

## LOCALISM IN ACTION: POST-POLITICAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

William Sparling<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Leeds Beckett University, [w.sparling6996@student.leedsbeckett.ac.uk](mailto:w.sparling6996@student.leedsbeckett.ac.uk)

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*The paper presents emerging primary research, in the form of two ‘inner-urban’ case studies, which investigates what Localism in the United Kingdom - specifically Neighbourhood Planning - means for processes of planning within an English northern city. That is to say, it discusses Localism’s impact(s) upon the process and content of plan making within a post-political perspective. In England, Neighbourhood Planning is grounded in the localist narrative of the United Kingdom Coalition Government to ‘devolve power to communities’. Neighbourhood Plans represent a way in which people may be included in the planning system and participate in decision-making by allowing the creation of a statutory document of the local plan. However, it has been argued that planning has been underpinned by a form of post-politics, with outcomes that are often constructed on vague governance objectives, normatively ‘sustainability’ and ‘growth’. This has been most notable in the ‘spatial planning’ approach of New Labour, which attempted to speed-up the planning system through achieving a meaningful consensus in development decision-making. In seeking to achieve this consensus, it has been argued that conflict and dissent have been marginalised and carefully managed within a variety of styles and scales of planning. The crux of the argument is as follows. Whilst on the face of it, ‘spatial planning’ within political narrative appears to have vanished, to be replaced by processes of Localism, spatial planning doctrine as mind-set and professional practice still remains.*

### 1. Introduction

The concept of the neighbourhood within city planning is viewed with some suspicion by Jane Jacobs. Neighbourhoods are sentimental constructs that are akin to a valentine, attempting to merge and distort two very distinct paradigms of the city and suburban life. Neighbourhood plays on emotions of sentimentality, rather than rational, or good sense. Cities on the other hand are different. Cities, if they are created by everybody, can provide for everybody (Jacobs, 1992). If the neighbourhood is something everyone can relate to – sentimentally at least - it is something that they can control, can create. Perhaps neighbourhoods are to be seen as building blocks of cities created by everybody.

Engaging with theories of post-politics, the working paper discusses state primed localism, followed by the emerging empirical study. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate how ‘Localism’ in England may be an attempt at the continuation of a post-political spatial planning and in doing so outlines emerging findings of two inner-urban Neighbourhood Planning case studies. The paper charts emerging findings based on the attempts of Government to deploy Localism, the issues encountered by those involved in making Plans, and the responses of local government and planning profession. Discussion takes place of an era of political, regulatory and policy flux, post-2010, characterised by a British coalition government consisting of the Conservative Party and Liberal Democratic Party. To be clear, Localism and Neighbourhood Planning in this paper refers to that developed by the Coalition Government. Along with the National Planning Policy Framework these are applicable to England only, due to the devolved nature of planning in the United Kingdom.

Localism is enacted by the Coalition as part of an on-going political localist narrative that appears to prioritise scales beneath the ‘national’ in decision making. Neighbourhood Planning is a key component of Localism, a tool, or more accurately is a set of ‘rights’, that is “promoted vigorously”

during the initial stages of the new legislation (Parker, 2012, p4). The Neighbourhood Development Plan sits within the wider package of Neighbourhood Planning ‘rights’ that is created, of which there are three; a Neighbourhood [Development] Plan; a Neighbourhood Development Order; and the Community Right to Build. Neighbourhood Planning is also promoted alongside a plethora of other ‘rights’ that purportedly allow greater control over subjects of economic development, buildings, and public service delivery (Locality, n.d.).

Planning in England is inherently political in its nature, due to the nationalised structure of development rights and land use regulation against which decisions are made in the United Kingdom (Booth, 2002). As a result, competition between many actors is intrinsically part of the planning system when decisions are made, with the state making decisions on behalf of the people, with a range of solutions and theories which attempt to reconcile differences and achieve consensus (Healey, 1997). Decisions are made within a system characterised by a plan-led structure, created in the early 1990s. Being plan-led, the system is such that at the local level, local planning authorities create forward looking development plans for their area, on which the public has a legal right to be consulted, before becoming legally binding documents. Planning decisions are then made by the local planning authority based on legislation, case law and local and national policy. This is the primary way in which Neighbourhood Development Plans appear to have influence and the principal way in which they are intended by Government to be used (UK Parliament, 2011; 2012). It is the process of creating such a policy that is the focus of the paper.

