and Salter, 2017). This paper supports these findings and identifies some of the reasons for this variation.

Whilst NP has been subject to widespread academic interest (see Wargent and Parker, 2018 for a review) there has been limited focus on the role of the LPA within the process. Brownill and Bradley (2017, 34) refer to the LPA as a “crucial but often neglected actor in neighbourhood planning” and Parker et al. (2015) called for additional work to assess how LPAs are responding to neighbourhood planning. This paper responds to the call for further research to understand “how local authorities are enabling and shaping neighbourhood planning in different ways” (see Brownill, 2017a; Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014; Parker et al., 2014; 2015; Sturzaker and Shaw, 2015) and to understand how the policy is steered as it passes ‘through’ the LPA and the legislative process established to regulate those preparing a NDP. It also considers how the broader planning policy context and increasing emphasis on the need for the LPA to prepare an up-to-date Local Plan has influenced LPA behaviours over time.

The focus is not on the outputs of the neighbourhood planning process (see Parker et al., 2015; 2017) but on how LPAs implement their response towards neighbourhood planning and the practices of localism that are emerging. It focuses on the South East of England and utilised a multi-scalar, mixed methods staged approach to data collection.

After conceptualising the research approach and conceptual frame of neo-liberal localism, the paper will discuss the role of the LPA within neighbourhood planning and what we know about their responses to date. Following an overview of the methodological approach, the overarching responses of the LPA towards NP identified within the study will be introduced and analysed. The article will conclude by discussing the entwined nature of the local and neighbourhood plan-making and the influence of the LPA in the process of spatial re-scaling and the distribution and retention of power between the centre, local and the sub-local.

### **Neo-liberal localism**

It is considered that the localism agenda of the Coalition Government is the latest in a line of government reforms and approaches to governing which aim to shift power towards localities (Wills, 2016).

For many the localism agenda, and NP within this is considered as a manifestation of neoliberal governmentality (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley, 2014; Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2013) with the focus of the state turning to create the right conditions to encourage groups to behave responsibly (Bulley and Sokhi-Bulley, 2014) and technologies of government employed to influence their “conduct, thoughts, decisions and aspirations” (Miller and Rose, 1990, 8). Davoudi and Madanipour (2013) discuss the technologies of government embedded by Central Government within NP and this includes the enrolment of the LPA who, as discussed previously, are provided with a key role within the process and retain democratic responsibility for the agenda. It is argued that this position and role of the LPA means that they are not only directly implicated in the overarching strategy of “governing at a distance” but they themselves are also provided with a direct role to govern the conduct of communities (Newman, 2013). This opens up the possibility that the LPA will also seek to influence its form as they embed their own technologies of government (Newman, 2013) and seek to direct the agenda towards their own ends.

In order to be implemented by the neighbourhood planning group, the policy must pass through the LPA and as such the LPA has the capacity to absorb, co-opt or deflect the policy initiative (Lowndes and Wilson, 2003) meaning that the “rules” may not be strictly followed, they may be “bent” or even ignored (Lowndes, 2005). This is likely to lead to variation in the response of LPAs and opens up the potential for alternative positions to be adopted, for elements of reform to be used in unintended ways and for agency to be expressed (Clifford and Tewdwr-Jones, 2013; Sturzaker and Shaw, 2015). The policy is likely to mutate as it interacts with the specific characteristics of the Local Authority, including the policy landscape, resulting in the emergence of variegated forms of neoliberal localism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).

Furthermore, there is considerable scope for different interpretations of the localism agenda as the idea of localism has itself a “definitional fuzziness” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2014) and it is seen by some as marked by inconsistency and incoherence (Layard, 2012). Diversity and experimentation were encouraged with the intention that the flexibility within the agenda would lead to more effective policy outcomes as services and policies could be designed to reflect the needs of their specific communities (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2014; Brownill, 2017a).

The lack of prescription extends towards NP policy, with LPAs provided with a broad “duty to support” and a lack of guidance in how to discharge these duties. The NDPs have to be in general conformity with the policies in the adopted Local Plan which will reflect the specific development needs of the local area.

