

# **Impacts of Neighbourhood Planning in England**

## **Final Report to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government**

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**Prof. Gavin Parker (University of Reading)**

**Dr Matthew Wargent (University of Reading)**

**Dr Kat Salter (University of Birmingham)**

**Dr Mark Dobson (University of Reading)**

**Dr Tessa Lynn (University of Reading)**

**Dr Andy Yuille (Lancaster University)**

**and Navigus Planning**



**University of  
Reading**

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## Final Report of the Research

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### **i. The Authors**

The research team was led by Prof. Gavin Parker with Dr Matthew Wargent, Dr Mark Dobson, Dr Tessa Lynn (University of Reading), Dr Kat Salter (University of Birmingham), Dr Andy Yuille (Lancaster University) and Chris Bowden (Navigus Planning).

### **ii. Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank all participants involved in the research as well as MHCLG's Peer Review Panel.

### **iii. Glossary / Abbreviations**

DM – Development Management

IMD – Indices of Multiple Deprivation

LP – Local Plan

LPA – Local Planning Authority

MHCLG – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

NP – Neighbourhood planning / plans

NDP – Neighbourhood Development Plan

OAN – Objectively Assessed Need (Housing)

QB – Qualifying Body

RO - Research Objective

S106 – Section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act – this refers to planning agreements made between local planning authorities and developers

WP - Work Package

## Impacts of Neighbourhood Planning in England

### Executive Summary

#### *The Approach*

The data collection elements of the research was conducted between September 2019 and March 2020 and involved desk study analysis of 141 plans as well as a cohort assessment of 865 completed neighbourhood plans; 143 questionnaires targeted at active neighbourhoods and Local Planning Authorities. Nine case study areas across England involving 20 neighbourhood plans were studied and three targeted discussions with developers, non-completing groups and active neighbourhood planning consultants were held.

#### *Key Findings*

The key findings are set out in precis and organised here by the six Research Objectives:

##### 1. *Development Impacts and Housing Supply*

Neighbourhood planning's contribution to housing supply can be significant. Neighbourhood plans which are allocating housing sites are providing sites for an average additional to local plan allocation 39 units per neighbourhood plan. The study found 18,000 units above LP allocations in 135 plans. However communities seeking to make housing allocations did encounter added burdens, both technical and political compared to creating a non-allocating NP. Scaling-up production of NPs could make a significant contribution to housing supply – particularly if cooperation between neighbourhoods and LPAs are strengthened further. There was no evidence found that NPs displace development from other parts of the local authority area.

##### 2. *Other Development Impacts (including Quality of Development)*

Neighbourhood plans have helped improve design policy and refined local priorities e.g. housing for specific societal groups. There is further potential within the neighbourhood planning process to reflect both community needs and tie with more strategic concerns coming from above. Closer partnership working between communities and planning professionals (i.e. local government planners and planning consultants) can help address this. Better recognition and more targeted support for the effective integration of place-making matters that go beyond pure land use planning policy would also benefit neighbourhoods and other interested parties (e.g. local government, third sector, funders).

##### 3. *Decision-Making and Investment*

Neighbourhood plans have improved local engagement with local planning authorities, and are important vehicles for place-making beyond land use planning. Other initiatives have included the establishment of Community Interest Companies and Community Land Trusts.

This highlights that communities lack a formal arena for place-making projects unrelated to planning policy, and may help explain why a large number of communities have not completed land use plans (NDPs).

In terms of how the Plans are used in practice, the evidence from LPAs and appeals indicates NPs do have an influential role in decisions, reflecting their legal status, and as a minimum they provide nuance to decisions. Over half of LPA respondents see NDPs as having a 'moderate' or 'high' degree of influence on decision-making. Moreover, responses suggest the vast majority of decisions that go to appeal go in favour of the relevant NDP.

However, their impact will vary according to the circumstances and Plan policies. We found no evidence that NPs were ignored but some communities felt Plans were not always recognised as clearly as they would wish. This indicates that LPAs could better communicate how neighbourhood plans have been taken into account and highlights the value of clear and specific policies that have been road-tested by development management officers. MHCLG could share best practice to support LPAs in their role in developing and implementing NDP policies.

#### 4. Community Attitudes and Engagement

Community attitudes to development may become more positive as a result of the NP experience, and the acceptability of development is supported by a large proportion of Plans with policies on design and affordable housing. Some neighbourhoods reported better relations with LPAs and a more positive attitude to development, but in other cases poor relations with some LPAs and lack of an up-to-date Local Plan also presented a barrier.

There was no clear evidence that there is faster delivery of sites, though where sites are chosen in the NDP they are clearly more accepted by the community, which can reduce delays associated with legal challenges or other forms of opposition. Often allocation of sites is a motivator as it allows greater protection of other locally important spaces. It is therefore important to maintain protection for neighbourhood plans from speculative development.

#### 5. Influence of Geography

While there has been strong take-up of neighbourhood planning since 2011, there are many neighbourhoods who have not used this community right. The total number of communities who have started or completed neighbourhood planning went beyond 2,600 in Autumn 2019, but the take-up rates have slowed considerably. The main reasons for this are associated to known time, processual and technical burdens, relationship with local plan progress, and levels of enthusiasm in some local planning authorities. This indicates that for some neighbourhoods an up-to-date Local Plan lessens their concern to finalise a NDP.

There is a noticeably low take-up in urban areas, and in northern regions. It is notable that all LPAs with no activity are urban. There are a range of reasons for this disparity and if government wish to continue to support the initiative there will need to be affirmative action taken to sustain and expand neighbourhood planning activity. Government are missing an opportunity to realise benefits in urban and deprived areas and assist in their levelling-up agenda. As such Government should consider either increasing support to reflect additional

challenges faced by these communities, or ensure community engagement/involvement, in other less burdensome ways.

#### 6. Success Factors and Common Barriers

While NP is a manageable process for most parished communities and a NDP is an achievable goal, support from consultants and positive relationships with LPA are important to helping with progress. MHCLG could do more to identify and share best practice for LPAs, particularly around site identification. The process remains burdensome for community volunteers with the time taken to reach completion around three years (and for many it can take longer). NDPs take longer when Local Plans are in progress, particularly where a new Local Plan is initiated *after* NDP work has started. This can add a further 6-10 months to NDP production on average. Better alignment with LPAs and Local Plans may assist here.

Local Planning Authority (LPA) support overall is varied, with examples of strong support but also ambivalence in other areas. A common criticism was duplication of policies and MHCLG could find ways of better aligning / integrating Local Plans and NP processes – through clearer ongoing communications between LPAs and neighbourhood planning groups.

#### *Key Areas for Further Work*

A list of 13 suggested areas for further work are set out in the final report and they are aimed at maximising the benefits of neighbourhood planning. These include integrating neighbourhood planning better across the key actors who play important roles in its success and involve attention being paid across a number of aspects of neighbourhood planning. Our suggestions seek to add value to the policy and address four wider governmental aims, namely: the *levelling-up agenda*, improving the *design of new development*; *increasing the supply of housing* and *affording more power to communities*.

The suggested areas for further work, set out in section 3.2 in the full report below, briefly are:

- to continue to support the neighbourhood planning policy (Area 1);
- to address uneven uptake of neighbourhood planning (Area 2);
- to introduce a 'triaging' process to funnel communities into the appropriate tool for their needs and aspirations and (should they pursue an NDP) to tailor support (Area 3);
- to reform funding arrangements to make them more equitable (Area 4);
- to introduce better training for all NP participants (Area 5);
- to guide and encourage LPAs to better support NP communities (Area 6);
- to continue and extend the emphasis on NP as a means to deliver enhanced design (Area 7);
- to better align NDPs and Local Plans (Area 8);

- to actively promote creative participation and place-making beyond land use planning matters (Area 9);
- to promote more efficient knowledge exchange (Area 10);
- to ensure greater consistency during the NDP examination process (Area 11);
- to improve messaging around decisions made using NDPs (Area 12); and
- to provide greater clarity concerning NDP Reviews (Area 13).

## Impacts of Neighbourhood Planning in England

### 1. Introduction and Overview

#### 1.1 Overview

Neighbourhood planning (NP) has been on offer to communities in England for almost a decade. It was formally introduced into the English planning system under the Localism Act (2011), although first wave 'frontrunners' were piloting the initiative from late 2010. In this time, NP has remained as an important part of Central Government's approach towards localism, enabling local growth and increasing the housing stock. This review was funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), and follows on from the *User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning in England* study conducted in 2014, funded through the Government's *Supporting Communities* programme (see Parker et al, 2014).

The following report is the distillation of an extensive research project that has surveyed Local Authorities, consultants, the development industry, as well as both communities who have completed a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) and those who have struggled to complete their Plan.

#### 1.2 Research Brief

The research was set out by MHCLG to cover a series of core Research Objectives (ROs). These concerned:

- Development Impacts and Housing Supply
- Other Development Impacts (including Quality of Development)
- Decision-Making and Investment
- Community Attitudes and Engagement
- Influence of Geography
- Success Factors and Common Barriers

#### 1.3 Methods

The research was divided into four Work Packages (WPs). The methods employed and the sampling approach adopted are set out in the relevant annexes. In summary the work packages provided a national picture of NP, split into two parts: a full update of neighbourhood plan activity covering over 2,600 designated NP areas and all 'made' Plans (a total of 865 at the time of the research). The second part evaluated all plans that had passed referendum and allocated sites for housing between mid-2015 and 2017, a total of 141 plans.

The second WP comprised two questionnaires developed to collect a range of qualitative and quantitative data. The first, WP2a, elicited the views of community members representing made NDPs from across England (n=100). The second, WP2b, the views of LPAs supporting communities in NP (n=43). Thirdly a series of nine case studies formed of desk study analysis and interviews were carried out. Cases were selected by a spread of more urban and rural areas, by geography and in terms of number of completed neighbourhood plans (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: WP3 Case Studies**

Case	Character	Region	Number of adopted/made Plans (as at Oct 2019)
1. Camden	Urban	London	4
2. Leeds	Urban	Yorkshire	13
3. Bassetlaw	Rural	East Midlands	15
4. Sedgemoor	Rural	South West	8
5. Basingstoke	Urban/Rural	South East	10
6. Aylesbury	Urban/Rural	South East	21
7. Lichfield	Urban/Rural	West Midlands	11
8. East Suffolk	Rural	East of England	9
9. Herefordshire	Rural	West Midlands	67

Finally, targetted discussion involving two focus groups (planning consultants and housing developers) and a set of 11 'stalled groups'<sup>1</sup> studies were completed. The focus groups and interviews were organised to discuss key themes that covered participant experiences and the relevant Research Objective.