Neighbourhood Planning is pronounced politically as an opportunity to influence decision making, to create neighbourhood. Neighbourhood Development Plans are intended to “...give [people] the opportunity to make their own choices...” (Clark, 2011, no page). Emerging criticism of Neighbourhood Planning perceives the policy as a method for removing politics from decision making, by foreclosing debate around carefully selected parameters (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). Political ideology is removed from decision making, reducing decisions to “technocratic deliberation” (Deas, 2013, p.75). To do so, a variety of mechanisms can be deployed, including the use of vague nomenclature and ‘governance’ arrangements without a specifically clear overall objective. There are well-choreographed processes within which conflict, or the potential for it, is displaced or residualised (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012).

Conversely, in areas that have taken up Neighbourhood Planning, there may be an “antagonism developing” at the neighbourhood scale that is contrary to this post-political analysis (Bradley, forthcoming, p.4). It is argued that in creating a nationally deployed framework of post-politics as Localism, Neighbourhood Planning has given people a collective identity. Rather than politics being residualised and reduced to a technocratic procedure between competing interests, antagonism develops to question political structures and ideals (Bradley, forthcoming). However, these can’t be seen as being on a linear axis of ‘post-political vs non-post-political’. A post-political analysis of cities goes much wider than this and as antagonism develops in one area, post-political responses may emerge. There are various trends which may highlight a post-political condition within planning, from a variety of sources. If Neighbourhood Planning is to be understood from a post-political perspective, and as such the concept of ‘neighbourhood’ within cities, it must be noted that the concept does not exist in silo.

Empirically the paper engages with two ‘inner-urban’ Neighbourhood Planning case studies within Leeds, England. The case studies are constructed of semi-structured interviews with members of the neighbourhood forum creating the neighbourhood development plan for two areas, in addition to local authority planning officers, elected councillors, developers, planning consultants and national civil servants. Observation data in the form of notes is also used to support the discussion, made during

forum meetings and discussions with individuals outside of the semi-structured interviews. A review of material produced by the neighbourhood forum within each area, including forum and boundary designation applications, leaflets and consultation information, minutes of meetings and discussion papers, also supports the case studies where necessary. It is recognised, that whilst these case studies tell only a fraction of the unfolding localist experiment of contemporary planning, they make a contribution to the development of post-political analysis of a recent, specific concept of localism that it appears will remain.

## 2. The post-political condition

### 2.1 Spatial planning

Spatial planning is deeply embedded within English planning, so it is worth briefly highlighting, in order to understand the impetus for Coalition changes. Despite the significant reforms to the planning system, and absence of ‘spatial planning’ from political rhetoric, it is likely there will be a residue left behind. Certainly, the potential for such entrenched thinking remaining in the planning system is predicted:

“...while the reforms are radical and represent a potential critical juncture in the evolution of local governance, problems of implementation are likely to dilute to dilute radicalism in favour of more incremental change. In particular, we argue that New Labour’s approach to local governance – with its emphasis on performance, partnership and participation – has become so deeply entrenched at the local level that the Coalition’s reforms will inevitably be interpreted and refracted through this lens” (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012, p.22).

Spatial planning emerges within contemporary planning as an assemblage of approaches appearing globally and “appealing to many diverse constituencies” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p.4) by offering a progressive way forward, whilst delivering economic growth. Spatial planning as a turn of phrase is used in the United Kingdom by the State, professional groups, academics and politicians and others to describe diverse processes of planning reform, policy integration and strategic governance (Tewdwr-Jones *et al*, 2008). Likely emerging out of re-territorialization, europeanization and integration debates (table 1.0), as a concept, it is difficult to pin-down and a variety of components of spatial planning may exist, all present within academia, policy making, professional doctrine, politics, and as a way of thinking about concepts that intersect with planning.

