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It's house-building but not as we know it: the impact of neighbourhood planning on development in England

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Abstract

Community opposition to house-building has been cited as one of the key factors in the decline in new housing supply over the last decade. The policy of neighbourhood planning was introduced to England in 2011 to overcome this opposition by devolving limited powers to communities to influence development. It was anticipated that giving communities the right to draw up neighbourhood development plans would secure their compliance with a pro-growth agenda and increase the number of sites allocated for housing. This paper explores the impact of neighbourhood planning in England on housing development and analyses its lessons for the state strategy of localism. It argues that neighbourhood planning is emerging as the proponent of sustainability and social purpose in the English housing market, in conflict with the corporate interests of a liberalised housing development market.

Key Words

House-building, neighbourhood planning, community empowerment, localism

Introduction

The devolution of governance to communities is an integral component of the state strategy of localism but risks conflict with policies dedicated to the liberalization of economic growth (Clarke & Cochrane 2013; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2015). This has been particularly true in the localisation of planning decisions since new housing developments often generate collective public opposition because of their anticipated environmental impacts (Sturzaker 2011). Community resistance to house-building has been cited as one of the key factors in the decline in new housing supply over the last decade and the collective action of citizens' groups in land-use or development planning is routinely dismissed as illegitimate, selfish and ignorant (DeVerteuil 2013).

The emergence of neighbourhood planning in England after 2011 was unusual both in its devolution of statutory planning policy to community organisations and in its explicit intention to reshape the protectionist opposition of citizens into enthusiastic support for housing development (Bradley 2015; Parker, Lynn, & Wargent 2015). It was anticipated that giving communities the right to devise neighbourhood development plans would secure their compliance with a pro-growth agenda and increase the number of sites allocated for housing. Neighbourhood planning was an experimental policy at the seismic juncture between localism and the liberalisation of housing growth (Young & Burcher 2014: 1). Making this policy work meant giving local people real influence over the scale and shape of development and at the same time enabling the volume house-building corporations that dominate the industry in England to access land and gain planning approval more easily.

The aim of this paper is to assess the impact of localism in England on community support for house-building and to review the spatial practices of neighbourhoods in planning for housing delivery. It is argued that neighbourhood planning created opportunities for communities to advance new socially and environmentally sustainable housing solutions that conflicted with the interests of corporate house-builders and unsettled the depiction of citizens' groups as protectionist and opposed to all economic growth. The paper seeks to contribute to housing theory in its analysis of the policy impacts of the engagement of citizens' and residents' groups in planning for housing delivery and, more broadly, it seeks to add to the debate on localism and public participation in housing (Rumming, Houston & Amati 2012; Cook, Taylor & Hurley 2013; Matthews, Bramley & Hastings 2015).

It draws on the body of planning policy developed by neighbourhoods across England since 2011 and on fieldwork research with a national sample of 50 neighbourhood plans carried out between 2013 and 2015. It presents specific case studies that evidence the planning pathways followed by neighbourhoods through the drafting and decision-making process and through subsequent legal challenges to illustrate the themes emerging from the sample as a whole. This research was conducted with rural and urban neighbourhoods and involved a preliminary review of draft and final plans and other documentation, including constitutions, applications for designation, council decision papers, minutes of meetings, consultation strategies, and examiners' reports, followed by interviews with the chairs and secretaries of neighbourhood planning committees or forums, observation at meetings, and separate interviews with the relevant officers from the planning authority. Participants gave their informed consent on the understanding that the actual place names for neighbourhood plans would be used.

The paper begins with a review of the liberalization of governance inherent in the spatial restructuring of localism and introduces neighbourhood planning in the context of housing growth and housing delivery. It explores the conflict that emerged between neighbourhoods and the volume house-builders and analyses government responses. It then identifies the distinctive spatial

practices that are emerging in neighbourhood plans with regard to housing delivery and evaluates the impact of neighbourhood planning on the dominant market model of house-building. The paper concludes with an assessment of the contribution of neighbourhood planning to housing delivery and its significance in understanding the tensions inherent in the state strategy of localism.

