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Neighbourhood planning in England: A decade of institutional learning

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a mix of policy learning and new institutionalist theory, the paper sets out the empirical evidence regarding the unfolding of neighbourhood planning (NP) in England during more than ten years of participatory practice. What has been learned about how this policy has been shaped reflexively by institutional actors is reviewed, drawing on two significant national research studies. The contribution of the paper is to provide a detailed consideration of neighbourhood planning as practiced over a decade and the policy iterations that have featured in that time, including what this tells us conceptually. We conclude this process has produced a range of neighbourhood planning forms that are reflected through the interplay of institutionalised agency, local conditions, policy iterations and varied community-local scale dynamics.

1. Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1. Neighbourhood planning in England

A crisis of legitimacy for traditional planning processes has been widely recognised and well documented. In the UK, this has formed part of an open debate about the legitimacy of public sector planning since the late 1960s (Fearn and Davoudi, 2022). The first fully rehearsed discussions followed the publication of the Skeffington Report in 1969 which trailed public participation in planning for the first time (Damer and Hague, 1971; Garner et al., 1979). Once formal rights to participate in the planning system had been established however, debates over how best to enable participation and to create a more inclusive process have continued (Glass, 1979; Innes & Booher, 2000; Inch et al., 2019; Brownill & Inch, 2019). Such debates feature as part of critical questions over the legitimacy of planning systems worldwide (Taylor, 2019; Healey, 1998).

By the turn of the 21st Century, the UK had experimented with a variety of governance tools to encourage citizen engagement in planning, such as Statements of Community Involvement (ODPM, 2004; Parker et al., 2021), Community Strategies (Raco et al., 2006; Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2006; Bailey, 2010; Lambert, 2006) and Parish Planning (Gallent et al., 2008; Parker, 2008; Parker and Murray, 2012), as well as localised action programmes developed from above, such as

the Single Regeneration Budget, City Challenge and the New Deal for Communities (Dargan, 2009; Lawless & Pearson, 2012; Hildreth, 2016). Local Authorities had, in some instances, attempted to innovate and go beyond more passive forms of participatory 'rights' by adopting deliberative processes, some inspired by pioneering work shaped through the Local Agenda 21 initiative in the 1990s (Coenen, 2009; Baker et al., 2010), and often directed towards broader goals than land use planning. Others had attempted to use deliberative tools such as citizen panels, citizen assemblies, and focus groups to go beyond formal planning (Lowndes et al., 2001; Laurian, 2009; Flinders & Dommett, 2013), and experimentation has been a feature of progressive planning internationally for the past two decades (Fung and Wright, 2003; Hossu et al., 2022). By the mid-2000 s various experiments with forms of community action had prompted discussion about further devolution (or 'double devolution'), involving ceding some powers to the very local level and, critically, involving a shift from *participation* and concerns over inclusivity, to forms of community *control* in planning. Such processes of experimentation and implementation of participation options have featured across different planning jurisdictions, although few if any have placed control of a formal plan in the hands of citizen-volunteers. We anticipate that by framing the experience of Neighbourhood Planning (NP) in England and in the theoretical terms deployed here, there may be useful lesson-drawing for other countries. This may be both in terms of how such policy evolves but also how similar policy design for other

countries could anticipate and embrace policy learning and modification (Dabrowski, Musiałkowska & Polverari, 2018; Rose, 2004).

In parallel to more supportive voices, a body of critical literature developed questioning the relationship between community control and forms of responsibilisation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Raco, 2009; Pill, 2021). A vast amount of literature has now been produced considering participatory initiatives in the UK alone. It is in this context that we focus on Neighbourhood Planning, as formally introduced in England under the 2011 Localism Act and as part of a wider range of localist initiatives which have attempted to experiment with forms of citizen influence over local planning policy since the early 2000 s. Our geographical focus here is therefore confined to England. This can be justified by the extent of policy experimentation over a decade in the context of a polity that continues to be a "symbolic marker of neoliberalisation" (Newman, 2014: p. 3293) and neighbourhood planning emblematic of that experimentation (Dobson & Parker, 2023). The therefore provides a reflective account of a participatory planning initiative that is confined to one country but is of international significance.

Neighbourhood Planning (NP) in England was a product of the Conservative-led coalition government's response to New Labour's own localism policy agenda (Wargent, 2021; Parker, 2014). It represented the decentralisation strand of the more amorphous Big Society agenda that valorised the role of communities, placing them centre stage in the future development of neighbourhoods (Buser, 2013; Williams et al., 2014; Lister, 2015). The significance of NP lay in its status as the first citizen-led planning tool to confer statutory power on the outcome of community planning processes. This was to be the key plank in the agenda outlined by Eric Pickles as the incoming Secretary of State at the then Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG)[1] in 2010:

If you want people to feel connected to their communities. Proud of their communities. Then you give people a real say over what happens in their communities… it will continue the overhaul of the planning system: to put the community back in charge of how their area develops… We want to make sure people can take control and take responsibility in their street, their estate, their town. Solving problems and taking action for themselves. With neighbourhoods, people working together, as the basis for the Big Society (Eric Pickles, June 2010: no pagination).

At the time of writing, over a decade of NP practice had accumulated, and the policy has assumed a central place in the localism agenda in England. It continues to be one of its most visible and resistant policies, even as planning reforms have subsequently struggled to maintain the wider localism agenda as a priority, and with new waves of policy priorities emerging such as the 'levelling-up' agenda since 2019 (Powell et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2022).

In this paper, we review the literature produced around the policy and reflect on the findings of two nationwide studies produced for the UK government in 2014 (Parker et al., 2014) and 2020 (Parker et al., 2020), alongside multiple other research projects concerning NP (e.g. Wargent, 2021; Yuille, 2020; Salter, 2022; Parker et al., 2020). We assess NP by drawing on policy learning and new institutionalist theories, which consider how and why policy is implemented and iterated over time. A central contribution conceptually is to discuss NP in the light of multiple 'implementation agents' as part of a co-production process that includes citizens, consultants and local authority officers, as well as national level civil servants (Parker et al., 2015). This sharing

of roles and responsibilities serves to complicate feedback loops about success, the need for change, and possible policy solutions. Moreover to bring together considerations of power and the governance of policy when examining policy implementation and learning/modification.

Given the tension-filled history of participation in planning, the complexity of the subject matter, and issues with the policy design, perhaps predictably the extant literature on NP paints a mixed picture of successes and limitations (Wargent & Parker, 2018). Learning lessons from this experiment in community empowerment is important in ascertaining the benefit to local citizens and wider society (Smith, 2009; Root, 2007; Parker et al., 2020) as well as how policymakers and other key actors adapt, learn and communicate with each other about policy design. Understanding the feedback loops and policy iterations are therefore critical given the established trajectory of a policy aimed at enabling greater civic involvement in planning. Central to this is understanding how and why such tools are received, interpreted, and changed over time and in different locales. This is made more critical by ongoing tensions between increased civic action and more instrumental policy goals that shape participatory spaces such as 'speeding-up' the planning process and otherwise making planning more 'efficient' as part of a neoliberal agenda (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014; 2018; Marshall & Cowell, 2016).

Attempts to foster planning that is more participatory must be critically appraised, especially given that "participation is not always desirable in practice … Yet at the same time the idea of participation … must ultimately be desirable" (Brownill & Parker, 2010, p.281). More recent calls regarding participatory planning argue for "hope. to be sustained but framed by a realistic and critical perspective on the possibilities and limitations of participation" (Brownill and Inch, 2018, p.22–23) and further demonstrate the need for a long-run analysis of such policies. As such, critical engagement with actual practices of participation in planning must be sustained in order to guard against co-option, exploitation or tokenism, or indeed worsening exclusion (Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020). This paper engages with this via an analysis of how actors learn and adapt to participatory planning, and indeed employ it to maintain self-interest. This seeks to provide important lessons about the implementation of policy within communities, government and the policy community, and the planning profession, as part of an ostensibly co-produced planning processes (Galuszka, 2019).

The paper is therefore framed by insights from new institutionalist theory to emphasise both the intentions of the policy initiators, its implementation, and change. This contributes consideration of not only *how* ideas about participatory planning influence institutional continuity and change, but how these ideas are *enacted* through interactive discursive practices – that is: who is involved in such practices and how, where, and when policy ideas are amplified, supported, altered or fail (May, 1992; Lauermann & Temenos, 2022).

1.2. Paper rationale

The paper brings together the extant literature on NP and presents empirical data to produce a rounded assessment of the policy through an extended reflection on the past decade. In so doing, we highlight how NP and its enactment as sanctioned implementation is subject to soft and hard boundaries (Wright & Kim, 2022; Zanotto, 2020; Parker et al., 2015). Neighbourhood Planning has been subject to numerous iterations relating to funding, support, and regulatory changes leading up to more fundamental planning reforms contemplated in England during 2020 and 2022 (MHCLG, 2020; TCPA, 2020). We discuss how NP has evolved, with protagonist responses and behaviours seen to be shifting over time.

By February 2020, 1000 communities in England had substantively completed a Neighbourhood Plan and by 2021 around 2800 had embarked on the process. By levels of uptake alone, NP is the most successful and radical innovation in UK neighbourhood governance in a generation (Wargent & Parker, 2018). With many plans now used in decision-making, and some going through their five-year plan reviews,

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[1] DCLG was the government department responsible for introducing and then managing NP in 2010. Since then, the department has been renamed twice, first in January 2018, following Theresa May elevation to Prime Minister, the department was renamed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in order to reflect a new political emphasis on housing. In September 2021, Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, refashioned the department yet again, under the moniker Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which remains at the time of writing.

sufficient time and data has amassed to assess the successes and failures of NP and to critically reflect on the initiative's position within the planning system. In doing so we assess how the ideological and practical boundaries - the 'enactment space' (Zanotto, 2020; Leon & Rosen, 2020) - has been maintained, in the wider landscape of participatory planning in England.

The paper is organised to help further debates about empowerment, institutional learning, and neoliberalism by detailing the unfolding of NP since 2010–11, highlighting both questions of success and failure, as well as the nature of policy learning. However it should be noted that the assessment of the policy is made more ambiguous as it was never explicit what government wanted NP to achieve "beyond rhetoric that acclaims community influence over decisions" (Wargent & Parker, 2018, p. 389). The only explicit guidance available indicates five wider objectives set out by government in 2012 and into which NP was to sit. These were highlighted by the National Audit Office in 2013:

> Decentralise power as far as possible
> Reinvigorate accountability, democracy, participation (including transparency)
> Support and incentivise local sustainable growth
> Meet people's housing aspirations
> Put communities in charge of planning (NAO, 2013, p.2)

The broad nature of these objectives leads us to the interpretation of formal policy adjustments, speeches, reports, presentations by civil servants, social media output, and other policy paraphernalia for intimations of the thinking of policy authors. Significant stock appears to be placed in quantifiable measures, such as the number of plans made and in progress, and perhaps more importantly given UK government priorities, the stipulation that neighbourhood plans be growth oriented, and the number of houses planned for be at or above the levels set out in overarching local plans (Wargent, 2021). Taken together these indicate some substantive policy aims (DCLG, 2015; 2016; Bradley & Sparling, 2017; Field & Layard, 2017; Parker et al., 2020), with other achievements brokered from within this bounded form of community control appearing to be less valued by government, notably: preventing speculative development, protecting green spaces, improving quality design and sustainability, and contribution to place identity. The evidence suggests that these latter achievements, in contrast, are those most valued by many of the communities undertaking NP.

Finally, assessment of participatory policy framed solely from the perspective of *actual* participants can easily neglect how the participatory space presents a range of practical challenges for a diversity of *possible* participants. This recognition highlights the exclusionary potential of participation and how change in policy implementation can accommodate or confront such exclusions (cf. Chaskin et al., 2012; Agger, 2012; Apostolides, 2018).

1.3. Contribution

The paper seeks to make four contributions. First, we critically review the extant literature and draw together the lessons of a decade of neighbourhood planning in England (Chapters 2 and 3). In so doing, we seek to explain the intentions of the policy initiators and, drawing on the new institutionalist literature (Chapter 2), explain how NP has been received and implemented on the ground and how it has been re-crafted over its lifespan. The second contribution is to set out the cumulative findings of two national research projects, representing the largest studies of NP conducted to date. The empirical data are rooted in citizen and policy-maker experiences of the process, but we also consider the outcomes of NP via decision-making processes and their effect on the built environment.

Thirdly, we reflect on attempts by government to iterate neighbourhood planning following the policy learning framework first outlined by Heclo (1974, p.305–306), who argued that:

> … politics finds its sources not only in power but also in uncertainty … Policy-making is a form of collective puzzlement on society's behalf; it entails both deciding and knowing… Much political interaction has constituted a process of social learning expressed through policy.

As we discuss, this learning is a fragmented and messy process and, in the case of NP, its development and iteration can be hampered by a lack of clarity over its purpose, inherent complexities of particular policy fields, and by forms of policy myopia (Lee et al., 2022; Nair & Howlett, 2017). This is complicated still further by NP's shared implementation model where communities, consultants and local authorities co-implement the policy. While we are not testing NP against normative criteria here (such as those set out by Wargent & Parker, 2018), we wish to highlight what, why, how, and by whom policy learning has taken place, alongside how such change can be understood and judged in normative terms. This follows from an assumption of active policy learning where there is a "deliberate attempt to adjust the goals or techniques of policy in the light of the consequences of past policy and new information so as to better attain the ultimate objects of governance" (Hall, 1988, p.6 cited in Bennett and Howlett, 1992, p. 276).

Lastly, in light of the above we discuss the learning that has been garnered over the duration of the NP policy and the calculus at work that has shaped the response (Davoudi, 2018). Analysing the creation, reception and iteration of NP, the 10-year lifespan fits well with the methodological parameters of institutional analysis (Sabatier, 1988). Given the deliberate theoretical orientation applied, the paper is less concerned with power dynamics – important though they are (see Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013; Wargent, 2021) – and instead rests on how and why the policy has been framed, enacted (or 'sanctioned'), practised, and iterated over time.

1.4. Data and methods

We examine iterations to the policy made by the responsible government department, since the inception of the policy. This is achieved through a literature review and a desk-based assessment of changing guidance, legislative adjustments and other discursive material, that complement the empirical findings that follow. The latter is drawn from two nationwide studies of NP commissioned by DCLG in 2014 (see Parker et al., 2014) and MHCLG in 2019–20 (see Parker et al., 2020). The 2014 research surveyed NP communities and involved a series of focus groups (see Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2015; 2017), while the 2020 study comprised a set of four work packages comprising a quantitative analysis of NP and its impact on housing supply,[2] a survey of 120 NP groups and 43 Local Planning Authorities, desk-based research and semi-structured interviews with key local authority and community NP actors in nine case study areas, focus groups with planning consultants and housing developers, and targeted semi-structured interviews with stalled groups.

Other relevant sources of empirical data on NP performance are drawn on where it exists. Mention should be made here that in addition to undertaking research for DCLG/MHCLG, various of the authors worked for, or were seconded to, DCLG/MHCLG for short periods during the timeframe under discussion. This entangles the authors to a degree within the story of NP that follows, in that they had minor roles in the policy's implementation. It simultaneously affords a degree of insider status that adds first-hand experience and authenticity to the account, however this should not be mistaken for direct ethnographic data collection.

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[2] The question of land supply, and how to increase or guarantee it, has been considered a key issue in English housing debates and problematisation of supply has prompted several reports e.g. Letwin (2018); Lichfields (2021).

1.5. Paper structure

The remainder of the paper is organised in three substantive sections followed by a conclusion. The subsequent chapter sets outs the theoretical basis of the paper, drawing on new institutionalism and establishing the context of a neoliberal planning environment in which NP has operated (Chapter 2). The history of NP's implementation is then set out via a policy and practice review (Chapter 3), before a discussion of what changed in NP over the period in question, why it was changed, and what we can learn from this (Chapter 4). The concluding chapter draws together the findings of the preceding three chapters to reflect on a decade of neoliberal experimentation in community-led planning (Chapter 5).

2. Chapter 2 – Policy learning, planning, and the new institutionalism

This chapter sets out the theoretical basis of the paper, drawing on new institutionalism and establishing the context of a neoliberal planning environment in which neighbourood planning has operated. We provide a brief consideration of participation and localism in planning seen in the past decade and then turn towards the application of institutional analysis to the timeline of NP. This allows us to examine the context, structures and behaviours that continue to shape NP to better understand the interactions that have constrained and enabled the implementation of the policy since 2011.

2.1. Participatory planning and neighbourhood planning

The literature on participation in planning is wide, much of it assuming invited participation, while further subsets of the literature discuss the significance of agonistic engagement, activist or insurgent planning forms (Miraftab, 2009; Monno & Khakee, 2012; Sager, 2016), or tended towards examining forms of social innovation in planning (Moulaert et al., 2016; Thompson, 2019). Claims made for the benefits of participation have accompanied parallel critiques that have emerged as policies have been implemented. These are contrasted here as part of a discussion of the relevant aspects of participatory theory, with particular reference to empowerment and scale (see Natarajan, 2019), in as far as is necessary to provide a link to our focus. We therefore do not seek to provide a far-reaching review here, but wish to highlight the antecedents to neighbourhood planning as a participatory innovation in planning by providing a necessarily, and necessary, focussed review.

