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**RESCALING GOVERNANCE, THE
TURN TO LOCALISM WITHIN SUB-
NATIONAL GOVERNANCE:
ASSESSING THE IMPACTS UPON
PLANNING AND REGENERATION
POLICIES DURING A PERIOD OF
AUSTERITY**

D R McGuinness

PhD

2020

**RESCALING GOVERNANCE, THE
TURN TO LOCALISM WITHIN SUB-
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ASSESSING THE IMPACTS UPON
PLANNING AND REGENERATION
POLICIES DURING A PERIOD OF
AUSTERITY**

DAVID RAYMOND MCGUINNESS

**A commentary submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the University of
Northumbria at Newcastle
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy by Published work**

May 2020

Abstract

The impact of the scalar shift from regionalism to localism within English sub-national governance has been an under-researched area of policy over the past decade. This submission for PhD by Published Work, comprising five jointly authored international journal articles and a book chapter, addresses a recent critical juncture and rescaling of governance on two interrelated areas of urban policy: i) planning and ii) regeneration. The outputs critically analyse the impacts of the rescaling of sub-national governance in England upon planning and regeneration policy. Complimentary qualitative research techniques, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, case study analysis and comparative study, allow the triangulation of research findings and enable an in-depth understanding of how localism has impacted upon planning and regeneration policy.

The submission illustrates that, in parallel with significant austerity measures, the lack of comprehensive sub-national governance structures has had a negative influence on planning and regeneration policies in many areas, this is particularly evident in post-industrial communities in England. The research has discovered that potential gains offered by rescaling are marginal and overshadowed by fiscal retrenchment in the public sector due to austerity, which has left many local authorities lacking in capacity and resources. Localities have been offered a form of managerial localism, where power is strictly constrained by central government guidelines and expectations. The premature removal of the regional tier of governance without an adequate replacement to facilitate strategic planning was perplexing, and left many areas disadvantaged when dealing with strategic dilemmas integral to governing. Without tailored local powers and resources, the current form of localism is an inadequate approach toward planning and regeneration for post-industrial areas in England. The commentary advocates the need for a more substantive form of localism, underpinned by bold commitments from central government, including establishing cohesive institutional structures for sub-national governance and greater autonomy for localities.

KEYWORDS: Planning, Regeneration, Localism, Governance, England

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Personal Statement

This section provides a short appraisal of my academic career to date, which has culminated in the submission of this PhD thesis by Published Work.

For the past three decades I have been interested by the relationship between the co-dependent concepts of power, politics and inequality. My first degree in Politics initiated my fascination with governance and uneven spatial development and embedded a desire to explore the dynamics and spatial scales involved in the governance process.

Over the past decade, my research interests have evolved to focus on the fluid concept of governance and the various groups of stakeholders engaged in contemporary planning and regeneration practice at the sub-national scale.

This research journey was started over two decades ago with my undergraduate dissertation, which examined the case for an elected Regional Assembly in the North East of England. The Referendum (November 2004) was a significant¹ blow for devolution in England and there has been subsequent stagnation in efforts to secure effective representative devolution for peripheral regions such as the North East of England. Authors like Shaw and Robinson (2007) suggested the referendum result in the North East would banish the English devolution debate for a generation. However, rather than diminishing my interest in sub-national governance, the referendum re-enforced my interest in this topic.

After graduating, I worked as a researcher on various contract research projects, which exposed me to the realities of the economic challenges facing peripheral post-industrial economies in their struggle to reverse decline in an increasingly competitive, globalised world.

This period introduced me to the writing on governance (and regionalism) by academics like Lovering, Jessop, Hudson, Tomaney, Morgan, Townsend and Stoker. It also provided an insight into the complex web of sub-national governance that evolved under the post 1997 Labour government. The English institutional system has evolved within a contested academic and policy discourse over whether a regional or a city-regional approach to sub-national governance structures is the most effective approach; this debate is yet to be convincingly resolved, as there appears to be no '*one size fits all*' solution to sub-national governance, with

¹ The end result was 78% of voters in the referendum rejected the idea of an elected North East Assembly.

no single decentralisation approach appearing to be able to satisfy the diverse range of English territorial spaces.

A subsequent academic role saw me engaged in a knowledge transfer partnership with Regeneration Exchange that sought to disseminate best practice in terms of area-based regeneration initiatives within North East England.

This role gave me insight into the importance of partnership working and the need for robust sub-national governance structures and sufficient financial resources when attempting to develop successful regeneration initiatives. It also underlined for me the scale of the task, if deprived localities are to challenge narratives of failure and a trajectory of managed decline; and confirmed the path-dependent political and economic antecedence of ingrained inequalities, which dominate the post-war history of post-industrial communities across Northern England.

My current academic role involves considerable engagement with planning and regeneration practice. It has reinforced the importance of stable and comprehensive sub-national institutional governance which reflect functional political and economic boundaries and, if possible, territorial identities and spatial imaginaries. Demarcating governance boundaries in England is far from a straightforward task and England still has significant unresolved problems in terms of its sub-national spatial boundaries, spatial imaginaries and institutional structures at the sub-national scale.

This thesis aims to critically analyse the most recent initiative to tackle the issue of sub-national governance, with the shift from 2010 to localism and localised solutions to planning and regeneration policy.

This submission aims to add to the growing evidence base which highlights the inequality that is inherent within the current status quo of asymmetrical decentralisation, constrained localism and a growth-based economic strategy which myopically focuses on bolstering a small number of economically dynamic city-regions.

It is intended to form part of the push for a more just and sustainable approach to the English question, and effective institutional structures of sub-national governance which contain more substance than casual rhetoric about 'levelling up'.

Acknowledgements

- Thank you to my wife, my parents and my brother who have all been a constant and unstinting source of support throughout this process.
- Thank you to several senior academics, who believed in me, and provided opportunities in academia – Professor Frank Peck, Professor Robin Smith, Professor Dave Greenwood, Professor Bob Evans, Dr Simon Robson and Dr Kevin Thomas.
- Thank you to Professor Bob Giddings, Dr Rachel Kirk and Professor Paul Jones who have guided me through the final phases of compiling this thesis.
- Thank you also to all my co-authors who have engaged in research projects with me during the past decade.
- Finally, thank you to my students who have inspired and challenged me to consider the world (and its challenges) through new perspectives.

Author's Declaration

I declare that no Outputs submitted for this degree have been submitted for a research degree of any other institution. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others that I have collaborated with in producing some of the Outputs within this submission.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this commentary has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the University and Faculty Ethics Committee for the all various research projects that have contributed to Academic Outputs within this submission for PhD by Published during the six years when the Outputs were completed.

I declare that the word count of this commentary is 11,165* words

Name: David R. McGuinness

Signature:

Date: 24th May 2020

(*Please note additional context was added at the request of the Examiners which has increased the word count for this commentary).

SECTION ONE: The Doctoral Statement

Introduction

This submission examines the impact of the rescaling of sub-national governance in England from a multi-scalar approach including a regional tier of governance to an approach primarily based on localism. The existing regional governance infrastructure was dismantled by the incoming Coalition Government in 2010 due to its turn to localism, which has had significant impacts on planning and regeneration policy.

This commentary utilises a theoretical understanding of institutional approaches to governance and employs the concept of historical institutionalism, where periodic critical junctures shape the policy environment. The work addresses the impact of rescaling governance on two inter-related areas of urban policy: i) planning and ii) regeneration. These two conjoined policy areas are central to developing resilient communities. Planning policies establish the policy context by generating economic, social and environmental objectives, creating the parameters within which regeneration is implemented.

This commentary illustrates that where effective institutional and governance structures at the sub-national scale are absent and practitioners attempt to engage with localism, implementing planning and regeneration policies for localities is extremely challenging.

This research primarily focuses on England, as historically Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have had devolved approaches² to planning and regeneration³.

As a consequence of the 2008 global economic crisis, austerity measures have compounded the impact of a lack of comprehensive sub-national governance structures on planning and regeneration policies. This submission for PhD by Published Work therefore focuses on researching the combined impacts of the scalar shift in sub-national governance, a lack of clarity pertaining to localism and the impact of fiscal austerity on planning and regeneration policies; particularly in post-industrial communities.

² Each nation state in the UK has its own planning system, and planning and regeneration are devolved responsibilities in the UK, except in the English regions

³ Constitutional reforms introduced by the post-1997 Labour Government accelerated the divergence of policy approach between the English regions and the rest of the UK. During this period (1997-2010) Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London all received devolution settlements and additional powers.

This submission for PhD by Published Work comprises five jointly authored academic papers in international refereed journals, and one jointly authored book chapter in a ground-breaking text on localism and planning.

All the Outputs were published⁴ in a six-year period between 2012 - 2018, coinciding with the rescaling from regionalism to localism and escalating austerity. The outputs have sought to critically analyse examples of the impacts of rescaling sub-national governance in England, post-2010, on planning and regeneration policy. The candidate is the principal author in four of the outputs; in the other two, the candidate is a co-author⁵ who made an equal contribution to the Output.

Research Context

The central focus of the thesis is the aftermath of a critical juncture within sub-national governance in England: the turn from a predominantly regional approach within sub-national governance, to a loosely defined localist approach to planning and regeneration. The catalyst was the election in 2010 of the Coalition Government. The incoming Secretary of State, Eric Pickles dismantled what he perceived as the undemocratic regional tier of governance. Subsequent, Central Government rhetoric promised a scalar shift in governance and a new era of bottom-up localism. Localism in its purest form has been perceived as both a panacea for disillusionment with the democratic process and an opportunity for localities to assume control and develop place-based visions for their communities. However, as set out in the theoretical framework for this commentary there are varying degrees of localism providing differing levels of power and autonomy from Central Government. Crucially, the details of post-2010 localism approach are vague and appeared to lack additional financial resources, a comprehensive vision for sub-national governance, or replacements for the institutional structures that were dismantled. Within the context of austerity, this research investigates the opportunities offered by rescaling within an era dominated by fiscal retrenchment in the public sector, leaving many localities in a state of extreme fiscal distress.

The impact of this scalar shift from regionalism to localism with England has been an under-researched area of policy over the past decade, as there is limited existing literature on the topic, and there is a significant gap in the literature relating to the impact of localism on post-

⁴Appendix 1 contains a list of the international conference papers, which acted as pilot versions of the outputs that are contained in this submission.

⁵ The reason for co-authorship is that all of the papers evolved from either externally funded contract research projects (Outputs 3 and 6) or university-funded small research projects (Outputs 1, 2, 4 and 5) that were collaborative, with the candidate being the Principal Investigator.

industrial communities. In terms of sub-national governance, Baker and Wong (2013, p. 92) observe a strategic conundrum about how sub-national institutional structures should be organised due to the lack of a one size fits all solution for England. Since 2010, the trajectory of sub-national governance in England has been subject to rapid evolution under a loosely defined decentralisation agenda; city-deals, local enterprise partnerships, combined authorities⁶ and metro mayors have emerged via ad-hoc localism.

Due to the lack of a comprehensive overarching vision for sub-national governance in England outside London⁷, there is no masterplan guiding decentralisation in England, and government appeared content for creative chaos to evolve. Deas (2013) defines creative chaos as releasing the latent entrepreneurial spirit of localities due to a diversity of approaches breeding creating innovation. The problem with this approach is it seems to assume all localities start from the same baseline with the same resources and have the same opportunities, which is clearly not realistic. The government has been vague about what localism means in practice and has not provided a comprehensive vision of what should replace the regional approach. Recent international policy emphasis, which has influenced the English approach to sub-national governance, has focused on the economic importance of well-connected and economically dynamic city-regions for national competitiveness. Consequently, city-regional approaches have been advocated in some major conurbations to attempt to fill the institutional void.

Scott and Storper (2015) have been influential in propagating the city-region agglomeration growth model. Storper (2013) contends city-regions are the principal scale at which people experience lived reality. However, Brenner and Schmid (2015) dispute the ubiquity of the city-region concept, stating, the city-region is not a homogenous concept with clear boundaries. The clarity of the term city-region is not the only area of controversy. Storper (1997) unashamedly outlined there will be winners and losers within the hierarchy of competitive city-regions. Consequently, the city-region paradigm provides little solace for economically marginalised places. City-regions, which are good at attracting investment, generating positive narratives and facilitating economic growth stand to gain further competitive advantage under this opaque approach to rescaling, leaving lagging areas further behind. Martin *et al.* (2016, p. 347) question the equity of this approach, highlighting that deprived places are not at fault,

⁶ Combined Authorities are legal bodies set up using legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take collective decisions across council boundaries. Once a group of councils have achieved combined authority status, they can negotiate with central government for additional powers from an optional menu of devolved powers, include housing, strategic planning, etc. they are a voluntary approach and at the outset of this research, only one combined authority had been established (Greater Manchester Combined Authority).

⁷ Greater London did not have its distinct sub-national approach, the Greater London Authority removed in 2010, this sub-national governance structure was retained.

as their predicament is due to structural features of the political and institutional landscape of the country. Within this growth-driven paradigm, there are no attempts to narrow gaps in terms of growth between successful and declining areas, as was the case with the prior regional approach. For national governments, the *raison d'être* of city-regions is to facilitate growth and localities must sink or swim.

Since the mid-2000s as city-regionalism – and financial retrenchment - have grown as drivers of government policy, a shift in urban policy has been evident in England, from a dual regeneration and economic development approach to a monocentric pursuit of economic growth, resulting in a withering of funding for redistributive urban regeneration policies. The enhanced economic focus within urban policy has been attributed to a response to the economic crisis and unfavourable evaluations of the impact of area-based initiatives (ABIs) (Lawless and Beatty, 2013; Lawless *et al.*, 2009). Notably, in terms of regeneration, the Work Foundation (2012) observe that for the first time since the advent of ABIs over forty years ago, to channel regeneration efforts, England had no ABI funding allocated from central government. The responsibility for regenerating deprived localities under localism had been devolved to fiscally constrained local authorities. This raises questions of political priorities, as entrenched pockets of poverty were still obvious in post-industrial communities throughout England in 2010. The lack of a national regeneration strategy and funding to regenerate communities implies a lack of focus from central Government on deprived communities under localism. Central government's focus on competitiveness - and lack of emphasis on need - in sub-national policy suggests a policy of managed decline for some localities which has exacerbated the problem of generating effective policies for sub-national planning and regeneration. The economic crisis meant that the country entered a sustained period of austerity, with retrenchment in public sector budgets. This submission supports Krugman's (2012, p. 27) observation that austerity is not 'really about debts and deficits', as has been the refrain of neo-liberal politicians, but is driven by an ideological strategy to utilise concerns about post-financial crash deficits as a decoy to accelerate policies to shrink the state.

One immediate consequence of the shift to localism for planning was the demise of regional planning structures, which provided a strategic framework for cross boundary issues that are too complex to co-ordinate at the local level, such as distribution of housing allocations within sub-regions. The co-ordinated regional approach was replaced with the Duty to Co-operate, which required neighbouring local authorities to consult each other on plans. Under the Duty to Co-operate, neighbouring authorities were encouraged to co-operate on strategic planning issues, but government did not require them to reach agreement. This research investigates the possibility that this was an error, which exposes a lack of capacity to make strategic

planning decisions. The removal of the regional approach to sub-national governance appears to have been politically-driven, and may have led to unintended consequences for planning and regeneration policy, leaving practitioners (local government planners) tasked with finding collaborative solutions at the local level, despite the piecemeal and fragmented institutional governance context. The research also considers whether the lack of a comprehensive vision for sub-national governance in England has left post-industrial localities in England at a disadvantage, compared to Scotland and perceived dynamic city-regions in England. The key cross-cutting research themes involve the reality of localities trying to plan for resilience in an era dominated by two external economic policy drivers: agglomeration economies, and austerity. For localities within post-industrial areas, the allure of localism could be a chimera, if localism brings greater responsibility without a commensurate uplift in resources. Much of the case for further devolution under localism has been made on the basis that no additional money is needed to fund local solutions, which is disingenuous. If local leaders are to overcome existing structural economic disadvantages, they need the resources and autonomy to develop place-based visions for their locality. This phenomena of gaining responsibility without resources is described by MacLennan and O'Sullivan, (2013) as 'policy dumping', a process of central government deflecting the consequences of austerity further down the governance hierarchy to localities.

Aims and Objectives

The identified lack of research on the impact of the linked challenges of the rescaling in sub-national governance from regionalism to localism, the shift in urban policy from regeneration to economic development and the cumulative impacts of an era of financial retrenchment; particularly upon peripheral post-industrial communities within the North of England; leads to the aim of this submission to explore how the rescaling of sub-national governance in England from the regional scale to the localism within a context of austerity has impacted upon the effectiveness of planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale.

The objectives of this commentary are:

- i. To understand the theoretical drivers for the rescaling of governance from regionalism to localism
- ii. To explore how the scalar shift to localism has impacted upon practitioners' ability to develop planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale
- iii. To examine how the scalar shift to localism has influenced the ability of post-industrial communities to challenge narratives of decline.

- iv. To investigate how austerity has influenced the development of local planning and regeneration policies.

SECTION TWO: The Doctoral Commentary

Introduction

This section locates the contribution of this PhD by Publication within theoretical and conceptual debates about planning, regeneration and governance. It outlines the theoretical framework for the submission, explains the methodology utilised in the submission, introduces short summaries of each of the outputs within the submission, highlighting the key findings from the research and the overall contribution to knowledge, before, outlining opportunities for further research, building on the findings within this submission.

Significance of Outputs

This submission comprises five jointly authored academic papers in international refereed journals and one jointly authored book chapter in a text on localism and planning. Farthing (2016: p.6) states that, 'to publish is to engage in an on-going conversation within the field of study'. This part of the submission illustrates how the outputs have made a significant contribution to the field of urban studies, specifically, planning and regeneration discourses. Table 1 shows citations of the outputs in this submission by peers in recent academic outputs, and other significant indicators of impact.

Table 1: Citations and impact resulting from the outputs⁸

Output	Title	Citations/Impact
1	Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its 'reason for being'– the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland	5 citations, won Sam Aaronovitch Memorial Prize for best paper in Local Economy (2013)
2	From a framework to a toolkit: Urban regeneration in an age of austerity	22 citations
3	Is the grass always greener? Making sense of convergence and divergence in regeneration policies in England and Scotland	9 citations, invited to submit to the <i>Special Issue of the Geographic Journal: Devolution and the geographies of policy</i> by the Editors Janice Morphet and Ben Clifford
4	The rescaling of sub-national planning: Can localism resolve England's spatial planning conundrum?	9 citations
5	Developing a neighbourhood plan: stories and lessons from 'community-led' planning	4 citations, invited to submit the chapter to, <i>Neighbourhood Planning and Localism: Power to the People?</i> by the Editors Quintin Bradley and Sue Brownhill

⁸ Data compiled from a range of sources: including Web of Science, Research Gate and Google Scholar data does not include self-citations.

6	Does one size fit all? Place-neutral national planning policy in England and its impact on housing land supplies and local development plans in North East England	1 citation, used by Tees Valley Combined Authority when evidencing the need for a Mayoral Development Corporation
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Throughout this commentary, the standard Northumbria University Harvard referencing system is used where publications are cited that have been written by others. Where referring to papers written by the author (with co-authors) they are referred to by the shorthand: **Output 1-6**. Full bibliographic references for the outputs can be found in the following section.

Summary of Outputs

In the following section, a short summary of each of the six outputs included within this submission is presented, which acts as an overview for the submitted outputs that can be found in their entirety in Section 3.

Output 1:

McGuinness, D., Greenhalgh, P., Davidson, G., Robinson, F. and Braidford, P. (2012) Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its 'reason for being' – the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland. *Local Economy*, 27 (3). pp. 251-264

The project⁹ sought to develop a baseline to evaluate progress on regeneration initiatives within a deprived community, South Bank, Teesside. The research highlights transferable knowledge applicable to other regeneration areas. It investigates how South Bank has suffered from multiple social, economic and environmental issues, and despite repeated attempts at regeneration, there has been limited improvement. The paper questions whether a trajectory of managed decline can be reversed in an environment of austerity, where public sector funding for deprived communities is dwindling and a community demonstrates signs of initiative fatigue. The analysis considers the consequences of industrial decline, entrenched deprivation and the stigmatization of communities, and questions central government's understanding of the breadth and depth of issues deprived communities face. It concludes that under localism, communities have been tasked with solving their own problems, which is impossible for places where skills, confidence and networks are lacking.

⁹ This paper emerged from contract research commissioned by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

Output 2:

Pugalis, L. and **McGuinness, D.** (2013) From a framework to a toolkit: Urban regeneration in an age of austerity, *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, 6 (4), pp. 339-353

This paper focuses on the shift in England from a redistributive programme of area-based regeneration, providing an integrated framework for regeneration, to a minimalistic toolkit. The paper illustrates that the toolkit prioritises and facilitates short-term economic growth rather than long-term regeneration. This shift of focus from holistic regeneration to a narrower market enabling economic growth focus, and the subsequent tightening of resources, has occurred concurrently with the rescaling to localism. Comprehensive regeneration initiatives designed to ameliorate the side effects of the national economy's preponderance for uneven development and to tackle complex issues like social exclusion have disappeared during austerity. This paper questions whether the demise of area-based regeneration policies is a short-term response to financial crisis, or a cynical neo-liberal agenda to shrink the state and to covertly consign some communities to a process of managed decline. The paper calls for a greater understanding of place, and an appreciation of the spatially unjust nature of localism and the limitations of a minimal regeneration toolkit. It suggests that the localist rhetoric of place-based policy from Government does not align with centralised market enabling initiatives like the Regional Growth Fund, designed to primarily support private sector business. The localism agenda devolves responsibility for regeneration from central government, whilst leaving deprived localities without sufficient funding to make a difference to their communities. Ultimately, localities are seeking to capture drips of investment within an economic policy of trickle-down economics, and the toolkit provides insufficient support to attempt to redress the destructive symptoms of capitalism's uneven development.

Output 3:

McGuinness, D., Greenhalgh, P and Pugalis, L (2015) Is the grass always greener? Making sense of convergence and divergence in regeneration policies in England and Scotland, *Geographical Journal*, 181 (1), pp.26-37

This paper is concerned with the trajectories of regeneration policy discourse and practice in a devolved United Kingdom. Holyrood's devolution agenda and Westminster's localism provide the backdrop for this paper. The study provides empirical analysis of contemporary English and Scottish regeneration policy. Over the past two decades, the asymmetrical nature of devolved governance in the UK has intensified. Scottish policy has been determined by successive nationalist-led governments with devolved powers, whilst in England a

reconfiguration of sub-national governance has occurred via localism; Scotland undoubtedly has greater autonomy over policy development. The paper investigates the extent to which divergences in government policy resonate with regeneration practice on both sides of the border. Theoretically, the paper engages with policy convergence and divergence literature. The key finding is the coexistence of ideological divergence, replete in political discourse and documentation, and growing convergence in practice, evidenced in the nature and scale of regeneration initiatives. Ultimately, the fiscal context of austerity is the defining factor in contemporary regeneration policy convergence between the two nations.

Output 4:

McGuinness, D. and Mawson, J. (2017) The rescaling of sub-national planning: Can localism resolve England's spatial planning conundrum?, *Town Planning Review*, 88 (3) pp. 282-303

This paper focuses on the aftermath of the Coalition government's decision to dismantle the regional structures of planning policy, Regional Spatial Strategies, leaving England¹⁰ as the only major country in north-western Europe without effective sub-national structures for spatial planning. This rescaling of planning has dismantled strategic planning capacity and generated a strategic void within English planning policy. The paper provides an initial assessment of the subsequent ad-hoc localism approach, introduced to deal with strategic planning via the Duty to Co-operate, established to encourage collaboration between neighbouring local authorities. The paper asks whether the current institutional fix in England can provide a long-term solution to the strategic dilemmas integral to governing, and whether localism can succeed where regionalism is perceived to have failed. The analysis illustrates that the localism approach faces significant problems in establishing collaborations between neighbouring authorities, and is only experiencing limited success in a minority of well-established city-regions. The paper concludes that it is unlikely that localism will provide a solution to the strategic planning void within English sub-national planning.

Output 5:

McGuinness, D and Ludwig, C. (2017) Developing a neighbourhood plan: stories and lessons from 'community-led' planning, published in: Bradley Q, and Brownhill, S (eds.) (2017) *Neighbourhood Planning and Localism: Power to the People?* Policy Press: Bristol

¹⁰ Excluding London, as London retained the Greater London Authority (GLA) when regional structures of governance in the rest of the English regions were discontinued.

Neighbourhood Planning Pathfinders provided an early application of the government's localism ideology, formalising the micro-level of planning within England. This chapter provides a detailed review of the introduction of neighbourhood planning, focusing specifically on two pathfinder neighbourhoods. The research found that the level of empowerment for local communities via neighbourhood planning was limited and could frustrate communities, due to the negligible amount of power localism offers. The constraints of general conformity, which assert that a neighbourhood plan must conform to the policies in the local development plan, is a centralising control lever applied by government, which results in what Hickson (2013) defines as managerial localism, a restrictive form of localism, which can anger communities, as they realise their aspirations - often to restrict development - are not supported by the hierarchical planning system. Ultimately, neighbourhood planning is a subservient level of policy, which can only steer development and cannot prohibit it. The research casts doubt upon whether neighbourhood plans could withstand legal examination in planning appeals. Exposing questions regarding the capacity and skills neighbourhoods possess to engage in localism, and specifically whether lay chairs can be expected to produce planning documents that contain rigorous terminology, able to withstand detailed scrutiny from a planning barrister. The chapter also questions the preparation devoted to the government's localism agenda, with respondents noting, a lack of guidance and policy being clarified in an ad hoc manner, as communities were developing neighbourhood plans.

Output 6:

McGuinness, D., Greenhalgh, P and Grainger, P (2018) Does one size fit all? Place-neutral national planning policy in England and its impact on housing land supplies and local development plans in North East England , *Local Economy*, 33 (3), pp 329-346

This paper¹¹ explores the impact of central government's place-neutral expectation that all local planning authorities must have a supply of developable land for a minimum of five years, to achieve a valid local plan. The paper argues that this policy is a form of managerial localism (Hickson, 2013) which could undermine the government's stated aim of a locally directed planning system. Theoretically, the paper contends that the five-year land supply requirement is a place-neutral policy, impacting disproportionately on areas with less dynamic housing markets in the north of England. Analysis of empirical data illustrates that the housing crisis has taken varying forms throughout the country, and in peripheral localities other supply and demand issues - including availability of finance, an abundance of brownfield land, and

¹¹ This paper evolved from contract research commissioned by all twelve of the local authorities in the North East of England.

development viability - are more significant problems than land supply. The paper contends that national planning policy has a myopic focus on economic and housing issues, impinging on priority spatial areas in southern England, and as a result generates policies lacking in place-based understanding of the issues that face peripheral localities. The paper concludes that despite successive governments espousing localism, in reality many policy developments have centralised the levers of control. The research found that centrally defined, place-neutral planning policies are hindering local planning authorities in the north, in attempting to achieve up-to-date local plans.

Theoretical framework for the empirical study

The subject of the inductive inquiry in this submission is how governance processes have evolved under localism, to frame the backdrop to the development of planning and regeneration policy in England. In this section, the commentary establishes a theoretical framework for this submission, by contextualising the outputs in relation to wider theoretical perspectives relating to the political and economic drivers of the evolution of sub-national governance in England. From a conceptual perspective, a multi-theoretical approach is utilised within this research; sociological and historical institutionalism is fused with concepts from economic geography in the theoretical framework. This multi-theoretical approach elucidates why the fragmented response to rescaling English sub-national governance for planning and regeneration have evolved against a historical backdrop of crisis within global capitalism, leaving a legacy of fragmented institutional structures and uneven development across England.

Historic institutionalism is the principal theoretical framework which shapes the context for this research, combined with elements of sociological institutionalism. Both theoretical paradigms form part of the broader new institutionalism approach (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Sorensen (2015, p. 18) states, 'Historical institutionalism is a... method that focuses on the creation, persistence, and change of institutions over time'; specifically, it focuses on how institutions emerge from conflicts and how new constellations of space and governance emerge (Thelen, 1999). Lowndes (2018, p. 56) expands on this theory by stating, 'Institutional change arises when power relations shift, new ideas come to the fore and the costs of maintaining an established institutional path become greater than those involved in change'. This theoretical viewpoint provides the context for the first objective of this study, to understand the theoretical drivers for the rescaling of governance from regionalism to localism. In order to locate the impacts of this rescaling of sub-national governance within broader conceptual debates, this

research considers how sub-national institutional approaches evolved in England. In doing so the empirical data explore the factors that generate local governance innovations, enabling the system to function and the factors that stymie progress and lead to governance breakdown. Gonzalez and Healey (2005) from a sociological institutional stance state that innovative governance capacity is generated by the ability of humans to adapt to evolving policy contexts by improvising. They describe this adaptation as the seeds and sediments of socially innovative governance, which are deposited in institutional memories and governance cultures and can germinate, to fill gaps in governance relations created by exogenous forces. This submission will explore the strategies that local policy makers and communities employ to attempt to generate government capacity despite the revolving governance environment at a subnational scale. In a similar vein, Davies (2004) builds on the work of Granovetter (1973), identifying the institutional glue that strengthens ties within networks and creates bridges to fuse collaboration within an era of institutional fragmentation. From this perspective, bridges are created by actors identifying common purposes within networks, to cement links and make participation in collaboration worthwhile. Empirical data generated in this submission elicits examples of the bridges that enable some localities to engage with sub-regional collaboration, whilst also exposing areas where bridges are lacking. This commentary focuses on a particular critical juncture and phase of rescaling within governance in England: the shift from a regional institutional approach to localism, as set out in local government legislation, the Localism Act 2011 and subsequent policy documents. This legislation created the opportunity to develop new sub-national forms of governance funded through competitive and negotiated agreements with central government, and to pursue localised approaches to planning and regeneration. The following section expands on the conceptual evolution of the approach to sub-national governance in England and how it has impacted upon planning and regeneration.

Sub-National Governance

By investigating, the theoretical drivers for the ongoing rescaling of governance spaces in England at the sub-national scale this sub-section will develop the conceptual framework for the study. Governance is a frequently used - and often misused - concept, which has theoretical roots in a range of academic disciplines, including economics, political science and economic geography (Stoker, 1998). There is no one universally accepted definition of the term governance. John (2001, p.9) suggests governance is, ‘...a flexible pattern of public decision-making based on loose networks of individuals... decisions rest less within hierarchically organized bureaucracies but take place more in long-term relationships between key individuals located in a diverse set of organizations located at various territorial levels.’

Stoker (1998) states that the outputs of governance are not markedly different from those of government. The difference lies in the process of achieving the outputs. Brenner (2004) explains that frequent shifts in governance occur as governance within capitalist economies no longer fits into neat hierarchical geographical containers, and that different scales of governance are not static entities. Jessop (2016) concurs highlighting a renewed post-war interest in governance, due to recurring state and market failures and an erosion of social cohesion in advanced capitalist societies. Jones (2018, p. 26) adds that the English system of governance is in a state of 'perpetual restructuring', due to persistent governance failures related to advanced capitalism and its propensity to generate crisis. Jessop's (1994), body of work is central to the conceptualisation of modern governance. His work focuses on state and governance failure, which inspired the concept of the hollowing out of the state, which contends that the powers of the nation state are eroded simultaneously from above and below. For Jessop (2016, p. 3), the state is not a neutral instrument, it is riven with '...asymmetries of authority and domination'; it is said to be experiencing a recurring crisis of legitimacy, as the glue that hold society together evaporates (Ohmae, 1995). Jessop's thesis is not universally accepted Jones (2001) contends Jessop exaggerates the erosion of state power, as changes in governance at a sub-national scale in England have been superficial, and policy is still steered by central government diktat. Subsequently, Jessop has reinterpreted the hollowing out of the state ¹²approach, maintaining that the nation state has ceded its post-war dominance through a process of de-nationalisation, but contending that no other scale of governance has replaced the nation state. As a result there is an on-going power struggle as, '...different economic and political spaces and forces located at different scales compete to become the primary or nodal point of accumulation or state power' (Jessop, 2016, p. 142). The drivers for this rescaling are multi-faceted, and include the complexity and speed of financial flows under global capitalism (Jessop, 2016), governance failures (Jones 2018), and sub-national spatial imageries (Healey, 2006).