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<sup>1</sup> This was a wide category that included those who did not pursue an NDP after initial investigation and those who delayed or abandoned production of a neighbourhood plan.

## 2. Main Findings

This section outlines the main findings of the research set out by the main themes of *Impact on Development, Wider Impacts and Decision-Making*. First, we set out existing knowledge, then some of the overarching findings, largely derived from the desk study work. The research confirms known patterns regarding NP take-up, but also reveals previously unknown issues, namely the trajectory of take-up (see Figure 2) and relationships between NDPs and Local Plan production.

### *Context: existing research on neighbourhood planning*

Neighbourhood planning has prompted a substantial amount of attention in both planning practice and academia. It is necessary to contextualise the current research into a brief synopsis of the existing research literature to ensure that key aspects are kept in view.

Information derived from research thus far had indicated higher take-up in affluent and rural neighbourhoods (Defra, 2013; Vigar, 2013; Parker and Salter, 2016, 2017) with ongoing pessimism about the ability of NP to promote local regeneration in the most deprived areas that lack market interest and development opportunities (Bailey and Pill, 2014).

Some of the burdens that the NDP process involved were seen as challenging for many and provided impetus for many neighbourhoods to involve consultants. Key issues faced by volunteers included understanding technical issues, navigating the regulatory hoops, and learning 'planning speak' (Parker et al., 2014).

Debates have explored the extent to which NDPs are a true reflection of community wishes (Wills, 2016) and raised concerns that neighbourhood plans 'double up' on local plan policies rather than creating innovative and value-adding policy (Brookfield, 2017). Furthermore, NDPs are overlaid on complex social fabrics - instigating a plan can entrench local divisions and fuel existing conflicts, particularly in diverse neighbourhoods (Colomb, 2017). There has been positive evidence of a revitalisation of democracy in Town and Parish Councils, and the ability of NP to create new collective identity (Bradley, 2015; Bradley et al, 2017; Brownill and Downing, 2013).

It has been found that some communities had adopted conservative positions in anticipation of legal challenge, and/or have found their NDPs limited by officers, consultants and examiners (Parker et al, 2016) acting to encourage 'norm enforcement' (Parker et al, 2017). Doubts exist as to whether the light touch regulatory approach may have resulted in NDPs not being able to withstand the rigours of implementation and raised concern regarding the availability of affordable and accessible housing supply (Field and Layard, 2017).

Although Local Authority support has been widely recognised as crucial to successful NP, this has proven uneven and difficult at a time of stretched local government resources. LPAs are expected to 'do more with less' and resourcing issues have been exacerbated by contradictory priorities from central government (Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014; Salter 2018).

This has led to calls for sustained funding for direct professional involvement in NP in order to maintain the policy's efficacy (McGuinness and Ludwig, 2017).

Some analyses have positioned communities as a moderators of market liberalisation, bringing them into conflict with housing development market. Evidence on the ability of NP to deliver new housing is particularly patchy (Lichfields, 2016; DCLG, 2016), although as relayed above, various studies have found new development to be better tailored to local needs. Some evidence has indicated a promising concentration on 'socially inclusive' growth and sustainable housebuilding with a social purpose (Bradley and Sparling, 2017; Bradley et al, 2017). For example, NDPs focussing on locally relevant locations, housing mix, occupancy, and design (Bailey, 2017). Examples of innovation concerning housing provision is also a positive outcome of NDPs (e.g. interest in community-led initiatives such as community land trusts, self and custom-build projects, 'co-housing' and other models (e.g. Field and Layard, 2017). Moreover, whilst plans may not project a definitive vision of a neighbourhood, they can act as useful a negotiating tool for local communities (Brownill, 2017).

As with all localist initiatives, neighbourhood planning has played out differently in different contexts (Brownill and Bradley, 2017), making it hard to reach an ultimate or definitive evaluation of the policy's success. The research literature reveals a policy with some notable successes and marginal gains; however these appear to be limited to more affluent communities and are bounded by constraints that go beyond the policy itself.

Several reports have made recommendations relating to neighbourhood planning, notably the 2014 study (Parker et al, 2014; 2015) which identified recommendations including clarity over the duty to support on LPAs; simplification of the process of designation stages (subsequently addressed); clearer messaging on interpretation of the rules for canvassing for either 'Yes' or 'No' vote at referendum; and clearer messaging regarding the future role and status of NDPs.

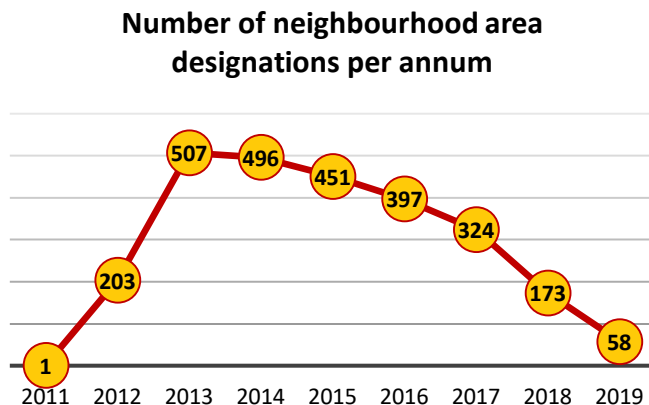
More recently the Locality report *People Power* (2018), although with a broader focus, asked for an extension of 'the powers which can be designated to neighbourhood forums in non-parished areas' (2018: p19). While the London Assembly (2020) also with a focus on Forums produced its review of neighbourhood planning in the capital. That report included recommendations to the mayor and other parties highlighting the need for training - for officers and elected members, to hone the duty to support and to ensure better support for communities across the stages of NDP production, to look at improving the funding arrangements for Forums, addressing CIL arrangements and its spend, and to require publication of NP funding and spend by LPAs. The Publica work (2019) commissioned by NP.London, also had a focus on urban and deprived areas, they identified four areas for action, set across: process improvements, mainstreaming or integration of NP activity, funding arrangements, and lastly how to better support and foster capacity.

### *2.1 The National picture: take-up of neighbourhood planning overall*

Despite the success and considerable take-up in some areas, nationally it is clear that take-up is slowing. The number of new area designations and NDPs passing referendum has

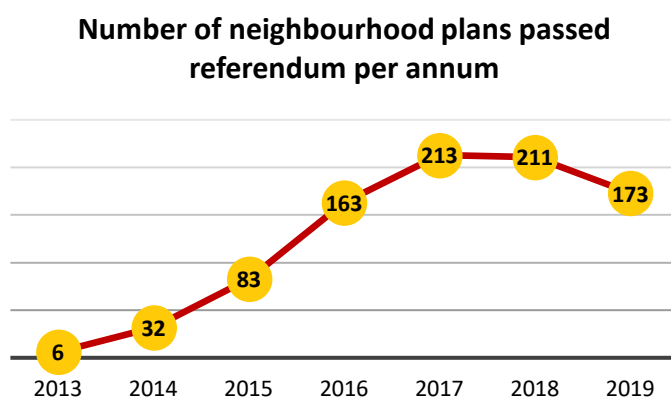
decreased over time and there is a high drop-off rate as neighbourhood areas are designated but not progressed. The number of new area designations is indicated in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Number of neighbourhood area designations per annum (2011-2019)**



The number of Plans passing referendum on an annual basis is also declining - as shown in Figure 3.

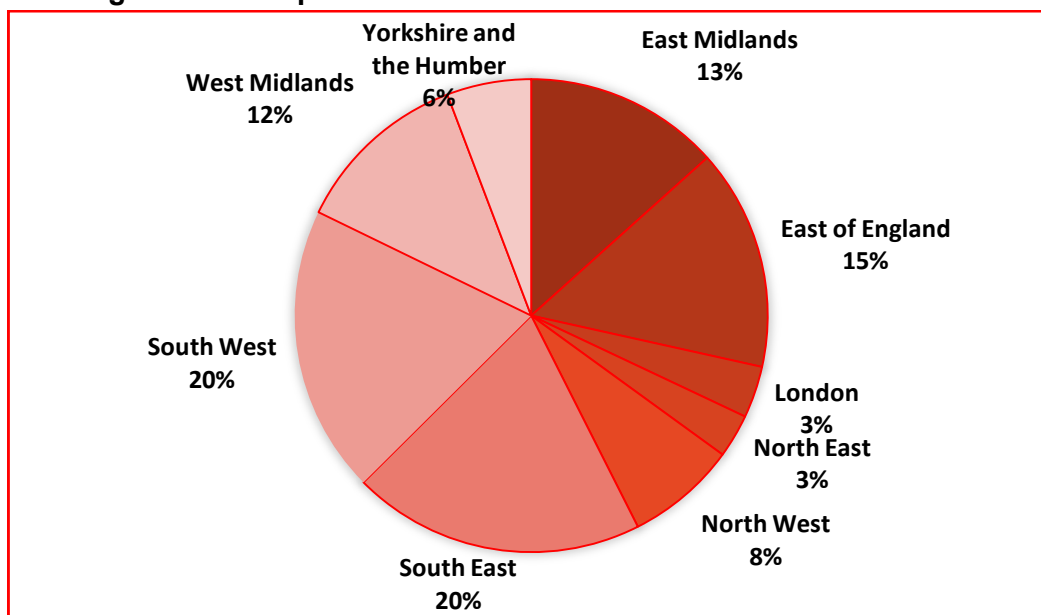
**Figure 3: Number of neighbourhood plans passed referendum per annum**



As in the *User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning* study<sup>2</sup> the overall picture of take-up of NP is biased towards parished, rural areas. There is activity in all region of England, although 18% of LPAs are completely without Neighbourhood Planning activity. There are higher levels of take-up in some areas, notably the South East and South West, and with correspondingly weaker take-up elsewhere, particularly in the North East and London (see Figure 4).

<sup>2</sup> Parker, G. et al. (2014) *User Experience of Neighbourhood Planning*.

**Figure 4: Regional Take-up of NP**



Less than 10% of designated neighbourhood areas are Forum-led (i.e. unparished and predominantly urban) and the majority of the LPAs with no NP activity are located in urban areas (see key statistics in Box 1).