Many researchers have explored the messiness of actually existing forms of participation as they are enacted on the ground and these have drawn out the implications and possibilities presented by shifting configurations of state-society relations, approaches to governance, planning ideologies, and personal testimonies that lie behind the diversity of participatory experiences (Brownill & Carpenter, 2007; Innes & Booher, 2000). Participation may be open-ended and ongoing at one extreme, or far more bounded in terms of scope, temporality, and power at the other. Different forms offer degrees of empowerment and examples are profuse.

The literature on neighbourhood planning specifically, while relatively young, has already been extensive (Wargent & Parker, 2018). This has been prompted by both the promise of the initiative, its statutory credentials, and its limitaitons as exposed by theorisation and later take-up. If the potential for such an initiative was widely recognised, widespread criticism of the initiative has also flourished. An overview of the themes that have been aired and many of the issues that have emerged were predicted in earlier papers which drew attention to the neoliberal characteristics of the policy itself and the wider planning framework into which the policy was introduced (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013; Wargent, 2021). The literature has highlighted numerous projected and actual limitations of NP: the issues identified have been based on, inter alia: volunteer burdens (Parker et al., 2020) and lack of

inclusivity, its bounded nature (Parker et al., 2015), and its effectiveness in guiding decisions and adding-value to the existing planning hierarchy (Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020). It should also be noted that the 'neighbourhood' has become a new scale for formal planning – setting-up new governance conditions and experimentation in empowerment and intervention through NP (Davoudi & Cowie, 2013).

Indeed, the localist programme, of which neighbourhood planning was central, can be viewed as an ideological response its immediate predecessor: New Labour's new localism (Corry & Stoker, 2002). The Conservative Party administration under David Cameron sought to build on New Labour's legacy of promoting civil society and community wellbeing, whilst doubling down on an established understanding of spatially 'fixed' communities (Raco, 2003). The philosophical groundwork for what became the Localism Act (2011) was established during debate over the future of the political terrain to be claimed by the centrist factions of the UK's two main political parties, encapsulated in the 'Blue Labour' and 'Red Tory' dialogue (Blond, 2010; Glasman, 2010; Glasman & Norman, 2011). These debates drew heavilty on traditional Conservative ideology harking back to Burke's little platoons and other liberal thinkers (Barker, 2011). By the time the result of the 2010 election was resolved by means of a Consevative-Liberal Democrat Coalition, the policy programme that emerged was an eclectic mix of One Nation Conservatism, free market ideology and libertarian paternalism – and to some extent the Liberal Democrat tradition of 'liberalism- cum-community' (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012: p.33). The desire for local autonomy and to a greater degree the prioritisation of economic growth (Conservative Party, 2009b) continued the trajectory of New Labour's later policy programmes under Gordon Brown's premiership (Lupton, 2013). The shift in emphasis from empowered communities in early policy debates to unlocking growth via the planning system coincided with the HM Treasury's input into the post-2010 localism agenda, with coincident emphasis on deregulation and housing delivery (Tait & Inch, 2016: p.183).

It is notable that one consequent emphasis from government has been for neighbourhood planning to be a tool to aid the supply of new housing (Bradley & Sparling, 2017; Field & Layard, 2017; Salter et a;l, 2022), used to nudge communities to accept more development (Ishkanian & Szreter, 2012; Bradley, 2017). As we explain below, this ideational environment acts to shape the design and the institutional arrangements of neighbouroood planning. However, there are mixed findings from the research literature, with two different accounts sustained: in the first assessment the rhetoric of community control is maintained by government while 'compelling' communities to align themselves with governmental motivations (i.e. more housing). Yet as Wargent (2021) points out, this often does not work, and the second set of accounts focus on how policy enactment is being shaped from below, albeit in a constrained way, regardless of governmental intention, where communities attempt to use the limited agency offered by neighbourhood to 'work the spaces of power' and to achieve outcomes that are not aligned with hegemonic intentions (Yuille, 2020).

Bradley and Sparling (2017) highlight the generation of different models of housing in this way, and Field and Layard (2017) highlight a focus on affordable housing, older people and local needs. Others have identified other goals such as green innovation through neighbourhod planning action (Burnett, 2019). Thus, the literature describes gains and constraints in NP on the ground, but despite this mixed picture the discursive scope and rhetoric used to promote the policy in 2011 clearly set-up particular expectations which were not likely given the wider structures of planning in place and the fuzziness of scope and possibility promoted by the UK government. In this light Parker, and Lynn, and Wargent (2017, p.460) argued that:

The terms of engagement enveloping the neighbourhood planning process hedges-in participants through a series of procedural rules, stage-points and limits which frame the process…localist empowerment is definitively subordinate to the Government's growth agenda. We label this skein of procedural and policy conditions here as the institutional

framing of neighbourhood planning.

The findings from the literature on NP indicate that local actors attempt to shape policy that adds value or challenges higher level myopia but it is burdensome to do so and the possibilities are limited (Parker et al.,; 2020), and many produce plans of limited additional value in the wider planning system. This propels linked questions of: i. whether it is worthwhile, and if so; ii. how might NP be designed so that its potential is better enabled?

2.2. Policy learning, new institutionalism and ideational power in neighbourhood planning

Attention paid to new institutionalist thinking has highlighted how its application to planning can provide a significant insight into short and long-term spatial and temporal processes of planning activity. This approach promises a valuable conceptual framework for planning studies (Sorensen, 2015, p.18). Moreover, the approach recognises that institutional analysis is mindful of underlying processes of social interaction, including how change is mediated and rules normalised (Salet, 2018). Heclo (1974) highlighted how political interaction has constituted a process of social learning expressed through policy – a process which indicates a relationship between policy adjustment and feedback (Moyson et al., 2017). Heclo also emphasised the importance of learning, and how people cope with uncertainties in shaping government decisions. Deutsch (1963) also emphasised learning in the study of politics and policy, arguing that governments maintain 'learning capacity' through constant processes of 'feedback' and 'steering'. Such learning is however shaped by certain filters or rationalities, such that the management of ideas involves the exertion of power (Walker, 1974). This perspective led Moyson et al. (2017, p.162) to conclude that "power relates to controlling processes that leads actors to select a different view of how things happen ("learning that") and what courses of action should be taken ("learning how")". This brings into view interactions and learning amongst actors who are constitutive of, and act to reconstitute, policy through practice in an ongoing process.

One of the complications in studying policy learning and a key contribution here, is that it occurs as part of a policy process. Policy processes consist of politically engaged individuals, labelled policy actors, interacting to influence government decisions in relation to a topical issue over time. Policy actors come from various organisational affiliations: they include politicians and public officials, managers of public and private companies, members of pressure groups, academics and researchers, and active citizens or organised groups. Finally, policy processes do not occur in a contextual vacuum but within the institutional systems of a country (Moyson et al., 2017, p.162).

Moreover, whatever is learnt and received may be selectively applied to policy iterations - the filters are both deliberate and otherwise as emphasised by Walker (1974). The idea of policy myopia helps to highlight actors' difficulty in seeing far enough into the future to discern, anticipate and plan in the present and to do so widely, given the scope of planning concerns (Dalton, 2007; Innes & Booher, 2010). Policy myopia also labels the inability to clearly see the horizon of the future policy environment through which the impacts of a given policy will or could develop (Nair & Howlett, 2017). This is important as policy that organises and shapes *how* we plan also shapes that *for which* we plan. This helps to highlight the tensions that develop where different policy actors hold different levels of knowledge or seek to maintain differing priorities – which in turn may be filtered by substantive priority and ideological preference.

Our review of NP takes this conceptualisation of policy learning and limited or conflicting understandings of how to design, implement and iterate policy as a cue, while considering the policy itself as a product of a particular set of neoliberal ideas from which policy actors work (Parker et al., 2022), and which in turn influence their interactions. As a result the conceptual contribution lies also in the combination of attention to the ideological frame and the observable policy learning and

change that has taken place. To do this both agency and structure are recognised as constitutive of policy implementation and learning. As such, the Agency, Structure, Institution, Discourse (ASID) model brings together, through a refined theoretical view, the structuring factors that shape agency and vice versa. In detailing the model Moulaert et al. (2016, p.173) argue that:

Institutions matter here because the structurally inscribed strategic selectivities of institutions shape actors' capacities to make a difference within a given conjuncture and, indeed, to transform sooner or later constraints and opportunities and their materialization in institutions. Significant issues here include the articulation of individual and collective agency; the socialization / institutionalization of agents; institutional resources and constraints; networking and institution building; mental maps, motivations and psychological processes – some of which are ideal reflections of structural relations.

Together these factors act to structure and orient learning and resultant decisions. The ASID framework assists in providing a theoretical frame though which to view the inter-relationships involved in NP and which we deploy to assess this policy over time and in the light of a neoliberalised enactment space. We maintain a critical view of the ideas in circulation and the neoliberal credentials which influence the overarching aim of government. These are what we term the ideational parameters, or what is presently 'in sight'. The policy design of NP in the time period in question is influenced by the various structuring influences that shape the 'enactment space' (i.e. the frame/design) and feedback loops (the learning/implementation) which are operating and interacting.

The particular configuration of ideational parameters acts to sustain policies and prioritise policy agendas, the requirements of which can both directly and indirectly influence the implementation of NP. The most apparent case in point is that of housing policy, where pressure is applied to ensure that neighbourhood plans align with a wider policy emphasis – ostensibly to achieve higher levels of housing completion (cf. Bradley & Sparling, 2017; Field & Layard, 2017; Salter, Parker, et al., 2022). Alignment with this parameter evidently and at least partially conflicts with the aim of devolving decision-making about future development to communities themselves (Parker et al., 2015).

Such analysis has a defining feature in taking 'ideas' seriously with cognitive and normative thinking used to legitimise specified issues, actions or reform features filtered through ideational power. Ideational power can be defined as "the capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements" (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016, p.320). Typically three types of ideational power are identifiable, the first and most common is that of *power through ideas*, based on the capacity of actors to persuade other actors to accept and adopt their views. The second expression of ideational power is *power over ideas*, understood as the capacity for the imposition of ideas and the power to resist the inclusion of alternative ideas into the policy-making arena. The third is where *power lies in ideas* – this is performed through institutions establishing hegemony and therefore constraining which ideas can be considered legitimate within that paradigm. These are both intentional (i.e. closed down by ideological tests) as well as reflecting a lack of knowledge (limited by input scope or depth), sometimes referred to as bounded rationality (e.g. Simon, 1991). We argue that the resultant scope and inertia is a product of deliberate as well as circumstantial (de) limitations; it is a product of political and ideological calculation.

2.3. Neoliberal ideology and the ideational parameters of neighbourhood planning

In considering NP in the period in question, neoliberal thinking and policy should be placed in context. While the literature concerning neoliberalism—including inter alia post-political planning, spatial rescaling, and devolution of power—is wide, and neoliberalism has become a long-run leitmotif, evident in waves of reform to planning and

wider public services (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014; 2018), it is also subject to criticism for its utility as a label (Buitelaar, 2020; Zanotto, 2020).

In planning, an orientation of neoliberal policy is apparent in serial reforms such as deregulation, marketisation, privatisation, responsibilisation and de-professionalising of public sector planning. These tropes have been sustained by successive governments in the UK over the last 40 years, with a changing mix of emphasis and modalities (Sager, 2011; Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2018; Parker et al., 2022). A divide between a naïve assessment of the reach and dominance of laissez-faire liberalism set against a state-positive neoliberalism; sometimes loosely categorised as roll-back and roll-out neoliberalism respectively has featured in the literature (Wargent et al., 2021), and some accounts may be characterised as 'fatalistic' in their assessment of its impacts and hegemonic potential (Castree, 2006). Peck (2013) explains that:

…their construction is a continuing and contradictory process, not a fixed condition. Those skeptical of the utility of the concept of neoliberalism sometimes complain that its deployment, even the dropping of the name, somehow throws gasoline on the flames while effectively denigrating alternatives, both actual and potential. Some of this skepticism, clearly, stems from a deeper concern with all forms of explanation that invoke structural rationalities, big processes, and hegemonic forces, but quite often these are stereotyped as mechanistic forms of template theorizing rather than for what they actually are (Peck, 2013, p.153).

Instead, Peck argues that neoliberalisation may be better understood as "a rolling and somewhat revolutionary program of macro-social and macro-institutional transformation, neoliberalization acts on and through these institutional landscapes; this is not a static neoliberalism" (Peck, 2013, p.146). Despite the type of defence provided by Peck, there continues to be calls to destabilize the 'neoliberal moment', to rethink the fundamental dichotomies that underpin neoliberal thought, not least the public/private (Inch et al., 2022) and state/market dichotomies. It has been argued that later iterations of neoliberal policy and its ideational parameters present 'zombie-like' features, that is, they lumber on without direction or evidential basis, rather, the evidence instead mounts regarding the 'failure' of neoliberal planning tools (Peck, 2010; Aalbers, 2013) and that this leaves proponents with little to base future iterations upon. This is where the Peck argument finds purchase – a mixed approach becomes apparent and such variegations become accepted, even normalised. Thus, the emphasis has moved on to consider a more mixed bag of conditions and responses and 'mongrel' characteristics of *actually existing* neo-liberalism(s) (Peck, 2013; Roy, 2011) and 'local neoliberalisms' (Peck & Theodore, 2019) as part of that multiplicity. Against that context of ideological bricolage, it is perhaps scarcely surprising that efforts to plan well have been stymied and produced limitations that add to the apparent 'myopia' of policymakers.

This theoretical perspective throws into question how a policy such as NP, which requires multi-actor cooperation across scales, actually operates. Furthermore, how, and on what basis, has such a policy been adjusted as part of policy learning in conditions of 'variegated' neoliberalism? There has been little on how neoliberal tools are modified and adjusted in practice; both by those whose agency is sought and by policy-makers seeking to devise approaches that adhere to neoliberal parameters and are pliable in the world as it exists. Indeed, this viewpoint prompted Peck (2013) to explain that:

…citing the process of neoliberalization must not be a substitute for explanation; it should be an occasion for explanation, involving the specification of particular causal mechanisms, modes of intervention, hybrid formations, social forms and foibles, counter-mobilizations, and so forth. It might be said that the concept does define a problem space and a zone of (possible) pertinence, and as such represents the beginning of a process of analysis. But it is here that the task of excavating contextual forms and connective flows really begins (Peck, 2013, p.153).

The debate over neoliberalism in planning has not explored particular policies in sufficient detail given the above and the possible corrosive effect it can have on planning 'well' (Davoudi, 2017). Against the backdrop of debates over the aims, characteristics, means and successes of neoliberalism, a significant amount of writing has emerged on participation in planning in a neoliberal context. Commentary on the past twelve years of participation in planning has critiqued the post-2010 localism project on the basis of bearing neoliberal credentials, with a formulation that appears to ignore past learning about participation (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013; 2015) and the heterogeneity of people and place. Neighbourhood planning has thus attracted a great deal of critical attention partly because of perceived potential as well as significant weaknesses. Yet it has stimulated a hope in some critics that it ought to be fostered rather than extinguished.

There has not been a full empirically rooted consideration of neighbourhood planning despite sustained attention, and fully detailed assessment about how and why NP has performed as it has over the past decade has not been available (see also, Wargent & Parker, 2018 for an appraisal of the literature). In the section below we discuss in this context how neighbourhood planning has acted as both a locus for debate about how community empowerment is made possible and how policy learning is being played out within the context of actually-existing neoliberalism.

2.4. Implementation and institutional change

Here we draw attention to the links between older studies that have focussed on 'implementation' and the utility of new forms of institutionalist assessment. In order to understand the roll-out of NP over time there is a need to assess implementation of the policy not only in terms of outcomes but also to understand how and why decisions and actions occur as the policy is implemented. This approach has been chosen rather than developing a focus on governmentality in planning per se (Moulaert et al., 2016; Gualini, 2010; Verma, 2007), yet clearly an understanding of governmentality is germane because of the relations of power circulating and shaping policy form and modification. The policy of NP has been modified and amended over time in a re-crafting which reflects the policy-action relationship as a negotiated process, as argued by Barrett and Fudge (1981). This enables identification of the factors influencing action and behaviour including the role (if any) played by policy in shaping behaviour and outcomes (Barrett, 2004). As explained below, a (discursive) institutionalist perspective maintains space for the precarity and heterogeneity of the policy and the application of ideational parameters.

This approach finds points of connection or shared roots in the Institutional Analysis and Development framework pioneered by Elinor Ostrom (2011) (and see McGinnis & Ostrom, 2014). This concerns the acceptance of systems and networks of actors and relations which are influential on institutional change. This methodological and conceptual frame maintains a dynamic view of the policy process (Yuille, 2020). Such critical policy analysis shows the limited space that dominant ideological frames can give actors when faced with negative feedback on the one side, but when a political ambition to realise other policy objectives is pressed on the other, and we have labelled this the 'enactment space' (see also Metzger et al., 2017).