Housing growth and localism

The state strategy of localism can be understood as part of a broader liberalisation of governance in which private market interests are promoted in the name of economic growth and community empowerment (Brenner & Theodore 2002; Davoudi & Mandanipour 2015). A spatial re-structuring of state institutions and services has reduced the regulatory environment for private corporations and increased their opportunities to benefit from the contraction of the public sector. Central to this project has been a rhetorical shrinkage of the space of public responsibility and the corresponding assertion of the 'community' or 'neighbourhood' as a unit of enterprising citizenry (Rose 1999; Hall & Massey 2010). Such a spatial imaginary implies the devolution of limited statutory authority to the neighbourhood as a collective organization of citizens, although any transfer of power is fraught with tension and, as a result, has been confined largely to the realm of the symbolic (Miraftab 2009; Bradley 2014).

Notions of 'citizen control' bring with them a troubling association with oppositional movements and 'counter-publics', and in land-use planning and housing especially, they recall neighbourhood campaigns against development that challenged entrenched networks of power and posited a global failure of trust in the legitimacy of state processes (Arnstein 1969; Fraser 1997; Mihaylov & Perkins 2015). Studies of citizen engagement in planning decisions have undermined the rationale for the use of the acronym NIMBY (not in my back yard) to condemn the planning objections of community groups as selfish and ill-informed (Burningham 2000; Wolsink 2006; Devine-Wright 2012). They have demonstrated that resident opposition to housing may be guided by broader societal concerns such as sustainability and social justice (Matthews, Bramley & Hastings 2014). Resistance to, and citizen participation in planning decisions manifests an empowered public claiming to speak for societal concerns and protect the public good (Ruming, Houston & Amati 2012). **These publics appear to assert connections between housing development, the enhancement of democracy and residents' rights to have a say over neighbourhood change (Cook, Taylor & Hurley 2013).**

The public concerns asserted by neighbourhoods in development planning address what the spatial theorist Henri Lefebvre called representational or lived space, 'space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols' (Lefebvre 1991: 39). Lefebvre's classification of space into three elements, as conceived, perceived and lived, enables distinctions to be made between the exchange values or use value of housing development (McCann 1999). **The development of market housing is motivated by exchange values, where the price of land determines scheme viability and subsequent affordability – or lack of it (Ball 2003; Bramley & Watkins 2016), and neighbourhood opposition to housing growth has been similarly related to socio-economic status and house values (Taylor 2013; Taylor et al 2016). But neighbourhoods appear additionally motivated by use values and the potential for land to meet local need and contribute intangibly to place identity and sense of belonging. The claim to local knowledge of resident groups can be also then understood as an articulation of the use values of lived space, as space that serves a range of public functions and civic needs and that has emotional resonance as well as practical purpose.** Lefebvre's spatial dialectic emphasises the relationship between social identity and residential space and provides a conceptual framework through which land-use can be understood as central to the

political questions of social reproduction and sustainability. Lefebvre contrasted the production of space as a homogenous abstract, commodified as parcelled units of exchange, with its social construction as emplaced labour, mapped into the practices and passions of everyday life. The engagement of neighbourhoods in development planning appears through this lens as a struggle for space, where housing market decisions may transgress local definitions of the public sphere and raise political dilemmas of social purpose (Clark 1994; Mihaylov & Perkins 2015). In this context, the devolution of planning powers to neighbourhoods might provide opportunities to enhance the social benefits of housing development and produce greater specificity and diversity in housing market decisions.

Neighbourhood plans and house-building

The introduction of neighbourhood planning to England from 2011 was experimental in its devolution of statutory planning powers to community groups and its expectation that greater collective influence over development would induce citizens to support new house-building. One of the principal objectives of neighbourhood planning was to increase the rate of growth of house-building by enabling communities 'to exercise real power in respect of the design and precise location of the development that takes place in the neighbourhood' (DCLG 2011: 10). Neighbourhood planning was accompanied by financial incentives to sweeten this behavioural change and the policy was expected to boost the number of land sites allocated for housing over and above those already apportioned by higher-level plans. One of the key indicators of the success of this policy would be a reduction in the number of rejected planning applications, planning appeals and legal challenges.