**Box 1: Overall take-up of Neighbourhood Planning in numbers<sup>3</sup>**

- 2,612 areas are designated and can or have progressed Neighbourhood Plans; 9 were revising a “made” neighbourhood plan
- 865 of the total have been “made” and a further 16 have passed referendum (34%)<sup>4</sup>
- 9 neighbourhood plans have failed examination, 6 failed referendum, 1 has been quashed in the High Court and a further 8 have formally withdrawn from the process.

The vast majority are led by Parish / Town Councils:

- 91.5% of area designations were led by Parish/Town Councils and 8.5% were Forum-led
- 94.3% of “made” Plans were led by a Parish/Town Council and 5.6% were Forum led.
- 58 LPAs have no neighbourhood planning activity (no designated areas) - 18%
- There are 22 business-led neighbourhood plans: 20 of which were Forum-led.

*Relationship between Local Plan and neighbourhood plan-making*

<sup>3</sup> As at September 2019.

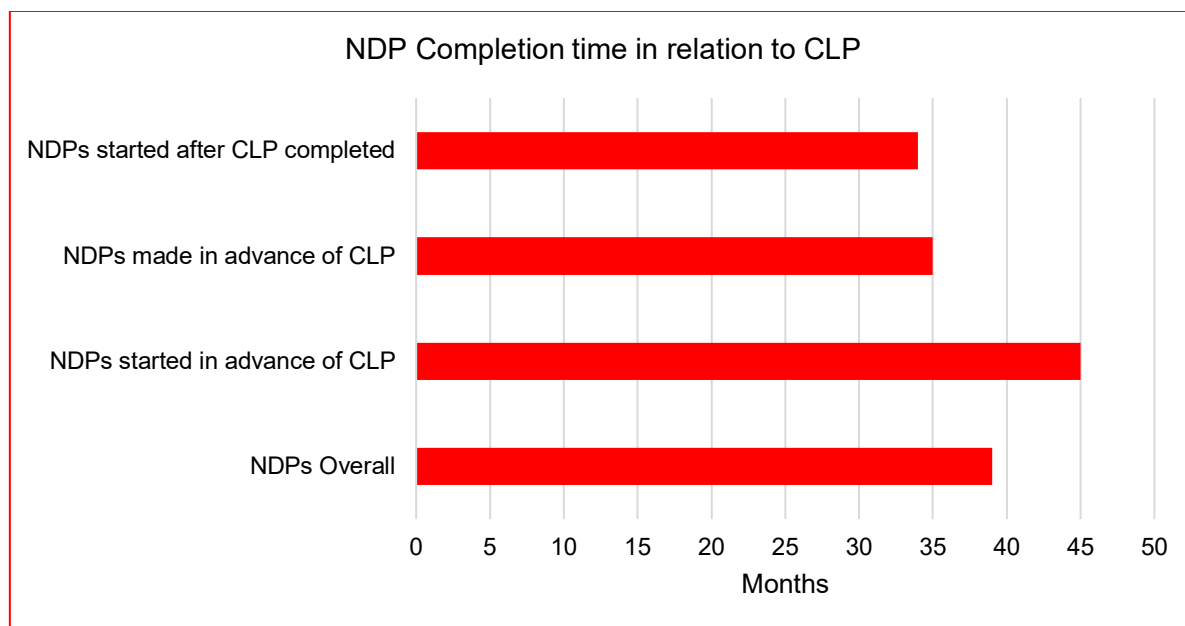
<sup>4</sup> Noting that by May 2020 more than 1000 neighbourhood plans had passed referendum.

The research identifies that although nearly 60% of neighbourhood areas were designated in LPAs where the Local Plan was emerging only 29% of NDPs were “made” in advance of the adopted Local Plan. This suggests that the timing and relationship between the Local Plan and NDPs is of importance (see Section 2.2). Considering the findings as whole, although the process is burdensome NP appears to be a manageable process for communities who overcome the initial barriers. The community questionnaire for example revealed that for 90% of respondents the process went ‘well’ or ‘OK’ (as opposed to ‘not well’). The role of consultants is important to note here: 84% of respondents in the community questionnaire indicated that consultant input was ‘essential’ to their progress. The experiences of communities who have not completed NDPs were not captured in the questionnaire, and so the issues and obstacles relating to NP were captured elsewhere in the project (particularly WP4). This suggests that a completed NDP is an achievable goal for all communities, given adequate support once they are ‘in the system’.

The research focussed on housing and on the NDP-Local Plan relationship. What emerges is a very complex picture of the context in which housing allocations are made, why they are made, how many units are allocated and the relationships between the numbers in NDPs and Local Plans.

The time taken to complete a NDP in relation to the Local Plan situation is set out in Figure 5. There was little difference between the completion time for NDPs started after a Local Plan (core strategy) is completed/adopted and the completion time for NDPs made before a new LP is commenced, but there was a significant difference where a NDP is started (but not made) in advance of a new Local Plan being commenced.

**Figure 5: Time taken to complete an NDP**



Responses from the survey work (WP2) indicated that the preparation of Local Plans can dominate planning officers’ time, impinging on their ability to support communities on

neighbourhood planning. LPAs deemed least supportive by communities were typically working on an emerging Local Plan. Furthermore, the lack of an up-to-date Local Plan creates uncertainty for communities, particularly regarding conformity (i.e. whether NDPs should aim to be in conformity with the existing or emerging Local Plan). It should be noted that as Local Plans move to a five-year cycle, and early NDPs begin to be reviewed, the issue of conformity with emerging Local Plans will likely become more acute. This is an important aspect that requires attention.

The case studies also showed how some Local Authorities have been keen to integrate NDPs as they emerge (i.e. to reconcile emerging Local Plan policy and site allocations), while others have struggled to reconcile timings and resource constraints. Future reforms to NP should seek to find improved means to coordinate and synchronise or phase activity on Local Plan-making and NDPs and integrate neighbourhood planning Groups into the Local Plan-making process. For example, site selection activity could be better integrated since local communities are often better placed to identify potential development sites than standard LPA processes. Drawing out best practice in this regard could also assist but our findings suggest that some LPAs may not be entirely receptive to closer working with neighbourhood planning entities.

## 2.2 Development Impacts (Theme 1)

The way that NDPs have acted to influence development is a central topic of interest in this study. This specifically relates to impacts on numbers of housing sites and units and in terms of quality and sustainability (see also Theme 2 below) and other factors relating to the delivery of new development. The findings show that NDPs can allocate more housing than the Local Plan might suggest. This occurred in around one third of cases where such Plans had chosen to allocate at all. However the local conditions and timing of the neighbourhood plans against timing of the Local Plan play a part in decision-making and act to shape the numbers achieved.

### *NDPs Allocating Housing Development*

To assess the effect of neighbourhood plans on housing allocations, a sample of 141 made NDPs was reviewed – of which, only two were without an Objectively Assessed Need (OAN) figure (either for the NDP area or for a wider area/entire district). Overall:

- 63% of NDPs had OAN figures provided for the NP area (including emerging figures)
- 26% of these NDPs allocated sites for *fewer* dwellings than OAN requirement (or 11% if windfall and reserve sites are taken into account)
- 38% (32 out of 84 plans that allocated) - where they were given an NDP area OAN exceeded their requirement.

As a result the number of homes planned for across the NDPs in this sample amounted to an allocation of 24,741 homes on 480 sites (n=135).

This gives a mean average size per site of 52 homes, with 4 sites per plan (46% of the sample had an average site size of 21-100 dwellings and 33% had an average of 101-300 dwellings).

32 Plans (38%) exceeded their OAN requirement. Of the sample only 19% had based their housing requirements on an adopted or examined Local Plan. Therefore, for the majority of neighbourhood plans the OAN / housing number identified in the Local Plan had yet to be tested through Examination (EiP) and only 63% (n=89) were provided with a figure for their specific neighbourhood area. Of these, 26% of NDPs allocated for fewer dwellings than the OAN once completions and sites in the planning pipeline had been taken into account. Windfall and reserve sites bring this figure down to 11%. Considering sites that were already allocated in emerging or adopted Local Plans and sites with planning permission, NDPs allocated a net number of over 18,000 additional dwellings with an average site size of 39 dwellings.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from the review of the 89 NDPs, that were given a specific housing number/OAN and chose to allocate sites, is that most did allocate sufficient numbers of houses - with a good number exceeding their requirement. Of the NDPs that, on the face of it, did not meet the OAN requirement, often there was a wider context to this which meant that there was not necessarily deliberate under-provision or, where the requirement was not ultimately met, this was by a *de minimis* amount.

Only a minority of communities responding to our surveys had allocated 'additional' sites in their NDP; their reasons for doing so included seeking to fund necessary infrastructure through new development (i.e. through s106 and CIL monies), seeking to achieve greater levels of affordable housing for the local community and seeking to avoid future development on unpopular sites. Here, it should be noted that a key finding from WP2 was that many respondents were unclear about whether their Plan was delivering net additions in terms of housing numbers, emphasising the frontline ambiguity about the Neighbourhood Development Plan-Local Plan relationship due to differing stages of Local Plan production and associated site allocations.

Not all neighbourhoods wish to allocate sites. There are two main reasons: firstly, allocation can be difficult for some communities - due to extra technical burdens (somewhat eased by use of consultants). Second because of possible community conflict over allocation. The feeling expressed by some non-allocating and allocating neighbourhoods was that allocations could lead to accusations of impropriety or worsening of personal relations generally.

#### *Types of housing policy and site allocation requirements*

The 141 NDPs reviewed contained 419 housing-related policies (an average of three policies per NDP – in addition to average four site allocations per NDP). Affordable housing, green/renewable, design, character/layout and density were all well-represented in policies. Housing design was the most common (67% of NDPs), then affordable housing (57% of NDPs).



In site allocation policies, 45% of NDPs addressed housing mix, 33% local needs and 31% needs of older people. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of respondents indicated that their NDP sought to improve the quality of development in their area (89%) – typically through design policies or a comprehensive design guide - and the same number of respondents sought to tailor development to local needs (n= 89).

The planning consultants interviewed as part of the study saw more potential for NDPs to carry innovation through their policies but a lack of confidence in and support for such policies may be discouraging this – with only a minority ‘innovating’. We think that a more directive approach to encourage neighbourhoods to finesse, extend or otherwise build from local policy and national and international ideas and needs could be very useful. Awareness raising and communication about such ideas and opportunities is needed, including amongst consultants, LPAs, and Examiners whose practices may be inadvertently stifling innovation in some locations.