Early exploration of institutions and relations focussing on policy implementation notably included Barrett and Hill (1984) with broader linkages to the implementation literature (e.g. Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; McConnell, 2019; Goggin et al., 1990; Sabatier, 1988; Bennett and Howlett, 1992; May, 1992; Talen, 1996). These sought to explain how and why policy implementation fails, or only partly succeeds. Policy implementation involves a process of interaction and negotiation between those who are seeking to put policy into action and those upon whom action depends. Thus, policy implementation should be conceptualised as a 'negotiated order' (Barrett, 2004) and a series of responses are possible as different actors adopt different mechanisms to gain power or avoid influence and control (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). Friedmann (1984) argues that policy knowledge is socially embedded

and results from power relations between human groups while Parson and Clark (1995) note how social learning approaches integrate learning and power.

Barrett and Fudge (1981) argue that the policy-implementation relationship might be better described as a process of action and reaction as the policy-making process continues with and alongside implementation. Furthermore, rather than policy producing control it affords 'semi-autonomies' where discretion and negotiation exist (Barrett & Hill, 1984, p.228). This may be due to external circumstances but also in response to experience in implementing the specific policy; it is unlikely that all issues will be resolved at the policy development stage. Thus, issues will continue to be addressed, or indeed neglected, during implementation and this "may involve continuing flexibility, it may involve the concretisation of policy in action, or it may involve a process of movement back and forth between policy and action" (Ham and Hill, 1984, p.108). This process acts to render the policy workable in the face of operational and other constraints (Barrett, 1981). However, this implies a single policy author and places less emphasis on the plurality of the implementation spaces and multiple actors involved in shaping implementation. More nuanced studies attempt to detect the concealment and reproduction of contingent identities, relationships and social patterns. Specific examples of social learning approaches include a focus on 'epistemic communities' (Haas, 1992), and 'advocacy coalition frameworks' (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). More recently attention has expanded on social innovation, which focusses on alternatives to dominant approaches and social transformation from within communities (Moulaert & MacCallum, 2019; Sorensen & Waldorff, 2014).

Within the assemblage of neighbourhood planning, there are a multiplicity of agencies with a role and degree of responsibility for its implementation. Policy directives and legislation emanate from central government, but the agency of communities and volunteers (as well as other actors such as local authority policy and development management officers, consultants and NP examiners) are critical as 'mobilisation' agents. The literature discusses several typical 'control' mechanisms that may be adopted by central government that include various 'sticks and carrots', nudges, and direct and more indirect interventions to control and regulate the new local institutions they have set up. We note Geddes (2006) and his assessment of the effectiveness of Local Strategic Partnerships and the New Deal for Communities programme in England. That work concluded that when success or failure of policy is particularly politically sensitive, then government will tend to curtail decentralised autonomy and emphasise centralised control. The relationships between national and local institutions and actors require attention here and Barrett and Hill (1984) argued this in their seminal work on centre-local relations; that the interplay between actors and scales is critical to understanding policy and its implementation:

…there is a tension between the normative assumptions of government, what ought to be done and how it should happen, and the struggle and conflict between interests – the need to bargain and compromise – that represent the reality of the process by which power/influence is gained and held in order to pursue ideological goals (Barrett & Hill, 1984, p.145).

We are mindful therefore that the political process and involvement is unlikely to stop once the policy is formulated but continues to influence the behaviour of those implementing policies, those affected by the policies and the means and that the locus of change to policy governance may shift. This ongoing process and interplay involves feedback loops and, as such, when analysing policy implementation, there is a need to look closely at the 'politics of policy' and to identify the inter-and intra-organisational policy relations at play (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1981). These findings lead toward the application of new institutionalism in terms of the rules and order that are created to 'bound' the space for negotiation and provide the settings within which groups of actors are operating (see Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2017; Tait & Inch, 2016; Ghose, 2005).

Thus, we now turn attention to new institutionalist theory to assist in interpreting how NP has evolved and been practiced in England in the period 2011–2020. In this light we set out the varying forms of institutional analysis and highlight our focus on interactions with existing institutions, hierarchical relations and attempts to impose, and respond to, predefined limits i.e. the contested and morphing enactment space.

2.5. Planning and the New Institutionalism(s)

Much of what has been written about NP has concentrated on actors and process. Yet robust theorisations of institutions are an important component of planning theory as they shape both hard and soft spaces of participation (Verma, 2007; Sorensen, 2017). DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p.11) highlight that "institutions do not just constrain options: they establish the very criteria by which people discover their preferences" and within planning, institutional approaches can help to integrate and overcome dualities e.g. state/market, public/private, top-down/bottom-up that drives much of planning thought (Kim, 2011).

Healey (2007) argued that early planning theorists positioned 'planning agency' in a landscape of multiple actors 'continually adjusting to each other, as in a market'. While Lindblom (1965) crystallised this conception through the idea of 'partisan mutual adjustment'. In this view planning agency was seen as a formal and coherent entity. The micro-politics of institutional practice was initially uncovered by those studying the implementation of planning policies from the 1970s, notably Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), but far less work has looked at implementation (or enactment) which relies on co-production. Such perspectives have been supplanted by more nuanced accounts which emphasise the role of both discourses and practices, the ideational and the material, and the social processes through which they are constructed.

Understanding not only how institutions shape but are shaped by practice forms an important part of new institutionalist (NI) thinking, most often when discussing 'institutional change' in a broad sense. Jessop and others have argued that "institutions mediate structure–agency dialectics by selectively shaping actors' opportunities for individual or collective action in space and time" (Moulaert et al., 2016, p.169). The above requires some discussion as there are different strands of NI thought which carry useful implications here. Several key strands of NI analysis have emerged since the 1990 s. Political institutions are comprised of formally organised rules, practices and organisational structures that define the setting where policy making takes place. New institutionalists see political institutions as the 'rules of the game' while organisations – like individuals – are players within that game (Lowndes and Wilson, 2003; Sorensen, 2015; 2017). The focus is on both formal 'rules' and structures as well as informal conventions. This point draws our attention to the way in which institutions embody values and power relationships (Lowndes, 2001).

The new institutionalism is not a single coherent body of thought, with as many as nine forms claimed by Lowndes and Roberts (2013), while Hall and Taylor's (1996) seminal paper identified three main branches of new institutionalism which were widely accepted, i.e. *sociological* (or normative) institutionalism (SI) arising in part from organizational analysis in sociology, *historical* institutionalism (HI) and *rational choice* institutionalism (RI) emerging within political science. A fourth branch, which also acts to combine and extend elements of the other three, has subsequently been labelled discursive institutionalism (DI) (Schmidt, 2008; Davoudi, 2018). This latter iteration links well to the recognition by planning theorists interested in micro-politics, that discourses and practices, materialities and mentalities are all influential on outcomes. We focus here on this fourth branch.

2.5.1. Discursive Institutionalism

The application of a sociological institutionalist perspective overall defines institutions broadly, and includes 'not just formal rules, procedures or norms, but the symbol systems, cognitive scripts, and moral templates that provide the 'frames of meaning' guiding human action'

([Hall & Taylor, 1996](#), p.947). This is a much more encompassing understanding of the role of institutions than either historical or rational choice institutionalism provide. Indeed some institutionalist perspectives have been criticised for overlooking the role of elites in dominating institutional order ([Jessop, 2001](#)) and otherwise being naïve regarding the effects of power. Discursive institutionalist analysis allows for a more open and combinatory approach and, as [Birkland (2020)](#) observes, this also allows for behaviouralist thinking to be applied alongside the assessment of formal institutions. In DI institutions are seen as internal 'structures and constructs', so when we talk about institutional change and continuity, we need to consider both changes to the policy framework of NP and to the lived practices on the ground. The result of such critique is logically a combined or consolidated application of NI which seeks to incorporate power and the maintenance of ideological boundaries in the theorisation of institutions, which also corresponds well with the ASID model discussed above ([Moulaert et al., 2016](#)).

Powerful agents promote certain ideas at the expense of alternative ideas through practices of exercising 'power over' others as they seek to promote or deny specific rationalities and sustain or amend the ideational environment. As such our perspective makes use of DI given the material changes in public planning and institutional structures which represent a manifestation of the changing underlying conduct of agents. These respond to external structural reform pressures and the ideational frame that is sustained. This means that an assemblage of legal, financial and rhetorical devices and other institutional forms shape action via the enactment space.

Neoliberal austerity and performance logics provide a strong strategic context and 'cognitive filter' that influences what ideas can be considered legitimate and shape 'realistic' responses within public institutions. The DI viewpoint stresses the need to take seriously the rhetoric and enactment of empowerment, local control, local knowledge and care, as well as the more frequently observed governmentalities of NP in which citizens are used to deliver centrally-determined objectives, i.e. higher levels of housing development. In methodological terms the new institutional perspective, through this more expansive lens of DI, assists in examining the adjustments of NP, given "a strength of these approaches is that they move beyond the discussion of major and incremental change, include a multi-actor and interest perspective, and provide the ability to zoom in and out on a larger or smaller timescale" ([Van der Heijden, 2011](#), p.10). This also allows us to take seriously the local enactments of such policies given institutions are part of the internal structures and constructs of NP groups and their communities, as well as central government.

Our assessment of NP therefore involves a primary focus on the policy formulation stage in the period 2009–2011 and adjustments made, by DCLG and MHCLG between 2012 and 20 to finance, guidance, scope and obligations of NP in response to feedback. Overlooking institutions and ignoring local specificities which are perniciously difficult to map and research can however, result in a partial picture – and even portray things as dominated by elites ([Kim, 2011](#)). We recognise that the mutual adjustments between a wide range of actors at multiple scales are of interest here but are far more difficult to assess and consider. Central government has made a range of adjustments attempting to mobilise diverse actors using resourcing, internal organisation, regulatory tweaks and rhetorical and discursive ploys intended to refine and enhance implementation of the NP project, which are more acceptable politically given the slipperiness and intentionally loose scope of NP. However, in the context of NP there are multiple intermediaries and implementation agents, all of whom are simultaneously making adjustments in response to perceived shifts in the enactment space generated by a variety of internal and external events. Adjustments in the practice of NP are conditioned by NP groups, Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), consultants and examiners, and in response to judicial decisions, published plans, new guidance, workshops and websites and networks sharing good practice; with case studies, examples, anecdotes and advice which have shaped the internal constructs and structures and all of which constitute the institution of NP through a DI lens.

Examination of local institutions does not mean larger power dynamics are overlooked. Rather, these dynamics must be identified and thoroughly considered, but to deny local specificities would mean slipping into a conceptual hegemony wherein elites dominate absolutely. As intimated above this paper's contribution to the literature lies in showing how a policy initiator attempts to enact, implement and modify a policy. Institutional change influences the world by affecting the shared understanding of individuals making choices in decision situations (Kiser and Ostrom, 1982). As Mahoney and Thelen (2010, p.10–11) discuss, policy and implementation through the application of institutional rules can often "remain ambiguous and always subject to interpretation, debate and contestation… struggles over the meaning, application and enforcement of institutional rules are inextricably intertwined to the resource allocations they entail". We are also concerned therefore with how policy is bargained and compromised amongst policy enactors and policy implementors.

Therefore, we highlight the policy iterations made in the actually experienced enactment space of neighbourhood planning, in which a tension between centralised intentions for NP and very local aspirations have been immediately evident. This was apparent in the contrasts found in empirical data about both user experience and across a timeline of the changes made to internal organisational arrangements, funding, support, guidance and regulations from 2010 to 2020. The assessment of NP presented here is explored by applying a combination of top-down and bottom-up new institutional analysis and in blending the strands of new institutionalist theory via a DI lens. First, there are four key characteristics of NP that need to be established:

i. NP is a top-down policy initiative, with a set of imperatives and claims that have been calculatingly developed with allowance for both wide interpretation and various claims to success (and failure) on its behalf ([Wargent & Parker, 2018](#)).

ii. NP is simultaneously being fashioned from the bottom-up and some neighbourhoods are doing things that are not aligned with, and in some cases directly conflict with, the housing growth agenda promoted by central government (Brownill and [Bradley, 2017](#)).

iii. NP is, in essence, a policy that requires multi-scalar cooperation (national, local, neighbourhood), and was novel in a complex operating environment where traditional modes of administrative power and control are weakened.

iv. NP relies on the mobilisation of volunteers ([Parker et al., 2020; Wills, 2016](#)) – where negotiation and communication becomes critical ([Goggin et al., 1990](#)).

This framing informs our assessment of NP in the following sections. Next we turn to explain the context of neighbourhood planning to ensure that a wide readership will comprehend the policy in general terms. This is followed by a focussed discussion of what we can draw from the experience of the neighbourhood planning initiative.

3. Chapter 3 – Neighbourhood planning: policy genesis and iteration

The context for understanding NP is set out in this chapter by way of a policy and practice review. This prefaces the discussion of how and why the policy has been iterated, as well as reflecting on delay and non-response from government. This is presented as part of a policy trajectory that has claimed to enhance community participation, as expressed as a central plank of the post-2010 UK government's iterated localism agenda for planning. However, antecedents to NP are also considered as part of the context, noting the 'new localism' of New Labour (1997–2010).

3.1. Managing neighbourhood governance

We begin this section by explaining how both Labour and the Conservative parties in England had been considering means to activate citizens and develop greater participation in public policy since 1997 - particularly local policy and activity at the very local scale in planning. This ensemble of thinking and associated policies has often been labelled 'new localism', although noting its longer run existence (see Painter et al., 2011 for wider review).

New Labour and the antecedents of Neighbourhood Planning (1997–2010).

When the Labour party was elected to government in 1997 a modernisation agenda was initiated which was designed to pursue a series of objectives involving local government change, including streamlining of the planning system and also to encourage 'spatial planning' as a more integrated activity (DETR, 1998; Labour Party, 2001; Nadin, 2005). According to Martin (2002) the wider project had three strands, first to improve the *quality of local public services*, second to e*nhance the capacity of local councils* to provide vision and community leadership and third, to *increase their level of engagement with local people*. Thus, a rescaling of governance was being promoted which featured a blend of entrepreneurialism, partnership working and new public management techniques (see, for example; Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). The New Labour project also invoked active citizenship as part of a civic republican vision where members of a political community would be encouraged to recognise reciprocal responsibilities toward each other (Bee & Pachi, 2014). The fusion of the civic republican model implied by the New Labour mix of aims, provided a new hybrid approach (Yuille, 2020); where responsibility is shared across civic society and public bodies. This dynamic created tension in policy making with later attempts to balance 'efficiency' and devolve power further to the local level.

To deliver this agenda, New Labour employed 'roll-out' neo-liberal tools aimed at making local government more efficient and responsive to central government aims (Lowndes et al., 2003; Laffin, 2016). A key part of the New Labour approach was formalised in the Local Government Act 2000 which introduced the obligation on local authorities to produce Community Strategies; where local government, through partnerships with community stakeholders, would seek via Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to address a "duty to promote economic, social, and environmental well-being in their areas" (Tewdwr-Jones et al., 2006; Lambert, 2006; Raco et al., 2006). Through this modality it was intended that the shared responsibilities of local governance would be realised.

In parallel to wider reforms of local government aimed at efficiency and effectiveness, the introduction of Parish Planning from 2001 (Parker, 2008; Gallent, 2013) was one of the governance tools that New Labour experimented with in order to mobilise active citizens in setting agendas and gathering local evidence.

Parish-level planning was piloted as a means to empower rural communities to produce documents that outlined the perceived needs of that community. They were not focused on land use planning but acted to inform communities and policy makers about issues and priorities in rural areas - in some cases they were used to formulate wider strategy and resource decisions for public bodies. The Countryside Agency who led on the policy, outlined five aims and objectives for 'Parish Plans' to:

1. reflect the views of all sections of the community
2. identify which features and characteristics local people value
3. identify local problems and opportunities
4. spell out how residents want the community to develop in the future, and
5. prepare a plan of action to achieve this vision. (Countryside Agency, 2003, p.6)

The programme reflected New Labour's level of interest in devolving some responsibility for very local agenda-setting and was cast as part of

wider efforts at promoting 'active citizenship' (Miraftab, 2012; Gallent and Robinson, 2012). By 2010 it was estimated that around 4000 rural areas had participated (Parker, 2014). In the final years of governmental sponsorship the idea of parish planning was relabelled 'community-led planning' as the possibility of extension to urban areas was being advocated.

In parallel local planning reform under Labour saw some key legislative changes, notably the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, where wider participation was claimed to be an important objective and measures such as Statements of Community Involvement (SCIs) were established. These were to more clearly articulate how LPAs were to engage with the community (Alexander, 2006; Parker et al., 2021) and where 'frontloading' or early stage community input was stressed (Brownill & Carpenter, 2007). A 'duty to involve' was introduced in 2008 (DCLG, 2008b) along with funding for Planning Aid England to actively engage with communities. New Labour intended to take this further under the banner of 'double-devolution' and the 2008 *Communities in Control* policy paper (DCLG, 2008a) provided an indication of the direction of future travel, but this was not fully realised as Labour lost the election in May 2010. The idea was most clearly promoted by David Miliband (then Secretary of State at DCLG), who described double-devolution as a key idea to underpin the future model of local governance:

…that takes power from central government and gives it to local government, but power that goes from local government down to local people, providing a critical role for individuals and neighbourhoods, often through the voluntary sector (David Miliband, February, 2006: no pagination).