Conceptualising NP as a form of neo-liberal localism thus focuses our attention on the potential to empirically evidence the different responses of LPAs towards the agenda as it is emerging and to understand how the policy is mediated, filtered and contested as it passes through the various scales of governance from the national to the local. Indeed, there is evidence of different responses towards the agenda and these will now be explored.

### **The role and response of the LPA to neighbourhood planning**

There is geographical variation in not only the take-up of NP by communities but also variations across and between LPAs (see Parker and Salter, 2016; 2017). In 2016, only 81% of LPAs had some NP activity (taken as at least one designated neighbourhood area) and there are “hotspots” of activity including Herefordshire, Sussex and Cornwall. This reflects that some LPAs are actively supporting the neighbourhood planning agenda and others being less enthusiastic and even obstructive (Brownill, 2017a). Variations have also been reported in the willingness of LPAs to respond to the agenda, their attitude and the consequential behaviour towards NP (see Brownill, 2017a; Parker et al., 2014; Wills, 2016) including instances where the LPA may, whether deliberately or not, seek to slow down or frustrate NDP progress (Parker et al., 2014) and deploy financial incentives to resist or downplay the agenda (Lowndes, 2005; Lowndes and Wilson, 2003). Conversely, in others the process has been initiated by the LPA (Parker et al., 2015).

The legislative process also provides the LPA with “power over” communities and the opportunity to directly frame and limit their planning activities (Sturzaker and Gordon, 2017). The approach and strategy within the Local Plan may circumscribe the “room for manoeuvre” for neighbourhood planning groups (Brownill, 2017b) as it serves to bound the content and scope of NDPs. Within the academic literature these behaviours are visible and examples provided where LPAs are restricting the ambition of emerging NDPs, based on concerns that they won’t meet the basic conditions (Gallent and Robinson, 2012; Parker et al., 2017) and / or they do not complement the overall aims of central and local planning policy (Sturzaker and Shaw, 2015). This can result in the LPA refusing to allow the NDP to proceed to examination for fear of failure (for example in Leominster, see Parker et al., 2016) or approving development which does not accord with the neighbourhood plan in order to ensure that the housing targets are met (for example in Thurston, see Wilding, 2020).

There is also evidence that in some instances LPAs have sought to commandeer the process to direct the energies and outputs towards delivering on the broader priorities of the local area be that the strategic policies in the Local Plan (Bradley and Brownill, 2017) or broader aims of urban renewal (Bradley et al., 2017). There have been reports that some LPAs are steering groups away from neighbourhood planning entirely and towards other forms of Community Led Planning (Brownill and

Downing, 2013) and in some instances the LPA argues that the Localism Act would have limited impact as the Council is already acting in a “localist” way (Lord et al., 2017). Some LPAs have effectively “vetted” groups and are discouraging take-up in areas with limited development pressure. The policies and approach in the Local Plan may also limit the value of NDPs as key issues are already addressed (Parker et al., 2017) impeding the ability of groups to develop locally distinctive policies (Stanton, 2014). Furthermore, the Local Plan establishes the overarching approach and strategy towards housing and this may enable the LPA to push development “forward potentially against the wishes and needs of the local communities” (Stanton, 2014, 273).

Whilst the original intention may have been for a sequenced approach to plan-making, many NDPs are being prepared in advance of an up-to-date Local Plan due to the slow pace and challenge LPAs are experiencing in bringing forward their Local Plan (Parker and Salter, 2017). Lichfields (2016) report that it is increasingly common for neighbourhood plans to “bypass” the Local Plan or for an “inverted” model to emerge where NDPs are made prior to the adoption of a Local Plan and thus shape its preparation and strategy. This can include in some cases establishing their own housing need, which may result in conflict as the emerging Plans envisage different futures for their area (Mullins and Bagaen, 2012) or result in a limited lifespan of NDPs as their policies are superseded by the more recently adopted Local Plan - thus undermining the communities’ efforts (Bogusz, 2018). The absence of an up-to-date Local Plan is also likely to result in uncertainty for groups as the parameters within which the Plan must be prepared may be unclear at the outset and may change as the process continues and as the Local Plan takes shape. Furthermore, in some instances NP groups have been advised to wait and produce their plan either in conjunction with, or after the adoption of, the emerging Local Plan (Parker, 2012) with suspicion fuelled that the prioritisation of the Local Plan is deflecting LPAs from providing support (Parker et al., 2015).