### *Impact on development outcomes*

Given that housing numbers are not always fixed in Local Plans when NDPs are prepared we cannot be definitive about the role of NDPs in housing number additionality. However on the best available information we think more sites can and do come forward as a result of the neighbourhood planning process than would otherwise happen without it. That said the net additionality appears limited and there may be a role in liaising more effectively at site identification / call for sites stages of the planning process to maximise this. Indeed, in relation to this question and in urban areas it was found that Forums can also act as a focus for (3-way) liaison i.e. at pre-application stages and also in helping to identify possible sites using local knowledge and networks.

### *Quality of development*

Unsurprisingly the vast majority of communities surveyed sought to improve the quality of new developments in their neighbourhood. The most commonly cited method for doing so was through design policies and fully-fledged design guides. This suggests that engaging with design issues is both attractive and achievable for communities, and the move towards encouraging better design through NDPs should continue (see areas for further work). The case study work confirmed that many neighbourhoods thought that their Plans would improve design quality and that this assisted in easing community acceptance of new development.

Overall, design policies can help with quality of development as well as helping with local community acceptance of development. Overall, no evidence of *displacement* of development was found in any of the cases. Some participants in the research felt that there was more potential in NP regarding innovative policy. Based on wider reflection it is useful to develop both space and support - an encouraging environment - for such idea development. Enhanced partnership working is one answer to this with active involvement of professional planners alongside community members.

## *2.3 Decision-making impact (Theme 2)*

This theme centres on how NDPs are used once they are completed. Neighbourhood planning processes have acted to extend the pool of knowledgeable local people as a product of NDP preparation and as a result the acceptability of development has likely been improved overall.

Responses from communities suggested somewhat variable use of NDPs in decision-making, but LPAs claimed that 'made' Plans were effectively integrated into decision-making processes. Evidence from the LPAs surveyed indicates that over half of LPA respondents see NDPs as having a 'moderate' or 'high' degree of influence on decision-making. Some examples of good practice were in operation to ensure that NDP policies are apparent to decision-makers. Moreover, responses suggest that the vast majority of decisions which go to appeal are in favour of the relevant NDP. Of 29 examples of planning appeals using NDPs reported by LPA questionnaire respondents, 27 cases (93%) were determined according to the Plan (noting that this departs from findings in the 2018 NALC research (Burns and Yuille, 2018). A clear message from planning officers, however, is that NDPs are rarely determinative on their own – far more often they are cited in decisions *in conjunction* with the Local Plan. As such we can say that they are being used, but the degree of influence is less certain as it does depend on the individual circumstances. This suggests that NDPs 'bolster' or nuance decisions rather than significantly alter decision-making. Some surprise was detected from neighbourhoods that they had an active role in attempting to enforce the use of their NDP policies after the Plan had attained 'made' status.

Better understanding of locally specific issues mean fewer and less weighty objections are likely to emerge, provided other Plan policies are also complied with. In some instances, and more widely this shows potential for greater ownership and acceptance of the decision in the community, even if full agreement on the matter is not possible.

LPA questionnaire responses suggest that NDPs do not speed up the development process. In fact, in some the presence of an NDP can slow decision-making where discrepancies between a NDP and Local Plan exist. Only 8 of 43 LPA respondents witnessed evidence of faster development being brought forward as a result of NDPs. In terms of allocation of (housing) sites in an NDP, this gave greater certainty for developers and communities which is welcome. LPA responses suggest more communities should be encouraged to consider site allocations in their NDPs, as this was considered a key area of added value. This has links to the area for future action, suggesting that a clearer government message about the purposes of neighbourhood planning would help smooth the process by aligning incentives amongst participants - so that all key partners are sufficiently well motivated to engage.

It was also argued by LPAs that site allocations require strong design policies and good local character assessments to ensure that quality was influenced. Thus, robust general, area-specific, and site-specific policies can be highly beneficial. It was felt by some that such approaches have improved the quality of development and helped to respond better to the character of local areas. It was observed that earlier NDPs had been less effective at this as policies were less robust.

Some evidence was presented that shows that in some cases other policy innovation (e.g. policies on local tree cover, self-build housing, safe school routes) is being applied that can improve quality and sustainability credentials. Yet such innovation appears to be the exception rather than the rule and releasing communities from more technical and quite time consuming burdens (either by regulatory change or through clearer recognition and demarcation of LPA and Consultant support roles) holds promise if NDPs are to express their innovative potentials.

The question of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arrangements locally continues to be a contentious point in some areas. As many LPAs do not have a CIL schedule it does not benefit or act as an incentive for many neighbourhood plan areas. Conversely in one case encountered, 'too much' money was flowing into a neighbourhood (by their own admission) although the area is not obliged to accept it. Despite some instances of CIL delivering considerable sums to communities, the vast majority of community questionnaire respondents (84%) indicated that CIL was either *not* a motivating factor or not applicable to their circumstances, as they were not allocating land for development that would generate CIL income. Government should therefore give more attention to how CIL and NDPs interact. In particular Government could ensure that NP groups are aware of the benefits CIL can deliver and how neighbourhood priorities can be addressed, as well as give further thought to ensuring neighbourhood forums have some substantive say in the process<sup>[1]</sup>. Alternatively a different means of providing community benefit could be developed based on evidence of need in an area.

## 2.4 Wider impacts (Theme 3)

This theme considers the wider benefits of neighbourhood planning as emphasised though the data collected. This embraces matters such as engaging with and empowering communities and addressing issues that fall beyond strict land use planning policy but which are nevertheless integral to place-making. Such matters can provide context for and guide planning and investment decision-making. It is noteworthy that these are often not discrete matters, and neighbourhoods tend to perceive place-making as a holistic process i.e. not recognising hard boundaries between land use planning and other matters which are important locally.

It emerged that neighbourhood planning activity often acts to stimulate wider debates about community actions and issues. Innovative policies and uses for NDPs continue to emerge, including: creating Coastal Change Management Areas, developing local flood policies, establishing Heritage Trails between settlements, and advocating carbon neutral developments. However, a significant number of innovative policies and projects were reported as being removed at examination stage, or by planning officers and consultants prior to submission (which is supported by past research findings cf. Parker et al., 2015). This suggests that there is considerable untapped potential within the NP process for

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<sup>[1]</sup> This aspect of NP process was also highlighted in the London Assembly report on 'neighbourhood planning – progress and insights' published in March 2020. It should be noted that other research suggests that financial logics have limited impact local objections to development (Inch et al, 2020).

innovative ideas and local solutions – notwithstanding that some policy efforts may well have been unsupported in evidence or poorly constructed.

There appears a disconnect between wider community issue identification (and action planning) and the current formal NDP outputs. Given lay understandings of the narrower definitions of land use planning topics, the NDP process has often generated non-planning ideas and projects. Indeed 61% of communities indicated that neighbourhood planning acted as a catalyst for other initiatives within their neighbourhood. Such matters ranged from one-off events to significant undertakings such as creating community land trusts. There is a missed opportunity as part of a wider localism project to ensure that such ideas and issues are found some locus, whether through a widening of NDP scope or a more formal 'community plan' adjunct to NDPs. Government may wish to pilot how such 'community plans' could work to capture non-land use planning aspirations and ideas, although new initiatives may compete with the statutory footing of NDPs.

Another finding that is borne out through other research findings is that neighbourhood planning can help improve local networks. Nearly half of community questionnaire respondents indicated the NP process had improved or continued community-LPA relations (49%). Also, that prior to an NDP being 'made', the Forums can act as the focus for liaison generally for LPAs and developers e.g. at pre-application stages and in Local Plan making stages such as site identification, and that where this happens it can be beneficial for all parties. Progressing an NDP can also improve liaison between Parish Councils and other actors in these stages.

There was some evidence neighbourhood planning can lead to improved attitudes towards local development although the most frequent response was no change in community attitudes (36%) or increased awareness and understanding of development issues (but not framed positively or negatively) (27%). Those reporting improvements (16%) were double the number reporting a worsening of community attitudes (8%), whilst a further 13% indicated too soon to say or no evidence to make a judgement. Wider benefits of neighbourhood planning include improved attitudes towards local development, although this is far from universal.

Conversely there were several key reasons for dissatisfied communities: a poor LPA response, a lack of Local Plan or an emerging changing local policy environment and significant modifications of a draft NDP at examination were the most prominent. Timing of NDPs (and Local Plans) are also recognised as important for such policy to have weight in the wider planning system. Thus, issues of improving the resilience of NDPs to a changeable policy environment was seen as important in encouraging take-up and review by some participants in the research.

### 3. Conclusions and Suggestions

#### 3.1 Success Factors and Common Barriers

Neighbourhood planning clearly provides benefits to communities and the built environment where conditions are supportive. However, there are burdens and obstacles (to up-take, creativity, and timely completion) that require addressing. Such matters impact on the likelihood of NDP reviews and may be a cause of the drop-off in neighbourhoods taking-up neighbourhood planning in the first place. There are also issues relating to support, roles and funding that deserve attention.

It is possible to identify a number of factors that have influenced success. The role of the LPA is consistently found to be a crucial element of successful neighbourhood planning. The research also highlighted that past resourcing models for LPAs in neighbourhood planning activity has played a part in producing uneven responses. Indeed, this is where the research work considering the 'stalled' groups category has helped highlight how the role of the Local Authority, both in terms of providing support and the relationship and timing of NDPs with the Local Plan are still prominent issues<sup>5</sup>. For Forums, the burdens involved, such as high start-up costs in terms of finance, time, volunteer effort and other social capital, as well as other concerns (e.g. wider neighbourhood projects or development proposals) can act to slow them down, if not stall them entirely. The pace of change locally can also deflect attention from the longer run endeavour of plan-making and towards day-to-day liaison and other engagement with local authorities and the development industry.

#### *The Main Barriers*

As seen above, although thousands of communities have taken up neighbourhood planning, many communities in England still have not, and perhaps more worryingly there appears to be a trend of fewer communities coming forward. By addressing the barriers to NP, this section seeks to address this trend.

First, the burdensome nature of the process overall expressed by many groups, alongside concerns over the way the NDPs are used during the development management process can act to cause reticence to review or reluctance to embark on a Plan. In short, for many communities it is questionable whether the benefits accrued from an NDP outweigh the effort required to produce one. Also, the availability of a pool of willing volunteers has stymied some neighbourhoods and when reflecting on the stalled groups' experiences this acted to deter or cause some neighbourhoods to withdraw from the process. This is a further reason to stress the importance of LPA support, which eases burdens on communities throughout the process and increases certainty for communities. Having an engaged LPA also helps ensure institutional memory in support of and complementing wider community experience of neighbourhood planning.