The emphasis on the local scale, on private citizens and on voluntarism was apparent and shared by the subsequent Coalition government. However, there was not yet a firm link to land use planning. As we explain this was then given a new formulation by the Coalition government elected in May 2010.

The Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government and Localism 2010–2015.

The 2010–2015 Coalition (Conservative/Liberal Democrat) Government from 2010 initiated a series of its own reforms; that included a recalibration or rescaling of formal planning. The reforms were packaged as a new wave of localist policy and advocated through the idea of the 'Big Society' (Lister, 2015). At its centre was the neighbourhood planning project sustained by an extension of the double devolution promoted by David Miliband. The incoming Secretary of State at DCLG, Eric Pickles argued in 2010 that:

We can build a Big Society and make localism a reality.I want to see double devolution, not just transferring power from central government to local authorities, but for power to transfer down to individuals and communities (Eric Pickles, July 2010: no pagination).

This prefaced the 2011 Localism Act with the planning system integral to the delivery of this agenda. Wider planning reforms also included the removal of regional planning (replaced with a modest 'duty to cooperate' between local planning authorities (Baker & Wong, 2013), a scaling back of planning guidance and the introduction of a single source of national planning policy nationally - the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in 2012.[3] Other deregulatory changes were also made, which have acted to destabilise some of the credibility of the localism agenda, notably the extension of permitted development rights which took some forms of development out of local and neighbourhood plan control (see Ferm et al., 2021). Taken together the suite of planning changes indicate the mobilisation of different strands of neo-liberal

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[3] The NPPF – National Planning Policy Framework is a document setting out what the English Planning system should deliver. It has undergone several iterations since its introduction in 2012.

thinking being acted out simultaneously (i.e. localism and responsibilisation, deregulation, market orientation and growth).

In 2010 after the general election in May the NP policy was to be launched swiftly with the Conservative Party explaining that through neighbourhood planning "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… this will 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, p.2). This was accompanied by assurances that NP was to be shaped as a community-led exercise and cover issues that the neighbourhood wanted – in the words of the then planning minister, it would spark 'a quiet revolution' (Nick Boles cited in DCLG, 2013: p.1).

3.2. The Localism Act (2011) and the development of neighbourhood planning

The 2011 Localism Act formally enabled the operation of neighbourhood planning. As we explain, the deemed success and ongoing iteration of NP has been influenced by a range of factors and a number of different actors. The early stages of the formulation of the neighbourhood planning policy (e.g. the outline found in the 2010 *Open Source Planning* paper cited above), indicated a desire to activate local populations in planning for their area with a more neo-liberal inflexion that paid far less regard to partnership than New Labour's vision for localism, and instead emphasised a broad set of community rights guaranteed by the state.

How the enactment and implementation of NP was to proceed presents a vision of encouraging communities to accept more development in their neighbourhood. This basis for enactment, the conditions and parameters that the Localism Act created, were recognisably contradictory. The twin narratives of empowerment and localism, and of growth and deregulation were in train across wider planning reforms as well as NP and reflected the 'downscaling' of spatial planning hierarchies (Mace, 2013). The conceptualisation of NP in this environment was set out as part of a 'virtuous circle' (Stanier, 2014 and see Fig. 1). This model was created by DCLG to show the logic path for NP and its benefits from a development and housing delivery perspective. It provides a basis from which to understand the design of the associated regulatory framework that has shaped neighbourhood planning practice.

The underlying political and operational framework depicted in Fig. 1 was clear conceptually, if simplistically; that neighbourhood planning was to act to align neighbourhoods towards accepting more development in their own locality, to speed up the planning process and

enable greater understanding of planning issues and processes.

Neighbourhood planning was characterised by government as "taking power away from officials and putting it into the hands of those who know most about their neighbourhood – local people themselves" (DCLG, 2010, no pagination). It promised communities the opportunity to agree upon their own vision for the ways in which their neighbourhood would change and develop: what new development there should be, what it should look like, how it would function and fit with existing built form, and which areas should be protected. NP radically extended potential democratic engagement with planning in two distinct dimensions. Firstly, it empowered community groups to prepare their own planning policies for their area, which, upon completion of a prescribed procedure, would become statutory and share the same legal status as the LPA's local plan. Secondly, it set the community at large – rather than a particular group of 'active citizens' who may have the cultural, social and material capital to engage in formal participation activities - as the final arbiters of individual neighbourhood plans. After passing examination, the plans have to pass, by a simple majority, a referendum of residents (and in some cases, businesses) in the neighbourhood plan area of those voting. This introduction of direct democracy into plan-making is unique in England, in stark contrast with previous public engagement initiatives which, broadly speaking, merely enabled publics to be consulted on plans drafted by certified experts working within local government, who could (within reason and with adequate justification) decide what weight should be given to different consultation responses.

However, many scholars have been sceptical of these claims, comparing the rhetoric of community control with the limited freedoms actually available to neighbourhood planners (Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2017; Vigar et al., 2017). Others have labelled the initiative an example of the trend towards localist neoliberal governmentality, an attempt to govern through communities rather than to allow communities to govern themselves (Featherstone et al., 2012; Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012; Rose, 1996). A third group has highlighted the tensions and unsettled accommodations between the different models of democracy drawn on to legitimise NDPs (Davoudi & Cowie, 2013, Bradley, 2015, Sturzaker & Gordon, 2017). However, as we discuss the policy has been subject to careful stewardship. This speaks to the idea that one policy has many forms (cf. Winter, 2012).
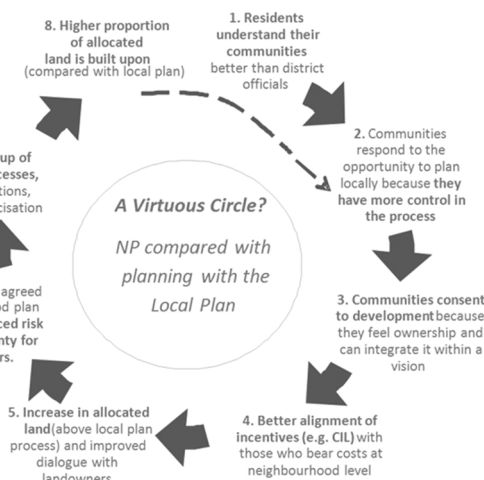
3.3. Regulations and process

3.3.1. The implementation of neighbourhood planning

The legislative process, regulatory stages of neighbourhood planning, the role and responsibilities of different actors, and reforms to the process over time are an important part of developing an understanding of how NP has worked and been enacted and how the policy has been crafted over time (see Table 1). As the policy was being implemented the underlying contradictions and ambiguities became increasingly apparent, particularly the reconciliation of the growth agenda, the austerity measures applied after the financial crash in 2008 and 'Big Society' localism. It became clear that outstanding issues would have to be resolved during policy implementation. We dissect this in stages from 2009 onwards and discuss how the policy was designed, responded to by other key actors (see Table 2), and how central government reacted both in terms of policy management and policy iteration - assessed through the application of new institutionalist theory as set-up in Chapter 2.

The roll-out and subsequent amendments to the policy can be separated into three phases:

1. Phase 1: Policy design, implementation and mobilisation phase (2009–2011)
2. Phase 2: Policy enactment (I) and learning (2011–2014)
3. Phase 3: Policy enactment (II) and reaction (2015–2018)

Fig. 1. The Neighbourhood Planning 'virtuous circle'.
Source: Stanier, 2014, p.113.

Table 1
Overview of the main legislative and policy framework.

Regulatory element	Form and detail
NP Frontrunners from late 2010	1. five waves of Frontrunners from April 2011. Totalling 234 communities and 17 local authorities. Each Neighbourhood received support monies and the local authority also received a 'burdens' payment, when a Plan was completed.
Supporting Communities contract let by DCLG	1. the four consortia bid and are awarded funding to assist neighbourhoods in 2011 (the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and Royal Town Planning Institute with Planning Aid England and Planning Aid London).
Localism Act 2011 (November 2011)	1. formal legal basis of NP passed into law 2. purpose of NP defined in the NPPF – establishes strategic framework which guides preparation of neighbourhood plans (March 2012)
NP Regulations (2012)	1. establishes the legal parameters for Plan preparation and separate Regulations associated with the NP referendum
'Notes on NP' (from 2012)	1. quarterly newsletter produced by DCLG/MHCLG to all those involved in NP to promote activity
Community Infrastructure Levy (neighbourhood portion), from April 2013	1. 25% of CIL receipts to be paid to those neighbourhoods with a completed plan. This alteration became known as the 'Boles Bung' (so named after the planning minister who introduced it).
Neighbourhood guidance (March 2014)	1. NP has its own guidance stream produced by DCLG.
Revised support contract (April 2015)	1. Support contracts reviewed, redesigned and new partnership between Locality and AECOM used to deliver support. 2. First attempt at increased funding for NP Forum areas in response to lower rates of take-up.
Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017	1. Government sought to tighten the duty to support and to strengthen neighbourhood plans by giving greater legal effect at an earlier stage of production
2020 further extension of NP funding to urban neighbourhoods and other categories	1. extra support money was made available to some areas, prompted by low take-up and emerging research in the INPE report published September 2020. This reflected the low take-up from urban and more deprived neighbourhoods.

Table 2
Key actors in Neighbourhood Planning.

Actor	Role
Central Government (noting that both Ministers and Civil servants - were changing frequently during the period 2010–2020)	i. in addition to developing the policy and legislation, DCLG / MHCLG would also "nurture enthusiasm for doing neighbourhood planning… help share that with others; to help ensure that communities continue to get the information and support they need; and… create and encourage chances to network with others, sharing ideas and learning about what works and what doesn't" (DCLG, 2012b) ii. DCLG/MHCLG sought to address concerns over the ability of groups to produce a technical land-use document and funded third-party organisations to produce best practice, advice notes, toolkits and guidance. iii. oversee the work of the support organisations contracted by them to support NP groups.
NP early adopters (2010–11) - largely Frontrunner neighbourhoods	In developing NP, Central Government were learning from not only experience of Parish Planning but they also developed their own front-runner / 'vanguard' scheme. The Vanguard provided financial support and resources to encourage groups to start the process of preparing a NP before the Localism Bill came into effect (Parker et al., 2015, p. 523). Alongside financial support front-runner groups also had a "hot-line" to Central Government and were assigned a link officer (a national government representative) who the frontrunner areas could call on for advice and to "convey government's intentions, interpret regulations and confirm courses of action in relation to the wider NP process" (Gunn & Vigar, 2015, p.157). Their experiences would also inform the writing of the legislation.
Local government (as Local Planning Authorities / 'LPAs')	Local planning authorities had a 'duty to support' neighbourhoods imposed via the Localism Act. They also act to register neighbourhoods, agree designated areas, adopt the final plan as well as co-appoint the examiner and organize the referendum. The LPAs have significant influence in the process as they can actively encourage/discourage and slow down NP processes (see Salter, 2022).
Enrolling support organisations	Third party organisations responsible for the delivery of Government funded support for neighbourhood planning groups. In the first 2 years (2011–2013) a set of four organisational groupings offered support via a funding programme (ACRE, CPRE/NALC, Locality, Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, RTPI/Planning Aid). There was also a role for PAS (Planning Advisory Service) here to support Councillors and LPA officers to understand NP.
NP 'Champions'	A network of advocates was established by MHCLG – with the Champions selected on the basis that they were "at the forefront of NP, actively involved in the process on the ground." Their role is to "spread the message and fund the movement" (LCC, 2014). This overtly proselytising role was intended to enthuse neighbourhoods considering or embarking on NP production. See also: https://neighbourhoodplanning.org/network/
NPIERS (Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examination Referral Service)	The NPIERS referral service for independent examiners was set up in 2012. This arrangement was supposed to ensure that training and consistency for neighbourhood plan examination was developed and to link neighbourhoods to candidate examiners (see DCLG, 2012).
NP consultants	

3.3.2. Phase 1: Policy design, implementation and mobilisation phase (2009–2011)

This period is where the Conservative Party prepared for government and indicated how they wished to pursue the activation of localist policy through their own formulation; in essence to square localism with logics commensurate with the ideological framework of the Conservative Party (see Baeten, 2012; Inch, 2018). The early policy paper *Control Shift: returning power to local communities* (February 2009) gave a clear indication of intent before the 2010 election. The aim was "to foster a new spirit of local enterprise and local social responsibility, we need to decentralise power and control. We need to allow local institutions to compete, innovate and diversify by giving them the powers currently exercised by central and regional bodies" (The Conservative Party, 2009, p.4).

The Conservative party approach to communities and to planning was further detailed in the February 2010 green paper *Open Source Planning*. The vision was to.

Table 2 (*continued*)

Actor	Role
Qualifying Bodies and Neighbourhood Planning Groups	Numerous consultancies offered support to neighbourhoods - both existing firms and new consultancies, some of whom were niche operations; and often the latter were set up after 2011. Town and Parish Councils (in parished areas) and Neighbourhood Forums established specifically for the purpose of promoting or improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area (in unparished areas) are the Qualifying Bodies with ultimate responsibility for producing NPs. The actual work of preparing the plan is often undertaken by a volunteer Neighbourhood Planning Group that may consist of some, all, or none of the members of the Qualifying Body.

give local people the power to engage in genuine local planning through collaborative democracy – designing a local plan from the "bottom up" starting with the aspirations of local residents and activating neighbourhood involvement to encourage sustainable development (The Conservative Party, 2010: p3).

Local planning authorities would be 'mandated' to use collaborative democratic methods in drawing up their local plans with communities preparing 'modules' that would be incorporated into the Local Plan (The Conservative Party, 2010, p.11). The introduction of the neighbourhood tier would feature a close link between communities and the local plan scale – however this approach was not actualised through the Localism Act.

Despite these initial intentions the "actual legislation included a modified vision of planning at the neighbourhood scale: one circumscribed by the primacy of local plans, prepared by planning authorities and setting out the 'strategic objectives' to which all NDPs must adhere" (Gallent, Hamiduddin, et al., 2013, p.568). These boundary conditions, or parameters, sought to ensure that neighbourhood plans did not stifle growth and addressed emergent concerns that NPs could act to frustrate development (Tait & Inch, 2016). Thus, the policy was amended as it passed through the Parliamentary process and it morphed into a more pronounced deregulatory approach towards the planning system (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2018).

Shortly after their successful election the Coalition Government sought to implement their approach and announced a roll-out of a NP pilot or 'vanguard' scheme (for selected willing local planning authority areas) in November 2010 (DCLG, 2010). This precursor phase was relabelled as neighbourhood planning 'frontrunners' in 2011 and tranches of funding were announced in five waves from April 2011. Frontrunner neighbourhoods and local authorities could start the NP process without the regulatory framework in place and detailed guidance having been agreed. The first frontrunner tranche involved 17 local authorities and in total the five waves attracted 234 neighbourhoods by the Spring of 2012 (Parker, 2012). This early phase of neighbourhood planning was to establish proof of concept and enable learning for all parties in the 'frontrunner' areas.

The Localism Bill was enacted in 2011 and was followed by the publication of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012 and the Neighbourhood Planning (Referendums) Regulations 2012. This legislative framework established the 'basic conditions' against which emergent NPs would be examined:

- having regard to national policies and advice contained in guidance issued by the Secretary of State it is appropriate to make the order (or neighbourhood plan)

- the making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) contributes to the achievement of sustainable development

- the making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) is in general conformity with the strategic policies contained in the development plan for the area of the authority (or any part of that area).

- the making of the order (or neighbourhood plan) does not breach, and is otherwise compatible with, EU obligations

- prescribed conditions are met in relation to the Order (or plan) and prescribed matters have been complied with in connection with the proposal for the order (or neighbourhood plan).

The basic conditions frame the parameters of Neighbourhood Planning and act to orient plans towards alignment with higher level policy and regulations (EU, national and local) and demand a growth orientation in relation to housing delivery. What is clear through the effect of the conditions is the attempt to direct NP towards a market enabling form of citizen activation via the national and local policy environment with which NP activity had to march in step, rather than allow for any emphasis or concern to maintain the collective fabric of public life against encroachment by the market (Marinetto, 2003) i.e. as other research has indicated, alternative policy approaches were discouraged (Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2015; 2017).

Furthermore, the neighbourhood's capacity to act is assumed (i.e. it is a voluntary endeavour) and a 'free choice' of what to address in the Plan was offered - conditional on the scope of land use planning and adequate procedural tests being met. This engineering of community perception about NP and its benefits reflects a concern to play-up the potentials of NP and be less open about the difficulties and limits of the enterprise (Gunn & Vigar, 2015; Parker et al., 2015). It also set up for the emergence of different practices of localism as communities decided whether or not to take-up the right to engage in neighbourhood planning and the emergent neighbourhood plans sought to address the distinctive issues within their locality.