Debate	Summary
Re-territorialization	The re-territorialization and rescaling of policy-making
Europeanization	The European origin and development of spatial development
Integration	The push towards sub-national agency and institutional integration

Table 1.0 - three theoretical and political origins of UK spatial planning (Tewdwr-Jones *et al*, 2008)

### 2.2 Post-political spatial planning

Post-politics arguments are underpinned by changes to the global political system, economic globalisation and increasing acceptance of diverse lifestyles (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). People live their lives within fluctuating identities, with an acceptance of individualism. As a result, ‘Partisan conflicts are a thing of the past and consensus can be achieved through dialogue’ (Mouffe 2005, p.1). Fundamental to these arguments are changing theories and models of democracy, which

sees a shift from aggregative democracy, towards deliberative democracy and finally a shift towards governance processes (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). Temporally it appears inevitable as a result, that an unspecified era is to become synonymous with a “policy imperative for planning practice to become more oriented towards consensus building” (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012, p2). The political climate at the start of the New Labour era, however, appears to have created perfect conditions for a substantive shift towards this.

With these larger, fundamental changes to the global political system taking place and planning as a profession so deeply hinged on conflict, the New Labour era may also simply represent another stage in the shift to ever increasing levels of conflict choreography. New institutions of Government are created by New Labour, based on the consensus building ‘Third-Way’ approach (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p.3). In that perspective, spatial planning departs from land use planning in that it focuses on “consensus brokering, allied to approaches designed to speed up planning decisions in order to facilitate economic growth” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p.12). Conflict is carefully managed and subsequent debate is foreclosed around issues based normatively on ‘growth’ or ‘sustainability’ for example, key features of the dominant contemporary planning agenda (Owens and Cowell, 2010). A ‘spatial planning’ system is created that operates with indiscernible strictures - portrayed as an arena for debating hefty issues, a way forward for society.

Whilst a post-political condition is most evident within spatial planning, these approaches may be one step further, rather than the end in itself. Primary to the argument of this paper is this formation of a ‘de-politicized’ consensus, or “crisis of consensus” when attributed to spatial planning (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012). The impact of that trend is neatly summarised on the planning system:

“This system gives the superficial appearance of engagement and legitimacy, whilst focusing on delivering growth expedited through some carefully choreographed processes for participation which minimise the potential for those with conflicting views to be given a meaningful hearing” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p2).

Post-political criticism emerges, which sees spatial planning as not progressive, that rather it’s a cleverly managed process within deliberately designed constraints. From this perspective, contemporary spatial planning loses its meaning. What is it for? Spatial planning’s use of abstract nouns and vague nomenclature allows objections to coalesce and significant opposition creates fractures, allowing challenges to spatial planning and its consensual underpinnings and leading eventually to planning reforms from the Coalition government.

### **2.3 Emerging post-political trends**

To be clear, whilst the primary focus of the paper is consensus, there exists a variety of trends that may be identified as post-political. Research and discussion of post-politics takes place at the ‘macro’ scale, including discussion of entire planning systems, metropolitan regions, and cities, whilst at the neighbourhood scale, a post-political literature is also developing (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015). To this end, post-politics analysis anticipates neoliberal and localist strategies to be embedded in planning processes at a variety of scales (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012) and as a result a post-political landscape is emerging across scales of planning. The main thrust of the paper is to investigate the extent to which a post-political consensus remains. However, within that there are six key post-political trends that are identified (Figure 1.0) (Clarke, 2015).

1. *Prior condition: national austerity policies and cuts in local funding.*  
These measures “bring shifts in the ‘strategic priorities of city government and coalitions’” (Macleod and Jones, 2011, 2444).
2. *Widespread agreement over conditions that exist and what needs to be done.*  
Despite conflicts of interest and opinion, there is widespread agreement over conditions that exist and what needs to be done (Ranciere, 2003).
3. *Growth in managerial approaches to Government.*  
Government is reconceived as a managerial function, deprived of its proper political dimension (Zizek in Swyngedouw, 2011).
4. *Expert opinions called on to legitimise decisions.*  
Options presented as complex and in need of expert opinions to legitimise decisions (Sloterdijk, 2005).
5. *Politics as a distribution of spaces.*  
Importance of activities that create order by distributing places, names, functions (Ranciere in Swyngedouw, 2011).
6. *Gradual ‘de-politicization’ and ‘de-democratization’ of significant institutional forms.*  
Urban institutions streamlined to foreclose debate and respond to market; now less accountable to the public (Macleod, 2011).