The emergent research suggests a multitude of reasons for the varied responses of the LPA including hesitance to “let go” of their power as they seek to retain control of the planning policies in their area (Farnsworth, 2012; Parker, 2012), concerns over the legitimacy and representativeness of those preparing a NDP due to their self-selected nature (Davoudi and Cowie, 2013) and the potential that the make-up of those leading the process may result in Plans being brought forward by narrow or vested interests (Gallent et al., 2013). Furthermore, differences in response have also been attributed to the inbuilt flexibility and prescription on how LPAs should deliver on their duty to support, the lack of clarity on what outcomes the LPAs should be addressing, the contradictory narratives within the agenda (Wargent and Parker, 2018) and attempts by the LPA to reconcile their responsibilities towards NP with their other statutory duties, government agendas and priorities (Salter, 2018).



This latter point is of particular pertinence as we await the publication of the Planning White Paper (anticipated summer 2020). This is the latest inference in a series of reforms which has led to increased uncertainty for LPAs as new systems and processes have to be put in place further exacerbated by the lack of detailed guidance surrounding the new proposals (Planning Futures, 2017). The continual reforms seem to reflect a change in direction towards pro-housing and pro-growth (Slade et al., 2019) with local authorities facing increased pressure to deliver an up-to-date Local Plan and five year land supply and concerns that this is undermining neighbourhood planning (NALC, 2018). For instance, in areas where the presumption in favour of sustainable development applies, this will have implications on NDPs as development may be approved outside of the Plan led system and undermine their strategy and approach (see NALC, 2018 for examples). The ability of LPAs to meet the increased burdens has also been weakened by the impact of austerity with Planning and development services having a reduction in spending equating to £1180mn by 2016-2017 (Gray and Barford, 2018) with reports that LPAs are “lacking the resources to do more than regulate development” (RTPI, 2018, 12).

The ability, and willingness, of the LPA to support neighbourhood planning is inherently influenced by this broader environment, with neighbourhood plans forming only one part of the wider planning policy context and hierarchy. This draws attention to the process of spatial re-scaling and the need to understand the implementation of top-down policies by the LPA and their response to the behaviours and actions of neighbourhood planning groups. Ultimately, as argued by Allmendinger and Haughton (2014, 37) it is the LPA who have to reconcile the contradictory narratives within the agenda as neighbourhood planning is promoted and conceptualised as a space for growth and a space for empowerment. This is likely to result in tensions as some communities are reported to progress NDPs as a mechanism to try and stop development (see Bogusz, 2018; Lichfields, 2016; Parker and Salter, 2016) whereas the LPA are under increasing pressure to deliver housing.

### **Methodological approach**

Positioned as an explanatory study, this research was designed to explore the different types of responses emerging from LPAs towards neighbourhood planning from a number of perspectives. A “cascade” approach to data collection (see Healey, 1991) was adopted with a broader overview of the responses of LPAs at the national and regional level. This was followed by a more detailed focus and analysis of the micro-dynamics of the response through analysis of five case study areas (see Table 1).

At the national level, a database was maintained since 2016 which provided data on neighbourhood planning activity (see Parker and Salter, 2017) and enabled the response of LPAs to NP to be ascertained.

This stage was followed by a more detailed analysis of the response by LPAs in the SE of England, a geographical region that experiences the highest take-up of neighbourhood planning (Parker and Salter, 2017). It is also considered to be the “test-bed” for Government policies and reforms (Inch, 2009) and, given it is an area of high development pressure, it “stress tests” the policy which has the explicit aim to reduce opposition to development and deliver on the government’s growth agenda. Furthermore, there is considerable variation in the levels of NP activity and the broader LPA context, including for example the Local Plan status, 5 year land supply, environmental designations and National Park boundaries.