It is important to note that localism takes specific form within the devolved UK, where separate planning systems now exist, and this paper is concerned with policy enacted only in England by the UK Parliament. Neighbourhood plans, or to give them their full significant title, Neighbourhood Development Plans, were brought in as part of a radical programme of spatial deregulation that aimed to generate economic growth in the context of a chronic mismatch between housing need and housing supply (NHF 2011). Neighbourhood planning powers were set out in a new National Planning Policy Framework that enshrined a presumption in favour of sustainable development binding on local authorities and their neighbourhoods (DCLG 2012). The regional tier of planning that had previously set housing targets was abolished and local planning authorities were instead required to provide more than five years' worth of specific, developable housing land sites and identify broad locations for new housing up to nine years ahead. Neighbourhood plans had to be in general conformity with these strategic policies as set out in the Local Plan drawn up by unitary and district authorities. They had to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and 'plan positively to support local development' especially housing development (DCLG 2012 Paragraphs 15-16). They could not promote less development than stipulated in the Local Plan or undermine its strategic policies and they had to have regard to national policies and be compatible with EU obligations. A neighbourhood plan could be made by a Town or Parish Council or, in urban areas, by a community group establishing a Neighbourhood Forum (Davoudi & Cowie 2013; Wills 2016). These 'qualifying bodies' must apply to the local planning authority to be designated as a neighbourhood area. They were responsible for assembling an evidence base from community engagement, and for writing planning policy, and the resulting neighbourhood plan went through a statutory consultation process and was formally examined. To win community support, the neighbourhood plan must be

approved in a local referendum and receive more than 50 per cent of the vote of those registered and taking part in the ballot.

While neighbourhood planning was to be evaluated according to its success in increasing housing numbers, the community empowerment imperatives of localism provided space for a more qualitative assessment of housing growth to emerge. Neighbourhood plans were presented in the Localism Act (2011) as a package of 'community rights' and were accompanied by additional powers that enabled neighbourhoods to allocate land and grant planning permission for small-scale building of community-led affordable housing and for cooperative ventures like community land trusts (DCLG 2013). Even though neighbourhood plans were pre-determined to a housing growth agenda, they could circumvent the local planning authority in non-strategic matters. They had to pass a 'light touch' examination that contained none of the tests of soundness applied to the Local Plan and once a neighbourhood plan was in force, its policies took precedence over existing non-strategic policies in the Local Plan. Importantly, a neighbourhood plan could be developed in the absence of an up-to-date Local Plan and in these cases it could take precedence over non-strategic land use policies.

In the rhetoric of localism and devolution the purpose of neighbourhood planning was to do more than provide land sites for speculative building; it was also intended to help local people 'develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood' (DCLG 2012 Paragraph 183) and 'take control of the look and feel of the places where they live' (Clark 2011). Place attachment and place identity were passions enlisted by government as leverage to achieve the behavioural shift desired in neighbourhood planning and neighbourhood groups were expressly directed to protect green space, prevent sprawl and safeguard heritage (Locality 2014). The government's Community Rights programme promoted community asset ownership and community-run services (DCLG 2015b). Participants in the early neighbourhood plans demonstrated a strong desire for more control over local decisions and many of them were motivated by previous conflicts with the local planning authority and with housing developers (Parker et al 2014; Bradley 2015).

The next section begins to explore the tension that emerged between the citizen empowerment aims of neighbourhood plans and their induced compliance with deregulated house-building.

Neighbourhoods and the developers

Early interest in neighbourhood planning came from rural parish councils and market towns under pressure from housing development in the south of England (Parker et al 2014). More affluent neighbourhoods were better able to mobilize the voluntary resources required by the long and complex process of plan-making. The uneven geography that emerged was only partially off-set by government support packages, training programmes, and municipal strategies aimed at ensuring the participation of urban and less affluent areas. Deprived areas with well-developed community organizations were prominent early frontrunners, and around 18 per cent of plans made by the end of 2015 were in the least affluent neighbourhoods, although the distribution was still weighted towards the southern counties (Parker 2015; Wills 2016).