Figure 1.0 – six key trends of post-political cities – (Clarke, 2015, pp. 57-58)

Also identified as post-political, is the “distinguishing ‘turning points’ in which post political elements are emerging...the temporal and spatial nature of post-political forces” (Clarke, 2015, p.58). Furthermore, an ‘ultra-politics’ of consensus, to control that which might disrupt a consumerist city (protest and homelessness for example) is also highlighted (Clarke, 2015). It is conceivable that as one post-political trend appears, it is responded to by another post-political trend. These actions and responses may also occur within and across a variety of scales.

### 3. Coalition Government Localism

Coalition criticism of spatial planning emerges as a narrative of a democratic deficit. Consensus building approaches of spatial planning by New Labour had failed, the system was broken (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Conservative Party, 2010). Much of the criticism levelled at spatial planning from all angles may remain as residue within the current system and are critical to a post-political analysis in the eyes of Allmendinger and Haughton (2012), so it is worth highlighting them here. Firstly, a rescaling of functions and processes takes place, especially through devolution, and there is emphasis on collaborative working. Despite this spatial planning is too driven by central priorities. Secondly, spatial planning is accompanied by “the emergence of multiple soft spaces and associated governance processes” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p49) which circumvent the statutory planning process.

#### 3.1 The Open Source Planning idea

*Open Source Planning* (Conservative Party, 2010) is an example of the wider context out of and within which the Coalition Government develops; a rejection of the large and over powering state and to develop a capacity within ‘civil society’. *Open Source Planning* promotes open source software development as being “...highly flexible and adaptable...” and that it “...values transparency and free access...” (Conservative Party, 2010, p.1). Applied to planning, it is necessary to reject the “[New Labour] Government’s centralising, corporatist attitude...” (Conservative Party, 2010, p.1), rather planning is a conflict-free ‘community’, without regulation which just gets things done. Whilst open source software development may contain these values, it is embedded within a larger ‘movement’ of

community software development which requires managing and organising. It is an organic process, which may be flexible and adaptable. But this is not a process without its limitations and divisions.

### 3.2 Big Society

Localism, as enacted by the Coalition Government, followed on in much the same vein as *Open Source Planning*, emerging from the political rhetoric of the ‘Big Society’. The ‘Big Society’ agenda, pursued by Ministers in the early years of the Coalition Government, challenges a state that is perceived as interfering, monolithic, slow and unifying, a state that has colonised people’s lives. An economic recovery is needed, but so too is a social recovery (Cameron, 2010, no page). The agenda therefore advocates the rollback of the state, but acknowledges that the state must encourage concepts to replace it including ‘social action’ and ‘public service reform’. Thirdly ‘community empowerment’ will create “communities with oomph – neighbourhoods who are in charge of their own destiny...” (Cameron, 2010, no page). Neighbourhoods are the polar opposite to the state. Neighbourhoods are exciting and energised.

The ‘Big Society’ and Localism promises to radically change the way in which governance, public services and policy are delivered. Neo-liberal ideas of economic growth are sutured to a desire to increase the number of actors in the system at the lowest possible level. Firstly, the state will “drive [power] down even further to communities, to neighbourhoods and individuals” as ‘decentralisation’ (Cameron, 2010, no page). Secondly the state will release data, under the banner of ‘transparency’, and thirdly it will provide limited finance directly to neighbourhoods. Purposes for the decentralisation of power within the ‘Big Society’ is clear within a series of Government financed and promoted ‘vanguards’. The intention is to give these ‘vanguards’ the power to run parks and libraries but also to “plan the look, size, shape and feel of housing developments” (Cameron, 2010, no page). Neighbourhoods are expected to want to plan *for* development. The State is the enabler.

Austerity measures appear to create opportunities for voluntaristic experimentation in public service delivery. Major concerns about the UK’s budget deficit gives impetus for the Spending Review, setting out areas for public spending reductions. Local government at the central level faced “a disproportionately high share of the cuts” (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). The Department for Communities and Local Government had its ‘local government’ budget cut by 27 percent and its ‘communities’ budget cut by 57 percent over four years (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). Austerity measures are the driving force behind the Spending Review. However, new freedoms for local government are also identified as a way to mitigate against long term effects of financial reductions. Specifically, the spending review identifies:

“...removing barriers to greater independent provision, and supporting communities, citizens and volunteers to play a bigger role in shaping and providing services; and improving the transparency, efficiency and accountability of public services” (HM Treasury, 2010, p8).