The five case-studies were selected for theoretical reasons with each case seen to represent a broader response to localism. They have similar characteristics; they have low levels of deprivation, they are predominately Parished and are under Conservative political control. This reflects the overall bias towards rural and less deprived areas and known challenges and lower levels of uptake in urban, more deprived, Forum led neighbourhood areas with analysis of these areas warranting further research (see Parker and Salter, 2017).

The key characteristics of the case study areas are as follows:

‘INSERT TABLE 1 HERE’

### ***Research tools***

Two research tools were employed. Firstly, a desk-based review of LPA websites and Local Plans was conducted enabling identification of the information, support and advice offered, how they have interpreted the duty to support and the response within the Local Plan.

On the basis of this initial analysis five case study areas were selected to offer a comparative sample of potential approaches and contexts (see above justification and table 1), with a series of semi-structured interviews with different actors involved in NP including officers employed at the Council, NP groups and in one area third party consultants. These interviews were supplemented with a systematic review of Council decision-making in order to understand the broader and formal context for how the resultant practices and response came about (see Watson, 2002). This triangulation of data from the documentary analysis and interviews enabled an understanding to be gained of the structures the LPAs put in place as well as the working practices employed – collectively these aspects are considered to be indicators of the “response” of the LPA and the “practices of localism” that are emerging.

The key attributes, behaviours and responses of the case study areas were identified and used as a basis to re-interrogate and analyse the data collected at a regional level; this analysis led to the

development of a typology of responses. The LPAs were categorised by analysing the overarching approach within the Local Plan towards neighbourhood planning (i.e. the “rules of the game” and parameters they put in place) and the ways in which the LPAs justify their approach towards NP (i.e. the political rationality they establish from which their conduct can then be governed and measured). In order to substantiate the findings and enable broader conclusions to be drawn the burgeoning academic literature is drawn upon to support or challenge the findings (reflecting Sturzaker and Shaw, 2015).

### **Emergent practices of localism**

The research identifies three broad LPA responses towards neighbourhood planning: the *deflective*, the *reactive* and the *integrative*.

#### ***Type 1: the deflective response***

2 of the case study areas (LPA1 and LPA2) and a further 3 LPAs within the broader region display a *deflective* response to NP. These areas are categorised by low levels of NP take-up as the LPA “deflect” groups away from NP but towards other opportunities for Community Led Planning (CLP) which may include Parish Plans, Village Design Statements or engagement and integration of CLP initiatives and approaches within the Local Plan. Within this study it is not considered that any LPAs were obstructing NDPs as in all instances, although not supportive of NP per se, they did offer alternative means and mechanisms for groups to engage in plan-making and the development of their area; their response represents both positive and negative behaviours.

‘INSERT FIGURE 2’ HERE

In order to deflect groups towards alternative (and possibly equally effective) forms of localism some LPAs actively discourage groups from taking up NP by citing resource constraints, the burdensome nature of the process, prioritisation of the Local Plan over other activity and the level of influence that NDPs may or may not have after adoption – these concerns are elevated and used as mechanisms through which they rationalise their approach and response to groups. This is exemplified in the following quote:

So, where we’ve said to them actually neighbourhood planning is quite a considerable amount of work and you have to go through these various stages, is this really appropriate for you? Are you willing to do that? They’re thinking “oh, I’m not quite sure” and we said there are other ways – you could do a Parish Plan if you want or a Village Design Statement. Because a lot of them are, they don’t want to be allocating any particular land, they don’t want to be doing any particular policies but what they want is to define and maintain the character of

their settlements and the Village Design Statements tend to do that for them (Planning Officer, LPA1)

The groups interviewed varied in their response towards this advice and approach by the LPA. For instance, Community Group 3 in LPA2 accepted this rationale and stated that “putting in a neighbourhood plan would not necessarily add a lot to what we have already got in the village design statement.” In contrast, Community Group 1 in LPA1 sought to continue with an NDP and have found support from the LPA wanting. The process was described as a “very, very uphill task” as they are considered to be “very, very low on their [the LPA’s] list of priorities” in part due to staffing pressures and as the LPA remain focused on getting an up-to-date Local Plan in place.