The first neighbourhood plans to be successful at referendum accepted the need for more house building and accommodated it within a strong sense of place. In the sparsely populated post-industrial landscape of the North Pennines, the Upper Eden neighbourhood plan demonstrated in 2012 that the devolution of planning could liberalise housing delivery and provide an approach to meeting housing need that was founded on local knowledge and a more intimate feeling for place. It overturned the settlement hierarchy of Eden District Council to allow new affordable self-build

housing in small hamlets and remote locations (Upper Eden Community Interest Company 2012). The plan was carefully tailored to provide a sustainable future for a marginal rural economy and it established an enabling framework for housing that ensured its continuing affordability. The next neighbourhood plan to be approved at referendum was for the South Oxfordshire market town of Thame that planned positively for housing growth despite local opposition. Working with a received target of 7,750 new homes, the town council of Thame rejected the intention of the planning authority to concentrate this development in one place and instead split the proposed new housing across seven sites in an attempt to retain the compact character of the market town and mitigate adverse impacts from unbalanced expansion (Thame Town Council 2012). Out of the first 75 neighbourhood plans to become part of the development framework over half allocated sites for housing, and 90 per cent had policies on housing with most specifically about affordable housing (DCLG 2015a). Many neighbourhood plans made explicit their opposition to the dominant housing market model and the speculative approach of the volume house-builders.

Government strategies to rectify 'a broken housing market' (NHF 2011) and increase supply have focused on the role of the volume builders who dominate the development industry. Ten companies produce 44 per cent of all new homes built in England and there has been a long term market concentration in the house-building industry where the largest company has 8 per cent of the market share (Adams, Leishman & Moore 2009). The restricted supply of land in the UK creates incentives for firms to combine both land development and housing construction functions. The larger sized firms that are created can therefore employ strategies to influence local land markets through their housing strategies. Acting strategically, large house-builders are selective about when they release properties onto the market to control the supply, and therefore prices, so that they can gain a competitive advantage in purchasing or securing options on more land (Ball, 2003). The price of land in England has risen by 300 per cent in the last ten years and there is considerable revenue to be generated by trading on the increased value that accrues once planning permission for housing has been granted (Hetherington 2015). The exponential growth in the revenues of the Big Five house-builders (Barratt Developments PLC, Taylor Wimpey PLC, Persimmon PLC, Berkeley Group Holdings PLC, and Bellway PLC) has not been matched by a comparable increase in house-building output but is evidenced in the size of their growing land banks (Ruddick 2015).

Since the global financial crisis of 2008 the volume house-builders have adopted strategies to maximise value over volume, producing detached housing on green field sites for an affluent market, and maintaining high prices by retaining substantial banks of land (Archer & Cole 2014). The liberal planning regime, in which neighbourhood plans emerged, dramatically boosted planning approvals for house-building in England. The requirement on planning authorities to specify five years supply of land resulted in a string of appeal victories for developers who succeeded in winning access to green field sites. If the Local Plan did not provide the requisite housing land it would be found 'out of date' enabling speculative building that did not reflect assessments of housing need (Burroughs 2015). Neighbourhood planning became a significant obstacle to the volume builders when a Local Plan was found to be 'out of date' but the neighbourhood plan passed examination and subsequently took precedent over local housing policies. The potential for communities to devise their own housing plans signalled to developers that neighbourhood planning posed a threat to their interests and they determined to challenge it through the system of planning appeal and through subsequent legal action (Peters 2014).