The second objective of this study is to explore how the scalar shift to localism has impacted upon practitioners' ability to develop planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale. During the past three decades, institutional governance structures in England have been buffeted by the trajectory of the evolution of the state outlined in Jessop's work, which has generated power struggles between the competing sub-national governance paradigms of new regionalism and new localism, vying for theoretical prominence. Compared to other European systems, the English system has struggled to achieve lasting consensus on how

¹² In part because of the central role that states played in rescuing banks after the global financial crisis of the mid 2000s.

the meso tier of governance should be configured, or even whether it should exist. Other nations in Western Europe have fixed structures of meso level government and legal powers established in federal constitutions, which restrict an incoming government from eradicating a tier of governance, as happened in England in 2010¹³(Pugalis and Townsend (2013). The United Kingdom system currently comprises the centralised Westminster system, with limited devolution to London and the Celtic nations¹⁴. The English regions (outside London) have no elected level of institutional devolution¹⁵.

Furthermore, the current phase of rescaling has generated controversy over whether it should be defined as devolution or decentralisation, with the terms being used interchangeably. Clarke and Cochrane (2013) state that localism under the Coalition Government meant decentralisation and is presented as solution to perceived deficits of efficiency, fairness and democracy in prior structures. The next section will consider whether the rescaling to localism has the potential to offer a solution to these perceived deficits within democracy. The current era of variegated decentralisation within English sub-national governance has heralded a period of experimentation, where a minority of favoured city-regions, are progressing by building on prior collaboration and functioning sub-regional networks; whereas other localities are struggling due to a lack of existing political networks, political competition and polycentric sub-regional geographies. Hodson *et al.* (2019) suggest that the drivers for rescaling governance appear to be positioning English sub-national spaces in the optimal competitive position to secure investment and economic growth. However, this approach is not without casualties, Jessop (2018) cautions that those outside networks of perceived economic excellence, who cannot compete, appear to be consigned to struggle with little addition government support. Prior to 2010 regeneration initiatives would have provide a limited safety net for localities that were struggling to diversify their economy to engage in the knowledge economy, these tools were removed post 2010 as part of the austerity agenda.

Re-scaling Governance - The Turn to Localism

The third objective of this study is to examine how the scalar shift to localism has influenced the ability of post-industrial communities to challenge narratives of decline. This sub-section examines the cohesiveness of the concept of localism and charts its rise in prominence in

¹³ Localism Act 2011 began the process of abolishing Regional Spatial Strategies, but due to legal challenge from CALA Homes, the process of abolishing RSS took another three years.

¹⁴ In the form of an Assembly in Wales and Northern Ireland, and a devolved Parliament in Scotland.

¹⁵ The latest wave of decentralisation has created elected mayors for combined authority areas, but sub-national governance in England is asymmetrical and still overwhelmingly controlled by the centre.

English governance. Over the past three decades, advocates of devolution to a regional and local level in England have duelled for theoretical supremacy. New regionalism views power as being most effective by coalescing at the regional level this paradigm gained prominence during the New Labour era, when the region was considered the optimal scale for policy intervention. By contrast, new localism views rescaling to the local level as optimal by empowering localities and sub-regional networks. This struggle has generated conflicts between different scalar interests to locate the primary scale at the level, which is most advantageous to them. In 2010, with the election of the Coalition Government, localism triumphed in its battle with regionalism. The incoming government forcefully advocated localism, but questions emerged about its interpretation of the concept and whether localism was a novel approach¹⁶.

Clarke and Cochrane (2013, p. 11) state that localism can be purposely vague, as it, '...brings geographical understandings about scale and place together with sets of political understanding about decentralisation, participation, and community, and managerialist understandings about efficiency and forms of market delivery...'. This breadth of meaning makes localism a politically expedient concept. Clarke and Cochrane (2013) define a fourfold typology of localism:

Table 2: Typology of Localism (adapted from Clarke and Cochrane, 2013)

Forms of Localism	Characteristics of type of Localism
1. Basic	Positive disposition to decentralisation of political power
2. Communitarian localism	Community/civil society mediating institutional layer
3. Politics of the Locality	Some groups and interests are locally dependant, brings together local politicians, locally dependent firms and workers
4. Localism as spaces of engagement	Attempts to regulate the capitalist economy, local economic development or local socialism

Other similar typologies of localism have been developed. Hickson's (2013) typology of localism emphasises the tensions between liberal and communitarian forms of localism:

¹⁶ Many authors (e.g. Hickinson, 2013; Rees and Lord, 2013; Gallent *et al.*, 2013; Sturzaker and Gordon, 2017) have asserted that the application of localism is not a novel approach within English governance, as there have been prior attempts over the past two decades.

- i. Managerial – powers devolved only where the local body supports the centre's objectives
- ii. Representative – transfer of competence(s) to local councils
- iii. Community – transfer of power from centre (or local government) directly to the community

This commentary mainly engages with a basic or managerial form of localism, as this form of localism which most accurately reflects the relationship found in the empirical research (Outputs 5 and 6) between tiers of governance within England. A key issue relating to localism that will be investigated in this research is how much actual power is being devolved to localities under localism and is power only available if localities align policy within the confines of the government's objectives? Governance approaches like localism do not exist in a policy vacuum and the following section explores the theoretical context for austerity the most dominant policy theme in the last decade.

The implications of Austerity

The final objective of this study is to investigate how austerity has influenced the development of local planning and regeneration policies. Peck (2014) states that the financial crisis became a state crisis, especially at the sub-national scale, as strategies of displacement shifted the consequences of the financial crisis from the market to the state; central government then displaced these consequences, to the local state. Brenner (2004, p.16) concurs stating that the goals of national spatial policies are, '...no longer to alleviate uneven geographical development, but actively to intensify it through the deployment of urban locational policies designed to strengthen the place-specific socioeconomic assets of strategic, globally linked city-regions'. Crouch and Le Galès (2012, p. 411) expand on this shift from a more balanced growth and redistribution policy to solely facilitating growth in the most successful city-regions and managing decline elsewhere, describing an 'archipelago economy', consisting of a handful of spaces of urban economic prosperity surrounded by hinterlands of decline. Tomaney and Colomb (2018, p. 30) concur, warning that an asymmetrical approach to devolution could generate, '...dynamic metropolitan areas surrounded by hinterlands of small towns and rural areas...', with shrinking and/or ageing populations, experiencing economic decline. These conceptual insights suggest that austerity could have a significant impact on planning and regeneration policies particularly in peripheral post-industrial economies. Successive national governments since 2010 have not imposed a comprehensive solution to English sub-national governance. Their preferred approach has been to allow a range of bespoke local approaches to emerge, which has empowered a minority of city-regions whilst

smaller and peripheral places are struggling to engage with this competitive, growth-driven approach to governance. Hodson *et al.* (2019, p. 9) cite, Greater Manchester as a 'favoured city-region' where the state has promoted the re-designing of governance to formalise a spatially selective growth trajectory. In contrast, other smaller peripheral localities have not been as successful as the favoured city-regions in exploiting the opportunities that are offered by localism. However, the amount of power which has been devolved down to city-regions is disputed with many academics arguing centralisation is still overwhelmingly the defining feature of central-local relations in England (Colomb and Tomaney, 2016; Healey, 2006; Pike *et al.*, 2016).

Summary of Theoretical Framework

This commentary employs a multi-theoretical approach with elements of meta and macro scale theory fusing together to generate a multi-level theoretical framework for the examination of the rescaling of sub-national governance in England.

Figure 1 (below) provides a conceptual framework which illustrates how the primary strands of the theoretical framework engage with the key concepts within the study to generate planning and regeneration outcomes at the sub-national level. Figure 2 illustrates the main theoretical components of the study from the meta through to the micro scale of theory and how they inform the outputs and the overarching theoretical framework. At the scale of meta theory the theoretical framework explores how from a historical institutionalist perspective shifts in governance approaches can be explained via critical junctures which are a catalyst for governance rescaling and policy change. From the perspective of this commentary, the critical juncture which occurred post 2010 with the rescaling of governance from a broadly regional approach to sub-national governance¹⁷ to an approach based on a loosely defined version of localism, has had a significant impact upon the development and application of planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale.

Correspondingly, at the scale of meta theory, rescaling of governance and policy change cannot be explained without reference to the wider macroeconomic context of austerity which has dominated the past decade within which all the outputs within the submission were completed. The theory of austerity urbanism is a central part of the theoretical and conceptual framework for this submission, this theory perceives austerity as a vehicle which has been

¹⁷ Including the demise of regional spatial planning and the completion of the dismantling of the regional governance institutional structures.

utilised to enact an ideologically driven process of shrinking the state which goes beyond a fiscal process of financial retrenchment due to the global economic crisis.

Finally, at the scale of meta theory, the submission explores the influence of agglomeration growth models to explain why Central Government is content for an asymmetrical approach to rescaling of sub-national governance to evolve across England via its localism and decentralisation approach. The prior substantive sub-national governance approach of regionalism was calibrated to attempt to close productivity gaps between successful and lagging regions and contained a normative ideological thrust. Whereas the present approach pursues a purer engagement with agglomeration growth models where there is an unashamed understanding that state spatial selectivity will occur and that some city-regions will succeed, and others will not. Within this approach successful global city-regions are the main policy priority and there are no significant attempts at economic redistribution to distribute economic growth more equitably around the country.

At a meso level of theory the concept of creative chaos (Deas, 2013) is utilised to broaden the theoretical framework and expand the analysis of the laissez faire economic driven approach to sub-national governance reform employed by Central Government. The commentary and the related outputs expose a lack of cohesion and vision emanating from Central Government about how sub-national governance should be structured leading to an asymmetric patchwork quilt of differing governance structures emerging across England. This unfolding trajectory of governance appears not to be an accident or an unintended consequences of policy action, it is a predictable corollary of an approach which does not seek parity and promotes state spatial selectivity.

Finally, power is central to any analysis of governance and this submission compares the Government's localism approach against a typology of forms of localism at a more applied (meso/micro) level of theory to understand the directions in which power is flowing in the arteries of governance. The analysis illustrates that at the applied level of theory, power is very constrained for sub-national actors and corresponds with a managerial form of localism being currently deployed in English sub-national governance. Furthermore, there is demonstrable evidence of growing centralism in aspects of contemporary governance and policy development (see Findings section for a full exploration of these centralising tendencies).

The commentary progresses to utilises the conceptual and theoretical framework which has been outlined to analyse how institutions emerge from critical junctures, generated by

exogenous crisis and governance conflict and how new alignments of space, power and sub-national governance evolve and impact on existing policy areas, like planning and regeneration.

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework for the study showing relationship between key concepts, theory and outcomes

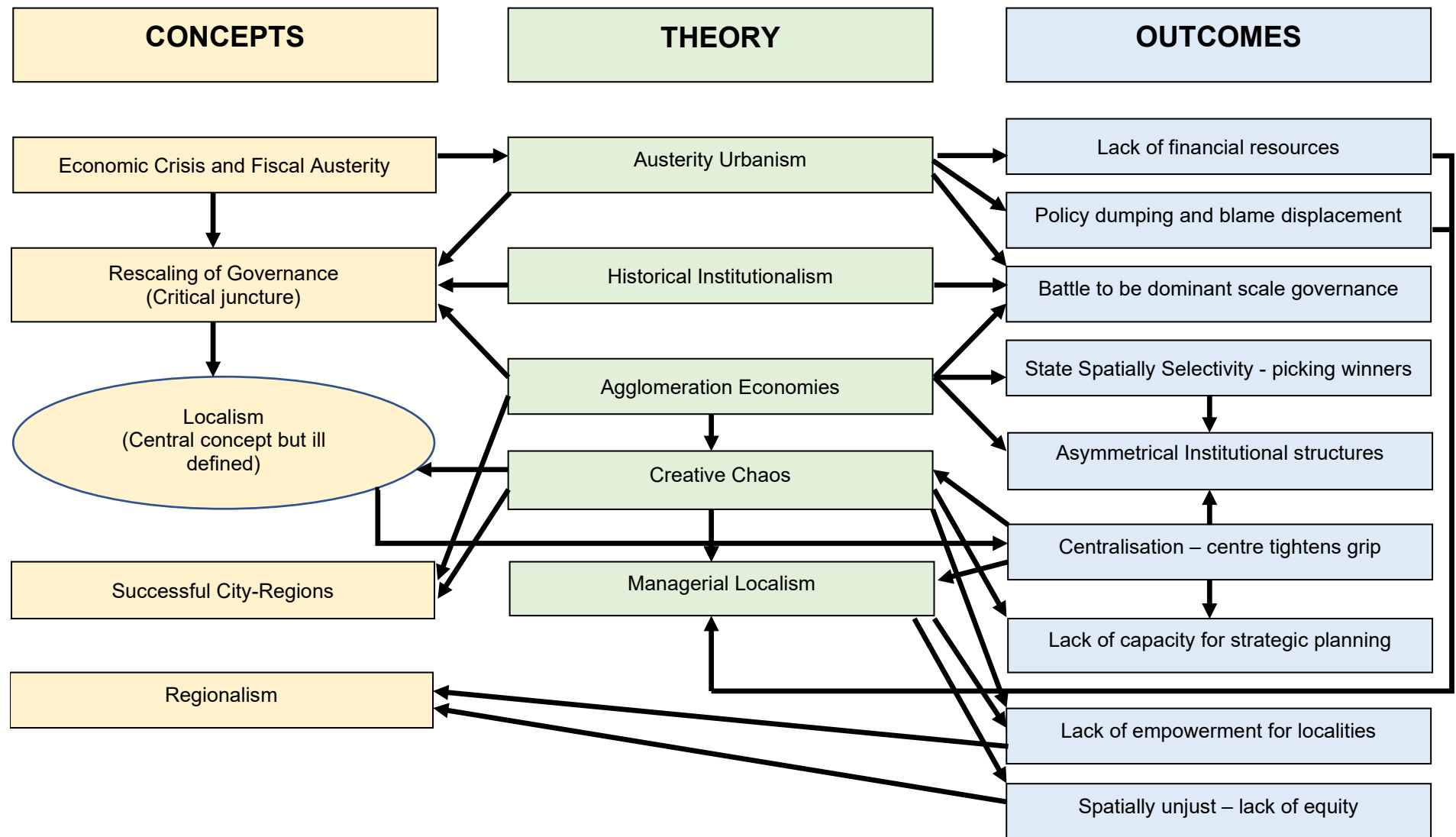
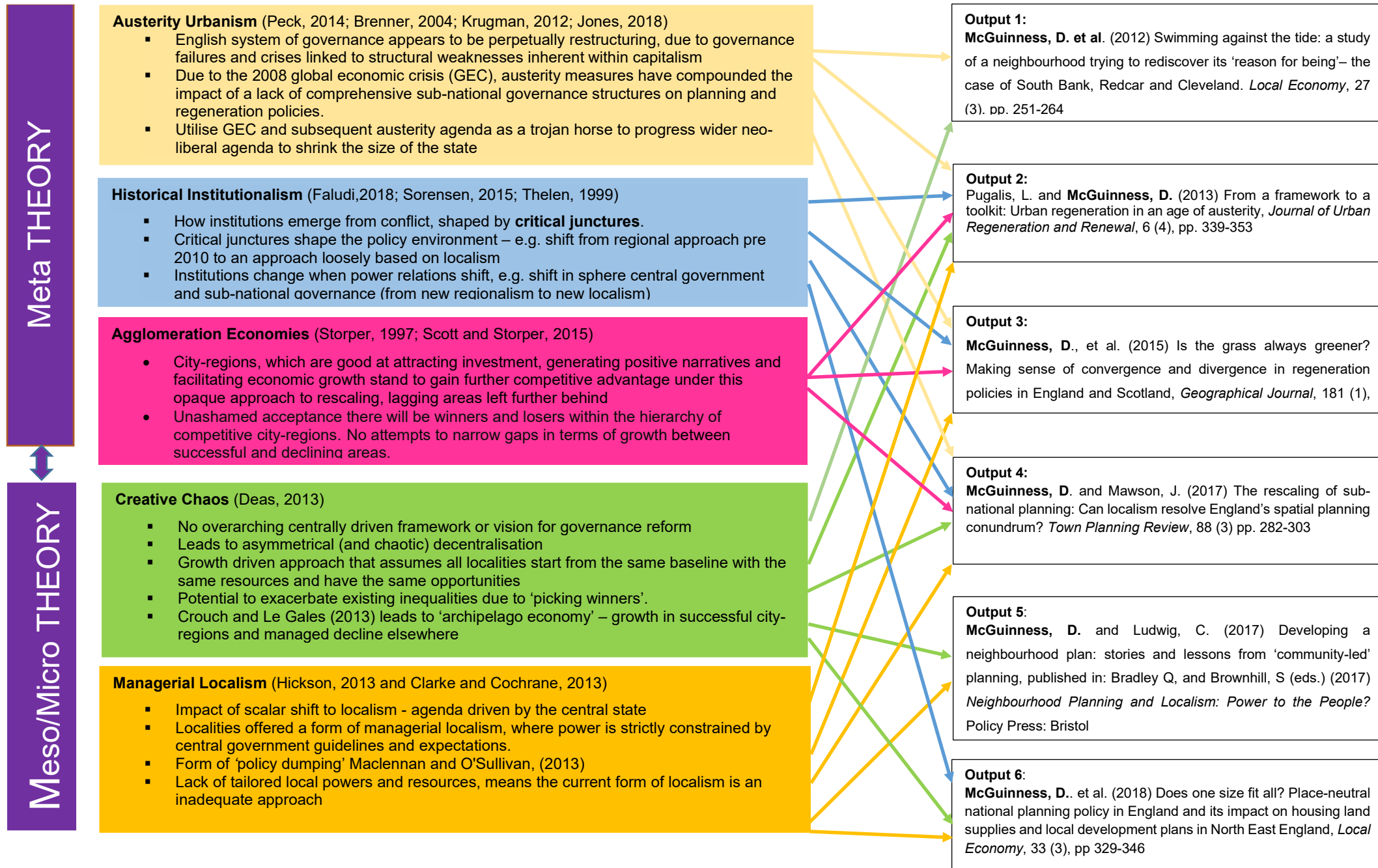


Fig 2: Explanatory framework of relationship between theory and outputs



Methodological Strategy

The studies that generated the outputs within this submission follow an inductive approach to knowledge via drawing conclusions from empirical investigation, as opposed to a deductive, theory-testing approach. This study has applied an interpretivist and anti-foundationalist epistemological approach throughout the research, which from an ontological perspective views knowledge as socially constructed (Marsh and Furlong, 2002). Fischer (2003, p. 50) states that within the interpretivist paradigm, ‘...to accurately explain social phenomena, the investigator must first attempt to understand the meaning of social phenomena from the actor’s perspective’. This commentary seeks to understand the impact of the rescaling of sub-national governance in England, for those implementing planning and regeneration policy under localism. The individual outputs utilise a variety of complementary qualitative research techniques, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, case studies and comparative analysis, which combine to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of localism on planning and regeneration policy. This following section presents a summary of the methodological approaches adopted within each of the individual outputs (see Table 3).

Desk-Based Review of Literature

At the outset of each study a thorough desk-based review of literature was conducted. This desk-based analysis was conducted to ascertain the current state of knowledge and practice to identify any existing gaps in knowledge of the impacts of the localism on sub-national governance within the spheres of planning and regeneration. The reviews highlighted that little had been published about the impact of localism on the demise of regeneration policy and although some literature had been published relating to the impact of localism for planning policy there was minimal coverage of the impacts on post-industrial communities¹⁸. The secondary data provides the insights to frame the questions for the primary data gathering phase based on existing theoretical and empirical work relating to planning and regeneration.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews was the main empirical technique utilised in the research to elicit the perspectives of practitioners, community stakeholders and private sector representatives about their experience of the cumulative impacts of localism and austerity. This qualitative

¹⁸ Particularly lacking was coverage of the impact of the demise of regional strategic planning and the advent of neighbourhood planning for post-industrial communities.

approach followed an agency-centred approach of attempting to understand phenomena from the perspective of stakeholders involved in planning and regeneration practice within an era of localism and austerity. Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 32) states, ‘...interviewing is a powerful way of helping people to make explicit things that have been hitherto implicit – to articulate their tacit perceptions and understandings’. Interview schedules were piloted with practitioners before a series of over one hundred face-to-face and telephone semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders¹⁹. Respondents were selected based on their tacit understandings of the impact of the rescaling to localism on planning and regeneration practice.

Focus Groups

This collective interview technique was utilised to elicit information from community members about their experience of the impacts of the shift to localism upon regeneration activity within their community. Bryman (2016, p. 502) outlines, focus groups can elucidate how ‘...individuals collectively make sense of phenomenon and construct meaning around it’. Community members proved a hard to reach group via conventional semi-structured interviews. Therefore, it was perceived that community members might feel more comfortable opening up in larger groups rather than feeling under individual scrutiny in a one-to-one interview. Three focus groups were scheduled (Output 3) in different community venues and at different times of the day to facilitate attendance for as many members of the community as possible. Seven to ten individuals attended each focus group and invitations were disseminated widely in the community²⁰. Focus groups were utilised so that respondents from the community could share experiences and spark a wider discussion, careful facilitation was implemented so that powerful voices did not dominate the discussions. The data from the focus groups was cross-referenced with other primary data such as semi-structured interviews, published local authority statistics and secondary literature to triangulate the findings.

Case Study Analysis

Yin (2014: p.16) defines a case study as, ‘...an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomena (the “case”) in depth and within its real world context’. In this

¹⁹ The stakeholders interviews depended on the specific element of localism and the individual case studies that were being explored in the relevant output but included regeneration practitioners, planners, consultants, politicians, community representatives, and private sector actors).

²⁰ The focus groups were advertised via community venues and groups, schools, sports clubs and places of worship.

submission, strategically chosen in-depth case studies were utilised to critically examine emerging aspects of localism and austerity. There are differing types of case study research, two of which have been utilised in this submission. Output 5 employs a multiple case approach by strategically selecting two case studies of neighbourhood planning to critically analyse experiences of localism in the development of neighbourhood plans. The cases studies were purposely selected because of the unique and timely insights they could provide as two of the first neighbourhood planning pathfinders to reach the stage of writing a plan and therefore comparing the cases gave an early and context rich insight into the challenges faced by communities pursuing neighbourhood planning under Localism. Output 1 utilised a single in depth case, this holistic approach (Gray, 2018) enabled the researcher to analyse the breadth of intertwined and seemingly intractable issues encountered when attempting to regenerate a severely deprived community in an era of both localism and austerity. The strategically selected community exhibits all the traits²¹ of a classic example of a severely deprived community that has been firmly within the lowest decile of neighbourhoods in England for decades based on national datasets like the Indices of Multiple Deprivation²². In both instances, the selected case studies were utilised to provide in-depth analysis and to provide illustrative findings that could be generalisable and testable in comparable communities within England seeking to pursue neighbourhood planning or deprived communities in need of regeneration.

Case study research is not without methodological challenge, Flyvbjerg (2006: p.221) outlines the conventional critique which is often levelled at case study research, namely single cases cannot generate valuable and generalizable knowledge²³, case studies are too subjective and theoretical knowledge is more valuable than practical knowledge. Flyvbjerg challenges this critique contending that on the contrary, case studies produce the type of context-dependant knowledge that is necessary to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to experts on social phenomena. Furthermore, the case study can enable the researcher to study the world as it evolves in practice, enabling the researcher to, '... "close in" on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice' (Flyvbjerg 2006: p.235). Yin (2009: p.15) concurs stating, 'Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations and universes. In this sense, the case study,

²¹ The central traits of a deprived community are low demand for housing, ongoing issues with crime and anti-social behaviour, high levels of unemployment, poor health indicators and low life expectancy, weak levels of educational attainment, issues with drug and alcohol dependency and a negative stigma attached to the community.

²² At the time of conducting the research three of the four Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which comprise the South Bank ward were in the most deprived decile nationally.

²³ A viewpoint is particularly prominent within proponents of the natural science influenced hypothetico-deductive and theory testing approach to research within the social sciences

like the experiment, does not represent a 'sample', and in doing a case study, your goal will be to expand and generalize theories (analytical generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)'.

This commentary contends case study analysis is a useful and effective component of the contemporary researcher's toolkit. Crucially, if researchers do not intimately understand the place-based context in which concepts like localism and austerity are being encountered then context-independent knowledge, (facts, rules and even theories) cannot be generated and researchers cannot progress beyond the level of beginners in the learning process in relation to topics like the impacts of localism and austerity. As outlined above, case studies have been challenged by advocates of alternative methodologies for being less methodologically rigorous than alternative quantitative methods, which follow the hypothetico-deductive approach. However, Flyvbjerg (2006: p.223) notes this is a naïve misrepresentation of the value case studies can bring to the research environment as, 'Concrete experiences can be achieved via continued proximity to the studies reality and via continued proximity to the studied', exploring phenomena as they evolve in practice and in real time. For Flyvbjerg (2006) the real key benefit of case study research is the unique opportunity which the carefully selected case study can provide via its proximity to reality; generating a unique learning opportunity to develop insights and nuances that could easily be missed when trying to cover large statistical samples.

Comparative Study

Ryan (2018:p. 272) states that comparison in the context of political science, involves aiming to understand, '...what meaningfully marks different political systems and their devices of governance apart'. Comparative study is closely related to the case study methodologically approach and was specifically utilised in this submission to ascertain a cross-national comparison of the scale of policy convergence/divergence in regeneration policy between Scotland and the English regions under Localism (Output 3). This research approach was selected to ascertain if regeneration policy within the constraints of the financial crisis was receiving greater protection in a nation state of the United Kingdom with a greater level of devolution and a different political ideology at the heart of Government. Flyvbjerg (2006) describes this approach of identifying examples, which are well known to the researcher as information orientated sampling due to the researcher already having a well-developed knowledge of the variables present in the two cases. The research generated empirical data for comparative study by analysing the experiences of regeneration practitioners from both sides of the border working under the two differing political systems driven by differing

ideological approaches. This approach enabled the researcher to expand their empirical analysis of how localism and austerity was influencing place-based regeneration policy and to develop a nuanced understanding of the significance of austerity on the trajectory of regeneration policy across national borders and differing political systems.

Summary of the Methodological Strategy

The application of a mixed methods approach (see Table 3) enabled the triangulation of research findings, across the empirical source of data that were generated enabling the researcher to elicit a wealth of in-depth primary data relating to how practitioners, community members and developers interpret the changes that are occurring via the imposition of localism upon planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale.

Table 3: Breakdown of research methods employed in each Output

Research method	O1	O2	O3	O4	O5	O6
Desk based review of literature	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Semi-structured interviews	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus group	✓					
Case study analysis	✓				✓	
Comparative study			✓			

Findings

In the following section the findings of the research are presented, in order to assess the extent to which the aim of the study and each of the objectives of the study have been achieved.

Review of Aim and Objectives

Aim: The aim of this submission is to explore how the rescaling of sub-national governance in England from the regional scale to the local scale has impacted upon the effectiveness of planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale within a context of austerity.

This commentary provides a detailed analysis of the impact of the rescaling of sub-national governance from a broadly regional approach to localism upon planning and regeneration policy. The submission contends that localism has not empowered localities or liberated them from the shackles of centralised control as promised by the advocates of localism within central government, see Output 2 - Pugalís and McGuinness (2013:p. 351); Output 3 – McGuinness *et al.* (2015: p.34) and Output 4 – McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 292). The commentary illustrates the removal of the regional tier of governance, without developing a replacement to facilitate strategic planning, was premature and has left many areas disadvantaged when dealing with practical dilemmas integral to governing, see Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 284 and 299) and Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.340-341). Regeneration activity has been decimated by the cessation of regeneration funding streams for social exclusion. Ultimately, only a managerial form of localism is available to localities, which provides limited autonomy to develop place-based strategies, as policymaking is constrained by restrictive centralisation and austerity.

Objective:

1. To understand the theoretical drivers for the rescaling of governance from regionalism to localism

The theoretical drivers from the rescaling of governance are multi-faceted; at the level of grand (meta) theory, the English system of governance appears to be perpetually restructuring, due to governance failures and crises linked to structural weaknesses inherent within capitalism (Jones, 2018). At a more pragmatic level, political drivers for localism include: attempts to

shrink the role of the state via austerity (Output 2 – Pugalis and McGuinness (2013: p.341); ideological opposition to regionalism²⁴ (Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p.290); and attempts to deflect criticism away from Central Government for the impacts of austerity (Output 3 - McGuinness *et al.* (2015: p.33).

The Outputs within this submission substantiate Brenner and Schmid's (2015) view that the English state under capitalism is in a constant state of flux, with tensions and shifting of responsibilities between scales of governance. In response to the latest critical juncture, the rescaling to localism, Output 4 – McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 284) outlines how the laissez faire approach post-2010 of asymmetrical decentralisation has led to a piecemeal institutional fix at the sub-national scale. Generating a spatially unjust institutional structure of sub-national governance with significant gaps in terms of governance capacity to facilitate strategic planning (Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 284) and Output 6 – McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.340)), effective neighbourhood planning (Output 5 – McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017) and the dissolution of vehicles and resources to facilitate holistic regeneration, see Output 1 McGuinness *et al.* (2012: p.262-3) and Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013:p.352).

2. To explore how the scalar shift to localism has impacted upon practitioners' ability to develop planning and regeneration policy at the sub-national scale

The rescaling to localism, and the removal of the regional tier of governance, without developing an adequate replacement to facilitate strategic collaboration, has left many areas incapable of dealing with strategic decision making at the larger than local scale, see Outputs 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 284) and Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.340). The localism agenda was launched with soaring rhetoric by ministers, implying that localism would free localities from the shackles of regional and central control (CLG, 2009). However, the research within this submission illustrates shifts in sub-national governance in England are restricted by centralism and can deliver spatially unjust and place neutral outcomes. In contrast to the promise of subsidiarity, Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013: p.348), Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 292), Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017: p. 106) and Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.330) all expose centralising tendencies within central government's approach, which fit the description of managerial localism. Localism within the current paradigm is conditional on local actors conforming to central government expectations and operating within narrowly defined parameters. Localism

²⁴ At the political level regionalism is often viewed as inextricably linked with left of centre redistributive policies to aid those post-industrial communities that have struggled to respond in a post-industrial era.

offers little for peripheral communities which lack the skills and confidence to engage with self-help forms of localism, see Outputs 1 - McGuinness *et al.* (2012: p. 262) and Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017: p.108).

From a planning perspective, Gallent, Hamiduddin and Madeddu (2013) describe fragmented localism evolving as the Localism Act (2011) rolled out, and authorities searched for effective governance boundaries for strategic planning. Consequently, makeshift planning initiatives like the Duty to Co-operate have been implemented which have failed to fill the institutional void generated by the demolition of regional structures, Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 299). Centralism has stymied local innovation as illustrated by the requirement for conformity between neighbourhood plans and higher-level development plans in the hierarchy of planning strategies, Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017:p.106) and the requirements for planning authorities to achieve five-year land supplies or lose control of local planning policy, Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.343).

3. To investigate how austerity has influenced the development of local planning and regeneration policies.

The economic crisis has defined the past decade, with public sector austerity having a significant impact on the planning and regeneration capacity of local authorities. A decade of austerity has meant any positives localism could offer are negated by cuts to public sector budgets, see Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013: p.347) and Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.341). Funding cuts have meant authorities have lost staff and specific skills, as planning teams have shrivelled and regeneration funding has collapsed. Austerity has meant local authorities are required to do more with fewer staff and emasculated budgets. Ultimately, what has been devolved to the local level are decision about where to make cuts, Output 2 – Pugalis and McGuinness, (2013: p.349) as localities have little capacity to develop place-based visions.