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<sup>5</sup> See also Salter, K. (2018) in *Town and Country Planning*.

Timing of NDPs relative to Local Plans and the question of asynchronous plan-making has also caused some problems. The time taken varied according to Local Plan status and stage and does highlight this issue. This can affect enthusiasm and encouragement levels and has clearly caused some delays and in some instances neighbourhood groups abandoning an NDP. Improving the integration of Local Plans and NDPs and deepening the partnership between local planning authorities and communities will help ameliorate some of the negative effects. Increased transparency from LPAs concerning their Local Plan timetables and commitments and active and early involvement of NPGs in Local Plan making / reviews would also help.

There are success factors which relate to LPA stance and attitudes. Local authorities appear to be providing uneven support. Several recommendations have been made in the past and further work to clarify the duty to support in terms of actual role and inputs is still needed.

### 3.2 Areas for Further Work

The suggested areas of further work identified have been developed keeping in mind wider governmental objectives and with a view to building on the positive impacts of neighbourhood planning, ensuring the initiative can be sustained over time. The key governmental objectives we have linked our further work areas to are:

- the levelling-up agenda (**levelling**)
- improving the design of new development (**design**)
- increasing the supply of housing (**housing supply**)
- affording more power to communities (**empowerment**)

These suggested areas for further work also reflect the three themes of *development impact*, *wider impacts*, and *decision-making* as well as these governmental objectives. The findings suggest that neighbourhood planning is helping to identify sites and nuance the development that goes there with benefits in quality terms – although more could be done to harness the innovative potentials of so many volunteer hours focussing in on planning at that scale. Design guides and policies appear to be a key area of emerging value added when it comes to decision-making.

Neighbourhood planning has enabled a better tailoring of development to local needs in some places, increasing communities' knowledge of the planning system and in some cases improving attitudes towards development (although this should not be considered widespread). There has been a role too in site identification and allocation but better working in tandem with LPAs would we feel, improve this. Indeed, a more overt recognition of the co-produced nature of neighbourhood plans would be beneficial.

We have been keen to address the overarching question of whether neighbourhood planning is something the Government should continue to support and promote. As a result of the research we can identify some key reforms which hold potential to improve the experience and impact of NDPs. It is not unambiguously clear that that the benefits outweigh the considerable effort neighbourhood planning requires in some cases. However given that



support programmes have been relatively light on the public purse<sup>6</sup>, the benefits that are being generated and the potential for further improvement suggest neighbourhood planning should be supported. This reflects the views of the majority of participants in this study, the vast majority of whom support the continuation of neighbourhood planning. Many respondents were also keen to see changes made to neighbourhood planning however.

Communities overall are also now more aware of the input costs and possible issues involved in progressing a NDP and those who have considered it recently have more information and alternative options. Thus, in our view there is clear merit in continuing to support neighbourhood planning but there should be some quite significant changes made. Taken together, this suggests that there is merit in Central Government continuing to fund and support the policy. This appears congruent with a role for communities to finesse the planning policy environment when the planning system and national planning policy changes - noting recent announcements and likely future iterations.

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. Thus the objectives of government for neighbourhood planning should be made more explicit. In order for these suggested reforms to have effect government needs to reflect on and then clarify what they want NDPs to achieve. We advocate that the following points below are taken into account in seeking to reform the policy.

### **Area 1 - Continuation of Support for Neighbourhood Planning**

Government should continue to support neighbourhood planning by reflecting on the suggested points below. These can aid government in maximising on the benefits of NP. MHCLG should continue to play a central role as the definitive point of guidance and advice on neighbourhood planning. **(Empowerment)**

### **Area 2 - Uptake**

Neighbourhood planning uptake continues to be uneven across the country and is disproportionately skewed towards rural, parished and affluent communities. There is now a clear indication that NDP take-up is falling back. Although a neighbourhood plan may not always be the best option for communities (see Area 3), neighbourhood planning should be practically available to all communities who wish to pursue it. Therefore steps should be taken to address this **(Levelling, Empowerment)**:

- a. Refined funding and support arrangements overall - both for communities and LPAs to ensure that each are able to deliver appropriate support, and inputs to NDP production. As part of this, attention to urban and deprived areas is still needed. This

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<sup>6</sup> Noting that central government has committed around £65m to neighbourhood planning support since 2010-11 (the figure is an estimate agreed by MHCLG).

may include a different model of support (e.g. dedicated officer time or reverse previous cuts to ensure enhanced consultancy support, plus assistance in early stages of designation) and greater levels of funding relative to the issues faced.

- b. Spread the burdens of the process – currently these rest heavily on volunteers. A clearer and more equitable balancing of roles and activity across neighbourhoods volunteers, Local Authorities and consultants. This refinement is needed given that the sharing of input and effort is already occurring (and successful NDPs are often predicated on good partnership working).

### **Area 3 - Scoping of neighbourhood issues and tools (triage)**

Not all community aspirations can be achieved through a neighbourhood plan. To ensure that communities pursue the most appropriate initiative, guidance should advise all parties about options available and to enable communities to request a formal initiation meeting - a 'triage' stage - between communities, LPAs and where appropriate, an independent third party (for example a consultant) (**Empowerment, Housing supply, Levelling**), this should feature:

- a) Directing communities towards the appropriate tool to meet their goals in a way that encourages their enthusiasm and prioritises innovation and creativity. (For example this may not be a neighbourhood plan but something akin to a Parish Plan, design guide or may involve neighbourhoods working more closely with the LPA in the development of their Local Plan or in the preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document or Area Action Plan.)
- b) Where an NDP is most appropriate, alignment of the expectations and (where possible) the motivations of key parties (especially the community and LPA) is important - this might include co-authoring a visioning document
- c) Ensuring community aspirations can add value to local planning policy (i.e. not replicate existing Local Plan policy)
- d) Clarifying roles (and inputs at NDP stages) and levels of support
- e) Assessing the need for and establishing support available for a community development phase (noting this may require 'inception' or start-up funding).

### **Area 4 – Funding**

Neighbourhood planning's funding arrangements require reform – however, notwithstanding wider funding issues for all Local Authorities (NAO, 2018), evidence does not indicate a need for a large injection of funding to sustain the policy. (**Empowerment, Levelling**).

Funding for LPAs could be better employed by:

- a. Bringing funding forward rather than being released to LPAs at the later stages of neighbourhood planning (e.g. currently examination and referendum)



- b. Criteria for funds to be adjusted and responding to identified needs (and by geography, development pressure, and other policy priorities such as disadvantaged areas).

For communities:

- c. All Forums and deprived neighbourhoods should qualify for higher levels of funding given the added barriers they face
- d. Consider what preparatory work should act to trigger support or initial funding tranches
- e. Funds should be made available for Forums post-NDP adoption to continue to operate, monitor their Plan and remain active in local governance
- f. Additional funding should be considered for neighbourhoods with significant potential for growth.

### Area 5 – Training

Volunteers are varied and skills differ. For each neighbourhood, and even for some reviewing an NDP, it will be the first time for them to undertake a Plan. LPAs, as well as neighbourhoods considering embarking on NDPs, will need clear and effective training too. We recommend that training should be stepped up for all key actors involved in neighbourhood planning (**Empowerment**).

- a) Better training and liaison for all parties on the wider planning system (i.e. Local Plans and national policy) would be beneficial and
- b) There is a need for parties to understand the role of the NDP, what is involved, who will support development of the Plan, the tests of the basic conditions, how the plan will be used in decision-making, the process for keeping the Plan up-to-date and the relationship with and need for continued engagement with the Local Plan making processes.

### Area 6 - Support for Communities

Support for communities from LPAs continues to be vital, as such several actions should be considered (**Empowerment**):

- a. The Duty to Support placed on Local Authorities under the Localism Act (2011) has been recognised in the past as being vague and therefore open to wide variation in interpretation. This duty should be clarified and possibly codified to give more certainty to all parties - this would involve a clearer 'service level agreement' to be instigated
- b. Dedicated neighbourhood planning support within LPAs was seen as ideal (e.g. dedicated planning officer roles) although this frequently requires a sufficient level of neighbourhood planning activity to sustain it. Alternatives might include pooling resource by area or exploring how the function can be sustained through a national body which may also facilitate local links.

- c. Encourage Development Management officers to review NDPs to ensure value-added policies are retained and are refined to maximise that value.
- d. Support for NP groups from LPAs and consultants should encourage innovation and creativity in producing evidence and developing policies and projects to achieve community aspirations.

### Area 7 - Design

Continue to promote neighbourhood planning as a means to deliver enhanced design, recognising the benefits provided by policies at different scales, ranging from: whole neighbourhood area, to character area-specific ones, to site specific issues - as relevant matters for a NDP potentially. (Note that we feel design should be considered in its widest sense, e.g. site-specific 'design' policies may include access issues, cycling and walkways, provision of green space, landscaping, density, massing, layout, materials and building design features). (**Design**)

### Area 8 - Relationship with Local Plans

Better alignment between neighbourhood plans and Local Plans is necessary. (**Levelling, Housing Supply**). This might be achieved by addressing *four* aspects:

- a. better integration of NPGs into the Local Plan-making and review process, in an early and active capacity rather than as consultees, e.g. in relation to site identification processes should be considered. Improved guidance on local plan integration, including working collaboratively around site identification practices e.g. where local communities are able to identify (and encourage) new local sites to come forward that might be missed by the LPA appears useful, and
- b. if neighbourhood planning is to be a recognised tool in this respect then an emphasis on site identification rather than allocation may assist with unburdening and with supply overall in some cases. While less burdensome this could also assist in helping to integrate Local Plans more with NDPs and the two active parties - the third being landowners (this may also be a more fruitful than tasking NDPs to formally allocate sites)
- c. conversely in other areas and situations encouraging more NDPs to include housing sites - particularly in terms of innovation, local needs (e.g. for housing suitable for older people, first-time buyers, young families) and tenure types to aid the levelling-up agenda and the climate resilience agendas may be useful. A review of funding and support arrangements in this context seems desirable to actively encourage local innovation and nationally recognised priority issues.
- d. A more formal role for communities with 'made' or emerging NDPs to engage with Local Plan production, particularly at their earliest stages, as decisions that are made through this process influence the scope of emergent NDPs. To facilitate this option a manual for collaboration could be developed – if this is pursued then we recommend that the text itself is produced jointly by the different active parties.