As part of this early phase of implementation DCLG launched the first iteration of a support programme and appointed organisations to work with the frontrunner neighbourhoods to provide advice and support in preparing their Plan. Four groupings of organisations were contracted to offer advice, with Locality leading a 'Building Communities Consortium' and with support variously delivered by the Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), Action for Communities in rural England (ACRE), the Design Council/CABE and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) with Planning Aid England and Planning Aid London. These organisations have different backgrounds and styles which led to the emergence of four neighbourhood plan cultures as each of the consortia attempted to interpret the approach needed and to produce their own support offer. It was left to individual neighbourhoods to approach those support organisations on a first come, first served basis and this approach created some confusion as the advice provided could be contradictory or highlight or omit different considerations. Parker, and Lynn, and Wargent (2017) argued that this approach became one factor in neighbourhoods starting to behave conservatively, in terms of the scope and ambition of their draft plans, as they were receiving variable support from their local authorities and different messages from support organisations.

For DCLG, however, this approach produced a competitive advice environment and four channels of feedback for government to reflect on, and potentially respond to, as the regulatory framework was being developed. As the policy was being implemented, there became a point where the first NPs were nearing examination but there were no arrangements in place to deal with that critical stage. Hence, in 2013 a number of professional bodies, led by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) and with support and encouragement from MHCLG, established the Neighbourhood Planning Independent Examiners Referral Service (NPIERS). This was to provide a one-stop shop for the appointment and training of NP examiners. However, as with other aspects of the process the examination stage was accompanied by limited guidance leading to differing approaches towards examination and

issues at the examination stage (DCLG, 2012; Parker, Salter and Hickman, 2017).

During this first stage of NP the policy was being designed and implemented at the same time with a role for DCLG to 'mobilise' communities to engage in order to demonstrate proof of concept. Despite NP being a 'community' endeavour a number of different actors are enrolled into the delivery of neighbourhood planning with responsibility for decision-making and decision-taking resting with the Local Planning Authority. The different actors involved are summarised in Table 2.

Once the Regulations were introduced and the first neighbourhood planning groups were nearing the referendum stage, the next stage of policy implementation commenced which can be considered that of 'policy enactment and learning.'.

3.3.3. Phase 2: Policy enactment and learning (2011 – 2015)

During this stage, MHCLG continued to support communities and 'mobilise' them to engage in neighbourhood planning. As the flagship policy of the Localism Act it was important to demonstrate success and this was characterised by DCLG as the number of communities preparing a NP and successfully completing the process with DCLG regularly reporting on the number of area designations and plans passing referendum. By 2014 over 1000 neighbourhoods had taken up neighbourhood planning (Parker et al., 2014) with a successful start but there were concerns within DCLG over slow progress.

In March 2014, the then Minister for Planning stated in a speech that it was appropriate to take stock and review progress:

> We have, I think now reached the point where there has been enough experience of neighbourhood planning with enough different kinds of communities for us to learn lessons and to ask whether there is not a version of neighbourhood planning that might be more easily accessible and quicker for some communities (Nick Boles - Planning Minister, 3rd March, 2014).

Subsequently, DCLG commissioned a study into the "User Experiences of Neighbourhood Planning." The research served to "inform future approaches towards neighbourhood planning, including how to improve and increase its effectiveness as well as the shape that support offered to those using the right should take" (Parker et al., 2014, p.7). This report provided an opportunity for feedback and led to a number of amendments to NP from 2014 onwards. From this study it became apparent that groups were finding the process more burdensome than anticipated and there was an identified need for improvements to guidance on neighbourhood planning, dissemination of best practice and publication of toolkits (Parker et al., 2014). These experiences shaped the design of the 2015 support package provided to groups by DCLG.

From 2013 a new single consortium, led by Locality and which included RTPI and Planning Aid England, was appointed until 2015 and then Locality with the consultancy AECOM took on the role (see also Table 2). The latter iteration saw more emphasis on standardised advice and 'off the shelf' packages of support. Neighbourhood planners would ask for a particular support 'module' with advice offered on a 'first come, first served basis.' As Locality explained "AECOM provides most of this support in the form of time-limited packages of independent advice on technical or process issues" (Locality, no date: p.3). This approach was, however, in contrast to the preferences of those neighbourhoods researched in 2014 where groups wanted clarity but recognised a need for help that was bespoke to their circumstances (Parker et al., 2014).

The user experience research also identified that neighbourhood forums were finding the process particularly burdensome and that disparities in take-up were emerging. There were lower levels of take-up in urban areas and a response to these findings was that additional funding was offered to urban and non-parished areas in the 2015 support package. This was pushed up to £ 10,000 from April 2018 and then, in Autumn 2020, a further increase was announced:

> …additional support… increases the grant available to neighbourhood planning groups in urban and deprived areas from £ 10,000 to £ 18,000 and gives them access to a range of technical planning support packages, which only a limited range of groups currently qualify for. The aim of this offer is to increase the take up of neighbourhood planning in urban and deprived areas, which is low and has decreased in recent years. The Government is interested in promoting opportunities for all groups, including those in disadvantaged areas, to have a say in shaping their communities.

(*Notes on Neighbourhood Planning* #25, MHCLG, 2020, p.4).

In part, the continued funding was due to studies that indicate geographical disparities in up-take (see Parker & Salter, 2017; Parker et al., 2020) as well as reflecting wider Government priorities and increased focus on the role of neighbourhood plans in delivering housing and, most recently, attempts to "level-up." In as much as feedback and 'policy learning' was enabled by the publication of the User Experience of NP report in 2014, the agenda was also being shaped by the broader policy environment and direct experiences of neighbourhood plan enactment.

In 2014, DLCG published further guidance on neighbourhood planning as part of the wider suite of National Planning Practice Guidance. This provided those engaged with NP additional information and a steer on how the policies and approach in the NPPF should be implemented. Furthermore, the NP regulations were also amended to provide further clarity on the requirements of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (SI 20, 2015) and the modification and renewal of plans to enable groups to keep their plans up-to-date.

Challenges were also being experienced in practice with a number of neighbourhood plans in the period 2013–2014 facing legal challenge from house-builders and land promoters (see Bradley & Sparling, 2017). Bradley and Sparling (2017, p.52) reported that "far from ending a system that pitted communities against house-builders…the policy of neighbourhood planning had, if anything, exasperated this antagonism." The potential for communities to devise their own housing numbers signalled to developers that NP posed a threat to their interests and as a result the NP process has been shaped through the "examination process or in the courts" (Bailey, 2017, p.8). This led DCLG to respond and clarify the policy position in some instances. From 2015 onwards NP was operating in an increasingly judicial environment with the policy shaped by High Court judgements marking a phase of policy action and reaction. For instance, a Judicial Review was launched to challenge whether Plans would carry weight in advance of the Local Plan and this led DCLG to confirm that this was the case via the issue of a Written Ministerial Statement.

3.3.4. Phase 3: Policy enactment (II) and reaction (2015–2018)

A series of amendments to the policy were made between 2015 and 2018 to overcome initial implementation challenges and to ensure the policy was workable when implemented in practice (Barrett, 1981). This included the "emergence of soft guidance including ministerial speeches and media interviews to signal emergent policy directions as much as changes through 'hard' policy initiatives". MHCLG adopted both indirect interventions and a series of sticks and carrots in order to regulate the actions of those with a role in the implementation of NP (see Geddes, 2006) including tweaks to funding, to incentives and toolkits to advise on particular stages or issues likely to be confronted. Thus, a range of actors were enrolled into the recrafting of the policy including the publication of soft guidance, advice and materials from support organisations (see Salter, 2018, p.65).

As previously discussed, in the early days of NP, there were a number of legal challenges to neighbourhood plans and a plethora of case law shaped the policy and now forms its basis. This has also resulted in a shift from a "light-touch" approach at examination as there is increased recognition that NPs need to be based on a robust evidence base. The

legal challenges centred on housing delivery and ensuring emergent plans were acting in-line with the growth agenda.

This led DCLG to reaffirm their support for NP and ensure due weight is given to plans during their production and implementation. For instance, powers for the Secretary of State to recover appeals for residential development in areas where a qualifying body had submitted a neighbourhood plan or where a neighbourhood plan has been made were introduced in 2014 and extended a further 4 times (e.g. HC Deb 10th July 2014, c25WS). This sought to ensure that planning appeal decisions reflect the Government's clear policy intention and that NP would not be undermined. In addition, the criteria against which to assess whether policies for the supply of housing in an NP should be considered out of date (and thus triggering the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' which would almost certainly see more development being permitted in an area) were changed with plans required to evidence a three year land-supply instead of five years (WMS HC Dec 12th 2016 c346WS - Barwell, 2016). This change initially applied for two years after an NP was made; at the time of writing in 2023 the Government is consulting on extending this to five years. Furthermore, neighbourhood forums were to be notified of planning applications in their area and changes were introduced in the 2017 Neighbourhood Planning Act to facilitate the modification of neighbourhood plans to ensure they are brought into force as soon as practicable.

This illustrates the susceptibility of the NP policy to external forces that threatened the power of NPs, with a particular emphasis on ensuring that the plans did not negatively impact upon development. Thus, DCLG implemented a number of changes to ensure that NPs were orientated towards growth but in doing so, they also needed to ensure groups remained motivated to engage and continued to take-up the right to prepare a neighbourhood plan.

The headline figures have been positive in this regard; take-up of NP had continued to the extent that by Autumn 2019 over 2600 communities had started or completed a neighbourhood plan (Parker et al., 2020). This makes it by far the most popular and widely adopted of the various "community rights" introduced by the Localism Act 2011, and the most radical and far-reaching shake-up of public participation in planning for a generation. However, despite this "neighbourhood planning uptake continues to be uneven across the country (Fig. 2) and is disproportionately skewed towards rural, Parished and affluent communities" (Table 3). Moreover, "there is now a clear indication that NP take-up is falling back" (Parker et al., 2020, p.22 and see Fig. 3).

There is a very strong correlation of neighbourhood planning with rural areas. By 2019, over 90% of neighbourhood plans had been initiated by Town or Parish Councils, with only 8.5% being led by Forums (these become the legally recognised 'qualifying bodies' to undertake a neighbourhood plan). In terms of completing the process the figures are even more unbalanced, with only 5.6% of 'made' (completed) plans led by Forums (Parker et al., 2020). It is also notable that the 18% of LPAs that have had no neighbourhood planning activity all are in urban areas and these tend to have few, if any, parished areas (Parker et al., 2020).

Furthermore, there are considerably higher levels of take-up and Plans that passed referendum in less deprived areas (Table 3) and the majority of neighbourhood areas who had Plans passing the referendum stage by July 2017 were within areas classified as "least deprived", with only 6.7% in areas classified as "most deprived" (IMD Quintile 4–5) reflecting previous studies (Parker & Salter, 2017).

There are a range of reasons for the disparities of take-up that are discussed in the wider literature and these may be arranged under a series of headings. The first relates to the existing 'soft infrastructures' in some areas. There were a range of social and cultural capital and other resources available to different neighbourhoods. Indeed, there was an anticipation that take-up of NP was more likely to be advanced by those better educated, well off and more vocal groups - who have the time, capacity and willingness to engage (Davoudi & Cowie, 2013; Featherstone et al., 2012). Furthermore, there are often more transient

populations in urban areas and the NP 'imaginary' of a homogenous community with shared place attachments is more easily enacted in rural communities (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013; Bradley, 2017).

In Parished areas the Parish Councils are the only body that can qualify to progress an NDP. Their status as the first tier of elected local government lends them automatic institutional legitimacy and profile that unparished areas (i.e. potential Neighbourhood Forum areas) lack. Their existing structures of bureaucratic organisation, communications with their constituencies, staffing (most have a parish clerk), funding and precept budgets combine to provide a baseline level of capacity that Forums need to develop, often from the ground up, before the business of developing a plan can begin in earnest. Town/Parish Councils will also, at least in theory, have a more detailed and sophisticated understanding of the planning system through their engagement with local planning and development management as statutory consultees. Parish Councils will in many cases have produced other relevant documents, e. g. parish plans (as mentioned above), giving them both some experience of plan production and an existing evidence base to draw on. Thus, developing knowledge about the planning system is often the first task for Forums with many drawing in consultants to support if they can access funding.

The second issue relates to inertias and additional burdens for Neighbourhood Forums to progress neighbourhood planning. Neighbourhood forums have to go through the additional steps of establishing a qualifying body and agreeing their neighbourhood boundary (Parker et al., 2015) without the support of a Parish Council Clerk or precept levy to assist. This was linked to issues with recognised Parish boundaries and difficulties of establishing Forum boundaries given that while all qualifying bodies are free to propose their own neighbourhood area boundaries, many Parish Council-led neighbourhood planning groups (NPGs) have chosen to use existing parish boundaries as they provide acknowledged and established administrative delimitation. This was assumed even where, for planning purposes, these may not immediately appear to be the most logical (e.g. NDPs in which policies focus primarily on a small settlement in a relatively large parish). It was clear from the 2014 study that agreeing neighbourhood boundaries provided Forums with substantial additional challenges (Parker, 2014). There can be competition between different aspiring Forums, which risks entrenching and exacerbating existing divisions and conflicts (Colomb, 2017). There is a greater risk too that the LPA will refuse to designate either the candidate Forum as a qualifying body or agree the neighbourhood area boundary. An extreme example featured a putative neighbourhood plan in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire (just north west of London), where the local authority first rejected the area proposed by the incipient Forum, instead designating a significantly larger area, and then rejected the group's application to be designated as a Neighbourhood Forum on the basis that they did not adequately represent the newly enlarged area (Rickmansworth Neighbourhood Forum, 2013).

The evidence of geographical disparities in take-up (and in particular lower levels in deprived areas, areas of growth and non-Parished areas) has prompted MHCLG to move to increase the amount of money available to urban communities to support a neighbourhood plan. As previously discussed, by 2015 the first extra funding pots were made available for Forum areas and the list of eligibility criteria has grown iteratively since 2015. By 2022 Locality, as main support provider, and via DLUHC / MHCLG, listed seven criteria that would qualify a neighbourhood for extra support funding:

- allocating sites for housing
- including a design code
- a business neighbourhood plan
- a cluster of three or more parishes writing a single plan
- a neighbourhood area with a population of over 25,000
- a designated neighbourhood forum
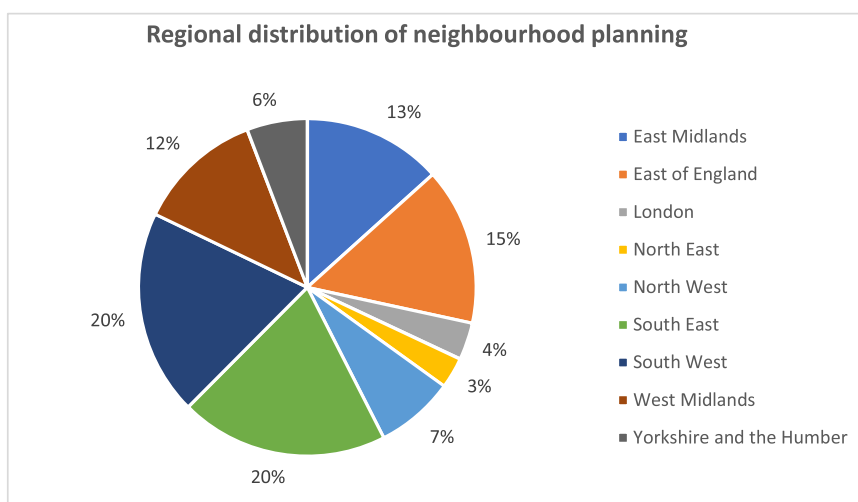- a group based in an area which has a high level of deprivation.

Fig. 2. Take-up by number across the English regions (2019). (
Source: Parker et al., 2020, p.13).

Table 3
NP Take-up by Index of Deprivation (as at 2016).

Region	IMD Q1-Q2	IMD Q2–Q3	IMD Q3-Q4	IMD Q4-Q5	Totals
London	0	0	3	2	5
South East	72	35	14	3	124
West Midlands	15	18	19	9	61
East Midlands	19	24	8	5	56
Yorkshire and Humber	3	3	0	1	7
North West	16	14	7	2	39
North East	1	1	3	0	5
Totals:	**155 (41.2%)**	**122 (32.4%)**	**74 (19.7%)**	**25 (6.7%)**	**376 (100%)**

Table 4
NP completions 2013–2019.

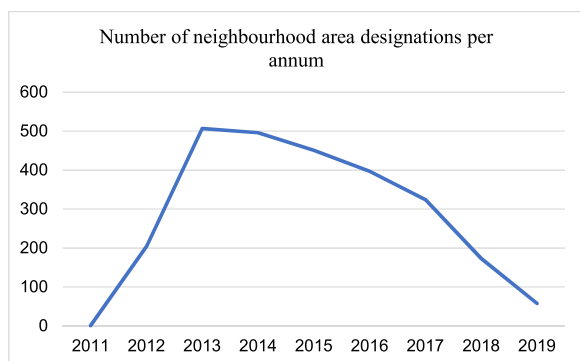| Year of area designation	Number of area designations (per year)	Number of plans passing referendum (by September 2019)
2013	519	6
2014	498	32
2015	455	83
2016	400	163
2017	320	213
2018	173	211
2019	58	173
Cumulative Total	**2423**	**881**

Fig. 3. Neighbourhood Planning take-up 2011–2019.