Austerity has constrained local authorities' capacity across all planning and regeneration functions. Strategic planning in England has floundered due to a lack of effective institutional structures, Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017), neighbourhood planning initially raised localities hopes of taking control. However, neighbourhood planning is a highly constrained form of localism that only enables communities to finesse development, not oppose it, Output 5 – McGuinness and Ludwig (2017: p106). Planning and regeneration as a sector has been viewed as ripe for cuts and an expendable area of public policy, Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013: p.341). Nationally across the UK, fiscal responses to

austerity has driven policy convergence even where ideological differences exist between devolved arms of UK government, Output 3 - McGuinness *et al.* (2015: p.34-35). Regeneration initiatives have historically provided a limited safety net for deprived communities, tempering some of the most destructive consequences of uneven regional development. However, responses to the economic crisis have meant the domination of economic imperatives and a lack of focus on redistributive, regeneration initiatives to rebalance the economy, Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013:p.347).

The localism agenda does not attempt to narrow uneven spatial development and this submission illustrates clear spatial injustice, see Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013: p.341) and Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 297). In England, localities have witnessed a year zero approach to regeneration with no discernible attempts to learn from decades of prior policy and evidence-based evaluations, Output 3 - McGuinness *et al.* (2015: p.35). England has returned to a political narrative reminiscent of the 1980s, with an onus on localities solving their own problems and a belief in the trickle down of wealth. Ultimately, a neo-liberal approach of managerial localism is ill suited to the place specific needs of deprived localities and combined with austerity has led to growing evidence that some localities are lagging further behind, see Output 1 - McGuinness *et al.* (2012: p. 262) and Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013:p.348).

4. To examine how the scalar shift to localism has influenced the ability of post-industrial communities to challenge narratives of decline.

From a theoretical perspective this submission illustrates the omnipotence of austerity is combining with historical path-dependent tendencies within capitalism to reinforce the status quo. National policy narratives of economic growth, based on agglomeration economies, have generated a system of state spatial selectivity, which suppresses the majority of positive impacts that localism could engender for planning and regeneration, see particularly, Output 1 - McGuinness *et al.* (2012: p.254), Output 2 - Pugalis and McGuinness (2013:p.347) and Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 297-298). Post-industrial localities lack the power and resources to shape their destiny in an era dominated by agglomeration policies at the national scale. Agglomeration has favoured certain places (Haughton *et al*, 2016) in a push for economic growth rather than attempting to redistribute economic activity more equitably. Deprived communities are in a comparatively worse position than they were in 2010, as government funded regeneration initiatives have been completely withdrawn and localities have struggled to fill the void. IPPR North (2019) reinforces the fact that the United Kingdom is still one of the most regionally unequal countries in the developed world and little has

changed in the past decade to alter this fact. Localities in post-industrial communities are struggling with dwindling resources to attempt to ensure that gaps between themselves and more economically successful places do not expand. Planning and regeneration policy is further constrained by the absence of a stable meso tier of sub-national governance, Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p.285-286), and a lack of power cascading from central government to the localities. MacLennan and O'Sullivan (2013) describe localism as a form of policy dumping, which aims to displace the blame for austerity down to localities. Without tailored resources, to develop community capacity at the local level, localism is a hollow approach toward place-based planning and regeneration for post-industrial areas in England, see Output 2 - Pugalís and McGuinness (2013:p.349) and Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017: p.99)). These findings align with Wills (2016) observation that more investment is required to facilitate the civic infrastructure that is essential if all localities are to benefit from localism.

Reflecting back on Gonzalez and Healey (2005) observations that from a sociological institutionalism stance, innovative governance capacity is generated by the ability of humans to adapt to evolving policy contexts by improvising. It appears improvisation under localism is easier for localities if either of two key factors are present;

- i. A prior history of joint working between neighbouring localities which mean historical institutional structures and collaboration can be maintained or rediscovered under the auspices of localism within a fragmented institutional structure, see Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p. 298-299) and Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017: p.110)²⁵.
- ii. A skilled and time rich local community which ideally includes retired professionals who have the time, technical skills and the confidence to contribute to activities like neighbourhood plans (Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, 2017) or regeneration funding bids (Output 2 - Pugalís and McGuinness (2013:p.348)).

Conclusions

Localism in England has led to spatially variegated outcomes across the country. Ultimately, for post-industrial communities, it has offered scarce resources to enable localities to reverse trajectories of decline. Martin *et al.* (2016) underline that struggling localities are not at fault

²⁵ Reasons for ineffective or absence of collaboration include, localities lacking a history of joint working, Output 5 - McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017), a breakdown in trust between partners, Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018), and participants unable to establish mutual value in collaboration.

for their predicament, and the beneficiaries of spatial agglomeration are not simply the places that are most able to compete. Fundamentally, the system does not exist in a political and institutional vacuum, ‘...it is shaped by the form, operation and spatial organization of the nation’s core institutions, governance structures, political arrangements and policy-making machinery’, (Martin *et al.* 2016, p. 347) it is a path-dependant process. This commentary concludes that a more place-based form of localism is required which would require a series of bold commitments from central government, including establishing cohesive institutional structures for sub-national governance across England and granting greater local autonomy over finances. Otherwise, as Tomaney (2016, p. 550) observes, ‘England is moving in the direction of an idiosyncratic, uneven and highly centralised form of multi-level government where devolved policy-making is approved only if it meets the criteria of central government.’ This submission identifies a lack of clarity about actual freedoms that localism offers to authorities at the local scale. Local authorities in post-industrial areas have faltered, as austerity and budget cuts have left local actors with insufficient resources to make impacts in the fields of planning and regeneration

Fundamentally, what is required is a more autonomous form of localism, which cascades real power down to the localities and includes greater freedom from central control and local income generating powers. A radical governance shift could rejuvenate sub-national institutional capacity, and potentially empower all parts of the country to respond innovatively to spatial challenges. Meaningful localism requires sustainable resources, to act as a catalyst to encourage those with diverse agendas to collaborate and pool resources to build the capacity that will give communities a chance to thrive. Regrettably, in the current climate of Brexit-induced paralysis²⁶, there appears little political appetite for institutional reform. This is unfortunate, as the status quo of managerial localism will only reinforce divisions, bolstering the position of favoured spatial areas, in terms of governance powers and resources leaving other localities to falter.

Contribution to Knowledge

This Phd by Published Work shows that the rescaling of governance from a largely regional approach to localism has not resolved the perennial dilemma about how to restructure sub-national governance in England. For planning and regeneration practice a process of managerial localism has provided minimal autonomy for local

²⁶ This submission was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic but this is another major problem for government and one which illustrates the problem where a functioning tier of meso level government is absent from institutional structures.

actors, generating a system which is constrained by centralising parameters. This submission has found few positives for post-industrial communities, as a result of localism. The evidence shows localities that lack the skills, confidence and resources, Output 3 - McGuinness *et al.*, (2015) to respond to what is largely a spatially selective self-help agenda, Output 2 - Pugalís and McGuinness (2013), have not flourished under localism and many have found themselves under increasing centralised control due to not being able to respond to localism and austerity has compounded these challenges, Output 6 – McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p. 341). Equally, the demolition of regional institutional structures post-2010 has further hampered localities attempts to control their destiny and provide co-ordinated strategic visions. Ultimately, localities in post-industrial areas have been presented with one choice, they can decide where to make cuts, Output 2 - Pugalís and McGuinness (2013: p.349), but have minimal scope to proactively develop place-based strategies for their localities, Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p. 343). Therefore, what has largely been experienced by post-industrial localities when engaging with the government's localism agenda is an under resourced, spatially unjust, place neutral, Output 6 - McGuinness *et al.* (2018: p.331) form of managerial localism, Output 5 – McGuinness and Ludwig, (2017). What is required is a thorough review of sub-national governance, which considers how to construct a sustainable meso tier of sub-national governance, Output 4 - McGuinness and Mawson (2017: p.285-286). Localism should be part of this sub-national governance solution but it must be a more robust Representative/Community (Hickson, 2013) form of localism, which delegates real autonomy, power and resources to the local level.

Further work

There are ongoing aspects of the evolution of sub-national governance in England and its impact on planning and regeneration that would benefit from further study:

The process of decentralisation in England has generated an asymmetrical system of sub-national governance in England, new governance structures, such as combined authorities are not mandatory and have only achieve partial coverage of the country. It is questionable how sustainable this asymmetrical approach to governance can be in the long-term, therefore further research into sustainable, sub-national governance approaches would be beneficial.

Equally, there needs to be a national debate informed by evidence-based research²⁷ about the appropriate spatial scale and apparatus of sub-national governance to deal effectively with the strategic and spatial challenges posed by planning and regeneration policy, to investigate the form an effective and sustainable meso-tier of governance should take in England.

²⁷ Something akin to the Constitutional Convention that was held in Scotland prior to Scottish Devolution.

SECTION THREE: The submitted Outputs

The submitted Outputs will now follow in their entirety in the following order:

1. **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P., Davidson, G., Robinson, F. and Braidford, P. (2012) Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its 'reason for being'– the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland. *Local Economy*, 27 (3). pp. 251-264 <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0269094211434492>
2. Pugalis, L. and **McGuinness, D.** (2013) 'From a framework to a toolkit: Urban regeneration in an age of austerity', *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, 6 (4), pp. 339-353
<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/hsp/jurr/2013/00000006/00000004/art00002#>
3. **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P and Pugalis, L. (2015) Is the grass always greener? Making sense of convergence and divergence in regeneration policies in England and Scotland, *Geographical Journal*, 181 (1), pp.26-37 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12090>
4. **McGuinness, D.** and Mawson, J. (2017) The rescaling of sub-national planning: Can localism resolve England's spatial planning conundrum? *Town Planning Review*, 88 (3), pp. 282 -303
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2017.19>
5. **McGuinness, D.** and Ludwig, C. (2017) Developing a neighbourhood plan: stories and lessons from 'community-led' planning, published in: Bradley Q, and Brownhill, S (eds.) (2017) *Neighbourhood Planning and Localism: Power to the People?* Policy Press: Bristol
Only available in hard copy
6. **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P. and Grainger, P. (2018) Does one size fit all? Place-neutral national planning policy in England and its impact on housing land supplies and local development plans in North East England, *Local Economy*, 33 (3), pp. 329-346
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0269094218772974>

Swimming against the tide: A study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its 'reason for being' – the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland

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Abstract

Many of the programmes and initiatives to regenerate deprived neighbourhoods appear to have had limited lasting impact. It has been argued that one reason for this is that we still have little real understanding of the nature and scale of the problems some communities face (Bernt, 2009). This article attempts to add to our knowledge through close study of an area with multiple problems and a history of failed regeneration attempts. An in-depth case study, undertaken to explore the current situation and future prospects of South Bank, a small neighbourhood in the North East of England, highlights transferable knowledge which may be applied to other regeneration areas. The analysis considers the nature and consequences of industrial decline; entrenched deprivation; the stigmatization of communities; the value of community consultation and the potential impact

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of retail-led regeneration. We question whether negative stigma attached to places can be changed and we ask what the future may hold for deprived communities now that public sector funding has largely dried up, and we consider an alternative approach: the potential impacts of private sector retail-led regeneration in the absence of public sector funding.

Keywords

community consultation, deprived areas, eco-homes, managed decline, retail-led regeneration, urban regeneration

Introduction

If the people of South Bank could hear me say this they would kill me – but there is almost no need for South Bank now, the industry has moved on. (Stakeholder interview, 2010)

You have to question whether parts of South Bank have a future. At the moment it is death by a thousand cuts. (Stakeholder interview, 2010)

This is the story of a deprived area struggling to secure a viable future. Like so many other places, South Bank, in Teesside, North East England, has been hard hit by long-term economic decline. Repeated attempts have been made to regenerate the area, with limited success. The future of South Bank hangs in the balance but it is not yet a lost cause. New opportunities are coming to the surrounding area and there is now a little more optimism; however, the wider economic context is problematic and could easily undermine regeneration efforts.

The story of South Bank is in many ways typical, and it is also revealing. It demonstrates the sheer difficulty of trying to tackle decline and intervene – with limited resources, of course – in ways that will bring about positive and lasting change. This account shows that there are no easy solutions to the problems experienced and endured by local communities in a place like South Bank. Both policymakers and

residents face difficult dilemmas and are having to make hard choices. The central overriding themes of this story are frustration, confusion and intractable problems. Residents have become increasingly frustrated with the slow pace of regeneration and the lack of promised new housing development, and policymakers are frustrated at the systemic nature of the social problems, the lack of funding to do a comprehensive job, and the constantly changing policy landscape. A pragmatic compromise needs to be reached between the normative dimension of what ‘should be done’ to change the trajectory of the area and, on a more practical level, what ‘can be done’, within the parameters of budgetary and moral constraints, to improve the area or, perhaps more realistically, to stem the tide of decline.

Trajectories of deprived areas: Terminal decline, or rise and fall?

The North East of England has experienced industrial decline over many years (Robinson, 2002; Robinson et al., 2007). The Teesside conurbation, in the southern part of the region, still has some industry, but manufacturing employs far fewer people than in the past. Robinson et al. (2007: 9) state the sobering reality that, ‘there are now more people working in shops than factories in the North East’. South Bank, close to the River Tees and

just east of Middlesbrough, is one of the places that have suffered most from the consequences of economic change, because of its former dependence on heavy industries, particularly steel, shipbuilding and chemicals.

South Bank benefited little from some of the major area-based regeneration schemes of the New Labour era. New Deal for Communities (NDC) funding was allocated to West Middlesbrough; Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder funding was granted to Stockton-on-Tees and no deprived neighbourhoods within Teesside were amongst the original nine Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder areas announced in 2002.¹ Even in more prosperous economic times at the start of the millennium, competition for regeneration funding was fierce within the Tees Valley sub-region. Robinson *et al.*'s (2007: 6) review of the North East notes that during the first 10 years of New Labour rule parts of the North East prospered but: 'there are individuals and communities which have been left behind, perhaps more marginalised than ever in this more prosperous North East'.

South Bank is a prime example of a marginalised community and the situation it faces now is not just difficult but may even threaten its survival. According to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation (DCLG, 2011), three of the four Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which make up South Bank ward are in the most deprived decile nationally. Two of these are among the 100 most deprived SOAs (ranking at 94th and 74th respectively). A local authority report expressed the gravity of the situation in South Bank in stark terms:

The decline... of the industries that provided jobs for local residents means that there is no longer any economic

justification for the existence of these communities. The challenge which they... face is to determine a new justification for their existence. (Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2001: 5)

The prospects for such areas are disputed. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council has been committed to regenerating the area and finding a 'new justification' for its existence for the last two decades. But here, as elsewhere, regeneration has not been enough. Perhaps the problems are too great. Indeed, some argue that such areas are trapped in a downward spiral, with poverty and its associated problems becoming increasingly entrenched and intractable:

Entrenched deprivation is defined as persistent and profound poverty and disadvantage that is characterised by multiple complex problems (such as generational worklessness, very low income, low educational achievement, chronic health problems) and is resistant to interventions to improve quality of life for people. (Hothi and Woodcraft, 2010: 11)

Recent research by IPPR North has shown that areas like South Bank did not show much improvement even when the economic context was more favourable. People claiming welfare benefits became more segregated and were increasingly concentrated in certain neighbourhoods during the recent years of economic growth (Schmuecker and Viitanen, 2011). The process of creating highly localised deprivation has been largely driven by housing market forces (North *et al.*, 2006, cited in Hildreth, 2007), but stigma is also a factor. Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) report that the concentration of deprivation in neighbourhoods intensifies disadvantage for individuals living in those neighbourhoods, most notably through the perceived reputation of the area. Being labelled as a 'deprived area' can prove increasingly 'toxic' and perceptions may only be altered across generations

rather than over 'mere' decades. Cameron (2003: 2376) observes: 'even existing stocks of good housing are "written-off" as acceptable places to live as a result of the stigmatisation and social exclusion of people and neighbourhoods'.

The negative stereotypes that are associated with coming from a 'deprived area' can have a real impact on some residents' aspirations, confidence and chances of securing employment. Our research found that a high percentage of young people from South Bank preferred to mix with people from their immediate locality and were very apprehensive about having contact with young people from other communities, fearing that they would be judged negatively because they were 'South Bankers'.

The influential think-tank Policy Exchange (2008: 62) is particularly pessimistic about places that, they say, are now 'in the wrong place at the wrong time' and argue that some old industrial areas should be taken off the 'life support systems' that have sustained them over the last three decades:

if we are honest about the constraints and realistic about the opportunities then we can make progress. We need to accept above all that we cannot guarantee to regenerate every town and every city in Britain that has fallen behind. (Policy Exchange, 2008: 5)

Others are more hopeful and less dismissive of the achievements of regeneration, suggesting that today's industrial ruins may bounce back when the time is right:

Each spatio-temporal moment of industrial ruination is situated somewhere along a continuum between creation and destruction, fixity and motion, expansion and contraction. Over time, landscapes of industrial ruination will become landscapes of regeneration, reuse, demolition or abandonment all over again. (Mah, 2010: 400)

For South Bank, the questions are: will the deep scars of 'industrial ruination' heal, and *can* the area become a viable 'landscape of reuse'?

Managing decline, promoting regeneration

We have been looking at the situation in South Bank in order to support local regeneration efforts. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council commissioned us to undertake a scoping exercise on the feasibility of setting up a 25-year longitudinal assessment of the impact of planned large-scale neighbourhood regeneration in the area.² The Council views this as a valuable opportunity to gather evidence on how the regeneration programme will affect the lives and opportunities of local residents over the long term.

A key part of the work was the compilation of a detailed baseline to capture the current position of the study area. A series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with local stakeholders, residents and community activists to enrich the baseline data and provide a deeper contextualisation of the area. This qualitative approach mirrors the agency-centred approach of Batty and Cole (2010), for example, which attempted to build an understanding of change within neighbourhoods from the perspectives of residents.

An initial review of South Bank's history highlighted the fact that the area had experienced boom as well as bust during the 20th century. At its most prosperous, it had a vibrant 'heart' with its own weekly market, diverse shopping areas and a lively social scene. However, the decline of local industries, technological change and the loss of local employment opportunities led to the seemingly inexorable decline of the area. The area has now had considerable problems for a number of decades; as early as 1962, the former Eston Urban District

Council expressed concern about 'disturbing' pockets of unemployment in South Bank and nearby Grangetown (Phillimore and Moffatt, 1999).

Subsequent regeneration schemes have included physical improvements, selective demolition in areas where antisocial behaviour was concentrated, refurbishment of properties and street improvements. Single Regeneration Budget Round 2 (SRB2) funding of around £17.5m was granted, followed by Round 5 funding of £7m (shared with a neighbouring area) for housing improvements and community development. While the SRB2 programme aimed to take an holistic approach to regeneration, extensive community consultations revealed that housing was a key priority for local people, and £2m was ultimately allocated to demolitions, refurbishment and street improvements. Community safety and education projects were also developed, and employment initiatives included a successful Job Connect scheme, which offered local employers training and equipment subsidies to encourage them to employ local people. However, it was unclear what impacts there had been on the long-term unemployed and people difficult to place in employment. Similarly with SRB5 funding, substantial monies were re-allocated from economic regeneration activity towards housing projects.

The SRB programmes did lead to a number of positive outcomes, including excellent literacy training and well-equipped schools, unemployment being halved and two new companies moving into the area, reduced housing voids and lowered crime rates. However, a 2001 position statement following these SRB initiatives reported that there were still numerous problems in the area, including social exclusion, low housing demand, a falling population, low incomes and 'a degree of apathy within the community' (Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2001: 8). The report

described what were regarded as the two main types of South Bank residents, 'those who have been there all their lives and don't want to or can't afford to move; and young people who move into the area because they cannot afford anywhere else' (Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2001: 5).

Over the past decade, three successive plans for the area's future have been developed: a Housing Renewal Plan (Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners, 2004), a Sustainable Communities Plan (DTZ Pidea Consulting, 2005) and Greater Eston Strategic Master Plan (GVA Grimley, 2008). A significant amount of community consultation activity has taken place during the formulation of these plans. Based on their recommendations, and with funding from a variety of sources, including the Borough Council, there has been widespread demolition of the 'street houses' (terraced houses), without replacement.

The Greater Eston Delivery Plan (Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2009) does include plans to retain and improve elements of the existing South Bank community, but that is not its central focus. A new development site, Low Grange Farm, has been earmarked for the provision of around 1000 new homes over the next few years. The site is around three-quarters of a mile from the traditional heart of the South Bank neighbourhood. Some long-standing residents of South Bank feel the new development is a cynical attempt to sideline the old South Bank and relocate parts of the community to the new development site at Low Grange.

South Bank, like many deprived communities in England, appears to be approaching a pivotal point in its history. Can it create a new future for the 21st century and beyond, or will it lapse into palliative care and be allowed to gradually expire? In 2010, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) requested that a full economic appraisal of regeneration plans for South

Bank be carried out to assess funding options for further action. At the time of writing, consultants are in the process of finalising this appraisal; however, early signs suggest that there will be a significant shortfall – in the region of millions – in funding for the existing regeneration plans. However, elements of the Greater Eston Strategic Master Plan that have already received funding are currently progressing.

Housing market failure

Low demand for terraced properties is a big problem in South Bank. By around 2000, house prices had fallen to an all-time low of £3000, with the result that many properties were bought by speculative investors for

private rental. Although this has not been substantiated, interviewees thought that problems relating to a number of private sector tenants had made up a high proportion of incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour in South Bank.

Housing statistics show that 75% of South Bank's housing stock is in the lowest Council Tax Band (A); house prices have stayed relatively low (the median price was £42,500 in 2009) and tenants' surveys of social housing indicate low levels of satisfaction on local estates. Void properties are seen as a particular problem, with empty houses being described by one interviewee as 'spreading like a cancer' (see Figure 1). There has been a widespread programme of demolition in the area in an



Figure 1. Boarded up housing in South Bank, 2011.
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attempt to tackle housing market failure, but the tactic of strategic demolition was deemed by many to have been unsuccessful.

At the time it was as though, if a street was derelict, it was best getting it down, but that just spread and spread and spread. (Resident, 2010)

A number of residents were emphatic that the only answer now was to invest in the area by refurbishing existing housing and building new developments. But there is doubt about whether that would actually work. A housing officer felt that:

The older 'street' housing area hasn't got a sustainable future because of the tenure mix and the make-up of the community. The older owner-occupiers who were keeping the place together are drifting off or dying. (Stakeholder, 2010)

Most local residents believed that South Bank had a bad reputation locally, associated with crime, drugs, violence and anti-social behaviour.

There is a stigma; when people ask me where I live and I say South Bank, they are shocked, the usual response is 'it's rough round there and there's loads of rogues'. (Resident, 2010)

Statistics show that, regrettably, this reputation is not without foundation. South Bank *does* have a very high level of crime: in 2008–2009, 196 offences were notified to the police per 1000 population, compared with 83.4 per 1000 in Redcar and Cleveland as a whole.

Despite its problems and reputation, many people feel a strong attachment to South Bank. Records from the local Housing Renewal Team, which was responsible for relocating residents in order to make way for demolitions, demonstrate that attachment. Out of 116 relocated households, the majority (61) chose to move to another property in South Bank,

while 35 moved short distances to other parts of Greater Eston and 20 were relocated further afield. This shows that many residents were committed to remaining in South Bank; interviews with other residents indicated that the reasons for this included family living locally, 'good neighbours' and community spirit, as well as a simple feeling of 'belonging' to the area:

I love South Bank, to me it is home. I have been all round the world and worked abroad but I still yearn to come home. (Resident, 2010)

However, contradictory evidence exists which suggests residents may change their views if they make the leap and move from South Bank to a neighbouring community. The local authority Housing Renewal Team recently undertook exit surveys with relocated householders who were relocated outside the existing South Bank community, to find out how they viewed the experience. Of the respondents who were relocated between 2004 and 2010, 33 were asked about how their circumstances had changed as a result of moving and how they viewed life in the street houses of South Bank in retrospect. Overwhelmingly, respondents said they were happy to have left the area for what they considered to be a better standard of housing (cited by 12 people) in better areas (6 people) and improved quality of life (21 people). Only two people expressed sadness about leaving.

Consultation as empowerment

Fuller and Geddes (2008: 262) state that: 'New Labour has gone further than previous governments in introducing the discourse of "community" into the urban state'. The level of consultation activity in South Bank which has accompanied the various regeneration initiatives is a very contentious issue within the community. There has been an awful lot of consultation

and there are visible signs of consultation fatigue among residents. It is debatable whether this increased level of consultation has actually been beneficial to the communities it was designed to empower. In South Bank many members of the community feel their views have not been properly integrated into regeneration plans, and, conversely, some policymakers feel that residents' expectations have been simply unrealistic. One resident summed up the mood:

There have been lots of big promises over the last 10 years, which haven't been fulfilled. Why promise something you can't deliver? (Resident, 2010)

As impartial observers of the process we must question in this instance the motives of the centrally-driven 'empowerment agenda': was it driven by a genuine desire to consult and empower, or as has been suggested by Fuller and Geddes (2008), a tick box control mechanism to enmesh the communities into a largely preordained state-driven neo-liberal governance process? Somerville (2011: 91) observes that successive governments have offered 'a vision of empowerment to communities that is largely illusory'. As researchers we were left with the feeling that it may have been kinder to all involved for someone to 'bite the bullet' and make a decision about the future of the community rather than to let it stagnate against a backdrop of confusion, frustration, growing stigmatization and increased deprivation.

Managed decline, or managing uncertainty?

Between 2001 and 2009, South Bank's population declined by 20.2%, from 6352 down to 5070 (ONS Small Area Population Estimates). Not surprisingly, in our interviews we found that residents and some of the other local stakeholders feel that South

Bank has effectively been subjected to a process of 'managed decline' for the last 20 years. Managed decline is not a new concept in the North East; during the 1950s and 1960s, mining villages in County Durham that were viewed as economically obsolete were classified as category 'D' villages. Pattinson (2004) states that, while few of the condemned villages were completely demolished, the policy created great anxiety, fear and resentment amongst the affected communities. Those emotions are evident in South Bank today.

Stakeholders and residents alike feel that the management of the regeneration process in South Bank has been weak, with too many changes of direction and a great deal of uncertainty along the way. However, there are conflicting views over what could realistically have been achieved in the area. A key local authority stakeholder commented that:

Strategies and plans were put in place with the best intentions with the money that was available. (Stakeholder, 2010)

Uncertainty around the future of the area has led to a sense of stagnation, which has had knock-on effects for the local housing market and resulted in the erosion of local amenities such as businesses, social facilities and the local market.

People will argue that they (the residents) haven't improved their properties because they don't know if the council are going to pull them down. (Stakeholder, 2010)

Some stakeholders argued that the regeneration process to date has shown little evidence of joined-up thinking and that the new development site at Low Grange is doomed to failure:

A new health village and schools (have been built), but (there is) no population to use them because everyone has been moved out of the area and the housing demolished. (Stakeholder, 2010)

The local regeneration programme was dismissed by one resident as, 'ten years of talk, lots of rubble, lots of rats, and no action'. Housing and regeneration officers took a somewhat different perspective on matters, citing the intractability of problems in South Bank, and the constraints of legal issues, delays and the need to achieve cooperation between partners. A key restraint on progress was the need to use available funding for the proper purpose and within the right time frame, while at the same time making sure residents accepted the planned changes.

People don't understand the complexity of the situation – they think it's just a case of flattening the houses and building some new ones. (Stakeholder, 2010)

Ashworth (2008: 21) sympathises with such an assessment, and states that pragmatic compromises are often a central part of the job for regeneration professionals: 'Good front-line regeneration practitioners are often reduced to simply trying to do their best in the moment as they are bounced from one crisis to another'.

New housing: A last chance for South Bank?

As part of the Greater Eston Strategic Master Plan (GVA Grimley, 2008), two residential development schemes are planned for the area. The first is in the very heart of the existing South Bank neighbourhood, and the second at its far eastern edge at the new Low Grange development site.

A small 'eco-homes' development is being built in the centre of South Bank, comprising 15 new homes on a site formerly occupied by street housing, plus the refurbishment of 11 existing houses. The development will be of mixed tenure, with units offered for outright sale, social rent or shared equity ownership. An 'eco-homes' development is one which meets the Code

for Sustainable Homes (DCLG, 2010); four units will be built to the highest level, Code 6, and the remainder will meet Code 4. The project has faced setbacks but the ground was finally broken in March 2011 and it is expected that the development will be completed within a year (see Figure 2). This represents the first substantial new residential development to have taken place in the area for over a decade. The development of the eco-homes and some recent shop front improvements further up Normanby Road (the main arterial road through South Bank) have begun to spruce up the area and this sense of renewal has begun to filter through to some of the residents. However, the current developments may simply act as a temporary veneer masking the significant problems of dereliction and deprivation which remain in the decaying terraced streets behind the main road.

The development of eco-housing in a deprived area may be viewed as anomalous; it appears to have been a pragmatic decision driven by the fact that a funding stream to develop this type of housing was available, when other sources of funding were not. The views of existing residents on the 'eco-village' are mixed. While many welcome it because it represents the first new building in the area for a long time, they are also sceptical about whether it will be successful. Residents are concerned about the long-term cost and viability of the development:

There are no roofs on the [street] houses, but they haven't got the money to knock them down; and then they are on about spending however many millions for the eco-village. (Resident, 2010)

Residents questioned whether South Bank was the right place to build such a development. Other stakeholders questioned the wisdom of building eco-homes in an area 'where you can't even get some of the residents to put rubbish in the bins'.



Figure 2. Image showing how the completed South Bank 'eco-village' will look.
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One stakeholder spoke of the local housing market's inability to support new development, citing the lack of previous interest from private developers in building new housing in the area. The housing market is so depressed that residential values may be lower than the costs of construction. It remains to be seen how the eco-village will fare, but it may prove difficult to buck the prevailing market trend.

The second, much larger, development is in neighbouring Low Grange, which has been identified as the key new housing site in the borough over the next 15 years. It is planned to provide over 1000 mixed-tenure homes; 70% for the open market and 30% for affordable housing options. Residents voiced concerns about the impact of such a large-scale residential development immediately adjacent to South Bank. Could this

be an attempt at gentrification and the final nail in the coffin of the old South Bank? Would the supply of new housing facilitate the relocation of the final residents from the old houses on the west side of the main Normanby Road and the comprehensive clearance of South Bank, thus paving the way for rumoured commercial and industrial development?

The Low Grange Farm SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) does little to calm these fears, stating that:

The development of the site will be central to the redevelopment of South Bank and the wider Greater Eston area in order to create a sustainable and inclusive heart to the wider community... The new [district] centre should contribute to creating a new community focus for South Bank. (Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, 2008: 11)

Although the local authority has been seeking to progress development on the land, the Low Grange housing project is currently stalled due to funding constraints and negative market conditions.

Retail-led regeneration: The role of Tesco

The Low Grange Housing Development is part of a wider development plan to create a new district centre which includes a new health village, a library, five small retail units and a substantial Tesco eco-store (including a petrol station). The Tesco store will act as an anchor for the new development; there is also scope within the planning application for a pub and community venue. Planning documents suggest the Tesco store and filling station will create 450 part- and full-time jobs in the area, with potentially 50–100 additional retail jobs coming from the smaller retail and leisure developments. Tesco has stated that it is committed to trying to ensure that 50% of the new jobs at the eco-store will be made available to the local long-term unemployed.