By deflecting groups towards these non-statutory tools, which have less weight in policy terms, the LPAs are seeking to limit the influence of groups. For instance, LPA1 argued that communities within the Green Belt would be better placed to prepare a Village Designment Statement:

We’ll write the policy wording as it were, and you write the detail, the guidance that connects that policy wording (Planning Officer, LPA1)

These quotes suggest that whilst the LPA may have valid concerns regarding the time and costs involved with preparing an NDP these are unlikely to be the overriding reason for their hesitance to support neighbourhood planning. Rather, it is considered that the deflection represents a political decision by the LPA, be that implicit or explicit, as they wish to retain control of the planning system and statutory plan-making.

LPA2 integrated community concerns as separate chapters within the Local Plan and actively

discouraged [neighbourhood planning] because we were going down this route and we said you don’t need to do it. If you want to go away and do it then that’s fine but we would be happier supporting you as a community to participate with our Local Plan (Planning Officer, LPA2)

Involving communities within the Local Plan in this manner enabled the LPA to have

the control of it, whereas with the neighbourhood plan you are just literally ‘here it is.’ Even though you’ve been part of the process if you haven’t actually written it and you’re not confident of what they’ve put in all of their documents (Planning Officer, LPA2)

This approach was ‘sold’ to the groups as the LPA taking the risk on their behalf:

if we work with you, we’ll give you the tools to do exactly the same thing as you would through a neighbourhood plan but the way we sold it is we’d take the risk. So basically, you know, you do it,

we'll be the ones that get it through our local committee processes and constitution and we're the ones who take it to the examination (Planning Officer, LPA2)

The research illustrates that *deflective* LPAs adopt mechanisms, tools and tactics to steer groups towards projects and initiatives which they are familiar with, that will not undermine the Local Plan and, in some instances, towards agendas that will assist in its delivery. This reflects broader findings that political resistance towards NP in the North West of England is in part as the LPA consider there are other, more appropriate, tiers of democratic space and opportunities for communities to engage in the planning system (Lord et al., 2017; Sturzaker, 2018).

These responses are likely to represent a defensive strategy of “sticking to their knitting” (see Geddes, 2006) as the LPA wish to retain control of the planning policy framework and minimise the risks associated with NP in order to ensure delivery of the Local Plan.

### ***Type 2: the reactive response***

The majority of the LPAs within the scope of the research displayed what is considered to reflect a ‘*reactive*’ approach towards NP. This classification is broad and there is considerable variation on the number of NDPs being progressed (from 2 area designations to over 20) and the resources, guidance and support offered by the LPA.

The data suggests that reactive approaches range from LPAs who only engage after groups have taken the initiative, and therefore ‘force’ the LPA to respond, or who remain ambivalent until issues arise which require their attention and response for example in finalising plans or assisting with legal challenges. Furthermore, LPAs offer more resources where community aspirations support the strategic needs of the LPA and where the Local Plan identifies a more defined and enhanced role for NDPs to assist in shaping and delivering the strategy.

The research illustrates that the response of the LPA in *reactive* areas is influenced more by circumstances and context (e.g. interest from communities and availability of resources) than by a political decision to engage or not engage with the policy agenda.

‘INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE’

6 of the LPAs categorised as reactive are in the early stages of producing an up-to-date Local Plan with NPs emerging within and potentially “by-passing” the Local Plan. The majority, however, are preparing a two-part Local Plan with the overarching strategy and housing targets established and found sound through the examination of Local Plan Part 1, enabling NDPs to assist with the delivery of Part 2. For instance, LPA3 reported at Executive Committee in 2011 that neighbourhood planning would be

encouraged within rural areas with the required housing within these localities “identified in the Local Plan Part II, through the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans and through the determination of applications for planning permission” (Planning Officer, LPA3).

Thus, while the LPA may support NDPs they are not reliant on them to deliver on the strategic objectives. This enables the LPA to adopt a more flexible and relaxed approach which may also be informed by their other statutory duties and commitments (for example getting an up-to-date Local Plan in place) as well as responding to the take-up and experiences of neighbourhood planning. In all cases the LPAs are responding to those NDPs in preparation; they are not including policies or devising an approach to accommodate plans which may emerge in the future.