Challenges to neighbourhood housing plans

In November 2015, with over 100 neighbourhood plans in place and a further 1700 underway, the Housing and Planning Minister announced the success of the policy in increasing house building. Analysis of selected neighbourhood plans showed they had allocated more sites for housing than required in the strategic Local Plan (Mountain 2015). The findings were presented as confirming the impact of neighbourhood planning in encouraging communities to support house building. The Minister Brandon Lewis said:

“We are scrapping the broken old planning system that pitted neighbours and developers against each other, and cornered people into opposing any development in their back yard. Our approach of getting the whole community working together is paying off, and breaking through local opposition” (DCLG & Lewis 2015)

Far from ending a system that pitted communities against house-builders, however, the policy of neighbourhood planning had, if anything, exasperated this antagonism. The first legal challenge from house-builders came when the neighbourhood plan for the parish of Tattenhall in rural Cheshire set a ceiling of no more than 30 homes per site in the built-up part of the village. The Tattenhall neighbourhood plan was produced in the absence of strategic housing policies, since the local planning authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council were still preparing their own Local Plan and could not evidence a five year land supply. It was approved at examination and Tattenhall neighbourhood plan was successful at referendum in September 2013 on a convincing 52 per cent turnout. House-builders Barratt Homes and Wainhomes sought a judicial review of Cheshire West’s decision to go to referendum arguing, among other grounds, that the neighbourhood plan sought to restrict the delivery of housing and therefore did not comply with pro-growth national planning policy. Mr Justice Supperstone dismissed the house-builder’s case ruling that the neighbourhood plan did not seek to limit the overall number of homes and had established its case for housing development at a scale that reflected the existing character of the area (Barratt Homes & Wainhomes Developments v Cheshire West & Chester Borough Council, Stephen Robinson & Tattenhall & District Parish Council 2014).

The right of neighbourhood plans to identify their own sites for house-building was also challenged by the volume house-builders in legal action. Larkfleet Homes sought a judicial review of the Uppingham neighbourhood plan in Rutland on the grounds that housing site allocation was a strategic matter and the responsibility of the planning authority. Uppingham had allocated three sites for at least 170 homes but Larkfleet had a commercial interest in land not included in the plan and demanded that the referendum result be quashed. Mr Justice Carter dismissed the claim since neighbourhood planning regulations expressly allowed neighbourhoods to allocate sites for development (Larkfleet Homes v Rutland County Council & Uppingham Town Council 2014). Larkfleet appealed to the High Court and the Court of Appeal and when defeated tried to take their challenge to the Supreme Court only to be refused again. In July 2014 the Minister for Planning issued a Ministerial Statement that brooked no doubt on the government’s intentions to intervene in this emerging conflict between the house-builders and communities (DCLG & Bowles 2014). His edict made decisive revisions to the legislation on planning appeals to enable the Secretary of State to scrutinise any appeal for house-building in a neighbourhood planning area.

These powers were tested in the case of Broughton Astley, a large village near Leicester with a population of around 9,000 people, whose neighbourhood plan was agreed in January 2014 after a referendum on a turnout of 38 per cent, with an 89 per cent vote in favour. Prior to the referendum an application by a developer to build 111 homes on a site not included in the neighbourhood plan was rejected by Harborough District Council, a decision overturned on appeal, but then reinstated by the Secretary of State and endorsed by the High Court (Crane v SoS CLG 2015). The developer’s

central challenge was that the Broughton Astley neighbourhood plan was based on a Local Plan that was 'out of date' and could not demonstrate a five year supply of housing. The sites allocated for housing in the neighbourhood plan, while meeting some of the local housing need, therefore might not meet all needs. The Secretary of State's judgement cuts to the heart of the dichotomy between devolution and liberal market growth, and it is worth quoting in some length:

'In this appeal case he considers that the key issue in applying the presumption is whether any adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole including its policies on neighbourhood planning as well as policy on housing supply.'

Paragraph 185 of the Framework states that, outside the strategic elements of the Local Plan, neighbourhood plans will be able to shape and direct sustainable development. The Secretary of State regards this purpose as more than a statement of aspiration. He considers that neighbourhood plans, once made part of the development plan, should be upheld as an effective means to shape and direct development in the neighbourhood planning area in question' (DCLG 2014: 4).