This attempt at retail-led regeneration fits what Lowe (2005) describes as a regeneration model which has been developed in the last two decades with roots in the Urban Development Corporations of the 80s and 90s. Lowe goes on to state that policy-makers desperate to encourage private sector investment in an area have 'found it expedient to use retail led development to "kick start" urban regeneration' (p. 450). However, Instone and Roberts (2006) caution against regarding retail-led regeneration as a panacea for deprived neighbourhoods, stating that the new developments may merely displace trade and exacerbate the problems of neighbouring communities. While this may be the case for neighbouring areas in Greater Eston, Tesco could offer South Bank a lifeline. The development should provide a

significant jobs boost for the area. In a deprived community like South Bank any new jobs are a reason for celebration. The full- and part-time entry level jobs available at the new Tesco store are potentially more accessible for existing South Bank residents than the more highly skilled positions which have also been announced with the re-opening of the neighbouring blast furnace by SSI. Recent research from DTZ Pineda (2009: 15) states that:

The retail sector has proved a key employment creator in areas where traditional manufacturing has declined. It is generally recognised as employing a wide range of different socioeconomic groups including low income families and minority and ethnic groups, promoting and supporting social inclusion.

Equally important is the promise that the store will have a designated community champion as part of its staff team who will work with local schools, charities and the wider local community. This element of corporate social responsibility could prove vital to local community and voluntary groups in this era of substantial mainstream budget cuts. The flagship Tesco eco-store may have a significant multiplier effect for the local economy by attracting other retailers to the area, and the Section 106 agreements which come with the development will help to improve the appearance of the area through landscaping and tree planting, while potentially offering employment and skills training for local residents.

The Low Grange development could provide a new focal point for the area, but in terms of its impact on the existing South Bank community and the remaining housing the jury is still out. Securing financial support for regeneration projects in the UK is becoming increasingly difficult due to extensive cuts to government funding. Competition for the remaining funds is intense, with multiple potential schemes

ving for the same dwindling funding streams. This may be particularly apparent in regions or sub-regions – like Teesside – where there are many deprived neighbourhoods bidding for limited funds. Several stakeholders cited other development sites within a few miles of the existing South Bank community that are strategically more viable, mainly because they are closer to the town of Middlesbrough (e.g. Gresham and Middlehaven). These sites, which are adjacent to the urban core and close to the University and hospital, are likely to attract students and key workers. Consequently competing areas may have stronger market demand for new residential units, thus higher property values and greater viability.

It remains to be seen whether the existing neighbourhood of South Bank will have a viable future. At the present time the odds seem to be stacked against it. Historically communities and neighbourhoods have evolved over time with new communities springing up to suit the demands of the age; however, this may be of little consolation to the small, hardy band of people who regard themselves as ‘South Bankers’.

Conclusion

South Bank could be characterised as a place locked into a downward spiral of multiple deprivation, housing market failure and declining population. These problems are deeply entrenched and have proved resistant to previous regeneration attempts; the relative lack of progress with the current housing renewal programme is frustrating for residents, and the area has a poor reputation. It could be argued that South Bank has no long-term future; however, it does have a strong sense of community, with residents displaying a genuine commitment to the area and concerned about its future.

Potential strategies to deal with population loss as discussed in the shrinking cities

literature include ‘right sizing’ and greening demolition areas (Schilling and Logan, 2008). While these strategies could be applied to areas like South Bank, and to an extent have been already, with demolition areas being simply grassed over, it is far from clear that the resources can be found to purchase and demolish further properties. Moreover, greening is generally viewed as a temporary measure until better times arrive. What if they never arrive? Another strategy which appears to be employed is to slowly geographically relocate areas like South Bank to neighbouring areas which do not share the stigma of the old community (Low Grange Farm in this case). There are existing examples of this ‘positive gentrification’ (Cameron, 2003) approach in the North East. For instance, the once notorious Cruddas Park estate in the West End of Newcastle is experiencing a very substantial change as it becomes ‘Riverside Dene’.

Wider social issues face deprived communities like South Bank. Lack of employment opportunities and the state of the wider economy are significant, but in South Bank there are emerging employment opportunities. Perhaps, rather than a lack of jobs, the real issues may be around aspirations, confidence and the debilitating effect of living in a community which has an inescapable reputation: a reputation which may create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where generations of young people and working age adults lack belief and perceive themselves as useless and destined to lead a life on the margins, depending on the State or the grey economy for their survival.

The Coalition Government appears to lack a coherent vision for deprived communities but early signs suggest the localism and Big Society agendas appear to advocate self-help and self-sufficiency. It remains to be seen what will happen in poorly connected communities where the confidence,

connections and skills to solve your own problems are in very limited supply.

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Disclaimer

All opinions outlined in this article represent the views of the research team and in no way represent the position of Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council.

Notes

1. Subsequently in 2006 Teesside (Tees Valley Living) received a limited amount of HMR funding, the funds were spread thinly between several areas in Tees Valley. South Bank ultimately received a small amount which was used to demolish 500 properties.
2. The research which forms the basis of this article was a scoping study for a planned 25-year longitudinal study which will investigate the impact of the Greater Eston Regeneration Masterplan on South Bank residents' quality of life.

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From a framework to a toolkit: Urban regeneration in an age of austerity

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Abstract An age of austerity presents considerable challenges for those engaged in purposeful acts aiming to regenerate communities of places. Driven by an intense period of global economic uncertainty and a crippling banking crisis, the last rites were effectively read for holistic notions of area-based regeneration in England across the space of a few months. Of central concern to this research is investigating the recalibrated urban policy measures involving the examination of the transition from a dense national regeneration framework accompanied by a plethora of area-based initiatives to a minimalistic 'regeneration' toolkit to enable growth. Drawing on interviews with some principal agents of regeneration, the paper explores emerging new agendas. The research material generated indicates that the public policy field of regeneration has largely been subsumed by a single-minded pursuit of economic growth as a spatially unjust neoliberal toolkit is unmasked. Views from practitioners, however, also indicate the complexity of actually existing regeneration projects as well as some potentially progressive activities associated with the retreat of the state.

Keywords: *Regeneration, austerity, incentives, single-mined economic growth, Labour Government, Coalition Government*

INTRODUCTION

Urban regeneration programmes and area-based initiatives can be distinguished from other public policies because of their geographic focus. That is to say that particular places are designated for special forms of state assistance beyond the norm, ie urban regeneration sites. Although not always referred to as

regeneration, such special assistance has been a defining feature of state policies around the world from the 1940s onwards: whether upgrading slum conditions in Bogotá or revitalising the post-industrial waterfronts of Boston. Certainly not beyond criticism in conceptual terms, specific regeneration practices — from estate renewal to the

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renaissance of commercial quarters — continue to generate heated public debate and raise some fundamental political questions. Yet, a mainstay of urban regeneration theory and discourse has been its explicit or implicit aim to ameliorate some of the social, economic and environmental injustices produced by capitalist modes of production: namely, uneven patterns of development.

Over the past four decades in the case of countries such as the UK and the US, but more recently for other countries such as China, public policies have, in broad terms, shifted from redistribution towards more market enabling approaches consistent with neoliberal political outlooks. Nevertheless, the variegated forms and effects of actually existing neoliberalisation need to be acknowledged. Thus, according to Jamie Peck, the fiscal purging of recurrent neoliberal acts has resulted ‘in the cumulative incapacitation of the state’.¹ This would imply that the current age of austerity presents considerable challenges for holistically framed patterns of regeneration that many communities of need around the world grew accustomed to over the past two decades. Yet, recent empirically informed research, which may help to reveal some of the actually existing patterns of austerity-induced regeneration, has been noticeably lacking. There is a critical gap in knowledge of the framings of English regeneration since the UK General Election in 2010, partly because of a renewed and all-encompassing political discourse of ‘localism’.² Critical questions relating to whether a transformation in state-led regeneration policies has actually materialised or whether such a shift has been focused on appearance or the substantive form of regeneration have remained largely unexplored.³ It is these questions that framed the research project reported in this paper.

Backdrop

Legislation by Thatcher’s Conservative Government paved the way for a range of market-oriented regeneration ventures, including Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) and Enterprise Zones (EZs) in the 1980s, to which more recent reincarnations such as Urban Regeneration Companies (URCs), Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and City Deals continue to bear some similar neoliberal hallmarks, albeit variegated in their spatial manifestations. It could be argued that a series of policies designed to achieve quick ‘wins’ have predominated over longer-term strategic planning and spatially inclusive ideals. This reveals an underlying tension between more holistic targets that favour social objectives (seeking to serve local communities at large) and those seeking narrowly to organise and control space to maximise economic growth (primarily benefiting individuals and corporations through capital accumulation) that target areas of development and economic opportunity.

During the 1990s, the Conservative Government introduced the competitive ‘challenge funding’ approach, which included initiatives such as City Challenge and the Single Regeneration Budget. The popularity of competitive bidding regimes did wane to some extent under successive Labour Governments between 1997 and 2010. For example, flagship redistributive initiatives such as New Deal for Communities and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund were based on quantitative measures of multiple deprivation that sought to target areas of need. Competitive bidding remained prominent, however, as it became accepted among a growing neoliberal repertoire of regeneration tools.

With an economy still reeling from the effects of the 2007–08 credit crunch and a global economic downturn, it was apparent that the favoured (housing-led)

model of regeneration predicated on the wide availability and easy access to relatively cheap credit to which the UK's public-, private- and third-sector interests had become accustomed was no longer financially viable.⁴ A change in the orientation and practice of state-led regeneration was thus apparent prior to the 2010 General Election, epitomised in the Treasury-led 2007 Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR).⁵ The election, however, provided a defining moment for the practice of regeneration and the significance of regeneration as a national urban policy concern. Upon accession to office, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat Coalition Government proposed what they claimed would be a radical ‘new model’ to rebalance the economy of England.⁶ As a discourse and policy goal, ‘regeneration’ was sidelined by the interwoven narratives of ‘localism’ and ‘economic growth’, closely aligned with the Coalition’s imperative to reduce the public budget deficit and to ease the reliance on public-sector employment. Although politics and discourses differ markedly around the world, many nation-states and especially those members of the European Union have accepted the necessity of fiscal austerity. Consequently, debate has been limited to the depth of cuts, the speed of implementation and the spatial distribution of such measures.

English regeneration programmes withered as funding was reduced by around two-thirds of the resources committed under previous spending rounds.⁷ This headline figure arguably disguises deeper cuts to resources made available for holistic forms of regeneration, especially when one considers that new ‘regeneration’ resources include initiatives such as infrastructure enhancements, primarily focused on delivering economic growth that are essentially loans rather than grants (eg Growing Places Fund).

Significantly, at the end of 2012, ‘for the first time in over forty years there are no area based initiatives targeted at the most deprived parts of England’.⁸ The repercussions of a spatially unjust fiscal revanchism are potentially far reaching: for example, the ‘extreme measures’ taken by some US cities, such as the decision to permanently remove 1,300 street lights in Michigan.¹

This paper analyses English regeneration policy during austere socio-economic times. It explores whether the shift towards ‘austerity-era regeneration’ is due to a pragmatic strategy to weather the economic storm or whether it could indicate a more covert strategy to complete the right-wing ideological ‘mission’ fundamentally to reconstitute the role of the state, initiated by the Thatcher administration of the 1980s. Focusing on England as a window through which actually existing neoliberal repertoires can be examined may help to elucidate some broader trends associated with austerity politics and places under austerity rule. More modestly, the shifting contours of regeneration during an age of fiscal revanchism may serve to illustrate some of the repercussions when debates about the merits of regeneration are curtailed by a discourse that is only concerned with the depth and pace of cuts.

Methodology

The empirical and secondary research that forms the basis of the research used for the analysis in this paper was carried out between 2010 and 2012. The aim of the research was to develop an understanding of the impact of the Coalition Government’s urban policies and the emerging era of austerity for the regeneration landscape in England. One of the key tasks was to compile a comprehensive desk-based literature

review; this was completed by examining key contemporary and historical policy documents, relevant academic research and reports from think-tanks. To provide further depth, including qualitative information on what the era of austerity means for regeneration policy at the micro level, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a number of regeneration and economic development practitioners (in the public, private and community sectors). The programme of interviews remains ongoing, as the research continues to track the shifting contours of state-led regeneration policy. Analysis is therefore provisional and explorative, with more detailed research reports and publications subject to follow. This paper discusses some of the key issues that research participants highlighted within the new paradigm of austere public policy and its political antecedence, using selected examples from the interview data for illustration.

Structure

In the first substantive section, divergent interpretations of the practice of regeneration are analysed. The purpose is to understand the competing narratives and motivations that have guided the formulation and implementation of regeneration policy. By this means, the goal is to analyse the holistic conceptualisation of regeneration that integrates social, economic and environmental facets. This approach will be contrasted with a more economically focused approach to regeneration, which began to appear after the first decade of Labour rule (*c.* 2007) and which has been intensified but also adapted by the Coalition Government. The conceptualisation provides the lens through which the policy shift from an integrated framework to a limited toolkit is examined. The following two sections

identify the defining features and rationale of Labour's framework and the Coalition's toolkit, respectively. By way of conclusion, the paper identifies the marginalisation of holistic regeneration values in favour of economic growth objectives.

STATE-LED REGENERATION: A BRIEF REVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL DEBATES

The concept of 'urban regeneration' is used here as a catch-all term to encompass terms, such as 'urban revitalisation', 'urban renewal', 'urban renaissance' and similar terms, as regeneration is a contested concept with no universally accepted definition. Different terms have found favour in specific countries at particular times and related to certain interventions. Urban regeneration is traditionally understood to be concerned with economic, environmental and social aspects, yet with a preoccupation with physical development activities that seek to redress social imbalances. Roberts⁹ refers to urban regeneration as 'a comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change'. Together with being a social, economic and environmental (physical) activity, regeneration is also a symbolic process that aims to foster a geography of hope. It carries an implicit message of resurrection, that 'something new' will be created, while simultaneously suggesting that a return to 'better times' is possible.¹⁰ It is such regenerative properties that are distinct from other public policy pursuits, such as economic growth and development. The hope that is often conveyed in regeneration initiatives suggests that it may help to repair what has been ravaged by capitalist uneven development.

Urban regeneration is a form of place management predominantly concerned with the management of the micro spatial processes, but it could be argued that its neoliberal incarnation is preoccupied with the management of perceptions and products to help situate localities at the forefront of the global competition of cities.¹⁰ Critiquing the middle-class gentrifying logics and consumerist tendencies of neoliberal regeneration efforts, Lovering¹⁰ observes that it 'is ubiquitously used to refer to a fairly standard set of policy goals and outcomes'. From this reading, regeneration responses, such as neoliberal repertoires, are emulated and mutated (to greater and lesser degrees) as part of the global-local mobilities of urban policy. This suggests that an examination of actually existing forms of practice in a particular jurisdiction may help to harvest lessons for other jurisdictions.

The identification of regeneration sites is not a spontaneous process: indeed, it is the opposite. Places are specifically chosen for targeted spatial intervention as a 'corrective' to the processes of uneven development. In this sense, state-led regeneration is part of an 'official strategy',¹⁰ rolled out to alter representations, practices and urban formations. It is a particular urban policy repertoire intended to temper some of the most visible and deleterious manifestations of capitalist uneven development. Hence, the designation of urban regeneration sites for special state assistance. Where social objectives remain important, this can result in channelling of regeneration resources towards deprived communities through, for example, specific area-based mechanisms such as New Deal for Communities. Alternatively, where economic objectives preside, this can result in channelling regeneration resources towards places of perceived growth potential, such as edge of city centre sites

that were the favoured sites of intervention by the UDCs.

While many agents of regeneration consider that the central mission of regeneration is to improve the social climate, one tends, on cross-examination with project 'outputs', to find the striking dominance of 'hard' physical measures and outputs favoured over process. This paradox between stated strategic goals and 'final' delivery targets may explain why regeneration initiatives have long been criticised for failing to address deep-rooted structural issues. Trebeck,¹¹ for example, calls for a more nuanced understanding of transformations taking shape, which departs from the narrow range of socio-economic indicators by focusing on overall 'quality of life', which may help to challenge the tenets of regeneration. Attempting to negotiate between demand-side objectives, such as tax incentives, and supply-side objectives, such as safe living environments, is a persistent issue. Consequently, the debate continues about the effectiveness of area-based regeneration. Recent research provides some evidence to affirm that spatially targeting resources can reach concentrated pockets of poverty, but also cautions that the accuracy of targeting is non-uniform and, at a finer grain, found that the regeneration process bypasses many excluded people and households.¹²

In political-economic terms, state-led regeneration is administered to help repair the social, environmental and economic repercussions of capitalist uneven development. It is a capitalist policy instrument intended to respond to and assuage the outcomes produced by capitalist frameworks — a safety net of sorts. Conceptually, state-led forms of regeneration therefore remain locked into the structural logics of capitalism. In practical terms, state-led regeneration is administered for a variety of purposes, but can be distilled as a distinct form of

assistance channelled towards particular communities of places. Assistance may include financial resources, political support, fiscal incentives and policy tools.

LABOUR'S REGENERATION FRAMEWORK

In broad terms, the Labour administrations from 1997 to 2010 pursued two key strands of regeneration policy: 'urban renaissance', which encompassed design-led physical regeneration, with a city-centre focus; and 'neighbourhood renewal', specific area-based initiatives to tackle social exclusion. The Urban Task Force described the pressing need to create an urban renaissance, revitalising the urban core through high-quality design and the regeneration of brownfield sites, the review was heavily influenced by practice in European cities such as Barcelona. Neighbourhood Renewal was a central feature of the first two terms of the Labour administration; it formed the social justice strand of the New Labour vision. The delivery mechanism was to be a plethora of area-based initiatives to enable 'problem spaces' to increase their economic activity and narrow the gap with more prosperous localities; the end goal, as Tony Blair famously stated, was that no one should be 'seriously disadvantaged by where they live'.¹³ In theory, there was the potential for the two key regeneration strands to support each other and create a holistic framework for regeneration, but in reality there were also significant contradictions¹⁴ and the potential for one agenda to undermine the other (see, for example, the substantial body of literature on gentrification).¹⁵

The two major area-based policy initiatives pursued by Labour were the decade-long New Deal for Communities initiative (involving 39 deprived neighbourhoods) and the more widespread Neighbourhood Renewal

initiative. Layer upon layer of area-based initiatives were introduced by New Labour, until the global economic conditions began to turn in 2007; the economic climate became toxic in September 2007 with the collapse of Northern Rock. The policy agenda then began to shift decisively from the holistic regeneration of place to the more modest aim to generate economic activity to bolster the flagging economy.

'Transforming places; changing lives: A framework for regeneration',¹⁶ issued by the Department of Communities and Local Government encapsulated many of the key messages and ideologies replete in the Treasury's SNR,⁵ which emphasised the tensions between neoliberal and neocommunitarian objectives: namely, increasing economic prosperity and reducing social inequality. The role of 'Transforming places' was to consult on a framework for confronting the root causes of deprivation in order to improve social justice by tackling the underlying economic challenges, which were perceived to be preventing places from reaching their potential. It aimed to:

- tackle underlying economic challenges including worklessness by boosting enterprise;
- improve the coordination and prioritisation of regeneration investment;
- devolve power to more local levels so that programmes fit places through local and regional regeneration alignment.

This was a clear recognition of the deep-seated deficiencies of previous state-led regeneration policies that had failed to overcome structural issues. Yet, 'Transforming places' remained locked into the structural logics of capitalism. It did not at any level seek to challenge the causes of uneven development. As a

precursor to an enduring politics of austerity, Labour's framework was intended to retain a safety net that would require less direct public assistance.

Self-styled as 'ambitious', much of the framework was fabricated from existing initiatives. At the time of its launch, it was also feared that the proposals were a 'done deal', which had prompted practitioners to focus on the more technical aspects of the package of proposals rather than consider the overarching objectives.¹⁷ The technocratic nature of state-led regeneration was a defining feature of the Labour years. Focusing on meeting targets, evidencing returns on public investment and demonstrating efficiency savings diverted attention from broader questions relating to the purpose of regeneration.

Extolling Third Way communitarian principles of helping people to help themselves by developing enterprising places to reduce worklessness, the framework laid out an agenda for improving the coordination and prioritisation of regeneration investment. Underpinning Labour's drive to achieve better value for money from regeneration investment was the principle that 'regeneration is a sub-set of economic development'. Prevalent here was the neoliberal orthodoxy that assumes areas of need and acute deprivation can be revitalised by spatially targeting investment in areas of opportunity.

As a means of extracting 'best value' from regeneration, Labour's technocratic method was to propose criteria to assess projects predicated on economic values, such as 'improving economic performance' and 'creating the conditions for business growth'. Driven by the intent to achieve better value for money from regeneration investment, the framework favoured an approach of enabling people to reach their full potential and preventing places from being held back economically, socially and environmentally. Referring to

'decades of de-industrialisation and economic restructuring' in the past tense indicated an extremely detached understanding of the economic challenges facing many urban and rural localities. The argument underpinning the framework was that direct investment in deprived neighbourhoods can often be very expensive compared with the economic uplift it generates, whereas reinforcing economic opportunities in central locations provides better value and greater success. Such economic tones were reminiscent of property-led regeneration initiatives launched in the 1980s that abided by a 'trickle-down' theory.

As part of Labour's top-down managerialist and paternalistic regeneration policy, they had a hyperactive tendency of experimenting with new structures of governance, partnership arrangements, performance management measures and special-purpose bodies. Each of these operated across different, albeit overlapping, scales and variously involved different, albeit overlapping, constellations of public, private and community actors. For example, cross-sector Local Strategic Partnerships were responsible to central government for delivering against targets established in Local Area Agreements (LAAs), while at the same time Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) between groups of local authorities and other partners were established, which again were predicated on the annual delivery of central government targets. As one interviewee expressed, 'Having been involved in previous MAA processes, MAAs felt very tangential to the real issues'. Such systems received criticism for devising technocratic institutional architecture and onerous reporting frameworks that recalibrated regeneration delivery away from the realities of particular communities of places. Indeed, post-2007 Labour's scalar preference for neighbourhood-based area initiatives started to wane. This provided a

key indication that part of the state-led regeneration safety net was being unravelled, although clothed in the rhetoric of enhanced coordination and greater prioritisation of regeneration resources — an economic investment. It was perhaps the technocratic complexity of state-led regeneration that helped to mask the retreat from seeking to address social needs.

The framework suffered from some notable deficiencies. It lacked any consideration of how places of need can be more adeptly connected with places of opportunity, despite an escalation in area-based initiatives, partnerships and scales of governance over the preceding decade. Without a direct policy connection being made between places of need and opportunity, whereby connections would include a mixture of physical, social, cultural and economic relations, the Labour administration's recognition that some places 'have been slower to bring about a significant reduction in the number of people without work, and deprivation is still intense in some areas' was unlikely to find a suitable remedy. Hence, the state policy recognition of uneven development failed to comprehend, or at least acknowledge, that this is an outcome of capitalist modes of production, the result being that Labour's regeneration framework was not so much a holistic frame of reference for providing an adequate safety net for tempering the most destructive effects of neoliberal capitalism, but was more precisely a state-led attempt to recalibrate regeneration to facilitate the ceaseless quest for economic growth. Put in other words, regeneration remained locked into the structural logics of capitalism, and the safety net was being unravelled to help some people and places to prosper.

The economic climate had further deteriorated upon publication of 'Taking forward the regeneration framework'.¹⁸

Consequently, the imperative of 'tackling worklessness', 'boosting enterprise' and supporting business during a recession was amplified with £418m allocated to 20 Local Enterprise Growth Initiative partnerships between 2006 and 2011, for example. By this stage, it was common for England regeneration practitioners to conceive of regeneration interventions as a means of delivering economic growth. Indeed, many considered that the primary role of regeneration was to promote prosperity, although this viewpoint remains more contested (especially among those operating at neighbourhood scales). In recognition of this prevalent regeneration mindset, the next section examines how regeneration has altered since the Coalition entered office in May 2010.

THE COALITION'S REGENERATION TOOLKIT

Signalled in the pre-election political party manifestos, it quickly became apparent that with the installation of a Coalition Government Labour's technocratic approach, including their regeneration framework, did not fit with the Coalition's 'economic growth' and 'localism' crusade.² Indeed, it is noteworthy that the 'Local growth' White Paper¹⁹ rarely mentions 'regeneration', which is in stark contrast to the political attention that regeneration as a policy field received under Labour.²⁰ The term 'regeneration', as is also the case with 'regions/regionalism',^{6,21} has been largely omitted from the Coalition's vocabulary and, more importantly, this discursive absence has had a direct impact on regeneration programmes, as ministers have refrained from establishing any bespoke regeneration initiatives. If the state-led regeneration safety net was being unravelled by Labour, has this safety net been completely dispensed with by the Coalition?

Arguably, it was a result of the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee's decision to launch an inquiry into regeneration that prompted the Coalition hastily to produce 'Regeneration to enable growth: What government is doing in support of community-led regeneration'.²² This rudimentary toolkit is limited to a few pages of text and some appendices. Of central concern, the toolkit offered no definition of regeneration.²³ The Coalition has refused to define 'regeneration', claiming that 'it is not for Government to define what regeneration is, what it should look like or what measures should be used to drive it'. In contrast, the Scottish Government published a comprehensive regeneration strategy at about the same time, which defines regeneration as 'the holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces won't suffice',²⁴ consistent with Roberts' definition of 'holistic' regeneration and similar to the notion of regeneration that guides Wales' 'New regeneration framework', which was published in March 2013.²⁵ This affirms that the retreat from holistic notions of regeneration, consistent with a politics of austerity, is not necessarily a hegemonic trend. Indeed, England is distinct from other nations of the UK when it comes to conceptualising (or not) the goals and principles of state-led regeneration.

Refusing to define regeneration and refraining from sanctioning any area-based regeneration initiatives of note was a clear signal of the Coalition's approach to fiscal purging: a localism gripped by financial cuts and devolving austerity. Indeed, denigrating the state as part of the problem would unleash further 'incapacitation', which Peck has observed across US cities.¹ Neglecting regeneration practice and experience accumulated over several decades, the Coalition's approach towards regeneration has been

characterised as commencing from 'year zero'.²⁶ More accurately, they eviscerated Labour's technocratic framework and prevalent regeneration practice of the 1990s and 2000s, which attempted to be holistic in its scope, design and intent. Yet, the Coalition also borrowed from and adapted the neoliberal repertoire of tools pioneered during the 1980s, such as incentive-based mechanisms.

The outcome was that, for the first time in several decades, England was left bereft of a genuine regeneration strategy and accompanying dedicated resources. Under the guise of 'localism', the Coalition has, instead, provided a toolkit of instruments, from the New Homes Bonus to EZs, which are intended to dispense financial rewards for additional housing delivery and incentivise additional business investment, respectively. More so, the toolkit is replete with incentives, tools and policies that convey a myopic mantra of 'economic growth at any costs'. The sole focus on the economics of regeneration signifies a deepening of neoliberal regeneration policy encapsulated in Labour's framework. Akin to Labour, the repercussions of uneven patterns of development, such as worklessness or deprivation, are considered by the Coalition to be a drag anchor on the quest for economic growth. To put it another way, the Coalition has completed Labour's recalibration of regeneration from a state policy primarily administered to address societal challenges to one primarily administered to attend to market demands. Distinct from Labour's approach, which perceived technocracy to be paramount to managing the regeneration problem, the Coalition perceive the 'big state' to be the foremost problem. Worryingly, the toolkit relies on many instruments launched in the 1980s that appear to rely implicitly on the much maligned 'trickle-down' theory. It is unclear how localist community-led

regeneration can be reconciled with top-down policies, such as EZs, and centrally administered resources, such as the Regional Growth Fund (RGF). Indeed, Lord Heseltine, the Chair of the RGF Independent Advisory Panel, was resolute that the £2.6bn RGF 'is not about regeneration'. A number of respondents commented on the manner that the RGF had centralised funding decisions for what limited public resources remained available, with one respondent stating:

'The RGF nationalised decision making — decisions are being made without the benefits of local knowledge. The process is flawed compared to the previous approach ... [which] brought a lot of local strategic knowledge to the decision making process.'

Notwithstanding substantial criticisms of some of Labour's regeneration machinery, which a significant proportion of regeneration agents perceived to be 'very tangential to the real issues', in rendering such technocracy obsolete, the Coalition's toolkit had also dispensed with 'a lot of local strategic knowledge', often accumulated over many years of practice.^{27,28} The withering of regeneration as a public policy priority has been accompanied by a loss of skills, tacit knowledge and expertise. Views held by practitioners and councillors suggest that the present 'austerity-era regeneration' approach is a retrograde step:

'At the end of the day you only get regeneration outputs when money is spent, jobs are created or bricks are laid, for me it is about actual delivery and I can't see where the delivery mechanism is going to be'

The deficiency of mechanisms to aid regeneration helps to draw attention to spatial implications of a localism gripped by austerity. Despite claims that the

Coalition's toolkit is designed to enable community-led regeneration, it has not gone unnoticed that risks and responsibilities have been devolved, but local autonomy over funding decisions has not followed suit. It is in this sense that Peck refers to 'an urbanization of neoliberal austerity', whereby it is something that central government does to local authorities, and local authorities do to deprived neighbourhoods.¹ Austerity is devolved, but it can only be devolved so far. In the case of state-led regeneration, this is usually the neighbourhood scale, and thus it is those deprived neighbourhoods that suffer disproportionately. This analysis helps to unmask the spatial injustice that secretes the structural apparatus of the Coalition's neoliberal toolkit. Several interviewees indicated that the preference for economic opportunism (over socio-economic need) is likely to result in some longer-term spatial implications:

'Those communities where you have affluent, prosperous and well educated people are ready to take up the challenge. These are the places that don't need regeneration. The places that need it are the places that don't have ... the aspirations, abilities, skills — they are the ones that will be left behind.'

Although a scenario of some communities of places being 'left behind' was widely recognised by agents of regeneration, and supported by evidence from the propensity of emergent Neighbourhood Plans to correspond with communities of places of 'prosperous and well educated people ready to take up the challenge', there was a sense of resignation — particularly among local government practitioners — that there are no alternatives. It was as if the future path of regeneration had already been marked and a change in direction would not be possible. This was quite surprising, and can

be contrasted with the rhetoric of localism that intends to offer enhanced freedoms, flexibilities and incentives that reward innovation.

There was a gut instinct among the majority of research participants that the Coalitions' approach was, at least in part, ideologically driven; a sense of an unfinished political agenda from the Thatcher era, although 'this latest austerity offensive is being prosecuted under historically and geographically distinctive conditions', that commences from an already neoliberalised configuration.¹ Hall²⁹ concurs, suggesting that, in the 1980s, only severe Inner City riots stopped the Thatcher administration carrying out a more extreme neoliberal agenda, by leaving 'the Northern regions and cities [to] face inevitable decline'. Such a policy theme was revived by the Policy Exchange in their 2008 report 'Cities unlimited'.³⁰ Hall questions the future for the north, now that the Coalition has rapidly begun to remove the palliative of public-sector and quasi-public-sector jobs from the region:

'Is it simply proposed to cut off the codeine and the tranquilisers that have eased their long-drawn-out pain over the last three decades, leaving them on a minimal life support? Or is the real intention ... to leave the North to wither and facilitate a great drift south?'²⁹

This fear, of a downscaled austerity politics actually existing in many American cities,¹ was echoed by research participants, with one public-sector interviewee observing that '[r]egeneration doesn't feel like it has a place in [the Coalitions' approach] — regeneration steps in where things aren't working, but this governments' attitude is, you just let the market take care of that'. In political-economic terms, the recalibration of state-led regeneration means that its administration to help repair the social, environmental and economic

repercussions of capitalist uneven development is becoming more infrequent. The depth of austerity measures, involving the retreat of public-sector spending, reduced welfare support as part of a strategy to 'make work pay' and a focus on supporting 'real' jobs in the private sector, has proved challenging for many communities of places. This pernicious situation led one interviewee to argue that: 'The UK governments' policy of "don't worry lads, the public sector will contract and everyone will get a job in the private services sector", that just doesn't work outside London and the South East'.