Financial cuts that drive the Spending Review conversely appear to be driven by an ideological attempt to allow rollback the state and thus allow greater innovation within public services, with local government seemingly given greater power over how to prioritise spending on public services. The point is, even in the face of massive cuts to local government, the State sees itself as the innovative enabler.

### 3.3 Localism

The structure of the Localism Act is such that it is an accurate indicator of the dominant belief at the time, that localist policy in planning is a way to deliver economic growth. Despite the attempts of Government to promote Localism as a tool for empowering ‘communities’, the structure of the Act appears to be clear on the role of planning. Neighbourhood Planning is situated within Part 6 of the Localism Act, within ‘Planning’ rather than Part 5 which is entitled ‘Community Empowerment’ (UK Parliament, 2011). As such, this accords with the movement of responsibility for Neighbourhood Planning between the directorates of the Department for Communities and Local Government in approximately the first year of its implementation. The responsibility shifted between the Planning Directorate to the Decentralisation and Communities team. The Planning Directorate has a clear remit of economic growth, demonstrated by the economic focus of the impact assessment for Neighbourhood Planning (DCLG, 2011), whilst the Decentralisation Communities team have responsibility for community empowerment aspects of Localism.

### 3.4 National Planning Policy Framework

Coinciding with the legislative changes was a period of policy flux, demonstrated by the removal of hundreds of pages of previous planning policy, replaced primarily by the 49 pages of policy in the *National Planning Policy Framework [NPPF]* (DCLG, 2012). This was justified at the time as being about ‘reforming’ a top-down and slow planning system (Clark, 2012) popularly reported and discussed in the profession as ‘cutting red tape’ (National Trust, 2015; Acres, 2012; Groves, 2014). Additionally, other key changes are the removal of regionally set housing targets and the entire regional layer of planning, previously existing in the form of Regional Spatial Strategies and created by Regional Assemblies (UK Parliament, 2009). A power shift away from the regional towards the neighbourhood scale is legislated for. Introducing optional ‘rights’ to be taken up, the plan-led system at the local level is retained, with responsibility for formal plan making remaining with Leeds City Council.

The policy within the *NPPF* is divided into key themes, which place emphasis on delivering economic growth and a rhetorical shift away from excluding and unaccountable decision making towards a devolved and inclusive planning system. Removing the regional tier of planning, reduced policy guidance and the rhetorical removal of targets may “free-up local authorities and neighbourhoods to plan in the way that they wish, as long as it is ‘sustainable’” (Parker, 2012, p4). Planning’s purpose is “helping to achieve sustainable development...[and]...this should be a collective enterprise” (DCLG, 2012, pi). A target culture and remote decision making are identified as a barrier and “Dismantling the unaccountable regional apparatus and introducing neighbourhood planning addresses this” (*ibid*). Localism is to help to deliver “sustainable development” (*ibid*) and the mechanism for doing so is via a Neighbourhood Plan. Neighbourhood planners are to plan in the way that they wish, supported by local authorities, as long as they plan *for* ‘sustainable development’.

### 3.5 Neighbourhood Development Plan

How does state deployed Localism work? Neighbourhood Development Plans are legislated for by the *Neighbourhood Planning Regulations 2012* and as such there are five necessary steps in their creation. Neighbourhood Plans must first establish a geographically bounded Neighbourhood Area and determine the qualifying body. Secondly the plan must be prepared according to the ‘basic conditions’ and undergo an independent examination. The basic conditions stipulate that a plan must; have regard to national policy; contribute to the achievement of ‘sustainable development’; be in ‘general conformity’ with the strategic policy in the local plan and; be compatible with EU regulations and

directives. If the plan is successful, independent examination is followed by a yes/no (accept/reject) referendum of the residents within the area and finally, a Neighbourhood Plan is formally ‘made’ by the local authority. At each stage a decision is required before moving to the next, with the exception of the area and forum designation which can be submitted for consideration concurrently.

A qualifying body is the legal entity which writes the plan. In areas that have a Parish or Town Council, they are automatically the only qualifying body within that town or parish boundary. The neighbourhood area boundary is established as the parish or town council boundary (or an area within it). Areas without a Parish or Town Council, mostly urban areas, must establish a qualifying body and neighbourhood area by making a planning application to the local planning authority. The qualifying body takes the form of a Neighbourhood Forum, consisting of a minimum of 21 people that “live, work or carry on business” in the defined area (UK Parliament, 2012, p. 3ff). A statement of rationale for why each should be designated must be submitted as part of this application.