The Secretary of State found that the community empowerment aims of neighbourhood planning were more important than ensuring housing growth. He gave more weight to the neighbourhood's right to determine the location of development than to the fact that no five year supply of land could be evidenced. The intervention of the Secretary of State in this and other appeals and legal action by house-builders over neighbourhood plans evidenced a political will to defend the right of neighbourhoods to exercise a level of autonomy over housing development. A complex framework of case law was established in which draft neighbourhood plans might be given the same substantial weight as those that had been approved at referendum; plans based on out of date housing numbers could be upheld; and plans that did not demonstrate site viability or conform to European directives might still be allowed. While neighbourhoods were often unsuccessful in these contests with the house builders, the spatial practices of neighbourhood plans with regard to house-building were shaped by such judgements and appeared as a result to offer considerable latitude for communities to direct and contain housing development within an overall vision of place.

In February 2016 national planning policy was changed to constrain the remit of neighbourhood plans where the allocation of housing sites in the strategic Local Plan was deemed out-of-date. The amendments opened up the housing policies of neighbourhoods to further challenge if no five year supply of land was evidenced. The volume house-builders had lobbied government to this effect arguing that 'neighbourhood plans are becoming an instrument only for "limited growth" at a level acceptable to local communities' (Young & Burcher 2014: 67). The next section explores the neighbourhood spatial practices of housing delivery objected to by developers.

House-building, but not as we know it

The most common policy in neighbourhood plans was the promotion of local distinctiveness and place identity (DCLG 2015a). This predominant concern was set within what was considered an overall balance of policies between 'protectionism' and pro-development (Peters 2014). Its effect, however, was to shape the spatial practice of neighbourhood plans so that their housing policies enhanced a sense of place and provided for identified local need. Where neighbourhood plans aimed to increase housing numbers, they prioritised small, previously developed or 'brownfield' sites, where development would cause minimum disruption to environmental quality and local

character. They were especially concerned to deliver affordable homes to meet local housing need and favoured resident-led approaches in custom-build and community land trusts that might lock-in affordability for the future.

The delivery of community-led housing plans, with the identification of small sites for affordable homes, potentially custom-built or run by a community land trust, presented a very different equation to the speculative approach of the volume builders, and was sometimes explicitly in opposition to the corporate model of house-building. One example was the neighbourhood plan of Slaugham, a parish of 2000 people in Sussex, where in January 2014 the first community right to build orders providing sites for at least 130 new custom-build affordable homes delivered through a parish-run community land trust 'built and owned to meet local affordable needs' went to examination (Slaugham Parish Council 2013: 18). The neighbourhood plan for Petersfield, a town in Hampshire of 6,500 households, earmarked sites for up to 112 self and custom-built homes restricted to people with a local connection, and gave its strong support for co-operative housing ventures. The plan stated: 'Self-build dwellings are likely to cost less than the market equivalent and the dwellings that are built will tend to be better quality with more innovative architecture than a standard developer's offering' (Petersfield's Neighbourhood Plan 2013: 17). The neighbourhood plan for Frome, a town in Somerset, lambasted the standard of new estates built by the volume house-builders and expressed its desire to rigorously control any such future development, stating: 'There is strong support for self-build and community-led development and...Such housing is likely to be more sustainable, affordable and community focused than conventional development' (Frome Town Council 2014:14). The neighbourhood plan for Arundel, a town of 3,650 homes on the Sussex coast, was innovative in securing previously developed, or 'brownfield' sites for housing use, stating that it intended to send 'a strong signal to landowners and developers that it [Arundel] will not support speculative planning applications for housing development on the lower-cost, green field sites on the edge of the town' (Arundel Town Council 2014: 26).

This preference for 'brownfield' and small-scale custom-build and affordable housing in neighbourhood plans can be evidenced in interviews with neighbourhood planning participants. The north Pennine parish of Allendale included policies for house-building in their neighbourhood plan to give their post-industrial community a sustainable future. These plans for growth needed to be tailored to suit the place identity of a wild and remote upland landscape. The parish clerk explained:

'What we've said in the plan is that we will support small-scale developments. Now if someone comes along and wants to put up 50-plus houses, we would probably oppose it. The parish council was instrumental in setting up a community land trust and they've managed to obtain a bit of land to build another four houses. And they are doing it the way that we would like to see it done, seeing an opportunity to have three here and have two there, and so on.'