The response of LPAs within the “reactive” category can therefore be considered “responsive rather than promotional” and further research is needed to ascertain whether these LPAs will become more enthusiastic over time and whether their cautious commitment will strengthen to active support (see Owen, 2002 for a similar discussion of LPA responses to Village Design Statements).

### ***Type 3: the integrative response***

2 of the case study areas (LPA4 and LPA5) and a further 2 LPAs within the broader region display an *integrative* approach towards NP. An *integrative* approach is effectively categorised by the LPA seeking to assimilate NP within the Local Plan; neighbourhood plans take on a defined and central role in the delivery of the Local Plan. Emergent NDPs are strongly encouraged to allocate suitable sites for development and are considered “an important part of the mechanism to deliver growth in the District” (Planning Officer, LPA4).

‘INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE’

*Integrative* LPAs draw upon the narratives of empowerment to justify and rationalise their approach; the LPA argue they are reflecting the principles of localism by putting local people in control and empowering communities to take responsibility for the future development of their area. Groups are encouraged to prepare NDPs and allocate sites for housing as

we can’t meet all our housing need...you’ll need to make a contribution you can do it two ways: the Local Plan can allocate those sites for you or we can give you a figure and you can make those decisions and by-and-large the Parishes and Towns have sort of stepped up to make those decisions themselves (Planning Officer, LPA5)

In *integrative* areas the timing of the introduction of the localism agenda was crucial. NP was introduced as an emerging Local Plan was being prepared thus enabling the LPA to proactively engage

and set the overarching framework, and parameters, for the preparation of NDPs. The decision to support and encourage NP was taken at a political level and appropriate resource (including staff resources, guidance and financial support) and procedures were put in place. The LPAs then actively encouraged the preparation of NDPs resulting in “clusters” of neighbourhood area designations and high levels of take-up as explained by the Planning Officer at LPA5

quite a flurry of neighbourhood planning areas...were designated in 2013 as a result of the approach that we were taking in the emerging Local Plan and part of our service level agreement and things for us to really drive this forward because it...is very crucial to us to get those neighbourhood plans going because part of their role is to identify sites for housing which obviously can have an implication on our 5 year land supply (Planning Officer, LPA5).

The majority of the groups interviewed within LPA4 and LPA5 engaged with NP in order to allocate land for development and were generally supportive of the approach of the LPA and the role afforded within the Local Plan:

This was a way that we could, not control but have some say in the development...and the parish council thought that it was a good idea to be able to at least try to have some sort of handle of what was going on in the village (Community Group 1 #1, LPA5)

[neighbourhood planning] was offering Parishes to identify possible requirements within their village for the next 15-20 years...[it] was a prompt for us that if we didn't perhaps identify places within the village that we would prefer we might have that taken out of our hands by either the District or by developers coming into the Parish trying to build in places where we'd like not to build (Community Group 2, LPA4)

As the above quote indicates, *integrative* LPAs became reliant on NDPs to assist in the delivery of the Local Plan and for delivering the requisite housing need. The LPA therefore need to ensure that the NDPs will deliver and they will have to defend their strategy and approach at the Examination in Public (EiP) of the Local Plan. Groups may be enrolled into the EiP process and called upon to give

their support...and indeed that they were doing their neighbourhood plan, preparing to contribute to the 1500 and indeed [they] were all in line together (Planning Consultant, LPA4)

The Local Plans all include a 'back-up' plan in case the neighbourhood plans do not deliver the intended level of growth.

Within “integrative” LPAs the policy agenda of NP is thus considered to be redirected by the LPA and adapted to favour their own interests of delivering an up-to-date Local Plan, reducing opposition to

housing and delivering growth (Lowndes et al., 2001). By adopting an integrative approach, the LPA establish their own framework and parameters for the preparation of NDPs, or in other words, establish the “rules of the game” (see Lowndes, 2005; Lowndes and Wilson, 2003) within the policies and approach of the Local Plan.

This section has discussed the three overarching practices of localism and LPA responses towards neighbourhood planning. It has highlighted the critical role of the Local Plan in framing neighbourhood planning responses and the mechanisms employed by the LPA to govern the conduct of communities (Newman, 2013).