#### **4. Case study: towards post-political Localism in Leeds**

This section begins to chart the impact of Neighbourhood Planning in Leeds. It outlines emerging findings of two case studies consisting of semi-structured interview data of people involved in the production of two Neighbourhood Plans. Most recently, supplementary planning documents have been produced for villages in the form of Village Design Statements, with this technique then applied to urban areas in the form of Neighbourhood Design Statements.

##### **4.1 Emphasis on technical-managerial apparatus**

Localism attempts to reinvigorate and energise the neighbourhood as a ‘community’. However, during a period of austerity and funding reductions to local government, neighbourhoods are politically seen as a site to deliver wider political strategies of the local authority. Plans represent an opportunity for a “locally strategic” base, in the absence of resources for wider strategic service delivery. Despite the use of vague terms such as ‘community’ and what this might consist of, it is possible to differentiate between ‘community’ and the local authority. During an interview with a leading member of the community in Case Study A’s Neighbourhood Forum, it is explained: “The local authority Councillors are involved, although when the Neighbourhood Plan was set-up they were told, I’m not sure by who, to take a back seat” (interview, 2015), with another ward councillor saying: “I heard about it through the grapevine...I didn’t even know about it. We were then told to take a back seat...although maybe not in quite so few words, but I’m paraphrasing what was said” (interview, 2015). The chairman of the forum felt that this was a deliberate decision, due to the perception of the local authority: “To not be seen to be leading because it is seen to have become a council thing again” (interview, 2015). In areas where the local authority it appears has a bad reputation at an institutional level or there is a perception of previous failure, Neighbourhood Planning may represent a clean break from the past. As a result, officers approached resident’s groups within the now defined Neighbourhood Area to create the plan. However, it is a political decision from within the local authority to encourage and develop a Neighbourhood Plan for an inner-urban area, the first one of its type within the local authority boundary. Local councillors, once they found out about the plan, then gave their support where they felt they could, acting as facilitators where major issues arise, but they didn’t drive the plan in the early stages.

Spatial planning focussed on delivery, in an era of deregulation of the planning system. It attempted to bring together disparate fragments and deliver on the growth agenda of New Labour (Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2008). Spatial planning presented an opportunity to deliver “the social, economic and environmental infrastructure needed for our communities and it is the mechanism for managing this

delivery process” (RTPI, 2007, p.5). Such an approach echoes the current era of deregulatory policy flux, the residue of which clearly remains, albeit now an approach reoriented towards a specific Coalition definition of “sustainable development” with a strong ‘growth’ agenda behind it. A planning consultant working on Case Study A explained how this had worked in practice:

“I feel that they feel that finally after many years of sort of...promises and failed strategies and initiatives and projects within [Case Study A] that the Neighbourhood Plan might actually be able to pull things together and provide some kind of reasonable framework for retaining the best of what [Case Study A] has got and improving it on a number of fronts for current and future residents” (interview, 2015).

Neighbourhood Planning in an urban area intersects with the local authority in more than one way, not just creating planning policy. There is a clear site of competition between a number of actors, that may develop into antagonism and conflict, primarily between services and Case Study A’s intentions. Neighbourhood becomes a site of both a competition for resources, with a focus on delivery and efficiency and potential for conflict between competing priorities.

As a result, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘neighbourhood’ as stakeholder and ‘neighbourhood’ as process. Local authority stakeholders are brought together at the neighbourhood scale, to discuss a way forward with neighbourhood as a stakeholder, to plan for the future, based on vague nomenclature of growth for example. Neighbourhood as stakeholder requires ‘managing’ and working with, whereas neighbourhood may also be the process for galvanising service delivery and responding to fragmented governance around a collective way forward. The stakeholder as ‘neighbourhood’ in Neighbourhood Planning, is managed both internally within the local authority and as an external stakeholder, depending on the department. It is in the best interest for the local authority that the Neighbourhood Plan is successful, because Neighbourhood Forums will create a plan that becomes the responsibility of the local authority. The Neighbourhood Forum as an entity creates an arena for debate and discussion, which would otherwise not take place. Bringing together these various actors within the system brings with it antagonisms, but also new understandings between the neighbourhood and local government. The effect of this, however, is that rather than an arena for debate and disagreement, politics in Neighbourhood Planning is replaced by normative principles. These manifest themselves as instruments, processes or narratives within which ‘things happen’ to achieve a consensus.