In the inner-city regeneration area of Holbeck, in Leeds, members of the neighbourhood forum identified sites for residential growth and invited a local co-operative custom build organisation to give a presentation to the planning group. But their plans foundered against the land banking strategies of 'high profile multi-wealthy' property companies, as two members of the forum (male and female) explain:

M: 'To my mind that would be ideal as a residential area, because the council have got to build, or give permission to build houses within the city to whatever level it is, and I think building down there would be ideal. But the Bank of Scotland or RBS have bought the land to sit on it to wait until the land values..'

F: The market changes

M. So whilst we have a plan in our minds, the kind of brick walls we are meeting are the fact that a lot of pieces of land are owned privately and we have got to persuade them,

F: That there is an alternative stance they can take that will offer the necessary amount of affordable housing that will still make money for them, rather than in the meantime, what is that land doing? Nothing; absolutely nothing.'

Neighbourhood planning's advocacy of small to medium builders, community ownership and custom-build 're-appropriated space' in planning policy for the use values of affordability and sustainability and triggered demands for a market shift in house-building (Clark 1994: 937). The self-build and community-led affordable housing schemes enabled by neighbourhood plans directed government attention towards a European model of housing delivery where the custom build market accounted for 50 per cent of new homes (Wilson 2015). A Self-Build and Custom House Building Act was passed in April 2015, followed by a Housing & Planning Bill the same year, that introduced a so-called 'Right to Build' promoting self or custom-build and supporting small and medium-size developers. The rationale for the Bill signalled government acceptance that the business model of the volume builders was constraining housing development and that enabling 'the smaller builders to increase their output could have the most impact on getting more homes built' (DCLG 2015c: 34).

The behavioural intent behind neighbourhood planning was to re-direct the behaviour of citizens to support house-building in a market system dominated by speculative building practices. In achieving its community empowerment outcomes, neighbourhood planning appeared to have authored new spatial practices of housing delivery that challenged the norms of the industry and resonated with the passion for place at the core of the community localism agenda. Opposition from developers to these spatial practices might suggest that the problems of housing supply lie, not with the refusal of communities to support growth, but with the dominant model of house-building and its dysfunctional market.

Conclusion

Neighbourhood planning emerged at the juncture of community localism and the liberalisation of economic growth and it aimed to devolve power to citizens in order to win their support for increased house-building. Evaluated according to its success in boosting housing numbers, neighbourhood planning appeared to demonstrate citizen acquiescence to the agenda of spatial liberalism. The hostility of the volume house-builders, however, suggested the emergence of new spatial practices in neighbourhood planning housing allocations. In its devolution of planning powers to communities, neighbourhood planning gave licence to a model of house-building that promoted small and medium sized companies, affordable community-led and custom-build housing on previously developed sites, rather than the green-field speculative strategies of the volume builders. It aimed to balance the imperatives of house-building with the priorities of place identity, heritage and environmental protection and it authored a spatial practice of housing delivery that resonated with the passion for place at the core of the localism agenda. Neighbourhood planning can be seen as a re-appropriation of space from the dominant market model with the neighbourhood emerging as the proponent of sustainability and social purpose in house-building. The need to evidence community empowerment to ensure the success of this policy, meant that government was required to support neighbourhood plans even when that meant acting against the corporate interests of the

volume house-builders. State housing strategies were changed accordingly with new initiatives in support of custom-building introduced to restructure the share of the market enjoyed by the volume builders and support the grassroots initiatives of neighbourhoods. The devolution of planning power to the community had been successful in orienting citizens towards house-building but it had achieved a corresponding impact on the model of liberal development promoted through localism. Neighbourhood planning endorsed the spatial practices of lived or representational space in contrast to the exchange values promoted in the current market model. It directed citizens to an awareness of housing needs not the market needs of the volume house-builders. The balance between community engagement and spatial liberalism appeared to have undergone a similar qualitative shift with empowerment and sense of place emerging as new arbiters of development planning.

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