Indeed, those familiar with the growing socio-economic inequalities within and across London and the South East,³¹ would prompt a reaction that a regeneration safety net is warranted in all parts of England. The localism agenda, which, in the words of one research participant, challenges communities to 'sink or swim', is showing signs of reinforcing the competitive advantages enjoyed by more affluent places with economic potential and penalising those places traditionally the beneficiaries of additional state support.³² Conceptually, this may indicate that not only are current state-led forms of regeneration locked into the structural logics of capitalism, but they have been recalibrated to support primarily capitalist growth. Equally, the Coalition's offer of greater autonomy to localities could be interpreted as a 'double edged sword', as one respondent stated that: 'sometimes increased autonomy has come with reduced resources, sometimes it has felt like it has come down to us to make decisions where we cut investment rather than where we can make investment'.

From the situated perspective of this agent of regeneration, 'localism' could be readily equated with 'cuts'. This raises new questions that concern whether greater

autonomy has compensated for public-sector disinvestment. The Coalition's preference for a 'toolkit' over a 'framework' is perhaps instructive, as the former exudes connotations of self-help, where only the most basic tools are provided. Despite the toolkit's use of the phrase 'community-led regeneration', there appears to be a chasm, which continues to widen, between such bottom-up initiatives and the top-down economic growth incentives (a chasm that was also all too apparent in Labour's framework).

The Coalition's approach to regeneration has been to treat it as a non-policy. In a report published by the Work Foundation, it was argued that, 'Without regeneration, the most deprived communities in the UK will have little chance of economic recovery'.⁸ Interview responses corroborate this assessment and also extend it by suggesting that the loss of institutional capacity would have a disproportionate impact on peripheral regions: 'The loss of One North East will have a far greater impact than the loss of SEEDA for example. RDAs [Regional Development Agencies] were at the forefront of things: they were the "players" not the local authorities'. Conversely, a different interviewee highlighted the positive aspects of the process: 'taking the RDAs away and giving us a more direct relationship with the government ... we are much closer to the people making policy, we have got a much better access around, opportunities like City Deals or Enterprise Zones'.

In a practical sense, there was a unanimous current of belief that replacing some of Labour's machinery, especially LAAs and MAAs, with more streamlined systems had improved central-local government relations. What the above interviewee extract also helps to identify is that a localist mindset is yet to penetrate the approach of all regeneration

practitioners. The research participants held a strong presumption that central government are 'the [only] people making policy'. This also serves to support the perspective highlighted earlier 'that there are no alternatives'. With most research participants taking a pragmatic stance that 'as a society we cannot expect the same levels of service previous generations have enjoyed', it was also noted that the 'onus has moved to [communities] from government — "do it for yourself or don't have it"' localist brand of regeneration. In Peck's terminology, it reflects '[t]he neoliberal proclivity for downloading, by way of responsibility dumping and devolved discipline'.¹ The implication is that, in some communities, there are particular cases where bottom-up forms of regeneration are thriving as they respond in creative ways to the shift from a grant funding regime to an incentives regime. Examples of community-operated post offices, public houses and village shops abound, together with the success stories associated with the transfer of 'assets' to voluntary-sector organisations. In practical terms, these are examples at a fine-grain scale of communities stepping in where the market (and state) will not. The perverse feature of this trend, however, is that it is often, although not entirely, areas of opportunity that are benefitting from the regeneration toolkit devised for an age of austerity. In conceptual terms, communities equipped for the task (eg socially, culturally, professionally, financially) are able to provide their own safety nets.

Whereas some interviewees suggested that deprived communities have been 'forgotten', an alternative perspective is that the Coalition Government (as well as other political factions such as Blue Labour and Red Tory) has represented deprived communities as an 'undeserving poor', signifying the end of more holistic forms of regeneration as we have come to

know it.³³ Respondents also remarked ruefully that 'it was not a great time to be in government [as a politician or officer], whatever your politics', with one interviewee elaborating on this sentiment by stating:

'There is an economic dimension but there is also a political dimension, in that the government has had to prioritise in terms of spending decisions ... regeneration expenditure has been less protected than some other forms of expenditure; like the NHS [National Health Service] or adult social care.'

It is such a sentiment that affirms the argument that the public policy field of regeneration has withered. Political choices have been made that have resulted in budget raids at national scales and left regeneration resources unprotected at local scales. To paraphrase Peck,¹ there has been a cumulative incapacitation of state-led regeneration.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This paper has demonstrated the withering of more holistic area-based regeneration policy ideals over recent years, specific to the geography of England and its unique historical conditions. This is in stark contrast to the halcyon days of regeneration experienced from the mid-1990s through to the latter part of the 2000s. Yet, a return to a regeneration paradigm of yesteryear is not being advocated. The issue at hand has been to draw attention to the recalibration of regeneration that has taken place, often concealed by *de facto* austerity measures and austerity politics.

Labour's regeneration framework attempted to outline how people, organisations and information could be marshalled more effectively to tackle deprivation and improve social justice by tackling the underlying economic

challenges that are impeding places from prospering. It conceived regeneration as 'a sub-set of economic development', which was used to support a narrative that areas of acute deprivation could be 'lifted up' by targeting resources in areas of opportunity. Yet, numerous observers have noted that a 'rising tide' does not lift all boats by the same height,³⁴ and the results can leave some places 'sunk' in poverty. Despite such 'costs', the approach outlined in the Coalition's regeneration toolkit has intensified the competitive nature by which prospective projects bid for government support. In addition, the 'incentives' on offer are spatially selective, favouring only some social groups and some places. Substantiated by empirical material, this paper has demonstrated how the incentives regime rarely favours deprived communities and has helped to unmask a spatially unjust neoliberal toolkit. The present policy preference is to target public resources in 'value-added' schemes that favour private-oriented objectives in a highly unbalanced way. This criticism can be traced back several decades, but has grown in prominence over more recent times. Indeed, it has been normalised by an austere state strategy, which has created a discursive space, which suggests that there are no alternatives. Most recently, 'regeneration' as a state-led policy objective and political concern has been virtually expunged from the Coalition lexicon.

'Regeneration' now appears to be at the mercy of capitalists seeking to maximise exchange values: a process contingent on market decrees of viability. In the words of one interviewee:

'Regeneration won't happen until economic development progresses and we see an upturn in economic activity, which will increase demand and that will start to fuel development, which will move into some major regeneration projects. Demand

and finance are currently a depressant on the whole sector.'

It is as if regeneration is no longer considered to be a role for the state. There is a perception held by some agents of regeneration that regeneration needs to ride on the wave of economic growth. Hence, austerity politics has been accepted — largely without debate and resistance — as a convenient truth. Such views also affirm the broader point that state-led forms of regeneration remain locked into the structural logics of capitalism. But significantly, regeneration is no longer locked into repairing the destructive tendencies of capitalist uneven development; rather, it is locked into assisting the quest for continued economic growth.

While space does not permit the analysis of counter-regeneration strategies, views from the coalface indicated the complexity of locally derived regeneration practice and pointed towards some instances of progressive alternatives. Therefore, the apparent post-political consensus repositioning regeneration as a means to enable economic growth needs to be tempered with insights derived from practice on the ground — the actually existing forms of regeneration that often challenge and adapt state-led regeneration conceptions in novel and creative ways. Distinct from state-led regeneration initiatives that have been experimented with over several decades by political parties of different hues, actually existing forms of 'community-led' may offer some useful pointers to inform the design of future policy. Questioning the validity of subsuming regeneration to a neoliberal capitalist logic that 'the market knows best', the research indicates that the reverse may prove to be productive: understanding economic development as a sub-set of regeneration. Indeed, economic development is just one of several

components collectively required to regenerate social spaces.

The curtailment of broader regeneration debates has framed discussions limited to the depth of cuts, the speed of implementation and the spatial distribution of such measures. The result is that regeneration, understood as a capitalist policy instrument intended to respond to and assuage the outcomes produced by capitalist frameworks, is no more. The safety net of sorts has largely been subsumed by a single-minded pursuit of economic growth, unless one is fortunate to reside in a community of place that is equipped for the task of community-led regeneration. Insights from agents of regeneration suggest that these communities rarely align with the most deprived communities in most need of state-led regeneration assistance. A challenge for those wishing to pursue holistically framed patterns of regeneration in an era dominated by austerity politics must go well beyond technocratic and resource issues by restoring regeneration to a policy platform that demands a new political debate.

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Is the grass always greener? Making sense of convergence and divergence in regeneration policies in England and Scotland

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This paper is concerned with the trajectories of regeneration policy discourse and practice in a devolved UK context. Over recent years the asymmetrical nature of devolved governance has intensified, exemplified by a policy of political containment in Scotland and a reconfiguration of sub-national institutional architecture in England. Against a backdrop of the transfusion of Holyrood's devolution agenda and Westminster's localism programme, an empirical analysis of contemporary English and Scottish regeneration policy is provided. We investigate the extent to which perceived divergences in government policy resonate with those at the sharp end of regeneration practice, informed by concepts derived from the policy convergence/divergence literature. The key finding is the coexistence of ideological divergence, replete in political discourse and policy documentation, but growing convergence in actual existing practice, evidenced in the nature, extent and scale of initiatives. The enveloping fiscal context and austere politics, producing what is anticipated to be a protracted period of financial retrenchment, appears to be a defining factor in contemporary urban regeneration policy convergence.

KEY WORDS: regeneration, urban policy, devolution, England, Scotland, policy divergence, policy convergence

Introduction

Constitutional reform and devolution were central elements of the 1997 Labour manifesto, *New Labour because Britain deserves better* (Labour Party 1997). Upon entering government the Blair administration prioritised the establishment of the mechanisms for devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland within their constitutional reform agenda. However, as Bentley *et al.* (2010) note, the process of devolution was never intended to be equitable across Britain and as a result, upon leaving office, Labour left an asymmetric patchwork of economic governance, with devolution and varying forms of political control for Scotland, Wales and London. Yet, England had to settle for an incomplete form of decentralisation for the English regions. In 2010, following the investiture of a Conservative–Liberal Democrats 'Coalition' Government, the asymmetrical nature of devolution in Britain deepened (Deas 2013). This has involved pursuing a policy of political containment in Scotland (to maintain the Union) whilst systematically severing extant institu-

tional architectures within England, including the ostracism and emasculation of regionalised policy frameworks and area-based regeneration mechanisms. Simultaneously, major nationally sponsored regeneration programmes, such as Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders and Working Neighbourhoods Fund, were curtailed and many areas-based initiatives terminated. This has been encapsulated by a new politics of 'localism' as a justification for market-based reforms in the pursuit of economic growth (Jacobs and Manzi 2013).

In Scotland, the Scottish National Party, a centre left government, in political rhetoric at least, appeared to be attempting to maintain a socially inclusive holistic focus on alleviating socio-economic disparities through regeneration interventions. Area-based regeneration projects, for example, are often considered to be holistic when they seek to alleviate interlinked social, economic, and environmental issues in an integrated manner, although face criticism when divorced from strategic contexts and other constellations of policies (Pugalis 2013; Matthews 2012). Matthews (2013) notes how as part of

the national performance management regime in Scotland (i.e. Single Outcome Agreement), the Government has developed a suite of 16 national outcome targets, one of which is a solidarity or social equity target. The Solidarity Target, which has no equivalent in England, is one of Scotland's 'golden rules', and seeks to increase the total income of all households in Scotland and reduce income inequality by increasing the proportion of that income received by the lowest three deciles¹. Thus, despite changes in governmental administrations, Scotland appears to have experienced more gradual and incremental adjustment of national regeneration policy, albeit with some noteworthy shifts in local practices, which are discussed below.

In contrast, England has faced more abrupt changes, which have often been politically induced. Initially, New Labour adopted a broadly similar policy agenda that confronted the 'wicked' problems of social exclusion (via the Social Exclusion Unit) and deprivation (using Index of Multiple Deprivation to target area based interventions). However, this espoused 'holistic' approach to regeneration in England has gradually dissipated, as the economic climate has deteriorated and dedicated funding has dried up; the contraction being heralded by the 2007 (HM Treasury, Department of Business, Innovation and Skills and Communities and Local Government 2007) Sub-national review of economic development and regeneration, extended by CLG's (2009) regeneration framework and 'crowned' by the Coalition's single minded pursuit of job creation through economic development and the concomitant but misguided faith in trickle-down.

The hypothesis, which initially sparked interest in the research project, emerged from the perception that from an English situated vantage, in terms of the contemporary regeneration policy landscape, quite simply, the grass appeared greener on the 'other side' of the border, in Scotland. An observation from a Local Enterprise Partnership Chair from the North of England, epitomises this: '... we in the North of England look at Scotland with some envy. Scotland has a clear identity, brand and "real" devolution. It knows where the power is and it gets it.'

From south of the border, Scotland appears to have the tripartite competitive advantage over peripheral areas of England: first, a more holistic and comprehensive policy approach to regeneration; second, greater political representation on the national and international stage than English core cities, due to a vocal and proactive First Minister, Alex Salmond; third, more effective tools for achieving regeneration (in terms of funding and initiatives). This paper, therefore, seeks to examine this initial hypothesis from the perspective of those operating at the sharp end of regeneration practice. We seek to test the credentials of an apparent inclusive style of Scottish urban regeneration policy *vis à vis* English

regeneration practice paying particular analytical attention to the extent of policy convergence and divergence in terms of ideology, emphasis and strategy.

The following section explores policy divergence and convergence discourses, in order to establish a conceptual outline to inform a comparative analysis of evolving practice in England and Scotland. In the third section we consider the methodological implications of the research approach before presenting a comparative analysis and discussion of evolving regeneration practice in the fourth section, before drawing some tentative conclusions in the final section.

Policy convergence and divergence

The research takes its theoretical departure from the policy convergence and divergence strand of the multiple 'travel of ideas' (Mukhtarov 2014), others of which comprise policy mobilities, policy transfer and policy mutations. Temenos and McCann (2013) observe that the broad policy mobilities discourse is, '... characterised by a concern for the actors, practices and representations that affect the (re) production, adaptation and travel of policies, and the best practice models across space and time'. Peck (2011, 793) concurs stating that, 'policies are not, after all, merely being transferred over space; their form and their effects are transformed by these journeys'. It is in this sense that policies at particular scales are transformed as they traverse different scales of governance, policy spaces and policy initiatives, creating the potential for divergence and convergence between nation states within the UK.

McCann (2011, 114) helps to frame our research by stating that the key dynamic of the mobility processes are the interactions between 'social actors and their associated institutions'. Thus, regeneration strategies and statements promoted by national politicians and civil servants are not necessarily directly transported into the regeneration milieus of practitioners. The 'transfer' and 'transportation' of policy is messier in practice, thus prescient to the study of regeneration which is itself a contested process involving numerous deals and interests that contribute to particularised regeneration policy assemblages. Although our work draws on the breadth of the 'travel of ideas' literature we are not specifically looking at the transferability (mobility) of an individual policy. We aim to investigate a more comprehensive and complex subsection of public policy and the external policy drivers which generate convergence and divergence between nation states within the specific public policy field of regeneration. Therefore, to refine our theoretical framework we have drawn primarily on the work of Nutley *et al.* (2012, 200) who detail four main reasons why policies may converge:

- *Concurrent pressure*: when policies converge because nations or states facing similar economic, social and technological challenges arrive independently at similar solutions.
- *Direct coercion*: when a policy is imposed on one country or state by a higher authority.
- *Indirect coercion*: when functional interdependence creates spill overs that lead to policy convergence.
- *Policy learning*: when nations or states adopt lessons from elsewhere.

In terms of drivers for policy divergence, Nutley *et al.* (2012) suggest the following factors are most significant:

- Institutional, demographic and cultural differences that influence the perceptions of problems and potential approaches to counter the problems.
- Political pressures, when nationalist governments need 'to be seen' to pursue different approaches to the Westminster model (distinctiveness).
- Growth in confidence from the devolved administrations post devolution means they are more prepared to follow divergent policy approaches.

Our research explores direct and indirect variables which impact upon the shifting spectrum of policy convergence and divergence in the policy field of Scottish and English regeneration policy. The empirical data for this analysis come from a series of semi-structured interviews with experienced and knowledgeable regeneration practitioners from both sides of the border. The next section elaborates further on the key methodological issues that subsequently informed our adopted approach.

Methodological considerations and research approach

Comparative analysis across two distinct nations, albeit part of the same union, is a challenging task, which is compounded by the degree of institutional upheaval and policy churn apparent since the 2010 UK general election. In addition, there is a significant level of confusion among frontline practitioners about the current definition and scope of regeneration, in terms of the fuzzy boundaries between 'regeneration' and concomitant activities, including 'economic development' and 'economic growth'. Deas (2013) suggests this lack of clarity is understandable due to an explicit policy pursued by the UK Coalition Government of attempting to develop an entrepreneurial climate of 'creative chaos', which Pugalís and Bentley (2013) observe exudes the notion of 'competitive tension'. However, as Waite *et al.* (2013) outline, there is a need for greater and more reflexive learning of the policy experiences either side of the border and just because something is challenging it

should not be overlooked as a research topic. At the very least it is possible to analyse and compare the broad directions of travel of regeneration policy in England and Scotland; is there evidence of convergence or divergence?

The research process began with a comprehensive literature review of key UK and Scottish Government² policy and strategy documents to identify the fundamental issues and frame questions for interview schedules. Yet, in recognition of disjunctures between policy and practice, empirical material was generated via a series of elite semi-structured interviews (for further details about elite interviewing, see Harvey 2011; Aberbach and Rockman 2002), conducted between summer 2012 and spring 2013, with senior regeneration practitioners in England and Scotland.

The rationale for selecting elite semi-structured interviews for this research process was influenced by observations made by Temenos and McCann (2013) that state by exploring the pathways and networks through which policies travel and mutate, researchers can help to uncover some of the tacit knowledge and practices that lie at the heart of policy transfer processes. Such an approach was favoured as it recognises that the translation of regeneration policies in practice is never pre-given, but rather, is to be negotiated as ideas, presuppositions and ideologies travel and evolve.

Nevertheless, elite interviews are not without methodological controversy, Harvey (2011, 432), states that there is an 'under theorization of the term elite', within methodological discourses. In this research, our definition of elite refers to the status of the interviewee within the regeneration profession. The specific characteristics of the individuals that were assessed when selecting interviewees include the level of professional qualifications held by the individual, the duration of their career within regeneration, their professional networks and connectivity (e.g. membership of professional bodies), their proximity and level of engagement with fellow policymakers/practitioners and their level of cross-border experience (e.g. their knowledge of regeneration from a UK-wide perspective). Such a definition is purposely narrow as it was intended to focus the empirical stage of research on targeted interviews with regeneration managers and professionals who are the traditional purveyors of national policy.

The 15 practitioners who participated in the interviews (eight from Scotland; seven from England) have significant regeneration experience in both the public and private sectors (interviewees included representatives from local authorities, former regional institutions, property developers, regeneration consultants, government advisers and professional bodies). They were offered anonymity to encourage expansive, open and honest reflection on emerging urban regeneration policy and practice; participants

are referred to by generic job title only. Interviewees were asked a range of questions structured around the core themes distilled from the literature review: knowledge of the drivers of policy convergence/divergence within urban regeneration policy in Scottish and English contexts; the influence of political and economic factors on the trajectory of urban policy within the two nations; the influence of concurrent pressure, direct and indirect coercion, and policy learning. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed before the data were collated and analysed using a thematic coding framework derived from the above themes.

How to define 'regeneration' and distinguish it from 'economic development' in particular was an issue that arose repeatedly during the research project. There was concern amongst some respondents that regeneration was an 'elastic' or 'fuzzy' concept which could lead to misunderstanding and, '... sometimes it feels as if, especially the private sector, try to badge everything as regeneration, when often it is simply private sector development' (interview with Scottish Regeneration Practitioner). In this research we chose not to 'spill more ink' trying to define regeneration and instead focused on how practitioners interpreted national regeneration policy at localised levels. This helped to explore how practitioners interpreted policies and engaged in policy assemblage.

In the following section we consider some of the political, economic and cultural factors which have shaped the Scottish political context and how these factors have impacted upon contemporary Scottish regeneration policy.

Contextual differences: comparing England and Scotland

Even prior to the devolutionary settlement north of the Border, and the introduction of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, Scotland has for over three decades pursued a divergent urban policy to England, due in part to the prior delegation of administrative functions to the Scottish Office (McCarthy 1999). Therefore, although policy divergence/convergence appears to be inter-related with the devolution process, it is not contingent on devolution: distinct policy assemblages were apparent prior to 1999.

Keating (2005, 454) states that pre 1999 there were divergent views within the academic community about whether Scotland enjoyed a relatively strong level of autonomy in terms of policymaking or whether the 'Scottish Office was there to put a Scottish face on British policy' – a form of direct coercion. To a large degree the scale of policy divergence under devolution was constrained by contextual and political factors (Keating 2005; Haydecker 2010); a key political factor being the restrictive funding formula that remains in place after the devolutionary

settlement and a situation where Scotland does not currently have fiscal autonomy.

The use of Scotland as a 'testbed' for policies over the last 30 years, before they are rolled out across the rest of the UK, partly explains why there has been a sense of powerlessness Scotland felt under Thatcherism, resulting in a theme of shared responsibility and social solidarity running through contemporary Scottish public policy discourse. Indeed, Tomaney and Colomb (2013, 377) attest that, 'Scottish political culture is more consensual, corporatist and egalitarian', than its English counterpart and this factor was a central feature of the devolution debate. Bradbury (2008) argues that during the latter half of the twenty-first century the Scottish and Welsh nations increasingly distinguished themselves by support for social collectivism, in direct opposition to more individualistic approaches which dominated policy-making in England, influenced by neoliberal ideologies.

McCarthy (2010) suggests that the creation of the Scottish Parliament catalysed a divergence in broad policy approach either side of the border, with Scottish policy forcefully promoting a narrative of social justice, which subsequently shifted the emphasis in urban regeneration policy to 'people rather than place', as an attempt to move away from the socio-pathological neoliberal and market-driven assumptions of much Whitehall public policy under successive British governments (Keating 2005). As a direct result of the ongoing process of devolution, there have been claims of a 'new politics' in Scotland (McCarthy 1999), with advocates championing a greater role for participation, social movements and consensual politics. There is a view that policymaking within this context is more deliberative, with diminished tendency to claim to know all the answers and more willingness to explore issues (Keating 2005, 457). In support of this thesis, Nutley *et al.* (2012, 199) report that in England:

performance regimes for local authorities under the Labour government were imposed 'top down' by the Government and the Audit Commission. Whilst conversely in (Wales and) Scotland although similar performance regimes were enacted they were developed through consensual processes in which local government representatives played a prominent role.

However, there is robust critique within the academic community in Scotland, challenging the holistic rhetoric of Scottish regeneration policy. Williams and Mooney (2008, 494), for example, observe that many Scottish Government policies are 'rhetorical' nation-building proclamations from a nationalist government keen to be viewed as distinct from what is perceived to be a distant London-centric Westminster administration. Akin to some notable critiques of English regeneration practice (see, for

example, Lees 2013; Paton *et al.* 2012) suggest that much urban regeneration in Scotland can be classified as state-led gentrification pursued from within a socio-pathological and neoliberal paradigm. The gentrification thesis charges the state with pursuing class-based physical and social cleansing, often via large flagship physical regeneration projects, which attempts to transfuse struggling places with a middle class population and cultural sensibilities, to effectively dilute 'problem' people and reclaim 'problem' places. This suggests some degree of policy convergence between Scotland and England where many flagship inner city regeneration projects have been implemented and subsequently critiqued for unleashing waves of gentrification (e.g. Salford Quays or the Clyde Gateway).

In the next section, the paper focuses on contemporary regeneration strategies in England and Scotland to explore whether differences in political culture and rhetoric filter through into frontline policy.

Comparative analysis of regeneration 'strategies' in England and Scotland

As outlined in the previous section historically, political and cultural distinctions have influenced the trajectories of regeneration policy in the two nations. For example, in the late 1980s to early 1990s the English approach reflected an emerging competitive neoliberal ethos with funding requests assessed in terms of the quality of the bid which favoured competition, whereas 'need' was the central criterion in the Scottish Urban Programme. A macro-level policy analysis of Scottish regeneration policy, since the SNP came to power in 2007, reveals a fairly consistent direction of overall travel. Nevertheless, research by Matthews (2013, 10) offers a more nuanced review observing that in 2007 the incoming Scottish Government weakened the focus in Scotland on deprived neighbourhoods (ABIs) and provided Community Planning Partnerships with more latitude to adopt a strategic approach directing funding across wider areas, which directed local authority spending 'to maximise impact and deliver outcomes', mirroring the Labour governments' holistic Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) approach in England and a focus on outcomes. However, since 2010 the role of LSPs in England has diminished in line with the regeneration funding that they administered. The Coalition Government systematically demolished the strategic approach to regeneration in England, including the revocation of Regional Strategies, the abolition of Regional Development Agencies and the termination of nationally funded area-based initiatives.

In February 2011, the Scottish Government published the discussion paper, *Building a sustainable future* (Scottish Government 2011a), which shaped the development of Scotland's outcome-driven regeneration strategy, issued in November 2011

under the title *Achieving a sustainable future* (Scottish Government 2011b), which was generally well received by practitioners in Scotland. During the same year, the UK Government issued the report, *Regeneration to enable growth: what government is doing in support of community-led regeneration* (CLG 2011), which received stinging criticism, and was subsequently updated (CLG 2012a). There is not space to provide a comprehensive analysis of each 'strategic' policy document, but Table 1 offers a simplified overview of the key content and defining principles.

When examining the regeneration strategies for Scotland and England it becomes clear that, at least in terms of rhetoric, there are distinct disparities between the two nations in terms of the fundamental nature of regeneration. The Scottish Government (2011b, 2) regeneration strategy is explicit about the intended purpose of regeneration policies, stating that: 'Regeneration is the holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces won't suffice.' Yet crucially, and in striking contrast, the first version of the Coalition Government's regeneration strategy for England, *Regeneration to enable growth* (CLG 2011) failed to define 'regeneration', and the mere issuing of a regeneration strategy was surprising given the apparent silencing of the regeneration metaphor in broader Coalition political-policy discourse. In part, this may help to explain why practitioners in England often referred to 'regeneration' and 'economic development' in an interchangeable manner. In contrast, the Scottish Government's (2011b, 4) attempt to clarify the role of 'regeneration' is unequivocal in its vision that:

The relationship between economic development and regeneration is co-dependent – equitable economic growth cannot be delivered with improving our under-performing areas, and successful regeneration cannot be delivered without investing in development, growing local economies and delivering sustainable employment.

Analysis of interview transcripts reveals that English practitioners tended to be less certain about the broader objectives of regeneration, with many interviewees referring to delivering 'development' and pursuing 'growth', which may reflect the contemporary nature of regeneration in policy discourse that scripts it as being subservient to economic development. This may indicate that, especially in an English context, the nature of regeneration is reflective of state-led forms of gentrification in practice; in other words, a mode of indirect coercion.

The UK Government's regeneration strategy merely identifies a set of (largely economic development) 'tools' to be selected from a spatially variable 'menu'. This was challenged by the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select

Table 1 A comparison of English and Scottish regeneration strategies

Characteristic	<i>Regeneration to enable growth</i> (CLG 2011)	<i>Achieving a sustainable future</i> (Scottish Government 2011b)
Political control strategy	Coalition Government Presented as a compendium of existing inherited and newly introduced ad hoc funding programmes	Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) majority Strategy appears to be part of a considered and planned process
Range and scope of strategy	Modest and constrained	Broad and embracing in scope
Definition of regeneration	None	The 'holistic process of reversing the economic, physical and social decline of places where market forces alone won't suffice' (p. 2)
Distinction between social, physical and economic	None	Explicit identification of the three strands or pillars of holistic regeneration
Definition of community-led regeneration	None	'Community led regeneration is about local people identifying for themselves the issues and opportunities in their areas, deciding what to do about them, and being responsible for delivering the economic, social and environmental action that will make a difference. It is dependent on the energy and commitment of local people themselves and has a wide range of benefits' (p. 20)
Ambition and articulation of vision	Absence of any clear vision	Explicit five-point vision set out (p. 9) with focus for interventions (pp. 11–14) and extensive actions for delivery (pp. 15–37); fairly ambitious
Demonstration of having learned lessons from the past	'Year zero' approach; no reference to evaluations of previous initiatives	Focuses on outcomes and takes account of lessons learned – list of seven lessons learned (p. 10). Based on evidence review and identification of critical success factors
Split between funding for physical and social regeneration	None apparent	Regeneration Investment Fund split between a Capital Investment Fund and People and Communities Fund
Identification of roles and responsibilities of key actors and agencies in delivery	Unspecified in document; lack of clarity about role of LEPs and linkages with emerging City Deals	Annex B details clear roles and responsibilities
Mechanisms for evaluation and review	Extremely light touch audit regime – no formal provision for evaluation or review	Minister in charge of regeneration policy (Alex Neil) commits to review process in page iii of strategy

Source: adapted from Pugalis *et al.* (2012).

Committee (2011a 2011b), which countered that the Coalition's espoused community-led approach lacked substance, and discarded decades of accumulated evidence and institutional memory, which led them to conclude that the strategy would ultimately prove to be ineffective. The UK Government responded by revising the original strategy, published as: *Regeneration to enable growth: a toolkit supporting*

community-led regeneration (CLG 2012a). Whilst still retaining a strong desire not to prescribe approaches, the revised version did at least offer a definition of regeneration:

At its core regeneration is about concerted action to address the challenges and problems faced by the communities of a particular place. It's about widening

opportunities, growing the local economy, and improving people's lives. But beyond that high level definition, it is not for Government to define what regeneration is, what it should look like, or what should be used to drive it. That will depend on the place – the local characteristics, challenges and opportunities.

(CLG 2012a, 2)

Regeneration to enable growth Mark II (CLG 2012a) still fails to develop a strategy of intent or action, despite claims that the role of central government 'will be strategic and supportive' in terms of decentralising and reforming public services, incentivising growth and removing barriers, and targeting investment in areas of opportunity and need.

Fundamentally, one of the most significant differences between the two approaches is that the Scottish strategy recognises how regeneration fits strategically with other government policies (i.e. the functional interdependence or indirect coercion of multiple policy agendas). Regeneration is viewed as making a clear contribution to social cohesion and solidarity, by reducing disparities between Scottish regions, reducing income inequalities, addressing market failure, and attracting investment to create new jobs. In this sense, divergence in the nature of regeneration could be attributed to cultural differences. Scotland's overarching vision is for regeneration to contribute to the drivers of growth by attempting to ensure that the potential of disadvantaged communities is realised, so that they become positive contributors to economic growth, rather than problematised as a societal ulcer, which may reflect a growth in confidence, accumulation of knowledge and *policy learning* from previous modes of regeneration. This is in marked contrast to the Coalition Government's complete lack of strategy and seeming ambivalence verging on wilful neglect of deprived communities, instead favouring 'creative chaos' (Deas 2013), which discounts decades of accumulated regeneration policy experiences and evaluations. Conversely, the Coalition Government's reluctance to impose a top-down definition of regeneration may provide opportunity for local innovation and experimentation.

The Scottish Government (2011b, 9) has developed a regeneration strategy which outlines a vision where the 'most disadvantaged communities are supported and where all places are sustainable and promote well-being'. This vision would necessitate regeneration initiatives being approached in a holistic manner. Such an approach stands in stark contrast to the Coalition's approach, which appears to be largely based on debt reduction, attempting to refuel the economy of the South of England and piecemeal 'do it yourself' regeneration, via more organic, bottom-up, community-driven, self-help initiatives and philanthropy (Pugalis et al. 2014).

The holistic approach in Scotland appears to accept wider structural influences which impact upon the recurrent problem of pronounced social inequalities and rejects the culture of poverty thesis. One of the three explicit strands of the Scottish Government's *Achieving a sustainable future* (2011b) offers support for community-led regeneration. Its stated vision is to support the most disadvantaged communities, the first key element of which is to put communities first: 'In simple terms we should ask "what makes this place good and where do the opportunities lie" and "what expertise and skills do local people have" instead of labelling particular areas and people as "a problem"' (Scottish Government 2011b, 12).