Reaching a consensual way forward is also not constrained to the land-use planning policy that Neighbourhood Planning legislated for, as they are being used as a tool for reconciliation across boundaries and sectors. In urban areas, land-use and development appear to intersect with a wide range of other policy sectors and spatial planning previously attempted to integrate these. Localism appears to allow the same, focusing on the management and control of apparent complex and multi-scalar issues, albeit at the neighbourhood scale. Local government appears to be oriented more towards a mediation role, managing both internal departments and also external stakeholders in the neighbourhood.

#### **4.2 Emphasis on narratives**

The narrative of community within Open Source Planning translates into Neighbourhood Planning, within which it is established that the site of community is neighbourhood. Neighbourhood Plans must produce an acceptable ‘good’ outcome, based on discussion and deliberation between all interested parties. Two planning professionals from central government interviewed for the research, said Neighbourhood Planning is an arena for “...grown-up discussion to achieve a good outcome for everybody” (interview, 2015). This ‘grown-up’ conversation sentiment is echoed by two local

authority officers during the semi-structured interviews. Those creating a Neighbourhood Plan (whoever ‘they’ might be) must act in a rational, or sensible, way to achieve a ‘good’ outcome. In the eyes of the local authority officers, the grown-up conversation must come from all of those involved, including them. However, what is less clear to the officers is what a ‘good’ outcome must be. Given the legal context of Neighbourhood Planning and the need to climb through regulatory hoops, it becomes clear. Neighbourhood Plans must deliver a ‘good’ outcome, based on the poorly-defined governing normative principles of growth and sustainable development.

The post-political condition describes how new forms of governance have appeared in contemporary planning, attempting to reconcile conflict and competing agendas through negotiation, to reach “mutually beneficial agreement” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012 p.4) within a positive-sum game. This amounts to a post-political ‘mode’ of governing by technical-managerial governance, resulting in the taking over of “the space of the political by forms of consensual depoliticised governance” (Oosterlynck and Swyngedouw, 2010, p.1577). It appears that Neighbourhood Planning as an instrument or process relies on the narrative of ‘grown-up’ conversation, constraining the debate to deliver a good outcome – growth.

### **4.3 Emphasis on instruments**

Neighbourhood Planning as an instrument - that is a combination of legislation and policy - attempts to ensure that an acceptable outcome is delivered based on the narrative of growth. The issue here is; in order to make the next stage, the Neighbourhood Forum must overcome the 5 legal hurdles in the regulations in a satisfactory manner. Neighbourhood Planning Regulations stipulate those hurdles, whilst aiming to deliver ‘growth’ through ‘sustainable development’. At the ‘macro’ level, Government intentions are clear; Neighbourhood Planning policy is about “testing” (interview, 2015), whether Localism can make ‘communities’ more accepting of development (figure 2.0).



Figure 2.0 – testing Neighbourhood Planning – (DCLG, 2015)

The structure is such that despite the potential for conflict, Neighbourhood Planning appears to be a “managerial-technological apparatus” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p.4), the aim of which is to produce a “good outcome” (interview, 2015). An instrument that is regulated by ‘the police’ (Ranciere, 2005), which are the “activities that create order...with agreed defined roles, processes and acceptable outcomes” (Ranciere, 2005 in Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012 p.4). Such an apparatus, it is argued has resulted in ‘depoliticization’ with ‘politics’ being replaced by “processes, instruments and narratives” (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012, p.4). Neighbourhood Plans are structured so that the only way forward is to be accepting of development. Such a macro view, however, largely ignores the work required to overcome the legal hurdles put in place. Although this may represent an attempt at incremental decrease in the *potential* for conflict, each hurdle may be a site for conflict and contestation.

#### 4.4 Emphasis on antagonism

Neighbourhood Planning may produce conditions for conflict and where there are deep rooted tensions, it is possible that an outcome which is acceptable may not be reached. Such conflict may be based on identities, not least at the boundary designation hurdle for example, (Bradley, forthcoming) which even at neighbourhood level take effort to overcome. There is potential for the boundary designation to generate “frontier effects by expanding the confrontation beyond the initial point of antagonism” (Bradley, forthcoming, p.10). In creating a legally marked neighbourhood, there is

potential for this to not only mark the edge of the Neighbourhood Plan, but also to create a political barrier between entities that has a practical and symbolic importance (Bradley, forthcoming). Boundary designation may therefore have deeper and longer-lasting effects.