### **Area 9 - Place-making and Participation**

Allow scope for non-land use planning matters, with more emphasis on early stage engagement, issue identification and opportunity for ideas generation to be allowed to flourish. This should embrace more creative participation modes. We recommend that neighbourhoods are encouraged to maintain a wide process of issue and priority identification. What is confirmed in the research is that the process stimulates far more than is currently captured or recognised. We feel there is evidence of demand and scope here for more than one output from neighbourhood planning activity and which may aid retaining continuities in neighbourhood planning. As such communities should be supported to produce wider local agendas and issues / priorities and into which a formal NDP is nested. **(Empowerment)**.

### **Area 10 – Knowledge exchange**

A more sophisticated and effective fostering of knowledge exchange across boundaries is required to help maximise the potentials of NP (noting that there is a distinction to be drawn between knowledge exchange and formal guidance). While there are some networks and sources now operating, they are patchy and sometimes inconsistent. A step change in this aspect of NP ‘support’ is needed and a dedicated, possibly open source platform for information, learning, sharing and discussion should be set-up for all engaged in NP, including: LPAs, examiners and consultants. It may be that such a resource could be funded from LPAs and other central funding pots as well as the development industry. **(Levelling, Empowerment)**

### **Area 11 - Neighbourhood Development Plan Examinations**

Ensuring consistency during the examination process and what is deemed permissible continues to be important. An improved approach to ensuring consistency should be explored, particularly in relation to examiner reports. Any such iteration to examination practice should enable rather than militate against policy innovation. **(Empowerment)**

### **Area 12 - Decision-making**

The widespread use of neighbourhood plans in local decision-making is to be further encouraged **(Empowerment)**. The use of NDPs in decision-making is already a legal requirement but a culture needs to be fostered to ensure this happens routinely. This might be enhanced by:

- a) an emphasis on clarity and deliverability alongside a concomitant greater weight afforded to NDPs. This will help bolster a stronger emphasis on the ability of NDPs to effectively shape development in their area, ensuring that appropriate weight is given

to them in decision-making, (including in some circumstances where the presumption in favour of sustainable development would otherwise trigger a tilted balance)

- b) clarification about the roles of neighbourhood groups beyond their Plan reaching 'made' status. For example in the encouragement for NPGs to actively engage with LPAs at application stage, in providing comments on the extent to which applications comply with NDP policies, and a more closely specified role for NPGs in pre-application discussions with LPAs and developers. We foresee this being a subject for refined planning guidance and for LPAs to adopt as best practice.

### **Area 13 – Neighbourhood Development Plan Reviews**

Although work on developing and refining guidance and support arrangements overall has been ongoing since 2012, few had reached the review stages by 2019. Government should provide even greater clarity concerning this aspect (i.e. the *review* of NDPs including the triggers, need and process as well as the support arrangements). Steps should also be taken to encourage the alignment of NDP reviews with the intended 5-year cycle of Local Plan reviews. **(Housing Supply, Empowerment)**

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## 5. Annexes

### Annex A: Work Package 1 Summary

#### *Overall take-up of Neighbourhood Planning at the point of research commencement (September 2019)*

- 2,612 areas were actively progressing Neighbourhood Plans; 9 of these were revising a “made” neighbourhood plan (as at September 2019).
  - 865 of the total were “made” and a further 16 passed referendum (34%)
- 9 neighbourhood plans had failed examination, 6 failed referendum, 1 had been quashed in the High Court and a further 8 were formally withdrawn from the process
- The vast majority are led by Parish / Town Councils:
  - 91.5% of area designations were led by Parish/Town Councils and 8.5% were Forum-led
  - 94.3% of “made” Plans were led by a Parish/Town Council and 5.6% were Forum led.
- 58 LPAs have no neighbourhood planning activity (no designated areas) - 18%
- There are 22 business-led neighbourhood plans: 20 of which were Forum-led and 2 Parish/Town council led. Three of these areas had passed referendum.

**Table A1: Regional analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation Breakdown of Neighbourhood Planning Qualifying Bodies at LA level<sup>7</sup>.**

Region	IMD Q1	IMD Q2	IMD Q3	IMD Q4	IMD Q5	Totals
London	1	3	36	29	16	85
South East	284	86	98	24	11	503
South West	67	230	77	146	3	523
West Midlands	52	75	163	18	8	316
East Midlands	88	94	75	69	20	346
East of England	102	142	94	41	18	397
Yorks and Humber	29	33		27	64	153
North West	4	65	63	18	34	184
North East		1		40	34	75
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>729</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>2582</b>

<sup>7</sup> Excludes neighbourhood area designations in National Parks

	(24.3%)	(28.2%)	(23.5%)	(16.0%)	(8%)	
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**Table A2: Progress of neighbourhood areas designated per annum**

Year of area designation	Number of area designations	No. of plans passed referendum (by Sept 2019)	No. of plans that have not progressed to referendum
2013	519	301	218
2014	498	191	307
2015	455	155	300
2016	400	70	330

- Table A2 suggests a 30-60% “success” rate and a high drop off rate which is increasing over time. The drop off rate is higher in plans designated 2014/2015 which we might expect to have passed by now considering the “median” time from designation to referendum is 39 months. This highlights the need for the WP4 focus group on stalled groups.
- It is difficult to ascertain what the relationship is between emerging NDPs and the likely growth pressures, however, as illustrated in Table A3; nearly 80% of designated Neighbourhood Areas are in LPAs that are anticipated to see their population increase - by between 9.5% and 29.5% between 2014-2039.
- The average IMD (2015) Quintile, at the neighbourhood area level, for Plans that had passed referendum by July 2017 was calculated (sample size 376 Plans). Reflecting previous studies<sup>8</sup> the majority of neighbourhood areas are within areas classified as “least deprived” with only 6.7% in areas classified as “most deprived” (IMD Quintile 4-5). This highlights how only a very small number of completed Plans are located in IMD Q4/5 areas.

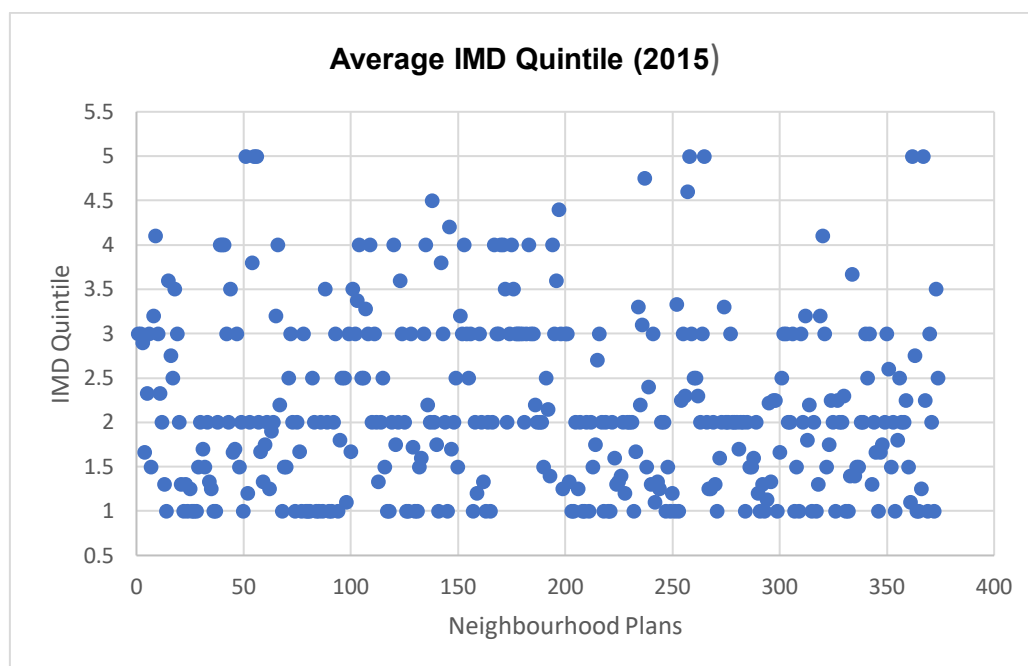
<sup>8</sup> See Parker, G, and Salter, K. (2017) ‘Taking stock of neighbourhood planning in England 2011–2016’. *Planning Practice & Research*, 32(4): 478-490.



**Table A3: Regional breakdown of average IMD (2015) Quintile for NDPs which passed referendum prior to July 2017.**

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
South West	14	17	13	3	47
West Midlands	15	18	19	9	61
East Midlands	19	24	8	5	56
East of England	15	10	7	0	32
Yorks and Humber	3	3	0	1	7
North West	16	14	7	2	39
North East	1	1	3	0	5
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>155</b> <b>(41.2%)</b>	<b>122</b> <b>(32.4%)</b>	<b>74</b> <b>(19.7%)</b>	<b>25</b> <b>(6.7%)</b>	<b>376</b>

**Figure A: Average IMD Quintile (2015) for NDPs which passed referendum prior to July 2017.**



In total, 141 neighbourhood plans were reviewed (136 in parished areas and 5 forums in unparished areas) across 58 LPAs. The majority were in the South East region (40%, with significant proportions in the East Midlands (19%), South West (14%) and West Midlands (18%) region. Table A4 sets out the figures.

**Table A4: Regional spread of LPAs and NDPs in WP1b**

Region	No. of NDPs	LPAs
East of England	4	3
East Midlands	27	12
London	2	2
North East	3	2
North West	3	1
South East	57	20
South West	20	10
West Midlands	25	8
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>58</b>

#### 4.2 Relationship between the Neighbourhood plan and Local Plan

Of the 141 NDPs, 50 were covered by 'comprehensive' local plans and the other 91 by two-part local plans, i.e. a Core Strategy and Development Plan Documents (DPDs).

38% of the areas covered by CLPs (19 NDPs) had an adopted LP at the time the NDP was examined. A further 4 had submitted CLPs whilst 27 (54%) were still emerging. 44% of the areas covered by two-part local plans (62 NDPs) had an adopted Core Strategy at the time the NDP was examined. Of these, a total of 8 Site Allocations DPDs had also been adopted by this point. Therefore 27 (19%) of the NDPs based their housing requirements on an adopted or examined local plan.