The research also identifies that the LPAs seek to influence *who* can take up the right to prepare an NDP by assigning technologies of agency.

### **Technologies of agency**

Within all of the case study areas, and irrespective of their overarching response towards NP, the LPAs were more supportive of neighbourhood plans coming forward in areas of growth. NDPs were seen as a mechanism to reduce opposition to development and to assist the LPAs to deliver on their strategic priorities and housing need.

LPA1 initially encouraged areas of highest development pressure to prepare an NDP “because the strategy was such that those areas that could take the most housing because they’re the most sustainable” (Planning Officer, LPA1). Village Design Statements were presented as an option for all other areas and following hesitance within these larger areas to prepare an NDP the LPA prepared Masterplans to guide the future regeneration of these areas “because there wasn’t the appetite to do it themselves” (Planning Officer, LPA1).

Similarly, in LPA2 the ‘alternative localist’ approach and integration of community strategies in the Local Plan was only afforded to

those [communities] that were named with a housing allocation because the other ones we said ‘well you haven’t got a housing allocation so actually there is no real pressure for you to be actively involved,’ and most of them were happy with that (Planning Officer, LPA2)

In these instances, the LPAs were very open about who they would support and ‘allow’ to engage in the various initiatives including NP and broader opportunities for CLP. However, the decision as to whether groups take-up NP may also be influenced by the wider Local Plan strategy and opportunities to influence and add-value. A community group in LPA1, who operate within a deflective approach, concluded



the areas where I think there is work on neighbourhood plans...they again have some fairly significant development sites around the town and they do see a need for local input...but as I say for the majority of the rural district then there is not a lot that a neighbourhood plan could actually add to the Local Plan (Community Group 3, LPA1)

Similarly, a Senior Manager at LPA5 stated that

the Parishes and Towns which are most enthusiastic about or have decided to do neighbourhood plans are the ones where they have to accommodate some growth... it's the ones who've got a real opportunity to shape where development takes place who have tended to be more engaged and also they tend to be the bigger ones so they've got more resources to support neighbourhood planning (Senior Manager 1, LP5)

This suggests that the strategy and approach adopted within the Local Plan can influence neighbourhood planning directly (in terms of establishing the specific requirements for the process, for example, the need to allocate land for housing) and also indirectly (in terms of overarching development strategy and approach towards growth). By assigning specific communities a role in the delivery of the Local Plan strategy the LPA can thus seek to align the agency of neighbourhood planners with the Local Plan and this can therefore be considered as an example of a technology of agency; named communities become "targeted populations" assigned responsibility by the LPA for managing the future development of their area. This further acts as a mechanism for the LPA to "govern at a distance" to influence the conduct of particular areas with the LPA also directing different strategies to different population groups within the area (see Newman, 2013).

## **Discussion**

This paper has extended knowledge about the responses of LPAs towards neighbourhood planning with 3 broad types of response emerging; the deflective, the reactive and the integrative. It has developed the work of Newman (2013) and Davoudi and Madanipour (2013) by exploring empirically the technologies of government employed by the LPA to govern the conduct of communities and highlights that central to this is the positioning and role afforded to NP within the Local Plan.

It illustrates that the LPA are indeed influencing the process of spatial rescaling and the redistribution of power between the centre, local and sub-local.

The LPA have both power and responsibility within the agenda and this has enabled them to set their own parameters for the preparation of NDPs and to direct the energies of groups towards delivering on not only national but also local and strategic priorities (Bevir and Gains, 2011; Dean, 2010; Stoker, 2003). Thus, as the policy passes 'through' the LPA it is trajectoryed and steered (Newman, 2013) and

the LPA can serve to slow down, frustrate, encourage and direct the agenda. The research affirms the argument of Sturzaker and Gordon (2017, 1328) that while the Localism Act 2010 does give the “power to” plan to communities it is not only the central state but also local authorities who retain a great deal of “power over” those communities to frame and limit their planning activities.