However, despite additional funding for Forums and areas with a high level of deprivation being available since 2015 there continue to be disparities in take-up. This suggests that additional funding and support for communities in non-Parished, urban areas and those in areas with high deprivation may be insufficient to adequately support groups through the process and to overcome the additional burdens.

Furthermore, despite the high numbers engaged in NP, there has, however, been a marked decrease in take-up and fewer groups completing the process as shown in Fig. 3 and Table 4. In recognition of these issues, in January 2022, government allocated funding to 11 councils across England to pilot two schemes to encourage greater take-up in urban and deprived areas: a 'Simpler Approach to Neighbourhood

Planning' to make it easier for communities to set out their development priorities without producing a full NDP, and a scheme to support local initiatives that deliver additional support to citizens to produce NDPs (DLUHC, 2022). However, it is noteworthy that Government had originally intended to support significantly higher numbers of councils through these schemes (MHCLG, 2021).

The progress to referendum for many has been slow and there has also been a concomitant slowdown in the number of plans passing referendum.

When considering the progress of neighbourhood area designations the data suggests a 30–60% "success" rate and a high drop off rate which is increasing over time (Table 5). The drop off rate is higher in plans designated 2014/2015, which we might expect to have passed referendum by now considering the "median" time from designation to referendum is 39 months (Parker et al., 2020). However, we need to stress that this almost certainly underplays the time taken in many places which have not completed a Plan or had actually stalled or given-up on the process. Tracking this trajectory highlights why the performance of

Table 5
Community Spend on Consultants.

Community Spend on Consultants	Frequency
> £5,000	13
£ 5,000 - £ 9,999	15
£ 10,000 - £ 14,999	11
£ 15000 - £ 19,999	11
£ 20,000 - £ 24,999	3
£ 25000 - £ 29999	1
£ 30,000 - £ 34,999	1
> £35,000	2

neighbourhood planning has fostered perceptions of policy morbidity (Wargent & Parker, 2018).

The main reasons for this drop-off in take up and the wider difficulties for neighbourhoods in progressing Plans can be related to the known burdens and barriers associated with neighbourhood planning, and may be summarised across six principal elements: time, burdens, coordination with the local plan, relationship with the LPA, design of the policy and uneven skills, resources and capacity. These are discussed below.

3.3.4.1. Time taken. The average time taken to complete a NDP (from area designation to the plan passing referendum) goes well beyond 2 years as estimated by DCLG/MHCLG. It has also increased over time from the 29 months in 2016 (Parker & Salter, 2017) to 39 months by 2019 (Parker et al., 2020). This demonstrates both the effort involved in completing a Plan but also how NP presents a sequencing challenge as local plans often begin or reach a stage where potential conflicts can appear with emerging NDPs.

3.3.4.2. Process and technical burdens. There have been concerns that the process is more burdensome than anticipated (Parker et al., 2014; 2015; Parker et al., 2019) and about the toll NP takes on those engaged (Gunn & Vigar, 2015; Mace and Tewdwr-Jones, 2017; Parker et al., 2020). NPG interviewees in the 2019–20 study frequently commented that the process was more difficult, convoluted and complicated than they had expected, with many reporting that, had they fully understood the scale of the task from the outset, they would have been much more reluctant to embark on the project. Many neighbourhoods reported significant levels of drop-out from their steering groups due to the burdensome and lengthy nature of the process, leaving remaining members with an even greater workload (Parker et al., 2020).

3.3.4.3. Process and technical burdens. The original intention was for a hierarchical approach to plan-making with NPs adding locally distinctive policies in areas with an up-to-date Local Plan. However, legislation allows Neighbourhood Plans to come forward in areas with an emerging local plan and many neighbourhoods have sought to do so. Parker and Salter (2017, p.485) identify that only 62% of Plans that passed referendum by October 2016 followed the traditional planning hierarchy – by 2019 this had increased to 71% (Parker et al., 2020). This suggests that timing and relationship with the relevant local plan is critical for longer term effectiveness. Despite a high number of neighbourhood area designations in areas with an emerging Local Plan the numbers that are made in advance of the Local Plan are substantially lower. Aside from the issues with preparing a NDP in advance with regards to uncertainty re: parameters and policies (see Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2015; 2017), Parker (2012) also reports that 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. A further problem for neighbourhood plans that come forward in advance of Local plans is that, upon adoption of the Local Plan, the NP risks becoming immediately out-of-date. NPs are examined against adopted Local Plans, not emerging ones, and if an emerging Plan differs substantially from the adopted one (against which the NP is statutorily examined), once the new Plan comes into effect, the plan may require immediate and substantial revision or risk becoming ineffective (Bogusz, 2018).

3.3.4.4. Response of the local planning authorities. LPAs are enabling and shaping neighbourhood planning in different ways (see Brownill, 2017a; Salter, 2018; 2022) with variations reported in the willingness of LPAs to respond to the agenda (see Brownill, 2017a; Parker et al., 2014; Salter, 2018, 2022; Wills, 2016). This includes instances where the LPA may, deliberately or not, seek to frustrate neighbourhood plan progress (Parker et al., 2014), or indeed 'deflect' communities away from NP and towards other forms of community action (Salter, 2022). In other areas

NPs have been initiated by the LPA (Parker et al., 2015) with some LPAs encouraging take-up of plans in order to assist in the delivery of the Local Plan (Salter, 2022).

3.3.4.5. Limitations of NP design and scope. When the policy of neighbourhood planning was first launched, there was a strong emphasis in the communicative discourse from policy and political actors on the powers that NP would provide with NP described as a policy which "gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area" (DCLG, 2014, paragraph 1). However, over time it became increasingly clear both to active and potential neighbourhood planners that the powers offered by NP were far more limited than Governmental rhetoric originally led people to believe. Furthermore, guidance provided by consultants and LPA officers has often acted to restrict NP groups' apparent scope for action even further (Parker et al., 2015). This diminution in the perceived potential for NP to deliver on community ambitions is likely to have discouraged many potential citizen planners from seeking designation, and to have led some active groups to either drop out or to focus on other priorities or vehicles to achieve their aims.

3.3.4.6. Skills, resources and capacity. An uneven availability of skills, resources, volunteers, time, experience and knowledge has been recognised. The technical know-how of planning and questions regarding the capacity of 'lay persons' to write effective and implementable planning policies has been an issue (DEFRA, 2003; Parker et al., 2015). Many groups overcome these challenges by employing consultants to assist, however, there are associated costs in doing so.

84% of communities involved in the Impact of Neighbourhood Planning study indicated that planning consultants had been 'essential' to their plan. Of these, 58 were able to provide indicative costs with an average of £ 12,142.23 and a range between £ 1200 and £ 54,899 and Table 5 sets this out in more detail.

As previously discussed, neighbourhood planning groups can access funding to employ consultants as part of the MHCLG / Locality Support Programme (in addition to government support advice 'agencies' e.g. AECOM). The reliance on groups for external support has set up an entire industry of NP consultancies[4] and effectively created a new market in planning knowledge. This has extended the tension between efforts to attune the Plans and the neighbourhoods to both regulatory requirements, local authority views and the primary concerns of central government for NP to help deliver housing. Clearly those actors have been intermediaries attempting to reconcile governmental objectives and regulatory guides with local authority strategic policy and other political concerns with the aims and wishes of the neighbourhood while themselves interpreting the need and differently and offering variable quality and types of support (Bradley, 2018).

Within this narrative arc of high initial engagement from communities followed by a sustained reduction in new involvement, there are very marked differences across the country in which neighbourhoods have and have not used this community right (see Fig. 1). While there is neighbourhood planning activity in all regions of England, its spatial distribution is highly uneven, with less than 20% of activity taking place in the three northern regions, compared with 40% in the South East and South West combined. This can be at least in part attributed to stronger development pressures in the southern regions. Furthermore, Bradley and Haigh (2016) consider that NP may not be suitable in urban areas where development pressure is weaker. Those findings echo the earlier *User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning* study (Parker et al., 2014) and other research (e.g. Parker & Salter, 2017), in terms of the bias towards neighbourhood planning activity being concentrated in less deprived,

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[4] At least 30 consultancies were active by 2019 in offering paid advisory services.

rural and southern parts of the country.

The 2020 report indicated 13 areas for action that government could consider which focus on the following aspects of the process:

– Continuation of support for neighbourhood planning
– Uptake
– Scoping of neighbourhood issues and tools (triage)
– Funding
– Training
– Design
– Relationship with Local Plan
– Place-making and Participation
– Knowledge exchange
– Neighbourhood Development Plan Examination
– Decision-making
– Neighbourhood Development Plan Reviews

However, shortly after the INPE report was published the 2020 White Paper appeared to suggest NP was to oriented towards a new trajectory:

… we think Neighbourhood Plans should be retained in the reformed planning system, but we will want to consider whether their content should become more focused to reflect our proposals for Local Plans, as well as the opportunities which digital tools and data offer to support their development and improve accessibility for users. By making it easier to develop Neighbourhood Plans we wish to encourage their continued use and indeed to help spread their use further, particularly in towns and cities (MHCLG, 2020a, 2020b, p.42).

3.4. Outcomes of neighbourhood planning – what is it to achieve?

Despite the various changes to the policy, its recrafting and modifications over time, the authors of the 2020 Impacts of neighbourhood Planning (INPE) study identify that "the objectives of government for neighbourhood planning should be more explicit…at present the message about the purpose of neighbourhood planning is quite diffuse and this is leading to frustrations and delays as the policy is interpreted and implemented in practice by both communities and LPAs" (Parker et al., 2020, p.22). This reflects the absence of clear success criteria against which NP can be assessed (see Wargent & Parker, 2018).

As discussed so far in this chapter, the emphasis from DCLG seems to have swayed from the number of communities engaged in neighbourhood planning and completing the process (during phase 1 and phase 2) to the role of neighbourhood plans in delivering growth (phase 3). Salter, Parker, et al. (2022), however, highlight "the complexities in isolating the contribution of NP to overall housing supply and the danger of attributing policy outcomes to one policy tool."

This changing ambition towards neighbourhood planning can also be seen through the subtle changes and revisions that have been made to the NPPF since its first publication in 2012. Changes have been made which reflect a tactic recognition that NP could not simply vest power to neighbourhoods but that it is a tool that acts to broker between key actors in 'helping to shape' the future of an area. The first iteration of the NPPF in 2012 included a detailed description of what NP could achieve and the only common surviving text in the 2019 iteration (also retained within the 2021 iteration) reads as follows:

Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan. Neighbourhood plans should not promote less development than set out in the strategic policies for the area, or undermine those strategic policies.

Once a neighbourhood plan has been brought into force, the policies

it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in a local plan covering the neighbourhood area, where they are in conflict; unless they are superseded by strategic or non-strategic policies that are adopted subsequently. (104 words - NPPF, 2019, para. 29–30).

What is removed is the stress on the degree of power and control that government claims for neighbourhood plans. The fuller description in the 2012 version was as follows:

Neighbourhood planning gives communities direct power to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and deliver the sustainable development they need. Parishes and neighbourhood forums can use neighbourhood planning to: set planning policies through neighbourhood plans to determine decisions on planning applications; and grant planning permission through Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders for specific development which complies with the order.

Neighbourhood planning provides a powerful set of tools for local people to ensure that they get the right types of development for their community. The ambition of the neighbourhood should be aligned with the strategic needs and priorities of the wider local area. Neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan. To facilitate this, local planning authorities should set out clearly their strategic policies for the area and ensure that an up-to-date Local Plan is in place as quickly as possible. Neighbourhood plans should reflect these policies and neighbourhoods should plan positively to support them. Neighbourhood plans and orders should not promote less development than set out in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies.

Outside these strategic elements, neighbourhood plans will be able to shape and direct sustainable development in their area. Once a neighbourhood plan has demonstrated its general conformity with the strategic policies of the Local Plan and is brought into force, the policies it contains take precedence over existing non-strategic policies in the Local Plan for that neighbourhood, where they are in conflict. Local planning authorities should avoid duplicating planning processes for non-strategic policies where a neighbourhood plan is in preparation. (267 words) (NPPF, 2012, paras. 183–85).

This recalibration between 2012 and 2019 also signals a recognition from MHCLG that neighbourhood plans are unlikely to be taken up by all.

3.5. Summary

● The first tenyears or so of NP has featured multiple changes to the detailing of regulation,of incentivisation, organisation of support and the partners involved in theorchestration and enactment of the policy. Given the iterations to NP since2011 it is considered that the Policy has been modified and amended to addressfour main challenges:
● Agency - as a result of the actions and responses of thoseenacting NP or upon whom it is brought to bear (Barrett and Hill, 1984, p.119)i.e. a process of interaction and negotiation to establish "negotiated order"was embarked upon, recognising questions of;
● Practicality - toreassert feasibility in response to issues arising during policy implementationin the second phase;
● Viability – to ensure that the endeavour is worth the time,energy and other resources to produce a neighbourhood plan given the shiftinglegal environment; and
● Support - toclarify the Government's intentions and support for Neighbourhood Planning i.e.their mandate to expand or continue the policy, the orientation of NP and itsbasis pursued in the second and third phases of implementation.

Each phase of NP reflects a stage of policy implementation, enactment and policy learning. However, there is fluidity between the stages as the policy-making process continued with and alongside enactment. Furthermore, the review has highlighted the assemblage of

neighbourhood planning and the range of actors involved in shaping the agenda and its implementation. In the discussion thus far DCLG have been presented as one entity, however, it is important to consider that the policy has also been influenced by the numerous changes within the Department (which has itself undergone a name change from DCLG to MHCLG) including the appointment of 3 different Secretaries of State and 6 Planning Ministers from 2011 to 2018. This has also been exacerbated by discontinuities of staff and support, with civil servants following the practice of regular reassignment in DCLG (MHCLG then DLUHC) who oversaw NP policy and delivery (see, also Syed, 2019 on the civil service and institutional isomorphism). This practice can militate against retention of accrued experience and may have stymied long-term thinking.

Furthermore, there have been changes to contract arrangements and organisations across the second phase period 2011–2015 and a shift in the role of Civil Servants from mobilisation to policy implementation. Changes to the implementation of the policy and, in particular, the support arrangements for neighbourhood planning groups therefore reflected not only the contracted organisation's repertoire but also the orientation given by central government periodically (itself subject to change) as well as varied responses by Local Planning Authorities (Salter, 2022) and neighbourhoods themselves.

Indicative of the open nature of debates over the future of this localist planning space differing views about what role NP should play are exemplified by this more expansive claim from a localist thinktank:

> We need to move from a passive, optional 'rights' approach (rights to provide, rights to buy, rights to transfer, rights to challenge, rights to neighbourhood plans, etc.) to a 'do' approach, where community power is the standard model. This means deliberately putting our public services and local assets into the hands of mutuals, social enterprises and charities which are run by local people. It means making neighbourhood planning universal and the ultimate arbiter of local development (Trusting the People, 2021, p.6).

Moreover, there has been an extended invocation of the neighbourhood as a scale of governance in the context of the UK government levelling-up policy agenda (Parker et al., 2022), with implications for the design, support and focus of neighbourhood planning activity in the future. If we project forward, a new policy phase will be necessary as the ideological work that NP is expected to do emerges. The following chapter now reflects on the NP policy, issues surrounding its evolution and application of New Institutionalist thinking before concluding with a reflection on the maintenance of the NP project past and future.

4. Chapter 4 - Discussion

Drawing on the theoretical base set out in Chapter 2 this chapter discusses what changed in NP over the period in question, why it was changed, and what we can learn from this as an analysis of the enactment of NP as set out in Chapter 3.

4.1. Keeping neighbourhood planning viable

As the previous assessment has outlined, the process of policy-making continued with and alongside implementation (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). Indeed, in the instance of neighbourhood planning, groups were supported by central government to start the process without the formal regulatory frame being in place. The initial rhetoric of empowerment was soon superseded by the ideational environment of growth, with the procedural rules and policy conditions (e.g. the legislative framework) providing the institutional framing of neighbourhood planning and bounding the enactment space within which actors could operate and negotiate (Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2017, p.460).

The introduction of a statutory form of community-led planning created for the first time a cohort of volunteers upon whom government

relied for the actualisation of formal planning policy. The lived experience of those engaging in neighbourhood planning thus provided a series of feedback loops which also shaped the policy design of NP as it progressed. As the policy began to be taken-up a more 'muscular' form of localism was detectable (Pickles, 2012; Tait & Inch, 2016). This sought to determine primary objectives for NP alongside what constituted 'appropriate' behaviours from participants, whilst remaining mindful of the responses of other actors. Volunteer community members and diverse neighbourhood contexts added complexity but they were necessary to the localist project and a careful balance of enabling and constraining technologies were needed to exercise different forms of ideational power in refining the formal and informal institutional parameters of NP. The enactment space could then flex to accommodate both governmental objectives and community ambitions (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). Through a range of multi-directional discursive practices, the agency of volunteers in the enactment space shaped the continually-emerging structure of the institution of NP, informing government iterations of the policy which acted to structure the constraints on and opportunities for volunteer agency.