#### 4.3 Local authority approach towards identifying housing need for Neighbourhood Plans

Of the 141 NDPs, only 2 did not have an OAN/housing number either specifically for the neighbourhood area or for a wider area/the district as a whole. As discussed above, a number of these OAN figures were provided through Local Plans that had yet to be examined or adopted.

89 NDPs (63%) were provided with an OAN/housing number specifically for their neighbourhood area.

#### 4.4 Number of homes planned for by Neighbourhood Plans

- In total, the 141 NDPs allocated sites for 24,661 dwellings on 480 sites. A further 39 sites were allocated for housing but did not specify an overall housing requirement.
- On the sites where housing numbers are specified, this represents an average site size of 51 dwellings. This is split as follows in Table A5.

**Table A5: Site allocations in NDPs**

Ave. size of site allocation	No. of NDPs	No. of dwellings	% of dwelling
1-5	8	132	1%
6-10	15	729	3%
11-20	23	1,102	4%
21-50	45	5,701	23%
51-100	21	5,959	23%
101-300	11	8,193	33%
301-500	2	3,165	13%
501+	0	0	0%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>24,741</b>	<b>100%</b>

The 135 NDPs that chose to allocate did so at an average of 4 sites per plan. Of the 89 NDPs that were provided with an OAN/housing number specifically for their neighbourhood area, 23 plans (26%) allocated sites for fewer dwellings than their specific requirement. Of these plans, near half (11) had a windfall allowance to address the shortfall and a further 2 NDPs had reserve sites. In effect therefore, these Plans could be said to meet their OAN. The requirement figure was derived after completions, and sites in the planning pipeline and existing Local Plan allocations had been taken into account. Also, it reflected the requirement at the time the NDP was being prepared, rather than any final figure following changes made through an emerging Local Plan process. It should be noted that this number should be treated with caution as the OAN figures for a number of NDPs were substantially different (by more than 200 dwellings) to those being planned for. Furthermore, a large proportion of these areas were only slightly below the OAN/housing need number and many of these were in areas with emerging Local Plans. It is therefore considered that as the Local Plan emerged there were late adjustments to the OAN and this may have resulted in a NDP moving from meeting its requirement to under-providing. In areas where the numbers were below the OAN this may represent areas that had seen speculative development come forward, yet an emerging Local Plan and accompanying OAN figure had left them feeling that a cautious approach was appropriate, particularly where the shortfall was small and could be addressed in other ways such as through windfall.

Closer examination of these Plans identifies a number of different reasons why NDPs did not meet their OAN figure at the time:

- 2 NDPs were prepared well before the Local Plans emerging for their area had established a robust OAN figure. In one case, the NDP was examined in December 2016 yet the emerging Local Plan has since still not been adopted
- One NDP did not have an OAN figure for its area and was instead informed by a Local Plan approach whereby it was assigned a percentage of a wider rural OAN figure which could then be amended by local evidence of potential to support such growth. In this case where flexibility was permitted, a windfall allowance was justified in order to meet the OAN
- 2 further NDPs were permitted to include a windfall allowance to meet their OAN figure. Both these were rural NDPs where the OAN figures were relatively low

- 7 NDPs did not meet their OAN figure by a very small number (less than 10 dwellings) In some cases it is understood that the OAN figure remained in draft throughout the process but was then fixed at a higher level once the NDP had reached an advanced stage and did not choose to delay and be amended. In light of the small nature of the shortfall, this was not identified as being a significant issue in any of these cases and was addressed through windfall
- One NDP saw 2 of its 3 site allocations be granted planning permission for scales of development lower than they were allocated for, resulting in a shortfall against the OAN
- 5 NDPs were in areas that included emerging strategic allocations which addressed the shortfall in OAN
- 2 NDPs identified reserve sites in case the permissions granted and built on the allocated sites did not meet the OAN requirement
- 2 NDPs saw their OAN requirements increase through the Local Plan process at a late stage in their development. In one case this involved a Local Plan Site Allocations DPD increasing the housing requirement on a site allocated in the NDP
- One NDP was reflecting the emerging Local Plan allocations in the NDP, so effectively did not allocate.

Our review of these Plans suggests that the most common scenario for emerging NDPs was that they were being informed by emerging Local Plans where the spatial disaggregation of OAN was not fully established and tested. Only 9 of 23 NDPs (39%) were examined at a point in time when there was an up-to-date adopted Local Plan in place, with 7 of these in a single local authority area. This was often further complicated by the presence of a strategic site in an area; which served to significantly inflate the OAN for the parish/forum, if not what was expected to be delivered through the NDP for that parish/forum. This highlights the difficulty in drawing robust conclusions from the data gathered. The Local Plan context for each district at the time that NDPs were emerging is different in many ways, as is the context for different types of NDP (rural NDPs with low OAN requirements versus NDPs in larger settlements where the OAN is higher and further complicated by the relationship with strategic development). Ultimately this means that the headline data needs to be interpreted carefully in all cases.

The data shows 31 out of the 84 Plans that allocated sites *exceeded* their identified OAN requirement (this equates to 38%). These figures include areas that exceeded the OAN by a *de minimis* number (i.e. less than 5 dwellings). In total, these 31 Plans provided 2,149 dwelling above the OAN:

- 6 NDPs accounted for 59% of this total, each exceeding the OAN requirement by 100 dwellings or more
- 6 NDPs exceeded the OAN requirement by less than 10 dwellings (contributing 27 dwellings to the total)
- 13 of the 31 NDPs (42%) were examined at a point in time when there was an up-to-date adopted Local Plan in place.

This is shown in Table A6.

**Table A6: NDPs that exceeded their OAN requirement**

Ave. amount OAN exceeded by	No. of NDPs	No. of dwellings	% of dwelling total
1-10	6	27	1%
11-25	6	120	6%
26-50	7	283	13%
51-99	6	455	21%
100+	6	1,264	59%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>100%</b>

The general conclusion that can be drawn from the review of the 89 NDPs that were given a specific housing number/OAN and chose to allocate sites is that most did allocate sufficient numbers of houses, with a good number exceeding their requirement. Of the NDPs that, on the face of it, did not meet the OAN requirement, often there was a wider context to this which meant that there was not necessarily deliberate under-provision, or where the requirement was not ultimately met, this was by a de minimis amount. Also, when comparing the NDPs which exceeded their OAN with those that did not meet it, there is no significant difference in the proportion that were examined with an up-to-date adopted Local Plan in place.

The 24,741 dwellings in allocation policies in the NDPs assessed does not reflect the fact that some of these sites had either already been allocated in a Local Plan (either adopted or emerging) or had received outline or full planning permission by the time the NDP was examined. As such, these cannot be counted as allocations made by the NDP because their allocation or delivery would probably have happened anyway. Of this total number of dwellings, 6,534 would have come forward as Local Plan allocations or as sites with planning permission. Therefore, the NDPs themselves allocated sites totalling 18,207 dwellings (74% of the total). In total, these dwellings were allocated by 117 NDPs across 466 sites, an average of 39 dwellings per site (compared with 51 dwellings per site for all sites in NDPs).

Again, this figure should be treated with caution. A number of sites that were allocated by an NDP may have come forward through an emerging Local Plan but the emerging Local Plan was then withdrawn and the NDP undertook to allocate the site. Equally, there were some NDPs which allocated sites but did not state a housing figure for them, therefore this will serve to increase the number of dwellings allocated through NDPs. (It should be noted however that, derived from WP3, some LPAs have been actively encouraging neighbourhood planning groups not to allocate sites but to support Local Plan allocations through site-specific policies in the NDP instead.

The above section provides an insight on the complex environment that housing allocations are being made. As such the figures that we cite do need careful treatment. By way of explanation. We indicate that 38% of the 84 NDPs which allocated sites, exceeded their identified OAN requirement. In total, these 31 plans provided 2,149 dwellings above the OAN. For these plans, their OAN figure was 8,006 dwellings, therefore it could be inferred

that these plans chose to allocate dwellings at an average of 27% above their OAN requirement. To do so however would be to over-simplify what is a complex picture across 24 different local planning authority areas.

It is difficult to directly compare the 27% figure with the figures presented in the Lichfields study. The reason for this is that this study considers 'effective' OAN, which means an OAN figure that has been reduced to take into account completions and sites in the planning pipeline that would otherwise contribute to OAN. This is distinct from what could be called a 'pure' OAN figure which is much higher.

6 NDPs accounted for 59% of the 2,149-dwelling total, each exceeding the OAN requirement by 100 dwellings or more. These 6 NDPs had OAN requirements totalling 6,030 dwellings, or 75% of the overall OAN figure for all 31 NDPs. What this shows is that NDPs with a very high 'effective' OAN - more than 1,000 dwellings - have a disproportionate impact on the headline figure of 27% above OAN.

12 NDPs accounted for just 7% of the 2,149-dwelling total, with none of them exceeding their OAN requirement by more than 25 dwellings. These 12 NDPs had OAN targets totalling 1,035 dwellings, or 13% of the overall OAN figure for all 31 NDPs. On average, they exceeded their OAN target by just 14%.

As a result caution should be exercised in presenting any headline figures from the report, in particular the 27%-above-OAN statistic.

What we can say is that, while the sample showed allocations were 27% above OAN (discounted to take account of sites with permission) this was skewed by some large allocations in a small number of Plans, so more realistically, the 'mean' average is was 14% above their remaining requirement.

*Types of Neighbourhood plan housing policy and specific site allocation requirements*

The 141 NDPs reviewed contained a total of 419 housing-related policies (excluding site allocation policies). This is an average of 3 housing-related policies per plan (in addition to the average of 4 site allocations per plan).

The following were the types of housing-related matters covered by these policies (it should be noted that more than one specific matter could be covered by a single policy (Table A7).

**Table A7: Housing policy in NDPs**

Housing matter in policy	Number of NDPs
Housing design	92
Affordable housing	80
Character/layout of new estates	61
Density	55
Green/renewable issues	44

Housing design was the most common housing-related policy, with 65% of NDPs having at least one policy addressing this matter. Also very commonly addressed was affordable

housing (57%). None of the NDPs set a target for affordable housing as this is considered a strategic policy. The majority of the affordable housing policies simply reiterated the need to comply with the Local Plan Policy particularly in areas with emerging Local Plans with new targets as a mechanism to signpost applicants to the most up to date requirements.