The primary research for the paper found that boundary designation is a tricky legal obstacle to overcome, which can lead to antagonism that goes unresolved, yet delivers a boundary designation. This resulted in an underlying potential for conflict between the two Neighbourhood Forums that remains. The boundary designation for Case Study B was difficult due to the close proximity of discussions taking place for another Neighbourhood Plan, and their perception of place. Whilst it is acknowledged that competition can develop between stakeholders, a line of antagonism developed between two ‘factions’, who were intending to become a Neighbourhood Area and Neighbourhood Forum, which took 9 months to “resolve”, according to members of the forum and officers interviewed (interview, 2015). The area in question is a small collection of shops, defined as a “local centre” within the settlement hierarchy of the local authority plan. Both groups lay claim to the area, with neither backing down. It became about ownership of the place and essentially which Plan would have control. Despite attempts at amicable resolution through deliberation and sensible debate, conflict remained, and it was the responsibility of the local authority to decide the boundary designation. During an interview a senior council officer stated how this happened:

“The two groups couldn’t decide on the boundary designation and at times the debate became quite heated.. so my suggestion to both groups was to go ahead and submit [the area application] and take it from there...” (Interview, 2014).

After the decision had been reached (although it took 9 months), a practical solution was delivered in that the smaller area, without another recognised ‘local centre’ in the settlement hierarchy was “given”, in the words of a council officer (interview, 2015) the area. However, whilst the practical solution has appeared to resolve the issue, antagonism and bitterness between individuals still remains and this spills into the decisions made within the Neighbourhood Forum structure. The implications of this are at an early stage, but may lead to difficulties in encouraging “grown-up” discussion between the two Neighbourhood Plans, where they might be more suited to work together on ‘locally strategic’ issues. Again, whilst Neighbourhood Planning appears to give room for a meaningful debate, there is a regulated and mediated process to climb through, facilitated by the local authority, in what appears to be a logical order for only acceptable outcomes to be achieved.

## **5.0 Conclusion: post-political outcomes**

The attempt of Government post 2010 to encourage popular participation in planning appears, on the face of it, to play on the emotion of neighbourhood. Despite rhetorical intentions of empowerment and greater control - described by a language of ‘rights’ and ‘social action’ to fix a broken system - state deployed Localism may simply represent a further relentless advance of a post-political condition. Opposition to previous New Labour spatial planning approaches appears to have coalesced as a result of the post-political condition of consensus, ironically parting the ocean to allow Coalition reforms. A symptom of the post-political condition is one within which objection to development is drowned out to deliver normative agendas of ‘sustainability’ and ‘growth’, packaged as ‘governance’. The paper has charted the rise of a post-political policy, as a catalyst for the development of other post-political responses at the local and neighbourhood level.

Neighbourhood Planning is an attempt from Government at the macro- scale to manage conflict and reduce objection to new development, which it is hoped will succeed by only allowing the creation that is neutral or pro-growth. It is clear that Government intended Neighbourhood Planning to

facilitate growth, carefully managing conflict and resistance to development. Government aimed to “...give people real choice, real influence and real reasons to say ‘yes’ to development” (Clark, 2011, no page), but not no. Neighbourhood Plans cannot plan for less development than that contained within the local authority’s plan. Neighbourhood Planning elevates the Forum creating a plan to a new status. Neighbourhood is created as a legal entity and the Neighbourhood Plan becomes part of the local plan. Therefore, the policy is structured in such a way, using a mixture of legislation, regulation and policy, that it is only possible to achieve the ‘correct’ outcome.

Competition from various actors is responded to by the local authority using a variety of means, whereby its function is primarily as a mediator and facilitator. Within the Neighbourhood Planning system, where antagonism appears to erupt from within processes, the local authority’s role is to ‘police’ the way forward. It does so using the structure of Neighbourhood Planning to guide it. Political debate is largely residualised to ‘grown-up’ discussion and debate, as is the intention of Government and where antagonism cannot be resolved, the local authority makes the practical decision to get the plan going in the name of efficiency.

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