The volunteer group of neighbourhood planners —both actual and potential—enter more fully into governmental calculus over time, regarding the balancing of incentives and requirements, as well as the apparent realisation of differences across neighbourhoods that demanded more nuanced approaches to support. This group needed to be kept sufficiently mobilised to ensure the policy was taken up and enacted; but as Parker et al. (2020, p.655) argued: "…the goals of the state in political and ideological terms have been prioritised above the activity and experience of the volunteer upon which the project relies and on whom its continued existence depends in the future". As such, government responses have intermittently been shaped and guided by the lived experience of and 'bottom-up' pressure from volunteers. These responses have attempted to keep volunteers induced as part of the ongoing gift relationship, where reciprocal tokens are being exchanged in the form of time on the one hand and institutional guarantees of facilitation and protection of agency within the enactment space on the other (e.g. the assumption of powers by the Secretary of State to intervene in decisions involving NDPs, and the protection of some NDP areas from the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' which would allow more development proposals that conflict with the plan to be permitted). The implementation of the policy therefore involved a process of interaction and negotiation between Central Government, who are seeking to put the policy into action, and those upon whom action depends.

As discussed in Chapter 3, once the legislative framework was established, Central Government continued to modify NP over time, reaffirming political confidence in the policy, and as the policy began to be taken-up the ideological frame of delivering growth came to the fore (Pickles, 2012; Tait & Inch, 2016). Thus, the policy organised and shaped not only *how* communities developed a plan (e.g. emergent practices) but also *for what* they planned (i.e. what became understood as central matters for NDPs to address). For example, the protection granted to NDPs from the presumption in favour of sustainable development in 2016 applied only to those NDPs which allocated sites for housing, providing a clear incentive for NPGs to allocate housing sites. During phase 2 (2011–2014) the focus of MHCLG was on mobilising take-up; with regular reports by MHCLG (in the notes on Neighbourhood Planning) on the number of area designations and Plans passing referendum.

The initial drivers of the changes to NP can be explained in part by research-led interventions, such as those enacted in light of the first review of NP funded by DCLG. The research focused on early lessons to be learned from 'successful' communities who were at least part way through the process. The research indicated that the speed of progress and level of take-up was however not as high as anticipated so, following the publication of the research (Parker et al., 2014) Government sought to make "the process quicker and simpler through regulation and also

non-regulatory actions" in order to "make the process of preparing an NDP easier" (Stanier, 2014, p.106). Most of the resultant amendments were non-regulatory but fall into the soft regulation category.

In terms of non-regulatory action, predominately linked to financial incentives, government adjusted the support package arrangements so that "from 2015, the support will target areas where NP is more difficult or complex or could bring particular benefits. This will include deprived areas, business areas, forums, clusters of parishes, areas that are proposing more growth than in the Local Plan, and areas proposing NDOs. In response to calls from communities and others a package of "off the shelf" tools and templates will help with particular aspects" (Locality, 2015, no pag.) and thus seeking to make it easier for groups to engage with the process. These adjustments were made based on the lived practices on the ground, to even out take-up on the ground and influence the agency of neighbourhood planners. The research also provided a channel for the agency and direct experience of NP volunteers to be voiced direct to civil servants and politicians nationally. Groups reported their challenges in engaging with the process and reported on their experiences with other actors engaged within this process. On the basis of this feedback a number of adjustments were made in terms of funding, guidance and information dissemination and these required input and action from a range of actors including local planning authorities and support organisations. The alterations included the introduction of time-scales for LPA decisions and the removal of discretionary powers in circumstances where the local authority was deemed to be frustrating the progress of NP groups (Salter, 2022) – Central Government therefore sought to directly modify their behaviour as the response of local authorities was considered as a barrier to implementation.

Towards the end of this period, as NDPs started to be used in decision-making, the Secretary of State took advantage of the powers he had granted himself to intervene in decisions regarding housing development in areas covered by an NDP. He used these opportunities to repeatedly emphasise the substantial negative weight that he placed on proposals that conflicted with made or emerging NDPs (Burns & Yuille, 2018). These interventions were intended not just to secure formal decisions in favour of NDP policies in the specific areas under consideration, but to reinforce the ideational parameters of the enactment space of NP, encouraging NPGs to take up and continue to progress plans by providing symbolic institutional guarantees for the efficacy of their agency within that space.

Thus, during phase 2 of policy implementation adjustments in the practice of NP were conditioned by a range of actors and processes all of which constitute the institution of NP. Through this broader assemblage of legal, financial, rhetorical and discursive devices, Government sought to shape the enactment space and refine and enhance implementation of the NP project and support take-up of the policy agenda by neighbourhood planning groups across the country.

From 2015 onwards (phase 3) NP was increasingly shaped by the broader policy environment and operational factors, for instance, a series of High Court Challenges by developers and experiences of the first NP examinations. These actions by local policy actors paradoxically enacted the institution of NP as both precarious (as NDPs were shown to be vulnerable to challenge of a number of fronts) and robust (as many of the legal challenges were defeated, and the vast majority of plans passed examination, albeit subject to modifications). DCLG took a selective view in responding to these issues and did so in order to clarify the enactment space (e.g. NPs can be "made" in advance of a Local Plan") as well to stabilise the place of neighbourhood plans in the wider planning system and in the face of external pressures. Thus, as discussed above institutional change was brought about based not only on the lived practices on the ground (of NPGs and other key actors) but also due to changes in the policy framework as DCLG sought to exercise 'power over' ideas and to ensure that the ideational frame of NP as a mechanism for the delivery of growth was maintained by adopting a more "muscular" approach to localism (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016; Tait & Inch, 2016).

Over this time period, Central Government adopted and amended various mechanisms to retain power and control over the agenda with, for example, recourse to written ministerial statements, amendments to the NPPF, ministerial decisions on recovered appeals, and in 2017 a modification to the legislation through the 2017 Neighbourhood Planning Act. A particularly clear example of this was found in a Ministerial Statement in 2016, through which the then Planning minister Gavin Barwell intervened to guarantee the durability of neighbourhood plans. This aimed to protect emerging and existing plans from speculative planning applications and where land supply issues at the local level threatened to undermine them: "I am today making clear that where communities plan for housing in their area in a neighbourhood plan, those plans should not be deemed to be out-of-date" (Barwell, 2016, no pagination). These discursive interventions acted to shape the meaning context (and therefore institutional parameters) of local policy actors and were intended to give confidence in their capacity to shape change through the institutions of NP, providing they contributed to government's central objective of housing delivery (Schmidt, 2008).

Furthermore, the temporary intervention powers for the Secretary of State were extended, opening-up the possibility of government enforcing decisions and determining what 'good conduct' constituted (Whitehead et al., 2017; Huxley, 2000). While early exercises of these powers were often used by the Sectary of State to emphasise the weight that government placed on the policy of NP and the rights of communities to use NP to determine their own futures, later uses of this tool tended to reinforce the centrality of the government's commitment to housebuilding (Burns & Yuille, 2018). The ideational parameters of the space were shifted in order to continue to maintain support from the policy actors (community volunteers) needed to implement the policy, while ensuring that implementation also contributed to delivering central Government objectives. These shifts in the structuring factors that shape the institutional enactment space contributed to wider moves during this period to constrain the agency of local actors in implementing the policy of NP (Moulaert et al., 2016).

The first legislative changes to NP and shaping of the institutional frame came in the form of reforms detailed in the 2016 Neighbourhood Planning and Infrastructure Bill (which became the 2017 Act). Changes to the law were introduced through the lens of housing delivery – where the proposals "[will] give local communities more power and control to shape their own area so that we can build more houses and give everyone who works hard the chance to buy their own home" (Cabinet Office, 2016 - Section 1.3 no pag.). This represented a doubling down on the neighbourhood as a key scale of policy delivery within planning and which presaged Theresa May's premiership with its brief but rhetorically strong emphasis on housing delivery as a solution to the housing affordability crisis (Morphet & Clifford, 2020).

This version of centre-local (and neighbourhood) relations is a familiar story: as explained by Allmendinger and Haughton :

> very quickly fault lines have emerged in this storyline of political indifference to local difference, as guidance wording has been tightened up with each iteration of draft policy and legislation to ensure some level of conformity by local actors to the guidance of national government and the wider local area plans agreed by local government.

This in turn reflects similar experiences reported by Geddes (2006, p.91) in analysing the response to the New Deal for Communities programme (NDC) and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), "when the success or failure of the policy is particularly politically sensitive government always tends to curtail decentralised autonomy and emphasise centralised control." Having previously acted to discursively emphasise the scope for community groups to wield power within the institutional enactment space of NP, this phase thus saw a shift in emphasis towards the delivery of government priorities and a tightening of discursive institutional structures of NPs. However, it also saw the introduction of

new formal rules, which acted to maintain some balance in the institutional meaning and context between mobilising volunteer support and advancing government priorities. This was aimed at entrenching NP as an effective means of shaping development to the extent that local enactment responded to tightened constraints on its scope (Barrett, 2004).

As has been discussed above, over 3 phases of policy implementation, the institutional form of NP has been influenced by a range of interests and ways in which the different actors have sought to engage with NP. The enactment space of NP comprises a dynamic set of interests with Central Government responding to the actions of others whose interests are affected by the policy initiative, as well as those who were unhappy about the way the policy tool was designed and supported (McConnell, 2010; Birkland, 2019; May, 1992). If, following Barrett and Fudge (1981), policy implementation is better described as a process of action and reaction, then a dynamic of this sort is clearly evident in the amendments to NP which alternately seek to emphasise community agency and achievement of central government objectives. This also corresponds with the policy adjustment and feedback model of Moyson et al. (2017) whereby multiple policy actors are involved in shaping decisions. This reinforces the literature on policy learning and ideological influence (Stone, 1999; Larner, 2000).

The formal and informal institutional parameters have been adjusted over time in order to accommodate both government objectives and community ambitions (Cartensen and Schmidt, 2019), with Central Government reliant on the motivations of volunteers to enact the policy. There remains an absence of clear success criteria against which NP can be assessed with the overarching message and objectives for NP remaining diffuse (Parker et al., 2020; Wargent & Parker, 2018).

Significantly, at no stage in the policy cycle have government looked for a sustained period at the *implementation* of plans, despite advice to look at this as a key aspect of the success of NP (see Wargent & Parker, 2018). Instead MHCLG started to gather evidence for themselves on the contribution of NP towards housing, then used this as a basis to justify further changes to policy and legislation (e.g. interventions to protect areas with made plans that allocate housing sites from speculative development as per Barwell, 2016 as referred to above) in order to reinforce their ideological frame.

NP is itself framed within a set of neoliberal ideas and this overarching ideology influences the interactions, and agency, of the policy actors engaged in the institution of NP (Parker et al., 2022). The ASID framework also provides a useful lens through which to view the interrelationships involved in NP and to consider the ways in which the policy is recrafted and policy enhancement shaped by the multiple actors and broader assemblage of NP. The next section will focus more closely on deepening our understanding of how the enactment space of NP has shaped the collective agency of those engaged in NP and how this broader assemblage has in turn contributed to the reshaping of the institution. During implementation policy is also enacted from below and regardless of governmental intentions the literature indicates that communities have used the limited agency offered by NP to 'work the spaces' of power and achieve outcomes that are not aligned with hegemonic intentions (Yuille, 2020; Wargent, 2021).

4.2. Neighbourhood planning, control and responsibilisation

Despite its statutory footing, unique in the history of English community-led planning, Haughton et al. (2013) identify NP as one of a proliferation of 'soft spaces' of spatial governance, operating alongside formal 'hard spaces' consisting of legally defined territorial units of government which are subject to electoral accountability through representative democracy. They argue that soft governance arrangements displace political contestation and normalise neoliberal, postpolitical rationalities—which combine various forms of marketisation, commodification, mistrust of the state, and regulatory reform—as part of "a political culture that paradoxically encourages engagement but

also defends against its disruptive effects" (Inch, 2015, p. 405). Where NP is promoted as a radically innovative form of empowerment, they claim that it only offers the *potential* for innovation in forms of public engagement and delivery, while scope for resistance, political contestation, or substantial agency over outcomes is effectively neutralised by the requirement for neighbourhood plans to comply with growth-led objectives found in local and national policy. In other words, it devolves the power to decide "*how* to meet targets, not *what* targets should be met" (Wargent, 2021, p.580 - emphasis in original).

Against such analysis, the innovative potential of NP (Bradley, 2015), and possibilities of de-professionalisation of planning (Lord et al., 2017), sit alongside the realities of the geographical and social gradients of uptake (Wills, 2016; Parker & Salter, 2017) which were broadly anticipated (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013; Inch, 2012). A tightly drawn space for community control was offered, with citizens expected to occupy this according to prescriptive rules which constrained their capacity to act (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Parker & Lynn, & Wargent, 2015; 2017), and which served to limit influence over the fundamental changes that concern them most (Gallent and Robinson, 2013). Davoudi and Madanipour develop this theme, arguing that NP represents a shift of emphasis from 'technologies of performance' (such as performance indicators, benchmarking and auditing), to 'technologies of agency' which "liberate individual freedoms and skills and redeploy individual's capacity as 'free subjects' to meet government's objectives" (2013, p.554), with the 'local' lauded as the key scale at which citizens and communities can be endowed with the 'freedom' to achieve centrally-driven aims.

While government discourse suggests that the powers of NP could be taken from experts and officials and redistributed to existing communities, the notion of neoliberal governmentality requires us to instead understand the policy and practice of NP as actively constructing communities (Wargent, 2021) and assembling neighbourhoods from the fluid and contingent relations between people, discourses, policies, resources, legislation, the material world and a variety of political actors (Brownill, 2017). Changes to the 'internal structures and constructs' that constitute the institutions of NP therefore also generate changes in the neighbourhoods aiming to enact the policy. Communities are constituted as good 'citizen planners', enabled by the specific framing of the limited powers and substantial constraints placed upon them only to enact 'responsible' choices that will contribute to delivering centrally determined objectives (Brownill, 2017b), with their 'freedoms' and agency substantially constrained (Clarke & Cochrane, 2013). As such the policy learning is not only institutionally constrained, it is ideologically filtered (Zanotto, 2020; Coaffee and Healey, 2003), such that the modifications keep in sight key logics of neoliberalised planning (e.g. housing growth, market-led development, speed/timeliness).

Citizens therefore take on the responsibilities of the state. Responsibilities, such as planning for the development and use of land in the public interest, are 'rolled back' from the latter and 'rolled out' to the former who self-mobilise out of a sense of self-preservation (Apostolides, 2018) or to bolster public sector planning. However, understandably not all communities are equally able (or willing) to mobilise, leading to considerable inequalities in the distribution of designated NP areas, with strong concentrations in more southern, rural, and affluent areas (Parker & Salter, 2017). Even within those communities able to mobilise the social and cultural capital and other resources necessary, significant burdens are imposed on those individuals that constitute the neighbourhood planning group, who "must combine their existing life commitments with the task of authoring and maintaining a neighbourhood plan" (Lord et al., 2017, p.359).

Community leaders frequently reflect that the neighbourhood planning process takes longer, is more time consuming, and involves more work, bureaucracy, and technical difficulties than expected, with additional problems often caused by a changing external environment (e.g. changes to national policy, out-of-sync development of local plans, and submission of significant planning applications while plans are

emerging, see Parker et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2020). The process has been characterised as disproportionately time, labour and resource-intensive across multiple dimensions of community capacity (Gunn et al., 2015), and pushing the boundaries of what may legitimately be expected of volunteers (Parker, Dobson, Lynn, & Salter, 2020; Dobson & Parker, 2023). Such burdens appear as particularly high entry costs when set against the "fragile possibilities" that neighbourhood plans have of retaining significant influence over future planning decisions (Mace and Tewdwr-Jones, 2019, p.185).

The construction of communities as citizen planners in the logics of localism has, as its counterpoint, the construction of professional planners as obstructive, bureaucratic barriers to progress, one of the "enemies of enterprise" (Cameron, 2011), and as exclusionary, technocratic 'insiders' (DCLG, 2012; The Conservative Party, 2010), both of which require market responsiveness and tolerance of the good, growth-oriented citizen planner. Some have argued that the institutionalisation of these frames of meaning, with their strong anti-(local) state ideology, contrasts with that of the previous New Labour government, in which the co-production of planning implied both strong communities and a strong state (Williams et al., 2014). However, others claim that it is in many ways a continuation of a movement which has been hollowing out planners' ability to co-ordinate and regulate the use of land in the public interest for many years (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014). Devolving power to communities under this logic entails bypassing local authority planners, who are simultaneously being squeezed by severe resourcing cuts under the policies of austerity (Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014). This is in contrast to scholarly calls to locate citizens at the centre of the planning system, but to be surrounded by a strong, public-interest-oriented public planning sector (e.g. Innes & Booher, 2010). Instead, planning as a profession is eroded through the disparagement, defunding and disempowerment of skilled experts in favour of unevenly distributed, well-meaning amateurs (Lord et al., 2017). These two discursive constructions – communities as good citizen planners willing to embrace and promote growth, and professional planners as mere facilitators of markets and of growth-oriented citizens – provide two prongs of the neoliberal governmentality narrative and crucial elements of the ideational parameters of the institution of NP.