This is important as it highlights that within the process of spatial re-scaling the policy from above is interpreted and responded to as it passes ‘through’ the tiers with, in this instance, the LPA (representing the meso-tier) exercising its own power within and over the process. Power is thus redistributed and also retained at the different scales of government and this study has emphasised how decisions made at the “higher tiers” of policy like the Local Plan directly influence the action and agency of those preparing an NDP. Furthermore, while research to date has primarily focused on the parameters of NP being established by “absent others” (taken to be central government, as discussed by Parker et al., 2015) this research has identified that many of the parameters are set by the LPA.

The research has illustrated that the Local Plan serves as a mechanism to frame the behaviours of neighbourhood planners, to assign role and responsibilities to NP and influence the content of emerging NDPs by establishing statutory parameters for their preparation. The LPAs have deployed technologies of government as they seek to direct the energy of groups and their “power to” Plan towards meeting the wider strategic objectives and towards their own ends (Newman, 2013). This has resulted in variegated forms of localism to emerge (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) with different strategies directed to different population groups and differences in the response of LPAs in different places (Newman, 2013).

This paper suggests that the contextual circumstances and policy environment influence the form of “localism” that emerges and, as discussed by Newman (2013) the LPAs have rearticulated and re-signified key concepts within the localism agenda. The conceptual uncertainty surrounding NP and the lack of prescription in how LPAs are to respond has enabled the LPAs to establish their own ‘truth’ from which they then govern the conduct of groups (Brown, 2015). The LPAs conceptualisation and explanation of the policy then provides a mandate and justification for their resultant policies and approach towards NP (Jacobs, 2015; Miller and Rose, 1990) and enables the LPA to exercise its power by shaping the values, and interests, of communities. From this political rationality the LPAs then introduce their own strategies for governing and introduce mechanisms to steer the policy towards their own ends.

The LPAs draw upon, re-signify and elevate those particular concepts and agendas within the broad “localism” agenda (Newman, 2013) which will best assist the LPA to protect (or further) their own interests (Lowndes, 2005) and ensure the delivery of the Local Plan. For example, LPAs that seek to

direct groups away from NP (deflective LPAs) cite resource constraints, lack of influence of NP and the “risks” associated with NP, whereas those within the integrative category draw on the narrative of empowerment and responsibility to encourage groups to take-up NP and deliver on the Local Plan strategy.

As outlined in the introduction, the focus of this study was how LPAs implement their response towards neighbourhood planning rather than on the outputs of the process. Further research is needed in order to understand how the groups respond to the actions and responses of the LPA and whether they in turn seek to resist, rework and rearticulate the key tenets of the localism agenda as presented by the LPA (Williams et al., 2014). This would enable analysis of whether alternative purposes of planning are emerging (Brownill, 2017a) including those which may challenge the growth agenda.

The focus of the research was on the SE of England with the LPAs predominately Parished, rural and less deprived which reflects areas of highest take-up of NP (Parker and Salter, 2017). Further research is therefore needed to determine whether these results are generalisable to other parts of England or whether other “types” of response exist. This is considered unlikely due to the broad categorisation of the types of response, however, it is acknowledged that the LPAs do not necessarily fit neatly within one category and they may not remain within the identified category as their response may change over time. For example, the wider academic research has identified that the response of the LPA may shift due to changes in staffing and the supportiveness (or not) of individual officers (Sturzaker and Shaw, 2015), the availability of resources, for example prioritisation of the Local Plan (Parker et al., 2015) or in response to the behaviours and actions of those preparing a neighbourhood plan (Salter, 2018).

The study has deepened our understanding of the tiered approach to governance and highlighted its complexity. It focuses our attention to how the policy is trajectoryed and steered at the different tiers of the planning hierarchy and the relationship, and interrelationship, between the policies and objectives which serve to operate within the same space.

It has illustrated that in order to understand how the LPA is responding to neighbourhood planning their actions, and response, at the different spatial scales needs to be explored further; this includes a detailed analysis of the approach towards NP within the Local Plan as well as analysis of their actions and response at the neighbourhood level.

This has a practical implication. The study emphasises the importance of groups to directly engage in the development of the Local Plan and pursue and contest the aims and objectives of the local

community at both the local and neighbourhood scale; failing to do so may result in their opportunities for influence being diluted, their room for manoeuvre circumscribed as the Local Plan has 'closed down' their scope and potential (see Stirling, 2008).

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