Achieving a sustainable future (Scottish Government 2011b) hints at structural roots to social exclusion that emanate beyond neighbourhood scales. This represents a shift away from the dominant socio-pathological neoliberal discourse that has inflicted much English regeneration policy, which has often implied or assumed that individual failure is the main root cause of deprivation and only the 'deserving poor' should be the target of support. According to Matthews (2012), ABIs in the UK were largely created as a response to deindustrialisation driven by a socio-pathological agency-based interpretation of deprivation which focuses on the symptoms of deprivation rather than the causes. Despite the last notable ABI in Scotland (the Social Inclusion Partnership) having ended circa 2006, Scotland has maintained a strategic approach to community regeneration, but with a more grassroots-driven, place-based emphasis. Matthews (2012) contrasts strategic city-wide regeneration initiatives, such as Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland, to the more tightly focused ABIs, such as the New Deal for Communities, which operated in England between 2000 and 2010. He contends that in Scotland the strategic approach replaced ABIs because, 'it was seen as more sustainable and effective' (2012, 147) before Scottish policy once again began to gravitate towards a place-based approach (Matthews 2013).

Over recent years, the Scottish Government has maintained some level of regeneration funding via the People and Communities Fund, a £7.9 million per annum fund (2012–15) to support community regeneration. This appears to be a modest sum to attempt to deal with the 'wicked' and intractable issues relating to social exclusion. Nevertheless, symbolically it helps to provide a source of hope. Political pressures are perhaps the most crucial driver for policy divergence with England in this respect, accounting for a situation where there is no comparable ring-fenced funding for community regeneration to serve England, which has 10 times the population of Scotland and equally persistent pockets of extreme social deprivation within communities. The Work Foundation (2012) confirms that, for the

first time in 40 years, England has no area-based initiatives.

Whilst Scotland's strategy has considerable integrity and reach, it is not without its flaws, one respondent commenting:

There is a slight irony, on the one hand Scottish government in 2008 saying to local government, right you guys are the local economic development agencies, so you must deliver local economic development. Scottish Enterprise you will step back from local economic development. With that change there has been an increase in remit and responsibilities for [local authorities], to economic development without a commensurate increase in cash to do that.

Scottish regeneration professional

The Outcomes approach has also been criticised in Scotland as part of the process involved a Concordat being signed between Scottish local authorities and the Scottish government which effectively meant Scottish local authorities lost their ability to raise their council tax; a key fiscal tool. There has been much discussion about the exact terms of the Concordat as some Scottish local authorities have perceived a trend of extra responsibilities being cascaded to local authorities without the power to increase local taxation to resource these additional responsibilities and a potentially precarious blurring of responsibilities between the central-local state (see Midwinter 2009 for further discussion). This situation is mirrored in England, pronounced by cuts to local government budgets. When additional responsibilities are bestowed on places without the commensurate legislative and financial support, this has been referred to as 'regulatory' (Peck and Tickell 2002), 'responsibility' (Peck 2012) and 'policy' (Waite *et al.* 2013) dumping. Practitioners either side of the border lamented a situation where the demand for regeneration services has increased in parallel with the withering of resources. One respondent from the interviews encapsulates the dilemma for local authorities from an English perspective:

[We are] genuinely hearing the message that the Government do recognise the individual characteristics of places and there is an increased autonomy within place, but sometimes increased autonomy has come with reduced resources, . . . it has felt like it has come down to us to make decisions where we cut investment rather than where we can make investment.

English regeneration practitioner

In England, alongside a cumulative process of responsibility dumping and fiscal tightening, *policy learning* has regressed. By adopting a 'year zero' position, *Regeneration to enable growth* failed to critically examine past experiences (Pugalis *et al.* 2012) – a point reinforced by Heseltine's (2012)

review of local growth measures. Against a backdrop of the demise of holistic regeneration or nationally coordinated funding for neighbourhood-based, socially focused regeneration, the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee urged the Government to 'urgently review the lessons learned from past regeneration programmes' and establish how their approach will be evaluated (House of Commons 2011a). Overall, the Coalition's approach lacks clarity and rigorous analysis of the nature of regeneration and the task in hand, leaving the Committee to conclude that it has 'little confidence' that regeneration needs will be addressed. In the view of one witness, the approach '*is really just a hotchpotch of spending commitments and little more than that*' (Keith Burge, Institute of Economic Development in CLG 2012b, Ev19). Such views suggest that 'creative chaos' operates across multiple scales of English regeneration policy and practice.

Promoting localism and community-led initiative in parallel with 'responsibility dumping' practices is a tactic that Shaw and Robinson (2009, 137) argue '... deflects attention away from structures and institutions, and how they create and reinforce economic inequalities and unequal power relationships'. It is in this sense that localism has been variously utilised in political and policy discourse to mask some deep-rooted (and exacerbating) socio-economic disparities. Lodge and Muir (2010, 99) observe that, 'if funding reform is the truest test of localist credentials, then the Blair and Brown governments can be seen as unequivocal centralisers'. More recently, Deas (2013) suggested that authentic localism can only exist in an environment where the spirit of localist devolution, leadership, organisational structures and resources would vary between places, reflecting the differential ability of local areas in terms of institutional capacity, social capital and fiscal integrity.

Under the Coalition Government there is variability between places and the climate for 'creative chaos', but without commensurate or guaranteed levels of funding from central government, local actors will have to be extremely imaginative and entrepreneurial to develop sustainable endogenous solutions. A recent report by Localis, a local government think tank, identifies the problem for English local authorities being that, 'with capital funding no longer available as a panacea for all regeneration ills, the question is now who is able to drive regeneration at a local level?' (Howell 2012, 5). Robson (2014, 3) offers an optimistic view by observing that, 'money may not be the most effective lever for change' and in its absence cities and local authorities will need to innovate. Nevertheless, it may only be the select few that have the confidence and dynamism to go beyond a risk averse default mind-set of shrinkage to core services, which in some places is leading to the decimation of non-statutory services of which regeneration is but one.

Growing spatial inequality is a central issue within the emerging version of English localism. Deas (2013, 73) describes how new assemblages of policy, social and economic actors are 'being actively encouraged to form and compete, with the fittest flourishing and the weakest withering'. From this ideological viewpoint, inequality is unavoidable and a price worth paying – the cost of searching out new opportunities. This approach exhibits overtones of Social Darwinism via an ideological vision where communities have to survive and prosper via their own merits without state support; effectively either 'sinking or swimming' (McGuinness *et al.* 2012). Equally, the Coalition's localism agenda has been critiqued as little more than a smokescreen to progressively reduce the role of the state, which masks some important acts of recentralisation (Pugalís and Bentley 2013).

In Scotland, tensions are evident between social democratic aspirations (rhetoric) and neoliberal realities (McCarthy 2010). Equally, Matthews (2013) suggests a re-emphasis on a place-based focus on deprivation in Scotland may be misguided and directing resources at symptoms rather than causes, which alludes to regeneration being 'locked into' hegemonic political economic structures (Pugalís and McGuinness 2013). However, there does appear to be significant political will to try to ensure no communities are left behind, and Scottish local authorities currently appear to have greater autonomy and more tools at their disposal than their English counterparts, as one respondent noted:

Scotland has a devolved government, politically there is an affinity to Scotland, they are making their own decisions around skills, education, health, etc. Local Government in Scotland has been charged with delivering economic development in terms of economic development powers, we still have the equivalent of a regional development agency, they have been ripped apart in England.

Scottish regeneration practitioner

Even so, not all Scottish practitioners felt that the Scottish Parliament's laudable aim of holistic community-driven regeneration was achievable, as articulated by one respondent:

I am not saying the policy is wrong up here but how the hell do you implement it? Maybe in England the policy is not as good but at least they are implementing it.

Scottish regeneration professional

This suggests some degree of practitioner convergence of opinion in terms of regeneration visions being limited to 'motherhood and apple pie' aspirations. Another Scottish practitioner even implied that they were slightly jealous of the conditions that

had been created in England via the Coalition's creative chaos approach, observing that there is:

... a greater pragmatism in England, a sense of can do because you have to; in Scotland a sense of too frightened to do, risk averse, not just political but also at middle officer level, like a permafrost, afraid to make the wrong decision.

Scottish regeneration professional

These selective interview quotes hint at a potentially more significant point, which is that practitioners (and others such as researchers) are often under the illusion that the 'grass is always greener' in other places and countries. This has potentially important implications in at least two respects. First, it might help to explain the propensity for 'fast' forms of policy transfer and policy travels (Peck 2011). Second, it has important methodological implications especially when conducting international comparative analysis, in terms of the perspective that practitioners adopt. Whilst this paper does not attempt to explore the psychology of envy, it is important to acknowledge the potential influence of constrained or partial information, tacit biases and heuristics, and inherited prejudices based on anecdotal or unreliable evidence and political rhetoric. Elite interviews conducted with senior regeneration practitioners either side of the border portrayed envious glances. Across quite diverse situated vantages, regeneration practitioners often held strong, albeit partial, impressions that things were being delivered 'much better' or more effectively in other political, economic and cultural contexts. Such an inversion of the 'rose-tinted spectacles syndrome' arises, in part, from conditions of bounded knowledge and information, allowing bias and political rhetoric to gain credence.

Conclusions: 'is the grass always greener?'

The central focus of this paper has been to better understand the evolving trajectories of regeneration policy discourse and practice in a devolved UK context. Over recent years the asymmetrical nature of devolved governance has intensified, exemplified by a policy of political containment in Scotland and a reconfiguration of sub-national institutional architecture in England.

The hypothesis, which initially sparked interest in the research project, emerged from the perception that from an English situated vantage, in terms of the contemporary regeneration policy landscape; quite simply: 'the grass appeared greener north of the border', in Scotland. We have investigated the extent to which perceived divergences in government policy resonate with those at the sharp end of regeneration practice, which is informed by concepts derived from the policy convergence/divergence literature. The key finding is the coexistence of ideological divergence,

replete in political discourse and policy documentation, but growing convergence in actually existing practice, evidenced in the nature, extent and scale of initiatives.

A desk-based review of the evolution and trajectory of English and Scottish regeneration policy indicates significant policy divergence between the two nation states. Such divergence between England and Scotland is nothing new, with Scotland having suffered from decades of direct coercion from Whitehall. The political pressure in Scotland for a nationalist administration to differentiate themselves from a London-centric UK Government, and a cultural and historic record of more corporatist policies, may exacerbate policy divergence in terms of policy rhetoric between the 'auld enemies'. However, ultimately the enveloping fiscal context and austere politics, producing what is anticipated to be a protracted period of financial retrenchment, appears to be a defining factor in contemporary urban regeneration policy convergence. Indeed, global economic forces could inexorably be reducing the scope that nation states have to direct, develop and pursue their own bespoke regeneration policies.

Elite interviews with senior regeneration practitioners have provided insights that are not always apparent in regeneration policy discourse, such as the rhetorical statements replete in national regeneration strategies. In summary, our empirical analysis has revealed divergence of the following:

1. Political rhetoric and strategy: the UK Government did not consider it necessary to define what regeneration is, or what it should look like; the pursuit of economic development by 'backing winners' holds sway; the Scottish Parliament take a different view, providing a rationale for regeneration that recognises the importance of supporting those in social need.
2. Learning lessons: England has adopted a 'year zero' approach, apparently uninterested in what did or did not work previously; Scotland has demonstrated a desire to learn lessons from the past (policy learning).
3. Scotland is increasingly seeking to differentiate itself from England, reflected in its holistic regeneration strategy and retention of some area-based initiatives, as a consequence of devolution reducing both direct and indirect coercion from Westminster.

Despite such obvious ideological and policy divergence, in terms of regeneration practice, there appears to be growing convergence between the two countries, with both pursuing broadly localist agendas, characterised by greater autonomy and increased responsibilities for local authorities for the framing and delivery of regeneration strategies at the same time as funding is being cut. Our empirical

analysis has specifically revealed the following areas of convergence:

1. Unintended policy convergence of funding and delivery arrangements in England and Scotland driven by the concurrent pressure of a global neoliberal austerity agenda (direct/indirect coercion and policy learning having little influence).
2. Regeneration, being a non-statutory function, faces significant fiscal pressures; investment is increasingly targeted at economic growth (backing winners) over ameliorating poverty and deprivation; responsibility dumping poses significant challenges for regeneration practices (and third sector actors such as community groups) in both England and Scotland.

Remarkably, in terms of activity on the ground, the creative chaos unleashed in England may offer greater opportunities for innovation (necessity being the mother of invention), than the more conservative and incremental approach of Scottish local government. Somewhat perversely, it appears that the perception amongst regeneration practitioners is that the grass is greener from whichever side of the fence one is. Will increased autonomy, political power and resources manifest themselves in greater policy divergence between Scotland and England or will the influence of overwhelming global economic and political forces moderate the Scottish Government's scope for doing so?

In terms of future research, there is significant value in examining and contemplating whether global economic imperatives are so omnipotent that governments around the world are embracing austerity measures and rapid forms of financial retrenchment, which may be producing unintended policy convergence across the diverse field of regeneration. Nevertheless, as this paper has revealed, alongside some currents of policy convergence are other currents of policy divergence. This finding alone supports a call for continued research investigating the practice of regeneration.

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Notes

- 1 The Coalition Government abolished the performance management approach of Local Area Agreements and Multi Area Agreements and has failed to replace it, despite suggesting a, yet to be defined, 'light touch' approach to audit and performance management.

- 2 The use of the term 'Government' in this paper refers to the UK Government in Westminster and includes all statutory and policymaking powers for England held by government departments such as DCLG and BIS, as distinct from the Scottish Government which is referred to as such.

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David McGuinness and John Mawson

The rescaling of sub-national planning: can localism resolve England's spatial planning conundrum?

This paper analyses the recent reorganisation of sub-national planning in England. The abrupt termination in 2010 of regional spatial strategies (RSSs) left England as the only major country in north-western Europe without effective sub-national governance structures (outside London) for spatial planning. Drawing on in-depth interviews with public-sector planners and other research material, this paper analyses the impacts of the demise of regional planning for 'larger-than-local' policy coordination in England. The paper seeks to question whether localism can succeed where regionalism is perceived to have failed in dealing effectively with the strategic spatial dilemmas integral to planning. It concludes by assessing whether the evolving decentralised forms of sub-national governance (combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)) emerging through the government's 'devolution revolution' can develop to fill the current strategic planning void and resurrect some form of spatial planning throughout England.

Keywords: localism, regional planning, rescaling, combined authorities, England

This article explores the ongoing ramifications of the decision in 2010 to revoke regional spatial strategies (RSSs) in England. This decision expunged the drive towards long-term coordinated strategic spatial planning from the sub-national governance process. Building on prior research by Pemberton and Morphet (2013), Baker and Wong (2013), Boddy and Hickman (2013) and Roodbol-Mekkes and Van den Brink (2015), the paper investigates the unfolding impacts of the reforms of land-use planning in England and considers whether some form of spatial planning will return to the English system. In this context Roodbol-Mekkes and Van den Brink (2015, 185) argue, 'In spatial planning the concept of rescaling has been used in a more narrow sense [than in wider economic geography literature] to analyse the redistribution of powers and responsibilities between the various tiers of government or the rise and fall of various tiers in spatial planning.'

The paper critiques the de facto strategic spatial planning vacuum that was created by the coalition government in removing the regional tier of planning and moving to a more localist approach to planning which aims to bring power closer to local people. Drawing on in-depth interviews it explores practitioner's responses to the decommissioning of spatial planning and the effectiveness of policies that have subsequently been introduced to facilitate 'large-than-local' cooperation (i.e. the duty to cooperate).

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It proceeds to consider the potential of evolving decentralised governance spaces to fill the strategic spatial planning void and facilitate the return of forms of spatial planning to the currently dislocated English planning system. Gallant et al. (2013, 569) question whether the new localist system of planning in England allows government to deal effectively with the strategic dilemmas integral to governing. Evidence provided in this paper and in other studies (Boddy and Hickman, 2013; Pugalís and Townsend, 2013 and Roodbol-Mekkes and Van den Brink, 2015) suggests that strategic dilemmas (e.g. the distribution of strategic housing allocations between neighbouring authorities, major infrastructure projects and responses to climate change) are unlikely to be effectively addressed via the existing duty to cooperate. This duty was introduced via the Localism Act (2011). It is a statutory requirement for neighbouring local authorities to collaborate and is assessed upon submission of a local plan for examination by the Planning Inspectorate. In England, new sub-national governance approaches (particularly combined authorities) are emerging which may gradually 'fill in' elements of the strategic spatial planning void in parts of the country. However, the present asymmetrical development of combined authorities is generating concerns of fragmentation in spatial planning coverage, creating 'a patchwork quilt' of governance approaches, which may accentuate existing economic inequalities between localities in England (Colomb and Tomaney, 2015).

In order to address the above issues, the background research involved two steps: a desk-based analysis of literature relating to the abolition of regional planning and a review and analysis of the subsequent spatial policy void, followed by a survey involving semi-structured interviews with planners in all eight core cities and a sample of planners from twelve (of the twenty-six) key cities in England. The twenty semi-structured interviews took place between March and September 2014. To maintain anonymity for respondents they were identified by a generic job title and location (e.g. Planner, North East). The paper begins by providing some context about the history of regional planning in England.

The rise and fall of regional planning in England

Regional planning has experienced 'a mercurial and often ephemeral' history in post-war England (Wannop, 1995, x). Until the turmoil unleashed by the Thatcher governments in the early 1980s, there was a degree of political consensus about the need to address regional imbalances with the focus on floor-space controls and regional financial assistance to encourage the relocation of largely manufacturing employment from the then prosperous regions of the Midlands and South to government-designated development areas in the North and West. In parallel within regions, public policy addressed congestion and urban regeneration via housing overspill and the construction of new towns within the framework of joint central-local government regional

strategies (Hall, 1973). Wannop (1995, xv) summarises two distinct forms of regional planning: 'the balancing of resources to modify standards of living and disparities in economic conditions ... between different parts of the nation' (which we define as regional economic planning) and 'intra-regional planning' (which will be the primary focus of this paper), an approach which 'attempts to resolve issues and local problems of growing metropolitan cities, spilling their population and their economic and social relationships and raising political disputes across their administrative boundaries'. Some commentators (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 2007, 30) argue that reincarnation of regional planning under New Labour introduced a less prescriptive form of regional planning, focusing on 'economic competitiveness and growth within a neo-liberal framework of supporting the market rather than supplanting it'. English regional planning (in its varying forms) has experienced its zenith during periods of Labour administration, where the terms 'regional' and 'spatial' planning have become conflated within some political and professional perspectives, as 'top-down' governance, redistribution and interventionism. In contrast, Haughton and Allmendinger (2012, 3) argue that in much of continental Europe, spatial planning is seen as 'a progressive largely technical movement', rather than being linked overtly to political agendas.

The current vacuum in strategic planning in England was initiated by the (former) Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, who used the Localism Act (2011) to rescale sub-national governance and remove (in his view) a costly and bureaucratic tier of governance. He stated, 'I've set about abolishing all the Rs. Regional Spatial Strategies, Regional Housing Targets, Regional Assemblies, Government Offices for the Regions and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) ... The arbitrary regional tier of government administration and bureaucracy was unpopular, ineffective and inefficient' (Pickles, 2010, n.p.). During the post-war era the application of English planning policy has occurred within the context of several centrally determined changes in the structure and processes of local government, notably the setting up and abolition of metropolitan councils, the establishment of district councils and the creation of unitary authorities. Pemberton and Morphet (2013) state that the churn within governance approaches occurs partly due to the philosophy and ideological stance of the national government of the day, combined with 'system shifts' which often relate to a response to economic crisis when the priority may become supporting macroeconomic policies, subordinating social and environmental imperatives and reorganising local government. Upon the demise of RSSs (and with the prior demise of structure plans), a fundamental component of the post-war architecture of statutory land-use planning had been extracted from the system in England. Pugalis and Townsend (2013) state that in most mainland western European countries, stable structured systems of 'meso'-level government and statutory legal powers enshrined in federal (and other) constitutional arrangements provide a more embedded approach and

greater continuity in their 'larger-than-local' planning approaches. This also makes it significantly harder for an incoming government to eradicate a tier of governance as happened in England in 2010.

Situating the recent reorganisation of sub-national governance in England within a wider European context, Olesen (2014) and Roodbol-Mekkes and Van den Brink (2015) identify a growing neo-liberal turn in terms of downgrading strategic spatial planning across many north-western European countries, with neo-liberal 'development-oriented' agendas prioritising economic growth and the competitiveness of cities becoming the default position. Olesen (2014) and Roodbol-Mekkes and Van den Brink (2015) identify England as the outlier in terms of its almost complete eradication of sub-national governance structures for strategic spatial planning (outside London), but find a comparable trajectory away from spatial planning in Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. Olesen (2014, 293) associates this shift in several north-west European countries with the growth of planning scepticism, which began during the regulatory 1980s when planning systems were dismantled due to 'roll-back neo-liberalism'.

Regional spatial strategies in England were created during the second term (2001–2005) of the Labour Administration (1997–2010). In 2004 the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act replaced the previous cooperative and advisory approach to regional planning and made spatial planning a legal requirement. Pemberton and Morphet (2013, 2021) state that the 2004 Act spurred the 'shift away from land-use planning to a broader leadership vision around "place shaping" and integrated delivery'. Gallent et al. (2013, 564) describe a significant statutory (and interventionist) shift from a system where 'local development planning needed to "have regard" to the content of regional plans, to a system of required compliance'. The theoretical drivers behind Labour's version of spatial planning sought to achieve strategic integration of local development documents between neighbouring authorities and to coordinate a wider range of public policies and public expenditure systems within the context of place making (Mawson et al., 2005). Regional spatial planning was designed to provide a form of institutional cohesion, 'joining up' efforts to respond to larger-than-local issues like strategic housing allocations, environmental pressures and major infrastructure projects, which due to their scale and complexity transcend local administrative boundaries. Spatial planning was an ambitious agenda and contrasted significantly with the more confined regulatory land-use planning approach of the previous two decades (Haughton et al., 2009). As the 2010 election approached, the RSS process was regarded by its critics as achieving only modest success in attempts to facilitate joined-up government. However, research commissioned for the collective body of regional assemblies (English Regions Network (ERN)) found that not all Whitehall departments were 'on board' in making the necessary adjustments to introduce greater coordination of public policies and expenditure within the regions (Mawson and Snape, 2005).

The political dimension of the demise of regional planning

The termination of RSSs had been widely touted by the Conservatives in opposition. Successive Green Papers (Conservative Party, 2009; 2010) stated that regional planning would be revoked. Amongst stakeholders there was a mixed reaction to the demise of RSSs (and the lack of an alternative), and the decision generated consternation within elements of the academic, professional and planning communities. Tewdwr-Jones (2012, 133) criticised the Conservative's 'myopic' critique of RSSs, focusing on contentious issues of housing targets and 'not the wider economic, environmental, infrastructure or strategic integration matters' that RSSs engaged with. In contrast, some Conservative politicians (particularly at the local level in southern England) were delighted to witness the demise of what they perceived as profoundly 'undemocratic' and top-down regional planning. However, Mawson (2007) seeks to qualify this viewpoint given that two-thirds of seats on regional assemblies which oversaw the development of RSSs were held by local politicians from across the region concerned. Gallent et al. (2013, 564) observe that, historically, regional planning had performed two functions, as a 'counterbalance to the risk of local interests subverting planning's broader purpose' and as a shield to deflect politically damaging criticism about strategic 'greater-good' decisions (particularly major housing developments) from local politicians. Upon the demise of RSSs, local authorities were now responsible for determining their own housing needs without a strategic mechanism for resolving with their neighbours the location of excess housing demand and politicians no longer had the regional tier to shelter them from criticisms. Indeed, the local government 'leaders' of a number of regional assemblies were prepared to admit in private to ERN-commissioned researchers the value of the assemblies in providing a powerful negotiating device with central government over housing numbers and securing additional infrastructure support (Mawson, 2006).

It would be disingenuous to portray the demise of regional planning in England as solely a partisan decision by an incoming administration with a divergent ideology to that of its predecessors. Mawson (2007) notes that the prior Labour era was characterised by significant tension within government between supporters of a regional approach (the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) and supporters of a city-region approach (the Treasury). Boddy and Hickman (2013, 745) identify the 2007 Treasury Sub-national Review of Economic Development and Regeneration as the point where supporters of a city-region approach within government began to exert control in this Whitehall tussle. The review contained an 'increasing emphasis on sub-regional, city-region focus and started to question European-style planning at regional scale'. The Labour government subsequently transferred the responsibility for preparing a 'single regional strategy' to the RDAs and a council 'leaders' board', although these arrangements were swiftly followed by a change in government (Pearce and Mawson,

2009). The 2007 Sub-national Review also introduced multi-area agreements (MAAs) as innovative 'soft governance mechanisms' to promote collaboration across local authority boundaries (Pemberton and Morphet, 2013). MAAs can be seen as a prototype for the current combined-authorities model (which is discussed later in the paper).

Against the background of the dismantling of Labour's spatial planning framework and our analysis and interpretation of these developments, the article turns to the reflections of practitioners working in the field of strategic planning on this marked policy shift. The views of these twenty senior English local authority planners about the effectiveness of RSSs broadly fell into three categories, those who valued RSSs and were opposed to its revocation (thirteen), those who were neutral about the demise of RSSs (six) and those who welcomed the demise of RSSs (one).

The majority (twelve) felt that although RSSs 'were by no means perfect' and to some extent could be criticised for being top-down and cumbersome to develop initially, they were a useful vehicle 'to get all stakeholders involved, allowing tricky spatial planning decision to be resolved' (Planner, West Midlands). Several (six) of the planners made related comments about the new and innovative RSS process being 'painful' during its long gestation, but only really realising the value of RSSs in hindsight: 'whilst it was a lengthy and painful process, it was important and we miss it' (Planner, North West). Concerns aired by planners during the research about the current difficulty of engaging with a strategic 'larger-than-local' approach to planning correlate with Gallent et al.'s (2013, 569) observation that the downscaling of planning may cause some authorities to 'lose sight of broader and longer-term objectives'.

Critical points were raised about the politicisation of regional planning in England since 2010. Some respondents felt that the concept of regional spatial planning was valuable in terms of an inclusive approach to governance and to negotiating controversial spatial planning issues like the development and location of major infrastructure projects. However, such mediation was made more difficult without the region-wide structure of decision making that accompanied it. It was commented that under the local planning regime it would be more difficult since 'ultimately there are compromises and everyone has to have their fair share ... it's not regional planning in its purest form' (Planner, North East).

Most planners were sceptical about whether the rescaling of the system to a localist approach would be more effective at mediating political conflicts between communities of interest and long-term spatial objectives because of the tensions between strategic priorities and local political pragmatism. A respondent from the West Midlands articulated a prevalent view that localism might prove a chimera: 'A lot of local authorities felt they were going to get more control of the scale and location of development with the removal of RSS ... the reality is that under localism, duty to cooperate and objectively assessed housing need ... things could get worse.' The dominant view (eighteen) was that the removal of RSSs had been a political

decision, based on dogma – ‘payback’ for Conservative councillors and an element of austerity pragmatism. Regional planning appears to have been partially blighted by a change in government and an associated shift in underlying political values. The issue of different perspectives of the regional approach at the national level was articulated strongly in the interviews: ‘Conservatives associate regionalism with top-down socialist planning, tied in with a strand of anti-European thinking; we are not a country of regions we are a country of shire councils’ (Planner, East of England). This identification of an anti-European dimension within Conservative ideology corresponds with Tewdwr-Jones et al. (2010, 246) observation that regional planning has been interpreted by some commentators as the ‘*Europeanization*’ of UK planning, which ultimately sought to create a Europe of the regions. This may be another reason why regional planning is held in such contempt by many Conservatives. Over three-quarters of the planners (seventeen) felt that the Secretary of State’s revocation of RSSs was injudicious, and a number of respondents queried the wisdom of revoking RSSs without establishing an alternative approach: ‘There is an element of dogma, in the way they were abolished, announcement made, challenges made, then a retraction. Rather than thinking through what a replacement system might look like’ (Planner, East Midlands). A planner from the South East added context to the orthodox thesis that RSSs were ultimately scrapped because of the imposition of perceived top-down housing targets: ‘It was purely politically, to do with the South East and predominately Conservative councillors. It wasn’t the regional assembly and it wasn’t regional planning, it was the National Housing Advisory Unit ... they were seen to be imposing very large, potentially very damaging, housing numbers on South East authorities’ (Planner, South East). Prominent amongst the respondents that felt RSSs were not fit for purpose or were neutral about RSSs was a strong representation of Yorkshire and Humber authorities:¹ ‘Regional assemblies, producing documents which don’t seem to be delivering much but loads of people are moaning about them. Government must think, “if we can get rid of them and save money, would anyone miss them?”’ (Planner, Yorkshire and Humber). Yorkshire and Humber was the region which produced the most comments during the interviews about ill-fitting (artificial) regional boundaries and a lack of cohesion with the economic geography of cities. It is difficult to conclusively ascertain whether these issues have soured opinions about RSSs, but they do suggest strong political tensions within this standard region. This seems to be confirmed by the difficulties which local government in the Yorkshire and Humber former planning region have experienced in agreeing (amongst themselves) an appropriate geographical basis for negotiating combined authorities with central government. Comments from respondents about the asymmetry of strategic fit created by inflexible regional administrative boundaries support Baker and Wong’s

1 Some respondents stated that the Yorkshire and Humber region was ‘too big and made little economic or political sense’.

(2013, 92) observations of a strategic conundrum inherent in spatial planning relating to the lack of workable institutional structures.

The policy implications of the abolition of RSSs

The abrupt revocation of RSSs led to a legal challenge, *Cala Homes (South) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government* (2010),² which upheld the view that the decision to revoke the policy by the Secretary of State had been premature.³ Despite the controversy over revocation, Allmendinger and Haughton (2013, 954) contend that regional spatial planning was ‘an unstable fix and one only ever likely to be a temporary phenomenon’. This can be attributed in part to a powerful local government lobby which resented the imposition of a ‘meso-tier’ tier of strategic planning and a government ideologically opposed to the approach. Swain et al. (2013) highlight the ‘received wisdom’ of a number of weaknesses in Labour’s regional spatial planning system:

- 1 democratic deficit and lack of regional autonomy;
- 2 insufficient inter-regional coordination;
- 3 separation of economic planning from spatial planning;
- 4 imposition of high (top-down) regional housing targets;
- 5 RSS became too detailed and strayed beyond appropriate influence of regional planning; and
- 6 preparation of plans overly long and complex.

In the case of the ‘democratic deficit’, however, the regional assemblies did enable a range of regional stakeholders from private, voluntary and civic society to formally engage in the spatial planning process, whilst at the same time senior local authority representatives retained the majority vote on all statutory planning matters (Snape and Mawson, 2004). This is in marked contrast to the current arrangements for the combined authorities. Further, a more detailed exploration of the evidence submitted in various official reports considered as part of the Review of Sub-national Economic Development and Regeneration (HM Treasury et al., 2007) suggests a more measured critique of the RSS sub-national governance model which reveals more effective working relationships than implied in Swain et al. (2013) (Audit Commission, 2005; DCLG, 2006; HM Treasury, 2006; 2007).

The Labour approach of transferring planning powers to regional structures set in train what Haughton et al. (2009, 5) describe as new ‘soft spaces’ of governance, ‘involving the multiplicity of newly created sub-national spatial identities around

2 *Cala Homes* successfully appealed against the Secretary of State’s guidance to revoke RSSs; eventually revoked March 2013.