However, other authors counter this narrative by pointing to the "interstitial spaces existing between consensus and conflict" (Legacy et al., 2019, p.273) that are often found in actually existing accounts of community-led planning. New expressions of political participation are generated through the dynamic relations between a range of state and non-state actors, as participating citizens resist, transform or appropriate the roles and identities anticipated for them (Felt and Fochler, 2010). These local enactments dynamically modify the internal structures and constructs of the institutions that both constitute and are constituted by them, as well as by the intentions of central policy authors (Alasuutari, 2015). To some, the performative aspect of neighbourhood planning – the 'construction' of citizens and communities through its policies and practices – signals opportunity rather than subjectification to governmental objectives and is itself part of the wider 'enactment' of NP. Bradley (2015) highlights that outside of neighbourhood planning, planning engagement with publics tends to be individualistic and aggregative, with collective action often interpreted as obstructive, self-serving or 'NIMBY'. However, in neighbourhood planning it is the collective, the neighbourhood itself, that is produced and empowered as a new political actor, in marked contrast to the individualising tendency of the neoliberal agenda more widely (Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013). Thus, the central construct of the institution of NP – the neighbourhood - while significantly bounded by the constraints of the enactment space, nevertheless generates potential for new forms of collective agency which can in turn contribute to the re-shaping of the institution by testing the limits of that space.

From this perspective, the neighbourhood is mobilised – brought into being – around issues which lead to the formation of a collective neighbourhood identity (Marres, 2007). Bradley (2017) further claims

that drawing a line between neighbourhood and local planning authority as institutions of spatial planning generates the potential for an agonistic politics of difference. Parker, and Lynn, and Wargent (2017) concur, but see that potential as heavily constrained in its current framing, while Sturzaker & Gordon (2017) identify this tension as problematic due to the different types of democratic claim made by each institution.

Bradley (2020) also notes that not one but two new actors are produced in the process of neighbourhood planning: the neighbourhood as the newly empowered polity, and the neighbourhood planning group who acts on its behalf. Yuille (2020) observes that these two new actors are interdependent, incapable of existing without each other, but that relations between them are fluid and shifting. He argues that the legitimacy of neighbourhood planning groups relies on their being enacted at different junctures in different, conflicting relations of identity with the neighbourhood, and that the differential arrangements in which these relational identities are performed both produce and constrain their agency.

Further to neighbourhoods as newly empowered polities, it should be noted here that the potential for change is not confined to individual neighbourhoods nor cooperation between neighbourhoods. As Bradley (2017) has argued, neighbourhood planning has opened spaces of political struggle not only over the value and meaning of place but also the social relations it prescribes. Unsurprisingly, the political mobilisation that arises from newly forged political identities is not confined to pre-defined participatory spaces, and frequently radiates outwards into cognate policy fields, generating new collective frames and often, bottom-up policies. One recent example of this England has been the emergence of the Community Planning Alliance (CPA), a grassroots campaign group founded in 2021 (see CPA, 2022), with the aim of networking disparate campaigns and groups across the UK, with an aim to increase community influence in the planning system. The development of collective action frames and a particular political manifestation - pressure groups – can influence institutions and beyond singlular policy arenas or sectors. This opens up wider questions on the role of social movements (see for example, Tarrow, 1994) within the new institutionalism.

UK government have responded to neighbourhood planning experience and pressure from NP groups, since 2015 in several ways. Firstly, to standardise support and guidance on the one hand, while secodndly increasing financial incentives for some categories of neighbourhood and activity on the other – as discussed in further detail in Chapter 3. They have also responded through changes to national policy and written ministerial statements that bolster the significance of neighbourhood plans – but only to the extent that they support government objectives.

Thus, institutional structures are being dynamically constructed that strengthen the capacity of NP groups to make a difference, but only where that difference aligns with government priorities. Yet, others have also argued that within the canvas of neoliberal governmentality lie possibilities for generating difference, solidarity and a renewed democracy, and that instances of localism such as neighbourhood planning can be sites of resistance rather than acquiescence (Williams et al., 2014). Research by a range of scholars suggests that neighbourhood planners, far from acceding to national growth imperatives, have focused on specific local needs, the preservation of place identity, green and social infrastructure, developing community projects, and addressing wider sustainability concerns (Bradley et al., 2017; Bradley and Sparling, 2016; Field & Layard, 2017). These communities are "exploring the possibilities of neighbourhood planning to reassert the social, environmental and redistributive purposes of planning… to present counter-narratives to the dominant planning paradigm and localism discourse and to put forward a differing representation of the neighbourhood" (Brownill and Bradley, 2017, p.5). These sites produce new ethical and political spaces with progressive potential to 'work the spaces of power' (Newman, 2012), taking advantage of the contingency

entailed by the construction of subjectivities to resist and subvert governmental intentions.

The institutions within which NP groups and other local policy actors operate are at once fixed and given by the formal structures and discursive cues emanating from central government, and simultaneously shaped and changed by the enactments of the policy by those local actors (Schmidt, 2008). However, such expressions must be set into a broader assessment that indicates how governmental bounding of NP has balanced-off a need to keep volunteers mobilised with the aim of adhering to key neoliberal features and delimitations. The reduction in take-up of NP in recent years suggests that unless governmental attempts at institutional reform to encourage wider take-up (in more urban, northern and deprived communities) are successful, the institution will cease to be reproduced at a local level and the policy will stagnate and perish (Wargent & Parker, 2018). More recent iterations by government in response include the announcement in 2021 of pilot schemes to support the development of simplified approaches to neighbourhood planning and to support councils in urban and deprived areas to encourage and support residents to produce NDPs, and proposals to extend the protection of NDPs from the presumption in favour of sustainable development from two years to five, and to introduce 'neighbourhood planning statements' as a simplified form of neighbourhood planning. These interventions seek to reinforce the ideational parameters of neighbourhood planning as an institutional space in which local agency is effective, in order to enrol the agency of volunteers in the expanded implementation of policy.

A majority of commercial consultants indicate that, far from furthering the government's pro-growth objectives, neighbourhood planning has increased communities' ability to resist unpopular development (Khan, 2020), and suggest that it has done little to boost housing numbers (Lichfields, 2017; Salter, Parker, et al., 2022). A fragmented, messy picture emerges therefore, in which the intentions of neoliberal governmentality, while strongly overshadowing any naïve claims for straightforward community empowerment, fail to gain a hegemonic purchase on the agency of citizens, and genuinely political tensions are continually played out in an ongoing contestation between centrally and locally-set agendas (Wargent, 2021). This exemplifies the new institutionalist imperative to take seriously the local enactments of policies and the ongoing contingent construction of institutional structures by all engaged policy actors – while at the same time acknowledging the inevitably unequal distributional effects of the institution, which structure opportunities for mobilisation and change (Sorensen, 2017). Indeed, it has been argued that a failure to engage with the progressive potential contained within participatory projects, despite their neoliberal intentions, runs the risk of actively suppressing this potential (Williams et al., 2012). It is therefore vital to achieve a detailed understanding of their operation in practice, and of the practices implicated in their operation (cf. Parker and Street, 2015).

When considering neighbourhoods as institutions of spatial planning it is useful to reflect on how the 'internal structures and constructs', 'frames of meaning' and 'norms and conventions' of NP (as well as and alongside the formal rules) are formed and reproduced, and how they are both governmentalist and oppositional (Schmidt, 2010). It is clear that there is a tension and the evidence set out indicates that citizen planners do not simply conform to the pre-prepared pro-growth identities anticipated by the state and constructed through formal legislative, regulatory, policy, guidance and funding regimes i.e. the formal institutional features of neighbourhood planning. Instead, while to an extent reproducing these identities and ways of acting, they also find ways in which alternative imaginaries and identities are able to emerge and therefore act to develop and change the informal institutional elements of NP as practised (Yuille, 2021).

However, this progressive potential is often limited to the material actions of individual NP groups, which do not tend to travel, and institutional change thus tends towards the neoliberal ideal. Communications across the wider institutions of NP tend to be mediated by

consultants, 'experts in community participation' and local planning officers. The focus of these mediators, on ensuring that neighbourhood plans are defensible at examination, at planning committee and in court, leads to the reproduction of increasingly conservative positions, which limits the capacity of NP groups to experiment or push the boundaries of the enactment space (Parker et al., 2015). These conservative tendencies also mobilise texts and discursive devices (such as 'made' plans, templates, toolkits etc) to reproduce and reinforce constraints on agency in such a way that historical precedent (what has been done) becomes institutionally embedded as present possibility (what can be done). Such material and ideational structuring factors combine to produce a set of internal constructs and frames of meaning that constrain the agency of local actors to an even greater degree than the formal institutional framing (Yuille, forthcoming). Individual instances of more progressive or contestable action therefore become both more difficult to achieve and have a more limited impact on the reproduction of institutional structures. This is arguably a significant factor leading to the stagnation envisaged by Wargent and Parker (2018) and demonstrated by the fall-off in new starts, referenda and reviews highlighted as in Parker et al. (2020).

The enactment space has, as a result, stayed remarkably intact - although in saying this we are mindful that this is never hegemonic: progressive potential always exists and is manifested in thousands of small ways in actual instances. But for the institution of NP to make concerted or widespread progressive change it will require a different kind of communication, by different actors in different ways. This could for example take the form of stronger forms of coordinative (peer-to-peer) discourse between NP groups as against the dominance of communicative (top-down) discourse in which consultants, professional planners and others act as mediators in communicating the messages of central government to NP groups as the ultimate implementors of the policy (Schmidt, 2008). When therefore bringing together the enactment and iterations involved in NP over a decade we can see the inter-relationships that the ASID model suggests, in which the interactions between agency, structure, institutions and discourse are mutually constitutive of an unfolding of neighbourhood planning as practiced and as imagined.

5. Chapter 5 – Conclusion

5.1. Neighbourhood planning(s), institutional change and neo-liberal learning

The implicit recognition of the art of government as a congenitally failing operation (Miller and Rose, 1990; Wesselink et al., 2011; Wargent, 2021), produces a feedback loop of problematisation and possible solutions. The sum of incremental reforms however can be hard to conceptualise. The preceding chapters have sought to detail both the historical changes to the NP policy, and the reasons behind those changes. Despite attempts to iterate NP, there has been a lack of understanding shown with regard to the weaknesses as well as the complexity of planning activity (Lauermann & Temenos, 2022). As such the policy represents the meeting of several ideological and socio-cultural assumptions based on capacity (agency), interest, resources and (bounded) understanding.

Since its introduction in late 2010, iterations to the policy of NP have enacted both institutional continuity and change, reflecting ongoing struggles and negotiation between policy actors over the meaning of the policy (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). Government interventions to the institutional assemblage of NP through legal, financial, policy, rhetorical and other devices have, to an extent, responded to feedback from local policy actors and national research, while also seeking to more strongly steer the local implementation of policy (Deutsch, 1963; Walker, 1974). These interventions have acted to partially concretize an ambiguous policy idea to ensure alignment with the broader programmatic and philosophical ideas of central government, representing the translation

of policy learning into policy change (Moyson et al., 2017). This exercise of ideational power has narrowed the internal 'constructs and structures' that constitute the institutions of NP, constraining the agency of local policy enactors and, apparently, reducing their willingness to participate (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). However, as Wargent and Parker (2018) state, there has never been an 'image of success' against which to compare the actual impacts and behaviours associated with NP. This highlights how the goals and messaging of NP may reflect a deliberate obfuscation to avoid scrutiny over success or otherwise of the policy.

Meanwhile, across England different neighbourhood plans have emerged that reflect the institutional relations at the time of plan production and the plans have been shaped by knowledge and understanding, learning from others and changing national regulation i.e. the enactment space. Thus, we return to consider the four contributions of the paper in terms of learning from the behaviours and iterations of the key actors - centrally the responses and motives of government - and conceptual advances relating to how institutions are shaped and oriented to suit particular political projects.

The literature shows a diverse set of outcomes and responses to NP, as would be expected as localist initiatives unfold in varied places and conditions. Such findings are likely to manifest elsewhere beyond England, where deliberately loose or vague scope or design features in efforts to organise localist planning. This diversity itself does not appear to be the motivating factor behind government management of NP, who rather emphasise cumulative, quantitative approaches to evaluation (number of plans initiated, number of plans adopted, number of sites allocated etc.). Hence for other jurisdictions, the way in which initial design and response is responded to by governments should be a critical question, alongside whether pre-programmed mechanisms for policy learning are present.

Policy learning over the ten-year period has led to iterations of the policy which maintained the tensions evident from the outset between the wide-ranging powers promised for neighbourhood planners in early government discourse, and governmental objectives to increase the supply of housing (Moyson et al., 2017). Take-up of the policy by communities at local level, while initially strong, did not achieve the extent and speed anticipated, leading to iterations intended to improve the support available to communities, speed up the process and give greater weight to the resultant plans. The responses of local authorities to the policy were identified as sometimes a barrier to implementation, which aligned with the government's rhetorical construction of planners as 'enemies of enterprise' and further iterations were introduced to require timely decisions. Government responded to vocal concerns about wider housing land supply issues leading to neighbourhood plans being undermined with iterations that gave designated NP areas some limited protection from this, and enabled the Secretary of State to intervene in decision-making. However, alongside and wrapped up in these iterations – presented as enhancing the capacities / agency of communities to make change – came a tightening of the discursive institutional structures of NP with an increasing focus on the delivery of housing. This led to conservative responses at the level of local implementation (Moulaert et al., 2016; Parker et al., 2015). The recent drop-off in take-up seems to indicate a failure to adequately value the incentives needed to motivate volunteer participation in this balance with centralised objectives, or to understand and adequately address the complex barriers in enactment and to participation in policy implementation. More recent proposals, not yet implemented at the time of writing, to encourage participation in under-represented areas, offer a simplified route for communities to express development priorities, and give greater protection from speculative development to made plans, indicate a further iteration of policy learning and change in response to past failures to define and refine the ideational parameters of NP to produce an institution that could balance or integrate the requirements of central government for control and local community volunteers for effective agency (Moulaert et al., 2016).

The policy product has thus become a rather myopic form of planning which only rarely generates innovation or added value. This is reflected in continuous claims to further community control as a solution to the planning problem, coupled with forms of deregulation (cf. David Malnick on Liz Truss in the Daily Telegraph, 16th July 2022).

5.2. Reflections

The decade of neighbourhood planning in England can be read as a neoliberal experiment in empowerment, part of an established, if uneven, roll-out of pro-growth, market-led development planning. The drop-off in new take up of NP, and of NDPs progressing to referendum and being reviewed, indicates a need to move beyond the co-production of planning embodied in NP to more thoroughly co-produced institutional learning to inform future iterations of the policy (Moyson, 2017). The policy requires multi-scalar delivery and relies upon the active involvement of local volunteers and other policy actors for implementation, the interests and motivations of which may only partially align with central government objectives. To avoid stagnation, future policy learning is likely to require more active engagement across the multi-actor field to better understand and incorporate the needs and ambitions of local policy implementors in institutional change, including more coordinative and less communicative discourse in which different policy actors are able to engage as peers (Schmidt, 2008).

Counter-intuitively, given the continual rhetorical promotion of the neighbourhood as an appropriate scale of intervention, and notably through the levelling up agenda promoted during 2021–2022 (DLUHC, 2022), there is a need to recognise the limitations of policy initiatives at this scale when addressing wider geographic inequalities. While there is clear scope for NP to contribute to the levelling up agenda, the unequal spatial distribution of resources and social and cultural capital required for such a voluntaristic agenda means that its benefits are currently largely restricted to more affluent areas. There is in any case a limit to what can be reasonably expected of neighbourhoods (Parker et al., 2022) and tools such as NP, where issues directly and indirectly related to the ambit or concerns of sustainable development planning lie deep-rooted in social-economic inequalities. These require integrated policy interventions, which extend far beyond land use policy at multiple scales. Furthermore, even when enacted with statutory powers through initiatives such as NP, neighbourhoods remain relatively minor actors on a larger scale, and are subject to subversion by powerful lobbies geared to resist or otherwise re-orient environmental and social goals promoted at a very local level.

If government wish to continue to support NP there will need to be affirmative action taken to sustain and expand neighbourhood planning activity. In our view UK Government are missing an opportunity to realise benefits in northern, urban and deprived areas and assist in their levelling-up agenda. This may include an increase in the quality and potentially the quantity of development, greater responsiveness of development to local needs, capacity building within communities, improved relationships with Local Authorities and potentially other agencies. As such there is a need to recognise the limits of neighbourhood planning and the tensions involved and act to either increase support to reflect additional challenges faced by some communities, or ensure community involvement, in other less burdensome ways - or indeed through a combination of the above.

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