Other matters that were frequently addressed in the NDPs were:

- Housing mix
- Parking provision
- Infill development

Across the housing allocation policies in the 141 NDPs assessed, there were a number of specific requirements for development proposals to comply with the policy. These are set out in Table A8.

**Table A8: Housing-related requirement of site allocation policies**

Housing requirement/type	No. of NDPs
Affordable housing	21
Housing to meet the needs of older people	44
Specific type of open market housing	3
Housing to meet local needs	47
Starter Homes	20
Shared ownership housing	4
Housing mix	63

The most common requirement of the site allocations related to housing mix (45% of NDPs), followed by housing to meet local needs (33%) and housing to meet the needs of older people (31%).



## Annex B: Work Package 2: Local Planning Authorities and Completed NDP area surveys Summary

### *Community attitudes toward development and the wider planning system*

Evidence from communities suggests that Neighbourhood Planning **can lead to improved attitudes towards local development**. Although the most frequent responses indicated no change in community attitudes or increased awareness and understanding of development issues. Those reporting improvements were double the number reporting a worsening of community attitudes. Motivations of communities expressed show a **vast majority of respondents sought to improve the quality of development in their area**. Typically through design policies or a comprehensive design guide and sought to tailor development to local needs.

- There is evidence that **on balance Neighbourhood Planning improves community attitudes towards the planning system**, with positive responses nearly double those of negative ones. Undoubtedly the process increases awareness and understanding of how planning works as identified by the vast majority of community respondents.
- The process overall - vast majority responded that the process went 'well' (n= 49) or 'OK' (n= 41), meaning that on balance the process was well-regarded by 90%

### *Community attitudes toward the Local Planning Authority*

- Just under half of community respondents (49%) indicated the Neighbourhood Planning process had improved community-LPA relations (44%) or helped continue positive relations (5%).
- A significant minority of 27% indicated that the process had not improved community-LPA relations. Twelve respondents indicated that they had insufficient information to answer this question or that it was too soon to tell.
- When asked how supportive the LPA had been, nearly 9 out of 10 communities felt their LPA was either very (49%) or somewhat (39%) supportive - this suggests that overall Neighbourhood Planning can be said to improve or sustain positive LPA-community relations.
- In communities where the LPA relationship was particularly difficult, respondents expressed a desire for independent actors to resolve disputes.

*Neighbourhood Planning as a catalyst for other neighbourhood initiatives* - a majority of community respondents (61%) suggested that Neighbourhood Planning was acted as a catalyst for other initiatives within their neighbourhood. These ranged from one-off events to significant undertakings such as creating community land trusts. The small number of Forums in the questionnaire (n=8) mean it is not possible to judge whether they are more likely to pursue other initiatives in the absence of a Parish Council, however three Forums did report considerable increases in community infrastructure and activity as a result of the Neighbourhood Planning process, including one Forum that established a Community Interest Company and another that formed a Community Land Trust to regenerate a town centre.



*Volunteer time* - NDPs require significant amount of volunteer time, typically falling on a small group of individuals. Within this wider group, the process is frequently driven by one or two residents, for whom the plan can become a full-time job. In total, 82% of community respondents found the process more burdensome than expected.

*Facilitators and barriers to Neighbourhood Planning* - Community respondents overwhelmingly identified the resilience and dedication of the communities themselves, as essential. This reflects the considerable volunteer time required (see above), but also the time and resource investment communities are placing into their NDPs. These 'sunk costs' are considerable and it is difficult for communities who have invested vast amounts of time completing an NDP to see decisions made against the wishes of the community.

Most respondents indicated that planning consultants had been 'essential' to their NDP. Only five communities in the questionnaire did not employ consultants. This suggests that consultant input is a vital component of completing an NDP.

*Decision-Making and Investment* - reports from Local Planning Authority suggest that Neighbourhood Planning does not speed up the development process, and at times can actually make decision-making more difficult. A minority of respondent had witnessed evidence of faster development being brought forward as a result of NDPs (n=8 / 18.6%), although slightly more reported reduced opposition to new development (n=10 / 23.3%). This suggests that under certain circumstances that development can be better facilitated by Neighbourhood Planning than in its absence, but that this is not the most frequent outcome. Local planning officers were keen to stress that regardless of Neighbourhood Planning, local development (especially larger sites) is almost always contentious, and so not reducing opposition should not be regarded as a failing of the policy.

**Neighbourhood Plans are now firmly bedded into the decision-making structure.** Communities reported that in the vast majority of cases where their NDP had been cited, the decision was in line with the NDP. In the minority of cases where decisions had gone against NDP policies, this caused significant upset in communities, especially where the decision-making process was deemed opaque. **LPA respondents did indicate that NDPs are rarely determinative on their own** – more often they are cited in conjunction with the Local Plan, suggesting that NDPs 'bolster' decision with local nuance rather than significantly alter decision-making.

Only one LPA respondent reported any evidence of NDP causing **displacement activity** – an increase in planning applications in communities without an NDP (from an LPA with a large amount of Neighbourhood Planning activity and the majority of the LPA's area under NDP designations). Difficult to calculate the level or position of development in the absence of NDPs.

## Annex C: Work Package 3 – NP Case Studies Summary

### **Development Impacts and Housing Supply**

- Net additionality appears limited but there may be a role in liaising more effectively at site identification/ / call for sites stages of the planning process.
- Overall no evidence of displacement of development was found in any of the cases.

### **Other Development Impacts (including Quality of Development)**

- Overall design policies can help with quality of development as well as helping with local community acceptance of development.
- Timing of Plans (and local plans) are also recognised as important for such policy to have weight.
- Forums can also act as the focus for liaison i.e. at pre-application stages.

### **Decision making and Investment**

- Some surprise detected from Neighbourhoods that they had an active role in attempting to enforce the use of their NDP policies;
- Most areas did not add much by way of substantive comment on investment
- Unclear about the speed question but good well-evidenced policy was seen as important;
- CIL continues to be a contentious point in some areas:
  - In one case too much money was flowing in
  - Other areas either no CIL or CIL arrangements were unsatisfactory from the neighbourhood perspective.
  - Two examples used an area-based approach to determining CIL spend.

### **Community Attitudes and Engagement**

- There is a somewhat mixed picture on attitudes to development, with some arguing that it has improved. Seems to depend partly on pre-existing relations and arrangements locally.
- Ongoing use and implementation of Plans could also affect such relations – this is contingent on quality of Plans and their use by LPAs.

### **Influence of Geography**

- Urban Forums have extra difficulties and lack funding;
- Presence of Skills and knowhow in different neighbourhoods uneven;
- Establishing urban neighbourhood areas can be challenging given boundary issues, lack of pre-existing community organisation and diversity of population;
- Areas where a local plan are in place may be more encouraging / attractive for Neighbourhoods to initiate a Plan.

### **Success Factors and Common Barriers**

- Significant time investment from volunteers;
- Consultants were seen as important (see also WP2 and WP4);
- Presence or advanced stage of a Local Plan;
- Overall LPA attitudes and resourcing of NP support.

### **Reforms and changes to practice**

- a more fundamental change to try and get a **more widespread engagement with planning** at the neighbourhood scale.
- Having compulsory support (i.e. **strengthen support framework**) and not relying so heavily on volunteers that are often quite elderly.
- a change in policy regarding the **review of NDPs** (timing / longevity) – and greater clarity concerning this process
- several thought that **simplification** (see also WP2) should be sought but there was little on the details of this reworking.
- being more prescriptive by stating that Neighbourhoods need to address housing if there is an (local plan) allocation in that area.

#### *Neighbourhoods:*

- enhanced **funding** generally, the enabling of residual funding for Forums and to look at clarifying how and on what basis the neighbourhood portion of CIL receipts will be spent.
- Better **project management** to be emphasised more
- Make it much clearer to local communities what it actually means to have an NDP and to be **explicit about it being pro-growth**
- Ensuring communities understand the boundaries of NDPs (i.e. what is land use policy) is still a concern
- More resources and **support around policy writing** was needed (creating effective design policy was also seen as difficulty for communities, and an opportunity to add value)
- Linked to increased **input from DM** during the initial stages of the process to cover how best to phrase policies.

#### *Local Planning Authorities:*

- more emphasis on local authorities' working actively with communities would be useful (**Basingstoke**).
- A more **streamlined process** or template NP was suggested (Basingstoke).
- LPA **resources** were cited - linked to ensuring better NDP quality
- Dedicated NP support in LPAs was seen as ideal (although requires a sufficient level of Neighbourhood Planning activity to sustain)
- Some LPAs would like to **promote NP and support groups more**, particularly during the initial stages – again resourcing appears to hamper this.

## Annex D: Work Package 4 - Consultants, Development Industry, and 'Stalled' groups Summary

**Consultants:** a lot of issues were raised and as might be expected, the consultants thought that they acted to stabilise neighbourhood planning as a policy by giving support across the stages and in interpreting policy and other requirements. They saw most value in NDPs where the local plan was absent and in trying to urge communities to add value in policy terms where a local plan is in place. There were concerns about the review of plans and how housing requirements are currently imposed or assessed. They see that neighbourhood planning can change attitudes and raise understanding of planning. They want to see clarification of roles and joint working across LPAs, communities and consultants as well as a reform of the support programme so that funding better reflected the required extent and type of inputs required.

**Developers:** a highly variable picture of neighbourhood planning emerges from this group. The findings from the Developers highlights arguments and counter-arguments for NDPs being allowed ahead of local plans (as well as disallowing them). A diversity of experiences in liaison were cited and some frustration at not being able to liaise. Many were cautious about the net value, particularly where a local plan is in place. They were also concerned about quality and robustness overall. They were concerned that emerging NDPs can confuse investment decisions and could overall slow down development.

Issues around site allocation could be pursued further – one option would be to task NPs with more active windfall and infill site identification rather than formal 'allocation' - which if found could be referred up to the LPAs as part of regular calls for sites.

**Stalled groups:** the 'stalled' groups category highlights how the role of the local authority, both in terms of providing support and the relationship and timing of NDPs with the local plan are prominent. For Forums, the burdens involved as well as other concerns (e.g. wider neighbourhood projects or development proposals) can act to slow them down, if not stall them entirely. Neighbourhoods overall are also now more aware of the input costs and possible issues involved in progressing an NDP and those who have considered it recently have more information and alternative options.

Overall this points to questions of resources, relations and value in maintaining the throughput of neighbourhood planning activity - perhaps most particularly in Forum areas.