3 In revoking RSSs the Secretary of State had not given appropriate consideration to statutory European obligations (Strategic Environmental Assessment).

which new understandings of spatial development possibilities are being created'. The RSSs, in association with the regional-assemblies approach, brought new actors and a reassertion of the importance of a partnership approach to strategic planning, but there was no easy path to mediate intractable conflicts between local politics and the more strategic 'greater-good' drivers of spatial planning. Ultimately, the Labour regional planning experiment was perceived by powerful critics in central and local government as being incapable of facilitating economic growth (particularly housing development and coordinating transport policy). An alternative interpretation of the period would suggest that the Labour government failed to impose its original aim to require the coordination of spatial investment by government departments and quangos. The concept of democratic regional governance, incorporating a strong strategic regional planning function, was never fully supported by senior figures in the Labour government (Mawson, 2007), and institutional regionalism lost political credibility after the North East Referendum in 2004.⁴ Post-2004, the Labour government retained elements of functional regionalism via the RSSs and Regional Economic Strategies (RESs), but it began to explore forms of city-region and sub-regional planning initially through the work of the RDAs. The 2007 Labour government White Paper *Communities in Control: Real People, Real Power* can be seen as a forerunner of aspects of the coalition's localism agenda, and it shares many central themes within an omnipresent neo-liberal discourse. At the end of the decade, with the formation of the coalition government and the bonfire of regional structures, the English planning system was about to be fundamentally rescaled back towards a more development-oriented regulatory approach, notwithstanding the optional introduction of (a micro level) of neighbourhood planning.

Is the duty to cooperate capable of filling the strategic planning void?

These changes posited the transference of any residual strategic planning to a new or alternative tier of governance. In the event, post-revocation of the RSSs, local plans have functioned largely in the absence of a strategic planning framework. Baker and Wong (2013, 96) note 'a serious institutional void between the need for some forms of strategic spatial planning and the government's localized approach to plan-making'. In this void the incoming government installed the 'duty to cooperate', which requires local planning authorities to undertake 'meaningful discussions' with neighbouring authorities around strategic planning issues. There was, however, no clarification

⁴ In November 2004, 78 per cent of voters (turnout was 48 per cent) opposed a North East regional assembly. Advocates of reform argue that the Labour government's proposals did not offer the electorate sufficient powers and resources to justify the establishment of a new 'meso' tier of government.

forthcoming from government about what constitutes ‘meaningful discussions’. The government’s streamlined planning guidance, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (DCLG, 2012) makes clear that an up-to-date local plan is the statutory planning document against which planning applications should be judged. In terms of the wider strategic function of planning (formerly covered by RSSs), the NPPF is largely silent, stating that ‘public bodies have a duty to co-operate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries’ (DCLG, 2012, para. 44). This parsimonious level of detail about how local planning authorities (LPAs) should collaborate in developing a coordinated vision for the ‘larger than local’ has led to claims of a ‘planning fudge’. Ultimately, the duty to cooperate is a weak requirement to consult neighbouring authorities and not a compulsion for local authorities to agree about cross-boundary priorities. The duty has been criticised as a ‘voluntary and light-touch’ form of strategic planning (Swain et al. 2013, xvi). Boddy and Hickman (2013) concur, stating the duty lacks teeth where local communities and authorities do not wish to collaborate or wish to take a unilateral (negative) stance to development. The resultant confusion relating to the duty is cited as the catalyst for many draft local plans failing at the examination stage (e.g. Aylesbury Vale). The arbiter of effective consultation between neighbouring local authorities has become national planning inspectors at the examination stage of the preparation of the local plan. The growing influence of planning inspectors and the courts has sparked concerns about a fragmented era of ‘appeal and court-driven planning’, contrary to the ethos of ‘localism’ as a quasi-judicial approach which generates a loss of local democratic input into the planning process (TCPA, 2015, 13).

When asked about policies which have been developed to mitigate the removal of spatial planning, there was an almost unequivocal negative response from respondents (planners) about the effectiveness of the duty to cooperate. ‘Naive to expect it to work in the South East ... to expect anybody to take other authorities’ housing numbers is unrealistic’ (Planner, South East). And, ‘if you set off with a blank sheet of paper to devise an approach to strategic planning, you wouldn’t come up with the duty to cooperate’ (Planner, West Midlands). Respondents reported concern about the lack of initial guidance from central government about the duty and how to achieve satisfactory levels of cooperation between authorities: ‘put into the legislation as a duty, without much explanation about what it meant and how it was supposed to operate ... we have all been making it up as we go along informed by various decisions of inspectors and the courts’ (Planner, South East). Interviewees held divergent opinions about the seriousness with which LPAs were approaching the duty to cooperate: ‘we will all find cosmetic ways to say we have done it’ (Planner, South West). At the other end of the spectrum there was serious concern expressed about the growing tendency for policy to be clarified by planning inspectors: ‘many authorities have had local plans fall down at inspection, due to failures in the duty

to cooperate. It wasn't spelt out well enough in the first place!' (Planner, South East). There was also concern about the perceived lack of consistency with inspectors' decisions: 'some of the inspectors' decisions that are coming through aren't that consistent' (Planner, North West). A planner from the South East encapsulated the sentiments of the majority of planners who were interviewed about the longer-term impact of the duty: 'The duty has not adequately filled the void left by regional planning; the consequences are less structured development and more planning by appeal' (Planner, South East). These views support Boddy and Hickman's (2013, 759) analysis that the duty to cooperate is a 'highly restricted' version of strategic planning when compared with the historic role of structure plans and RSSs, which is of particular concern at a time of national housing shortage. Fundamental questions were also raised by planners about whether the duty to cooperate fitted with a localism narrative or whether it was a covert form of centralism: 'On the one hand they say, make it up yourself ... then they say your plan is unsound because you have not done what we wanted you to do, it's actually more centralisation' (Planner, North East). The government has recently acknowledged failings within the present system, stating that existing guidance relating to the duty to cooperate will be strengthened, 'to ensure that housing and infrastructure needs are identified and planned for' (HM Treasury, 2015, 45). However, the majority of planners interviewed were unconvinced that localism via the duty to cooperate is a positive step in delivering coordinated strategic planning responses across administrative boundaries. There were some positive examples of existing collaboration between local authorities highlighted, but it is unclear to what extent these arrangements have been facilitated by the present localism narrative. They appeared to be largely based on pre-existing links, a track record of working together between local authorities and/or pragmatic decisions to collaborate in a climate of austerity. Examples highlighted included joint planning arrangements in the East Midlands established since the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that have endured because of their statutory status (PAS, 2015), and joint planning initiatives between authorities around the Hull conurbation driven by economic development imperatives.

'Rescaling' from regionalism to localism

Localism has been heralded by successive UK governments as a panacea to re-engage the wider electorate with the planning process and as an antidote to opposition to development. However, beyond the alluring rhetoric, Allmendinger and Haughton (2011, 314) warn of localism approaches 'with thinly disguised libertarian political agendas to reduce State influence'. Davoudi and Madanipour (2013, 560) expand on the 'Janus-faced' nature of localism, describing a concept simultaneously capable of illustrating 'exclusionary and regressive' and 'inclusive, innovative and transformative

forms'. Localism is therefore an extremely malleable concept which can take multiple forms. Against this background the paper now turns to explore the government's narrative surrounding the transference of planning powers to the local level and investigates the degree to which this is actively the case.

Roodbol-Mekkes and Van den Brink (2015, 186) state that where rescaling takes place in planning, it invariably must include 'the two, often concurrent, processes of centralisation and decentralisation – the movement of tasks in an upward and downward direction'. Within the English system the transfer of some planning functions down to the local scale has coincided with muscular centralising initiatives from national government. This is, perhaps, to counterbalance the parochial political tendencies often inherent in localist approaches and to protect the omnipresent thrust for economic growth. The government has tried to entice communities and authorities to accept new development with financial incentives like the New Homes Bonus whilst simultaneously attempting to underpin growth by requiring all LPAs to facilitate challenging land supply targets for housing, or lose their discretionary scrutiny role over development. Pugalis and Townsend (2013, 107) state that prior attempts at rescaling governance in England have involved 'concentration in larger units, including innovations to fill the "missing middle" between the local and the national'. In contrast, the recent rescaling of planning has extracted altogether the regional spatial approach, seen as a restrictive, bureaucratic, top-down process, but without an alternative effective mechanism to address critical cross-boundary opportunities and challenges, offering instead what might be described as fuzzy notions of collaborative localism. The subliminal development-oriented economic imperatives within the NPPF are evidence that despite the populist rhetoric of localism, the English planning system ultimately still functions as a regulatory system, with a strong central drive to deregulate planning to facilitate economic growth. Recent critiques of the government's brand of localism suggest that it proffers *responsibility* without commensurate *resources* (McGuinness et al., 2014), whilst facilitating shrinkage of the state, enabling the government 'to deny responsibility for failure and to claim any success' (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011, 314). Allmendinger and Haughton (2011) observe that as localism has gained traction in England it has reinforced a crude dualism which states "'local" good, "national government" bad'. In planning terms the localism approach prioritises the local statutory development process (within the regulatory framework of a centrally determined NPPF), expunging remaining regional approaches and offering an optional tier of neighbourhood planning (see Gallent and Robinson, 2012).

Emerging soft spaces of governance: local enterprise partnerships and combined authorities

The paper now moves on to consider emerging sub-national governance structures which have evolved since the end of the Labour government in 2010. The demise of regionalism and the rescaling to city-regions and localism has heralded another chapter in the volatile evolution of sub-national governance in England. The state has to resolve the conundrum of how to effectively reform sub-national governance structures which reflect the political and economic realities in complex rural, dispersed urban and often polycentric city-regions. Hall (2013, 3) states, 'The individual city or town is no longer an adequate framework to understand or plan for the future'. It is evident that a 'one-size-fits-all' spatial approach to sub-national governance in Britain is problematic due to the country's complex political and physical geography.

Under its devolution agenda, the government is not inclined to be prescriptive about a preferred approach to strategic planning and governance, preferring to task neighbouring authorities to come up with governance solutions that will be effective for their locality (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2016). The government maintains that the duty to cooperate was not designed as a proxy measure to replace RSSs. A solution to the deficiencies of the duty may be emerging in some localities (e.g. Greater Manchester and the West Midlands), involving the existing institutional vehicles which have been created to enable groupings of local authorities to work collaboratively, via combined authorities and local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). The combined-authorities approach is a form of earned autonomy whereby consortia of local authorities must conduct a governance review and then can join together to form combined authorities; they can then develop a proposal to government that, if successful, will allow additional control of aspects of policy areas like economic development and skills and transport policies. Combined authorities in metropolitan areas can apply to expand their powers, but in exchange they must establish an elected mayor (Sandford, 2015). The primary driver for local authorities' creating combined authorities appears to be financial, including the lure of a combined funding pot and greater autonomy over decisions for economic development, skills policies and transport infrastructure. Strategic planning appears to currently be a secondary priority for the majority of 'devolution deal' negotiations taking place with government. However, within the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (2016) the Secretary of State has reserved the right to devolve further powers (e.g. strategic planning) to combined authorities and this may prove to be one next step in their evolution.

At the outset of this research (2014), LEPs appeared to offer a pragmatic interim medium to reinvigorate some form of spatial planning (Pemberton and Morphet, 2013; Pugalís and Townsend, 2013). There are currently thirty-nine LEPs of varying

sizes in England, with some LPAs inhabiting more than one LEP boundary. However, a recent RTPI (2015, 2) study states that LEPs 'lack clarity in terms of their role in the planning system'. The LEPs have absorbed elements of the economic strategy role that was formerly delivered by the RDAs via the development of non-statutory economic plans known as strategic economic plans (SEPs). However, it remains unclear where, if at all, this leaves the environmental and social pillars of strategic planning that were integral components of the holistic RSSs approach under Labour.

In terms of the potential for LEPs to engage in strategic planning, a number of recurrent issues were raised during the interviews, including a clear democratic deficit, lack of capacity within LEP teams, lack of desire for LEPs to go beyond their economic remit and a reluctance from the private sector to become mired in intractable strategic planning issues: 'LEPs could have a role in identifying a framework for planning issues; the difficulty is LEPs have an economic focus rather than one geared around environmental or inequality issues' (Planner, Yorkshire & Humber). The perceived myopic economic focus of the majority of LEPs was a feature of the interviews, and the overriding view was that under the current disjointed structure of sub-national governance combined authorities would be a more suitable forum for addressing strategic planning issues, such as reviewing green belt policy. The Great Birmingham and Solihull LEP (GBSLEP) was highlighted as innovative in that it had been directly involved with local government in the development of a strategic spatial plan which was designed to dovetail with the strategic economic plan. The Planner interviewed from the West Midlands commented, 'We produced the strategic plan in a true partnership way, with topic groups led by ... the private sector, under the RSS that would have never happened.' The Spatial Plan for Recovery and Growth (SPRG) will draw together the main elements of the individual local plans from the nine GBSLEP local authorities. It was suggested that this approach might present a model for other areas. However, the interviewee from the West Midlands acknowledged that the 'crunch' was yet to come in negotiating difficult decisions about the scale and distribution of growth for housing and employment sites in a LEP area which encompassed nine local authorities. Earlier attempts at central-local government inter-agency economic and spatial planning in the West Midlands and elsewhere in the 1970s and 1980s have identified a tendency for individual partners to seek to maximise their own resource gains and autonomy whilst fudging intractable issues surrounding the location of housing overspill (Mawson and Skelcher, 1980). Moreover, while Greater Birmingham and Greater Manchester may appear to be relatively stable city-regions, it remains to be seen whether this model of governance can be effective, especially in localities where there are deeply contested boundaries and polycentric power struggles between cities and related localities.

The government appears relaxed about an era where spatially varied decentralisation outcomes are agreed in terms of the range of powers a combined authority

can hold, with spatial planning appearing to be an option (enabling the creation of statutory spatial strategies). It seems content for an iterative approach to decentralisation to evolve via ad hoc deals across England. The Secretary of State recently stated, 'rather than having administrative tidiness ... it's going to look like how England is ... a combination of different places' (Clarke, 2015). Theoretically, there is synergy between the Government's *laissez-faire* approach to sub-national decentralisation and Deas's (2013) concept of 'creative chaos', which engenders a free-market competitive ethos between localities, a process where winners are perceived as innovators and successful places. Creating a funding climate which requires strong political leadership and robust organisational capacity at the local level to succeed does raise concerns about the future of localities which are lagging and do not possess the political and organisational attributes to succeed in this competitive environment. Nonetheless, this competitive approach which central government appears to trust will spur creativity amongst authorities and drive the new leaner local state, and this multi-speed approach to the evolution of sub-national governance structures is rapidly evolving. There is much detail that needs to be clarified before the impact of this approach can be ascertained, particularly impacts on perceived 'failing' localities.

At the time of finalising the paper there were five agreed combined authorities,⁵ with over thirty further collaborations of authorities submitting expressions of interest to central government to progress devolution proposals.⁶ The benchmark combined authority under the new governance arrangements is Greater Manchester, and the Greater Manchester Agreement, announced in 2014, empowers the city-region 'to create a statutory spatial framework for the city-region' subject to unanimous approval by the ten local authority leaders and the Greater Manchester mayor (who form the combined authority cabinet) (Sandford, 2015). Subsequently, devolutions deals in West Yorkshire and the West Midlands do not contain powers for spatial planning, and the draft for the Sheffield deal did not initially include spatial planning although a subsequent draft (October 2015) now includes comparable powers to those of Greater Manchester for spatial planning. The Teesside Combined Authority has also recently received approval for a non-statutory plan with a focus on land development. This suggests an era of fragmented and piecemeal approaches to spatial planning emerging across England. This research was completed when the concept of combined authorities was nascent; therefore this paper cannot provide comprehensive analysis of the evolution of combined authorities. However, the empirical data generated for this article do include practitioner's views of the potential influence of combined authorities as a governance

5 Combined authorities agreed by 2014: Greater Manchester, North East, West Yorkshire, Sheffield and Liverpool. Future combined authorities 2016–2017: Tees Valley, West Midlands and North Midlands.

6 Thirty-four applications for devolution deals were submitted to government; six separate applications from within Yorkshire.

approach and their potential to take on a greater strategic planning role. Planners were concerned about perceptions that combined authorities meant further depletion of planning staff, and there was a strong sentiment that the subliminal political drivers for combined authorities would be further rationalisation of public services and a push to combine dwindling resources at the local level: 'Combined authorities is a process driven by national perceptions, of how local authorities work, resource needs, efficiency and savings, rather than being driven by the best organisational way to do things' (Planner, Yorkshire & Humber). This view echoes Pugalís and Townsend's (2013, 117) assertion that recent rescaling of governance in England 'has more to do with the politics of dwindling public resources and ideological viewpoints than it does with locating a more appropriate spatial scale for the leadership and operation of sub-national planning'.

There was a level of concern that strategic planning (other than SEPs) had been not been central enough in the initial negotiations around combined authorities: 'Combined authorities look to be about economic development, transport and housing, not planning. The City Deal was a bribe basically, civil servants saying to ***** look at how well Manchester has done, if you go for a combined authority ... we'll give you money and freedoms' (Planner, North West). A significant concern that planners repeatedly raised was a fear that local politics and city rivalries would intervene as some cities or towns might perceive that their identities are being eroded and in turn subvert the most effective technocratic (although not necessarily geopolitical) solution for devising combined authorities in terms of functional economic geography: 'The push will be on for local authorities to join up to make best use of resources, but it doesn't mean they will join with the local authorities that make most sense in terms of strategic planning' (Planner, South East). There was clear anxiety from some planners that although government might be successful in the short term by cajoling local authorities to combine for enhanced autonomy, ultimately, historical political rivalries could implode and stymie the longer-term prospects of the approach; many second-tier cities and towns were wary of being consumed within a 'big-city' brand.⁷ One interview stated he was sceptical about combined authorities due to 'a lack of local political appetite for it' (Planner, East Midlands). A number of comments were made about the calibre of municipal leadership present in Greater Manchester over the past two decades, together with common urban problems, and the predominant control of local councils by the Labour Party. Respondents warned about underestimating the importance of political capability and the presence of other positive local circumstances which encouraged neighbouring local authorities to go beyond lowest-common-denominator politics: 'Combined authorities will take time to mature ... there is a danger you end up with lowest-common-denominator

7 Non-core city authorities within Merseyside and West Yorkshire fear becoming subsumed within a Greater Liverpool or Greater Leeds brand.

politics. Manchester has been successful but it has taken twenty years' (Planner, North West). However, planners also noted that the stick of being excluded from access to funding had 'focused minds' beyond political squabbles and encouraged more strategic thinking.

Conclusion

Regional spatial planning in England during the Labour era proved problematic because of a seemingly intractable struggle between strong strategic planning ('the greater good') and vocal (political and community) interests within local democracy – a problem now faced by the localist model. Some critics argue the RSS model was stymied by their lack of formal democratic accountability due to Labour's failure to establish an elected political tier at the meso (regional) level (Swain et al., 2013). In some regions the standard regions were criticised as providing the basis for statutory spatial planning when it was felt they did not adequately reflect functional economic areas and had not gained local political acceptance (Pugalis and Townsend, 2013; Baker and Wong, 2013). However, achieving a universally accepted institutional fix for sub-national governance has been a recurring quandary in England; Wannop (1995, xxi) sagely observed that 'regional planning and governance can never be perfectly arranged, except in the moment'. The demise of RSSs and the subsequent rescaling of governance towards a localist approach undoubtedly left a strategic spatial planning void across much of England during the term of the coalition government. Hence Gallent et al.'s (2013) question – whether the new localist system of planning in England allows government to deal effectively with the strategic dilemmas integral to governing. The first five years of localism suggest that for most localities the answer is categorically negative. The duty to cooperate has clearly not evolved to fill the spatial planning void. The TCPA (2014, 2) recently described the state of sub-regional planning in England 'as one of fragmentation and contrast'. Planning practitioners interviewed during this research were broadly supportive of the need for some form of spatial planning but recognised some of the limitations of the English RSS approach. Planners' overriding concern was the unsuitability of the current institutional fix (duty to cooperate). After a period of stagnation in spatial planning the Conservative government appears to have recognised that the duty to cooperate fails to provide sufficient incentives within the planning system to encourage all local authorities to strive for collaborative approaches to strategic dilemmas. The government has vowed to 'beef up' the duty but it is unlikely that tweaking existing policy will be sufficient to fill the strategic spatial planning void. It is perhaps naive to assume that central government can conclusively solve the intractable conundrum of a comprehensive approach to sub-national governance in England without a constitutional settlement. Nevertheless, it is equally naive to assume that organic localist approaches will emerge

in all localities to span the chasms within the current planning framework. In the autumn of 2015 a number of devolution deals were negotiated between government, city-regions and county-level groupings of authorities across England. It appears that in some areas (e.g. Greater Manchester and Sheffield) the new 'soft spaces' of governance will offer an opportunity for innovative forms of spatial planning to return to the policy agenda. A clear message from the government's devolution approach is that 'one size does not fit all'. It appears comfortable about iterative decentralisation and the emerging asymmetrical (patchwork quilt) system of devolved powers and governance approaches developing across England. The clear difference from regional spatial strategies is that spatial planning in the current government's approach is non-mandatory. This raises a question about fragmentation in national spatial planning coverage which potentially could accentuate existing economic inequalities between successful places and lagging places, and make it more difficult to resolve the national housing crisis (Colomb and Tomaney, 2015).

Ultimately, there are still many questions to be answered relating to the government's 'devolution revolution'. Currently the approach contains insufficient contextual detail and if the experiences of negotiating RSSs are a precedent, the requirement to achieve unanimous political support from the 'combined authority cabinet' for a spatial strategy to proceed could prove challenging. Nevertheless, the kaleidoscope of governance in England has been decisively shaken, and a new constellation of actors is emerging in the 'soft spaces' of sub-national governance. It will take time for the new structures to settle, and for some the reality of localism may match the rhetoric. However, critical questions of social equity arise: what is the future for those places that struggle to respond to the opportunities of localism and/or those places where local political rivalries implode? Equally, the financing formula for combined authorities is another major question which requires clarification. Concerns are being expressed about unequal financial settlements in the new funding environment and whether all new emerging sub-national governance structures around the country will be adequately resourced to rise to the holistic (economic, social and environmental) spatial planning challenges. Again, does central government have the capacity to engage? If some form of spatial planning is to comprehensively return to the English planning landscape, will additional resources be forthcoming to bolster the depleted ranks of public-sector planners or will those few remaining local authority planners be expected to expand their workload to deliver the new era of spatial plans? Ultimately, it seems localism will allow some forms of spatial planning to resume in England, but the extent to which the English spatial planning conundrum will be resolved is still a matter for much enquiry, empirical research and debate.

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The background is a detailed urban planning map. It features various colored overlays: a pink sticky note at the top left with the text 'AFFORDABLE HOUSING', a purple sticky note at the top right with 'Protect local shops', and a yellow sticky note at the bottom left with 'A6 Protect allotments'. A red marker is visible at the bottom right, and a blue marker is on the left. The map itself shows streets, buildings, and green spaces, with some areas highlighted in yellow and others in pink. The title 'Localism and neighbourhood planning' is centered in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Localism and neighbourhood planning

Power to the people?

Edited by

Sue Brownill and Quintin Bradley

A6 Protect allotments

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Developing a neighbourhood plan: stories from 'community-led' planning pathfinders

David McGuinness and Carol Ludwig

Introduction

This chapter provides empirical data from two of the earliest neighbourhood planning pathfinders in England: Upper Eden in rural Cumbria and North Shields on the Tyneside coast. It critically explores how each neighbourhood navigated the plan-making process and provides first-hand insights into the challenges faced by the first wave of pathfinder neighbourhoods to embark on the neighbourhood planning process. The unfolding experiences of the two areas reveal some important questions about the impact of the initial lack of clear policy guidance about neighbourhood planning, whether *communities* have the capacity to develop robust neighbourhood plans without the *direct* assistance of professional planners and the *role* that professional planners should play in the neighbourhood plan development process. The chapter is organised into three sections: the first section analyses the North Shields case study; the second section analyses the Upper Eden case study; and the concluding section draws together key findings from the research. In doing so, the chapter unpacks some important lessons about the limitations and opportunities provided by 'community-led' planning.

Case study 1: North Shield Fish Quay Neighbourhood Plan

The fish quay lies within the metropolitan borough of North Tyneside, nine miles east of Newcastle in the North East of England. The North Shields Fish Quay Neighbourhood Plan (FQNP) was adopted by North Tyneside Council (NTC) on 8 April 2013. Although the final document is titled a 'neighbourhood plan', it is actually a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as it was not subjected to

a referendum. Unlike most contemporary neighbourhood plans, the FQNP was proposed by the local authority (LA) to an existing resident group, and was deemed “the final piece in the regeneration jigsaw” (planning officer, NTC). The fish quay has experienced pockets of persistent blight due to the decline of traditional industries, a changing economic climate and the cessation of area-based regeneration funding initiatives. To attract new investors into the area, it was deemed essential to provide updated planning guidance relating to acceptable land uses on key derelict sites (which had formerly been designated for employment land). Such a case was presented by NTC in their bid to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to become one of the pathfinders for neighbourhood planning. Following a successful application, NTC received £20,000 and the FQNP officially commenced in June 2011.

Planning stages

Formation of group

The Conservative Mayor of North Tyneside was keen to promote neighbourhood planning and support the government’s localism agenda. As a metropolitan area with no parish councils, NTC approached an existing ‘neighbourhood group’ to gauge whether they wanted to produce a neighbourhood plan. While not organic, the formation of the group was nevertheless aided by the active citizen mobilisation in the area over the past decade. In 2002, a pressure group, Folk Interested in Shields Harbour (FISH), was established directly by citizens, and this group formed the basis of a more formalised ‘Fish Quay Heritage Partnership’, set up in 2005 with heritage lottery funding. In 2007, the partnership was involved in the preparation of a management strategy for the fish quay. Despite the natural morphing of FISH and the Fish Quay Heritage Partnership into the new FQNP group, new members were also encouraged to join. Following the formation of the neighbourhood group, a chairman was elected to lead the group, and an independent facilitator from the North of England Civic Trust was appointed to steer the project.

Guidance and support

When the FQNP group was confirmed, the first obstacle faced by the group was the lack of established support mechanisms and guidance to steer the process. The lack of information challenged not only

the group, but also NTC and the facilitator: “Nobody really knew what a neighbourhood plan was.... The guidance came out about six months after we started” (independent facilitator). In particular, the interviewees involved with the FQNP all expressed confusion and frustration about the timing of the release of the guidance, which was further amplified by the absence of the expected two-way flow of information between the pathfinder group and central government.

Links to central government

The FQNP group expected some form of scaling-up or linking capital (Holman and Rydin, 2013), facilitating access to the higher tier of governance, which would enable them to genuinely influence the development of neighbourhood planning policy and guidance. The planning officer from NTC explained that they had a designated ‘link officer’ from DCLG but he only “met me once”. This apparent indifference was deemed incomprehensible to the planning officer and the independent facilitator, both of whom considered that the pilot should be a tool for wider learning: “they brought out the regulations whilst we were still piloting ... shouldn’t we finish and you learn and then you pursue it?” (planning officer, NTC); “We had no reporting. DCLG weren’t interested” (independent facilitator). In addition to these misconceptions, a further challenge at the outset was managing the range of expectations about neighbourhood planning that varied within the local actors.

Expectation management

Interviewees explained how the FQNP group initially envisaged a neighbourhood plan to be a tool to solve all existing problems in the area (eg traffic congestion) and a way to deliver new infrastructure, such as a new metro station. When the planning officer explained the constraints of the English planning system and the need to be in general conformity with the local plan, the group “were disappointed” (planning officer, NTC). This illustrated what the planning officer described as a severe “lack of understanding of the planning system”. Indeed, she had to continually emphasise that “It’s not a ‘doing’ document it’s a ‘guiding’ document” (planning officer, NTC).

NTC was very clear about their expectations for the plan, as shown in the following extract: “We wanted a focus on those particular sites that were derelict and give them a proper ... design brief” (planning

officer, NTC). In terms of achieving this, NTC also had a preconceived idea about how the process would unfold:

“we thought that they would write the document collaboratively amongst themselves, that we would point them towards the kind of information they should be looking for and they would go away and they would read it and digest it and put it into a document.” (Planning officer, NTC)

This collaborative writing, the interviewees explained, did not materialise however; instead, “it ... did boil down to mostly just one guy writing it” (planning officer, NTC).

Indeed, while the notion of ‘neighbourhood’ planning, by virtue, carries with it an inherent expectation of democratic accountability and local representativeness, the reality of the process at the fish quay was that the resident chairman was solely responsible for writing the majority of the plan. This approach intensified the pressure on one individual and also increased the likelihood that the views of all sectors would not be adequately encompassed within the plan. This diminishing trend in collaboration was also evident in the falling rate of attendance and participation at meetings.

Process

Issues relating to attendance and participation

The FQNP group’s fortnightly meetings commenced with high levels of attendance. The resident chair explained that there were “about 15 regular people turning up for the meetings and 40-odd people who could turn up to workshops”. Despite the initial strength of participation, the number of people participating in FQNP meetings and contributing fell substantially over time. The planning officer identified key factors contributing to the dwindling input, including a sense of “fatigue” due to the length of the process and disillusionment with the ultimate level of power that the group wielded: “why are the council asking us to do this? We’re working for free. It’s not given as much power to us as we thought it would” (planning officer, NTC).

The resident chair, on the other hand, had a more cynical opinion about some of the motives within the group, suggesting: “what you get from the public is, ‘We all have an opinion and we all want to be heard but none of us want to do anything’” (resident chair). One

explanation for this reluctance of the wider FQNP group to write emerged as a severe skill deficit within the group.

Lack of skills within the community

All interviewees expressed concern that the group did not individually possess or have access to the skills required for effective governance of the neighbourhood plan: “[we] haven’t got a clue how it works ... people don’t have a lot of experience, and an extreme lack of skills” (resident chair). This created, in the planning officer’s view, a self-perpetuating fear and lack of confidence to put their “head above the parapet” (planning officer, NTC). Moreover, this acknowledged skill deficit led to gross frustration about the unrealistic expectations placed on the group by the government: “they expect a group of amateurs who haven’t got the facilities or the knowledge to suddenly do it” (resident chair).

In addition to such challenges, the chair explained that the logistical and administrative aspects of neighbourhood planning also often got overlooked. For example, many group members did not have access to a computer or email. These issues illustrate that despite a very competent chairman, the expectations placed on groups to govern themselves can be problematic. There are, however, important lessons to be learnt about the ways in which capacity building should be rolled out, as unpacked in the following.

Capacity building

At the beginning of the process, NTC organised a number of professional workshops, which were delivered by both civic institutions and professional planning organisations. Despite the capacity-building initiatives, the FQNP group expressed concern with the pressure placed upon them to rapidly learn how to become planners: “it takes god knows how many years to educate a planner ... and we’re expected to be up to speed in four weeks” (resident chair). Consequently, the fast-paced capacity-building phase of the process not only risked information overload, but also did little to significantly reduce the group’s wariness of the professionals and of the process. This trust was particularly tested with the independent facilitator, appointed from the North of England Civic Trust to help guide the group.

Issues with the 'facilitator'

The independent facilitator appointed to the group was a professional planner who had prior experience of working in the area and existing relationships with members of the FQNP. Despite these advantages, issues arose surrounding the role and responsibility of the facilitator in the process. From the outset, the facilitator took the decision to be *neutral* in guiding the group: “throughout the whole project ... I made sure that my opinion was completely impartial.... If I was asked for my opinion, I gave two opinions ... and allowed them to come to an informed conclusion” (independent facilitator). This neutrality was deemed unhelpful among the group and, indeed, was interpreted by some as obstructive: “If ... you don't know what you're doing, you want someone to tell you ... being told by a facilitator, ‘Oh, I can't tell you that, I can't advise you’, is then seen as you're trying to hide something” (resident chair).

The independent facilitator became increasingly uncomfortable with his role. While he strongly believed that the plan should come from the community (and thus not be professional-led), he nevertheless struggled with this neutral stance and felt it resulted in a weaker document:

“[this] made me feel professionally castrated.... I felt that that was the wrong thing to be doing. There were policies [and] clauses in there that I don't agree with ... the decisions that the group came to on some things were bland ... they would have been far stronger decisions had there been ... *stronger guidance from professional planners*. (Independent facilitator, emphasis added)

The facilitator gave an example of one of the very large key development sites that was the impetus for the plan in the first place. He explained that the site needed design guidance but that the group decided to take a “laissez-faire approach”. Instead of delivering the clarity of guidance that NTC expected, they left it open for developers to come forward with a proposal. The facilitator expressed his exasperation at this: “That's reactive planning; that's not forward planning” (independent facilitator).

In summing up what he had learnt from this experience, he maintained that “neighbourhood plans should be community-led”, but he simultaneously argued that “they've *got* to be informed by professional planners” (independent facilitator, emphasis added). The absence of strong decision-making and robust guidance led to a

comparatively weak plan. This is a concern because it has significant implications for the plan's operationalisation within the legal apparatus of the planning system, as discussed in the following.

Product: quality of the plan

The preceding issues have raised some serious questions about the quality of the final document and whether it is fit for purpose. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the FQNP was adopted as an SPD not a fully ratified neighbourhood plan. The reason for this was that the guidance emerged at a relatively late stage of plan preparation. The group were fatigued and therefore decided to pursue a less onerous route to providing their plan with some weight in planning decision-making. Cowie and Davoudi (2015) state that there were also concerns within the FQNP group over the lack of clarity (at the time) about who would be eligible to vote in a referendum.¹

The planning officer described several characteristics of the final product (its length, the conversational tone in which it is written and the difficulty in identifying the key points) as prohibitive of its value as a planning tool: “I think it’s definitely much longer than it needs to be, it’s ... very sprawling ... very chatty” (planning officer, NTC). Directly linked to this was the concern shared by the planning officer and the independent facilitator that the document may not be defensible at appeal. The planning officer spent a lot of time balancing the need to edit the document to make it more robust, while appreciating that it was the community’s document: “this has to be a sensible document ... justifiable, because I don’t want my colleague to write a decision based on it and then as soon as someone appeals it, it’s torn apart” (planning officer, NTC). The independent facilitator elaborated on this issue: “some of the neighbourhood plans are not robust enough in their wording ... there were many things in the plan which I don’t think are clear enough ... a good barrister would destroy them” (independent facilitator).

This raises some important questions about the nature of neighbourhood planning and whether it is, indeed, fair and realistic to expect communities to write professional planning documents that are resilient to challenge and can withstand legal scrutiny. Nevertheless, despite the concerns about the quality of the final plan, the interviewees did all share some positive perspectives of the overall neighbourhood planning experience.

Positive aspects of local governance structures: development of networks

Interview data revealed an improved level of understanding of the multiple and disparate interests in the area. This knowledge exchange paved the way for better relationships within the group and created more outwardly oriented networks. The process undoubtedly developed a trust and rapport that had previously not existed. As the independent facilitator explained: “There was a lot more trust between many sectors of the group by the end of the project than there was at the beginning” (independent facilitator). Another major visible benefit was the improvement in the relationship between the wider community and the planning officers: “if I go out now to fish quay ... there’s a little bit of trust there, maybe that wasn’t there before” (planning officer, NTC). This closer relationship had other benefits, such as a better understanding of the planning system, which the planning officer deemed would prove useful in the longer term. This was supplemented by a strengthened community capacity and skill set. As the resident chair stated: “I’ve learnt an awful lot in going through it”. This evidence of learning within the community, together with the community mobilisation and outward-oriented networks that were formed during the process, presents some highly positive aspects of neighbourhood planning as a form of localised governance. Despite the ephemeral nature of the group (temporarily set up specifically to prepare a neighbourhood plan), the knowledge and skills gained by individuals will be lasting and can be applied to future participation in local plan-making. These positive side effects of the process, however, could arguably have been achieved through other means, for example, as part of more structured community work associated with NTC’s local plan preparation. Indeed, what the fish quay case study has demonstrated is that the expedience of the *process* appears to have proven more useful and beneficial to all actors than the *product* (plan) itself.

Case study 2: Upper Eden Neighbourhood Plan

The Upper Eden Neighbourhood Development Plan (UENDP) was made by Eden District Council (EDC) on 11 April 2013. ‘Upper Eden’ is an administrative construct comprising 17 neighbouring parishes that came together in 2005 to develop a community/parish plan. Upper Eden is not a tightly bounded neighbourhood, but more an archipelago of dispersed rural settlements (circa 5,000 people) with an extremely sparsely populated rural district. As the first example of

an adopted neighbourhood plan, the UENDP case study epitomises the importance of a professional planner as a ‘facilitator’ to codify the community’s aspirations into ‘planning speak’ and to develop policies that are robust enough to withstand legal challenge.

Governance arrangements

Similar to North Tyneside, there had been a long history of partnership working in the small neighbouring rural parishes of Upper Eden prior to the preparation of the UENDP. The impetus for the UENDP (UECP, 2013) began under the parish/community planning regime of the Labour government. When the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 stated that parish plans could be a material consideration in the planning process, this spurred the 17 rural parishes within Upper Eden to join together in 2005 to create the Upper Eden Community Plan (UECP) group. The central issue that drove the formation of the UECP was the lack of affordable housing for existing local residents. The community of Upper Eden had been pressing EDC to facilitate more specialist affordable housing in the Upper Eden valley (specifically, self-build and barn conversions on existing family farms) but their efforts to develop an area action plan to address their aspirations for housing policy had been continually frustrated. Many local residents resented the local authority’s myopic focus on developing housing that was in close proximity to the main urban settlement of Penrith. The main reason articulated by the council for not pursuing a more dispersed pattern of development was the lack of sustainable transport within the outlying parishes of the district. This stance was deeply frustrating for Upper Eden residents, with many local residents feeling that planning policy had effectively left them in a “sustainability trap” (project officer, UECP).

In 2008, a community plan (UECP) was published, which represented the aspirations of the Upper Eden residents. The plan had a substantial list of action points (over 80), with not all the points directly relating to planning issues. The most significant planning element of the UECP was the proposal to build an average of 29 new homes per annum over the next decade in order to increase the number of residential households in Upper Eden by 10%. It was felt that this scale of development would go some way to ameliorate the lack of affordable housing in the area. Upper Eden communities, however, continued to lobby for a more formal planning outlet to strengthen their affordable housing aspirations. In 2010, the election of the Coalition government offered the community renewed hope

via its localism initiative and the election of a new Conservative MP (Rory Stewart), who had a particular inclination to develop and drive the government's Big Society agenda.

Planning stages

Localism Act

Indeed, the MP for Upper Eden immediately approached both the UECP group and local politicians to enquire whether they had projects that they could develop through the government's Big Society agenda. His support for the neighbourhood plan was considered a crucial element in the successful progression of the plan; as the project officer responsible for developing the UENDP stated: "Rory Stewart got us to the table". Soon after the election, Upper Eden was visited by the government's Big Society czar (Nat Wei), which began a continual process of engagement between senior figures in the new government and Upper Eden.

Funding and resistance to neighbourhood planning

Despite the high-level political support, EDC officers had serious reservations about the implications of being a pathfinder authority trialling neighbourhood planning and initially maintained a thoroughly risk-averse approach to neighbourhood planning. Specifically, the EDC officers felt that the £20,000 of funding on offer was insufficient, particularly if there were a series of appeals related to the neighbourhood plan – an issue that was viewed as a live possibility due to a lack of clear guidance about the evolution of neighbourhood planning policy.

EDC took the proposals to develop a neighbourhood plan in Upper Eden to its cabinet but it was decided that the policy would be a financial risk and that the council would not support it. The policy officer describes this outcome as "a headache for the civil servants at DCLG" as they were eager for the pilot in Upper Eden to proceed. Subsequently, the civil servants arranged to fund the process from a community development (Big Society Vanguard) budget rather than through mainstream neighbourhood planning budgets in order to circumvent the unsupportive local authority by directing the funding straight to the community.

Guidance, support and links to central government

As reported in the North Tyneside case study, there was little effective policy guidance for the neighbourhood planning pathfinders. The policy area was rapidly evolving and the project officer describes a situation where:

“There was no guidance and if you have ever read the Localism Act you will know it is completely impenetrable.... I was speaking to the guys at DCLG, they were helpful at saying that is what this is supposed to mean.”

All the interviewees consulted in Eden gave the impression that at the micro-level, policy was being negotiated and clarified as it was being developed, with significant input from the Upper Eden pathfinder. The project officer drafting the plan stated: “DCLG were bouncing things off me and asking how things might work in practice. Everyone and their dog had a guide about how to do neighbourhood planning, they were rubbish because they either overcomplicated or oversimplified things” (policy officer, UECP).

Despite the absence of regulations, the project officer emphasised that “I have had massive help and support from the civil servants at DCLG”. This ‘hotline’ to senior civil servants enjoyed by the UECP is atypical and was in complete contrast to the experience of the North Tyneside case study; it is perhaps attributable to Upper Eden possessing an influential MP from the party of government. The senior local politician from EDC adds weight to this view, stating: “this was done with the direct support of the MP and unusually we had a situation where members of the group ... developing this plan had direct access to officials and even ministers in Westminster”.

There was a stark contrast in the early stage of plan development in Upper Eden between links with central government and links with EDC at the local level. While the relationship between the UECP group and the local authority improved markedly over time, at the outset of the process, there were clear tensions that were not helped by the delicate issue of managing expectations in the community.

Expectation management

EDC was acutely aware that localism had been launched by central government with emotive empowerment rhetoric that had significantly raised expectations. The senior politician stated at the outset that

“Eden [EDC] decided they would develop a neighbourhood planning protocol to manage the expectations of the communities and to set out in clear language ‘what we can and can’t do’ in terms of neighbourhood planning”, he stated:

“I paraphrase it as, ‘*you can do what you want but not what you like*’; that encompasses the reconciling with national policy, local plans and SPDs. Sometimes, people want to get involved to stop development ... [neighbourhood planning] is to influence what happens not to stop it happening.”

It took time for the expectations of the Upper Eden community to converge with the realities of developing a neighbourhood plan (which must be in conformity with existing planning policy). However, despite reservations about community expectations, both representatives from EDC were very clear that ownership of the plan must reside with the community: “it is extremely important the plans are owned by the communities they cover, it is not our plan, it is not the consultant’s plan, it is their plan” (senior politician, EDC).

Process

Attendance and participation

Variants of community-led planning had been active in Upper Eden since the mid-2000s and much of the groundwork towards developing the UENDP had already been completed by the time the Localism Act proposed neighbourhood planning. Ultimately, the neighbourhood planning process in Upper Eden was driven by one particular individual who had been active in the area for a decade, initially as an employee of a local town council, then as a planning consultant (project officer) appointed to develop the neighbourhood plan by the UECP group. Throughout the interviews, the interviewer probed to explore if other individuals from the wider Upper Eden community had played significant roles in the neighbourhood plan development process. The project officer was evasive and stated: “The aims and objectives of the plan were set at the beginning; we had no reason to change them”. It appears that the wider community (often rural farming families) played little part in the formal writing of the neighbourhood plan. The wider UECP group performed more of a ratifying role for the neighbourhood plan as it moved through the stages of drafting. The project officer confirmed this, stating: “We had a steering group that

met to discuss the process as we went through, they relied on me to do most of the drafting”. To be fair to the project officer, the bulk of the UENDP was a consolidation of previous iterations of the community-led planning process and much of the consultation work had already been completed when formulating the 2008 community plan. The project officer stated:

“we knew what all the issues were ... we didn’t need to go back through all the evidence gathering. We went straight to an issues and consultation paper ... basically a rough draft of the plan and a series of questions to focus the communities’ responses and fine-tune your policy ideas.”

Once at the formal draft stage, the UENDP went through a round of consultations that garnered 35 responses from a population of about 5,000. The project officer contrasted this response rate favourably to EDC’s core strategy consultation, which he claimed received fewer responses from the whole of the district. After reflecting on the initial consultation responses, the project officer prepared a pre-submission draft, which received a further seven responses. A referendum was held on the UENDP on 7 March 2013, in which over 1,400 people voted (33.7% turnout); 90% of them (1,310) were in favour of the UENDP. As the UENDP was the first neighbourhood plan to go to referendum, it became a showpiece political event covered by national broadcasters. The senior politicians from EDC stated: “we had Rory Stewart MP, and two ministers of state [Nick Bowles and Don Foster] for the count in Brough Village Hall at 10.30 pm on a pouring Thursday night!”.

Capacity building: lack of planning experience and skills

The practical approach to developing the neighbourhood plan in Upper Eden was in complete contrast to the process in North Tyneside, where the facilitator saw his role as restricted to *enabling* the local community to write the plan. In Upper Eden, the drafting of the neighbourhood plan was solely down to one planning professional (UECP project officer), who was entrusted to articulate the community’s views into a robust planning document. The ‘facilitator’ in the Upper Eden example was an experienced planner who took an executive role in plan development. He describes his role in the following terms: “my role was to simply turn what they [the community] wanted into planning-speak”.

The policy officer from EDC felt that, to some extent, the community in Upper Eden had taken a back seat in terms of the formal stages of preparing the neighbourhood plan because of their lack of planning knowledge and the time pressures involved in running rural farms and businesses, stating:

“A lot of our interaction as a council seemed to be with him [project officer]. We should have had more interaction with the qualifying body and let them talk to him separately, to keep them in the loop on everything. I suspect it was because he was a professional and because he was local, there was a bit of a gap in knowledge.”

The politician for EDC raised a wider concern about neighbourhood planning in isolated rural areas, stating that although there are people with skills and time on their hands, there is a problem that some “usual suspects” within communities get burnt out through constant engagement with community initiatives and “people don’t do this kind of thing forever ... to sustain community activities you need new blood for continuity and succession”.

Role of the facilitator (project officer)

The approach to utilising a planning ‘facilitator’ in Upper Eden provides an interesting comparison between the two case studies. In North Tyneside, the facilitator took an extremely neutral and normative stance in terms of direct input into the plan, viewing his role purely as a facilitator and critical friend. In stark contrast, in Upper Eden, the planning consultant (appointed the project officer for the UECP group) was pivotally involved, taking an extremely ‘hands-on’ and pragmatic approach by personally writing the plan. Both interviewees from EDC were clear about the decisive role played by the UCEP project officer in developing the UENDP. The senior politician from EDC stated: “I would describe XXXX as the man with the mission” (name omitted). The policy officer from EDC concurred:

“he was very central to the process. Talking to some of the people in the parish councils in the area, I don’t get the feeling they had a grip on what was going on, they trusted him and relied on him to deliver. From our point of view as the council, he was very active and trusted to some extent.”

Reflecting on his own role within the process, the UECP project officer felt that a planning practitioner working centrally in the neighbourhood planning process provided a crucial *knowledge brokerage* role between the community and the local authority:

“You absolutely need someone with the planning knowledge. Communities are too easily bamboozled, ignored, obfuscated and generally put off ... if they approach the planning authority directly, they will be told about some new plan or some new consultation that will solve all their problems.”

Product: quality of the plan

As the project officer (planning consultant) was centrally involved in the drafting of the UENDP, this meant less of a burden on EDC planning staff to support the drafting of the plan and greater confidence that the plan would be defensible at appeal. The senior politician from EDC stated: “The wording has to be sound and it has to be capable of consistent interpretation”. Reflecting back on the whole process, the project officer felt in hindsight that the plan could have been more ambitious: “we have seven policies in the Upper Eden plan; I think only two policies have been used all the way through. I don’t think we were bold enough”. Like the FQNP, the final product of the UENDP process was therefore also a plan that may have failed to take some key decisions and provide sufficiently strong and meaningful planning guidance. Being pilots, insights can, however, be obtained from both case studies to inform future neighbourhood planning endeavours.

Conclusions: reflecting on the experiences of neighbourhood planning in North Shields and Upper Eden

As two of the earliest examples of neighbourhood planning in England, the FQNP and the UENDP processes provide useful insights into the intricacies of community mobilisation, self-regulation and the governance of neighbourhood planning. They pose a number of important questions: is neighbourhood planning truly an empowerment tool if the ‘product’ of the process is potentially not fit for purpose or fails to provide robust guidance? Or, is it more important that communities benefit and learn in some way from the *process*, for example, through enhanced knowledge about the planning system or better relationships with residents, local businesses

and planners? Fundamentally, a key question to emerge from the two case studies is: to what extent do communities have the capacity to develop robust neighbourhood plans *without* the direct assistance of professional planners and what role professional planners should play in the neighbourhood plan development process?

From analysis of the two case studies, several points can be made to reflect on these questions. Both groups experienced similar problems in the early stages of the process. A lack of policy guidance was a key issue, although Upper Eden, via the project officer, benefitted from preferential engagement with central government (DCLG). Moreover, it took both groups significant time for their expectations to converge with the reality of what a neighbourhood plan could realistically achieve within the perceived constraints of general conformity. Significantly, there was existing active community mobilisation in both areas, which provided the foundations for the embryonic neighbourhood planning groups. In neither case, however, was the neighbourhood plan written through a process of true collaborative writing. In both examples, the drafting was completed by one individual. A key difference was that in Upper Eden, it was a professional planner (consultant) who prepared the plan.

In the FQNP, a series of capacity-building sessions were developed to try to 'upskill' the group; while welcomed, the skill set gained from this intensive, condensed training was still deemed by all to be insufficient to *produce* a meaningful plan robust enough to stand up to legal scrutiny. While Upper Eden contains significant community capital, the decision was still taken by the group to appoint the project officer (planning consultant) to independently prepare the plan. In contrast, the same role for the FQNP was filled by a professional planner who took a neutral approach, *facilitating* rather than contributing to writing the plan, which, in hindsight, he regretted. Throughout the process, both the 'facilitator' (FQNP) and the project officer (UENDP) turned away from the notion of 'community-led' planning and instead compromised by emphasising the importance of the community 'taking ownership' of the final plan. The project officer in Upper Eden effectively dominated the plan, viewing it as a personal commission.

From the preceding analysis, it can be concluded that while many areas engaged in neighbourhood planning will not hold the required skills to produce a robust and meaningful 'community-led' plan, such communities are undoubtedly disadvantaged if the lack of human capital is not compensated by direct and active civic institution/professional planning support *in addition to* an associated programme of capacity-building initiatives. Recently, limited central government support (via

Locality and Planning Aid) has been forthcoming for capacity building, but without sustained funding for *direct* professional involvement, the undeniable limits of neighbourhood planning, such as conformity with the local plan, the ultimate defensibility and operationalisation of the final plan, and the time invested by all involved, is unlikely to be worth the effort.

Note

- ¹ Concerns were raised that local business-owners within the fish quay that lived outside the district would not be eligible to vote, whereas the majority of residents from the wider district who lived outside the fish quay boundary would be eligible to vote.

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Does one size fit all? Place-neutral national planning policy in England and its impact on housing land supplies and local development plans in North East England

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of the National Planning Policy Framework's requirement that all local planning authorities in England should strive to achieve a robust supply of housing land to satisfy demand for housing development for a minimum of five years. Conceptually the paper challenges the orthodox *place-neutral* view propounded by UK central government (and many major housing developers) that a bottleneck in land supply caused by deficiencies in the local (plan-led) planning system is the central barrier to unblocking housing supply in *all* parts of the country. Theoretically, we contend that the five-year land supply requirement within the National Planning Policy Framework is an example of a spatially place-neutral policy approach that does not comprehend the place-based nuances in local and regional land and housing markets in England. Empirically, it explores a case study of all 12 local planning authorities in the North East of England, to question whether a uniform (*one size fits all*) approach to identifying a five-year supply of land for housing development across England is effectual. Analysis of empirical data validates concerns that in some peripheral localities, other variables constrain housing deliverability more significantly than land supply, issues such as limited mortgage and development finance, an abundance of brownfield land, negative place-based stigma and development viability concern. The research concludes that centrally defined, inflexible, place-neutral planning policy is a significant impairment to some local planning authorities in the North of England achieving up-to-date local plans.

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brownfield, England, housing, localism, place-neutral, planning

Introduction

The central assertion of this article is that the UK Government's approach to allocating land for housing development in England,¹ which is codified within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is flawed, and misguided in its 'place neutral' and spatially blind approach of requiring all local planning authorities (LPAs) to provide rolling five-year housing land supplies, regardless of the prevailing housing market conditions. The place-neutral approach to facilitating housing development currently pursued in England is markedly out of line with other Western European approaches (Hildreth and Bailey, 2014: 368). The lack of place-based (spatial) sensitivity in the English planning system appears to be attributable to a myopic central government response to the 'housing crisis', which is unwavering in its desire to accelerate land supply in dynamic housing markets in southern England, where pressure on land, problems of housing affordability and opposition to development are intense. Our research investigates whether the 'one size fits all' requirement for LPAs to identify a five-year supply of housing land² is an efficacious approach for the prevailing and variegated housing market conditions in England, specifically post-industrial areas of North East England. Our central contention is that, in parts of post-industrial England, LPAs are finding it increasingly difficult to develop robust five-year land supplies due to structural economic issues relating to development viability (particularly of brownfield³ sites), place-based stigma and the *deliverability* of land rather than the *availability* of land.

The primary empirical objectives of this paper are as follows:

- To explore the factors which are hindering some LPAs in less dynamic housing market areas in their quest to achieve robust five-year land supplies;
- To ascertain whether difficulties around achieving a robust five-year land supply are having a knock on impact on some LPA's ability to achieve an up-to-date local (development) plan?
- To question which factors, other than land supply issues, are impacting upon housing delivery in peripheral former industrial economic areas of England (e.g. North East England).

Conceptually this paper will highlight how the *place-neutral* approach of requiring all LPAs to attempt to develop and maintain rolling five-year housing land supplies is creating spatially variegated outcomes across England. Fundamentally, the policy implication if LPAs cannot demonstrate a viable five-year supply is that the local state (LPA) loses its ability to retain control over the determination of development proposals within its jurisdiction, eroding a central pillar of the English 'plan-led' planning system. Where an authority cannot prove a robust five-year supply, their local plan is deemed 'absent' or 'out of date' in such circumstances, the Government can direct that planning applications should be assessed upon central government's NPPF 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' (DCLG, 2012), which represents a much less rigorous approach than local determination of a development application. Hinks and Baker (2013) support this

view stating that both the NPPF and the National Housing Strategy are essentially *aspatial* in nature and are heavily focused on incentivising development in priority spatial areas (e.g. London and the South East), underscoring the central assertion of this article, that planning is not the problem in many peripheral post-industrial communities (e.g. Northern England). Centralised, place-neutral planning policies, such as the requirement to provide a five-year land supply, are a *blunt* tool when contending with variegated structural conditions that often characterise less dynamic housing markets outside London and the wider South East of England. A submission to the Lyons Housing Review (Lyons, 2015: 58) from major cities outside London further substantiates this point:

The uniform, aspatial, guidance provided by the NPPF is found not sufficiently robust to address different demographic and market conditions between different areas of the country and there is a sense that it is largely driven by a focus on London and the South East.

Centralising measures infused into the planning system

Over the last decade, central government in England has progressively incorporated centralising measures into national planning policy to counter a perceived reluctance towards development from some localities (particularly shire county authorities in Southern England, Bramley and Watkins, 2014). Central government policy relating to housing and planning has been framed with a myopic focus on the burgeoning housing markets of London and the South East of England. The recent Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017) outlines the Government's analysis of

the causes of the UK housing crisis, as threefold: '...not enough local authorities *planning* for the homes they need; house building that is simply too slow; and a construction industry that is too reliant on a small number of big players' (DCLG, 2017: 9).

Centralising reform of the English planned planning system continues under the new Conservative administration, with the impending adoption of a zonal planning approach of implied consent for housing development on the majority of brownfield sites throughout England. The *new zonal system* for brownfield sites was outlined in the HM Treasury (2015: 45) paper *Fixing the Foundations*, it states, '...this will give England a 'zonal' system, like those seen in many other countries, reducing unnecessary delay and uncertainty for brownfield development'.

The approach of placing LPAs in 'special measures' for a variety of planning performance issues (e.g. failing to develop and up-to-date local plan, being too slow in determining planning applications and failing in the Duty to Co-operate) are all examples of the erosion of the ethos of the plan-led system and enable developers to circumvent the discretionary (and localist) nature of the current system, by effectively seeking planning approval for development directly from central government (via the Planning Inspectorate).

This systematic tightening of central government's grip on the levers of planning is symptomatic of ministers' frustrations with the perceived sluggishness of the planning system and exasperation with housing outputs. Thus, whilst successive governments have espoused localism, in actuality, national planning reform has comprised a series of centralising measures:

1. The addition of 'penalty' buffers to five-year land supply targets for LPAs

deemed to exhibit poor prior performance on housing provision

2. The target to move to Planning in Principle (a zonal system) for 90% of brownfield sites by 2020
3. The proposal to remove the responsibility to write a local plan from LPAs that do not have an NPPF compliant local plan⁴
4. Significant changes to Permitted Development (e.g. permanent changes facilitating some offices to residential conversion)
5. The proposed new power for ministers to order LPAs to prepare joint local plans; where The Secretary of State considers, it will lead to more effective planning and utilisation of land

Consequently, the five-year supply requirement in the NPPF can penalise peripheral post-industrial areas like large parts of the North of England, by requiring them to strive to achieve unattainably high levels of housing land supply.

The theoretical perspective for this article is the concept of place neutral, or spatially blind, planning policies, a prevailing condition defined by Barca et al. (2012: 137) as when:

..., the same solutions tended to be applied to similar problems in different places, without any real consideration of the specifics of the wider regional and local context. In an era of increasing globalization **place is more, rather than less significant.**

Barca et al. (2012) go on to substantiate the view that space-neutral policies will always have *variegated* spatial effects, many of which will undermine the aims of the policy itself unless its spatial effects are explicitly taken into consideration. Hildreth and Bailey (2014: 364) note that UK central government has been guilty of disingenuity by utilising the rhetoric

of place-based policy even when its policies and economic rationale might not come close to fitting this definition. Hildreth and Bailey (2014) go on to identify two fundamental weaknesses in central state policymaking from a place-based epistemological stance:

1. The national (spatial scale) has a tendency to lack both an understanding and knowledge of local places.
2. The national (spatial scale) is prone to the policymaking influences of 'capital city elites' over other sub-national spaces.

Achieving a five-year housing land supply

The Labour Government's Planning Policy Statement 3 original requirement for LPAs to achieve a five-year housing land supply was modified by the incoming Coalition Government; NPPF (DCLG, 2012), paragraph 47 states, that, in order to significantly increase housing supply, LPAs should: 'Identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years' worth of housing against their housing requirements'.

The NPPF requirement of a five-year housing land supply, and the associated penalty buffers, represent place-neutral policies that exhibit both of the central flaws outlined by Hildreth and Bailey, failing to reflect wide variation of demand for housing across England.

The main modification to the five-year supply requirement in the NPPF was the addition of penalty buffers to penalise poor historic output in terms of housing delivery. This modification has *raised the bar* and proven extremely challenging for many LPAs that were already struggling to achieve a five-year supply. The NPPF gives broad guidance to LPAs about forecasting

new housing supply. It stipulates that *more* land should be allocated for housing than was required under previous guidance and where there has been a record of persistent under delivery the buffer should increase to 20%. Our research illustrates that the introduction of the additional penalty buffers has been a *considerable barrier* for the majority of LPAs in the less dynamic housing markets of the north; with one respondent describing, ‘...a constant process of chasing your tail’ (Planner, North East England).

Achieving a robust five-year housing land supply is a central part of the evidence base for achieving the adoption of an up-to-date local (development) plan. Since the introduction of the NPPF in 2012, adoption of local plans nationally has been painfully slow despite LPAs having been presented with an ultimatum to adopt plans synchronised with the NPPF or face central government intervention. The recent Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017: 13) states that over 40% of LPAs still do not have a local plan that meets the projected growth in households in their area. The White Paper goes on to state, ‘At present too few places have an up-to-date plan:..., despite having had over twelve years to do so; and only a third of authorities had adopted a plan since the National Planning Policy Framework was published [in 2012]’.

Our research contends that in reality, due to legal and appeal decisions challenging the validity of five-year supplies, the *real* level of robust local plans is likely to be much lower; with some sources suggesting only circa 25% of LPAs have defensible local plans (TCPA, 2015). Recent Savills (2017b) research substantiates this view, noting in 2017, that nearly one in five English LPAs had their five-year supply successfully challenged by developers at appeal.

Methodology

The research comprised two distinct phases:

1. a comprehensive desk-based survey and analysis of academic and policy documents, relating to the level of compliance of local authorities across England, with the Government’s requirement to provide a five-year housing land supply
2. empirical study of how the 12 LPAs in the North East of England were responding to the requirement and wider aspirations for housing land supply and development viability.

The empirical research comprised semi-structured elite interviews with senior planners⁵ in all 12 LPAs in the North East of England, triangulated with data from a sample of semi-structured interviews with land managers working for national and regional housing developers operating across the North of England. The data generated by the interviews were analysed using a coding framework to highlight themes and trends in the responses. The primary data substantiate the view that a uniform policy to allocate land for housing across England generates spatially variegated (and unintended outcomes) particularly in post-industrial areas of England that contain surplus brownfield land, negative place-based stigma, low market values and significant issues relating to development viability.

Is planning the problem?

Kate Barker (2004)⁶ was tasked on behalf of HM Treasury with undertaking a review of the housing market. The central findings of Barker’s Review emphasised the need for the supply of land to keep pace with local demand to temper affordability problems and price rises. Cheshire et al. (2014) contend that by restricting the supply of

housing space in the UK, the functioning of the English planning system (primarily at the local level) has contributed to increasing inelasticity of housing supply, echoing, a central finding of the Barker Review (2004) and aligning with the view reported in The Callcutt Review (2007: 32) that the development industry feel, 'the planning system releases too little land, and its release is slow and unpredictable'. Conversely, Sharp (2017) adds weight to the thesis that the planning system is not the problem by observing that the impact of the demise of housing development by the public sector (over the past 30 years) far outweighs any problems within the planning system as an explanation of the English housing crisis. Significantly, the public sector has not been a major housing developer in England for the past four decades, which has coincided with a historical slump in housing provision; supply being dependent on a small number of private sector volume housebuilders.

Fundamentally, Barker's review stated that over a sustained period, housing supply has been unresponsive to pricing signals and that in large part this reflected constraints embedded in the planning system (Belfield et al., 2015). Post-Barker Review, governmental pressure intensified on planning with a neoliberal orthodoxy emanating from Whitehall, echoing Barker's central finding, that planning (primarily at the local authority level) was a significant bureaucratic obstruction to housing development by ultimately constraining land supply. From an international perspective, Cheshire et al. (2014: 81) contextualise this critique by describing a system in which development is constrained by regulatory uncertainty, 'the British experience ... provides some idea of what the future might hold for other countries as planning systems becoming increasingly restrictive'. The populist suggestion that planning (and in particular local authority planners) are anti-growth, fails to comprehend the

complex interaction of prevailing 'place-based' factors that will influence how localities (and local authority planners) may best plan for development and delivery of a robust long-term housing supply. In the following sections, we briefly consider significant facets of the UK housing crisis.

A wider problem than planning?

The Government has recently toned down its rhetoric towards planning (and the planning profession) with the former Planning and Housing Minister (Gavin Barwell), stating, 'I don't think the planning system is the *sole* problem ... Last year, a record number of planning permissions were granted, but that didn't translate into a record number of homes being built...'⁷

The Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017) also acknowledges that local/regional housing markets exhibit some place-specific characteristics. Additionally, in the Autumn Budget (House of Commons Select Committee, Treasury Committee, 2017) the Government announced former minister, Oliver Letwin will conduct a review of build out rates of existing planning permissions. However, despite the softening of the Government's rhetoric, Whitehall is still actively implementing *place-neutral* national planning policies towards the provision of land supply for housing (via the NPPF), which imply every LPA across the country needs to be incentivised to adopt a positive development stance. This uniform approach does not appear to be based on compelling evidence and is paradoxical to the explicit 'bottom-up' localism approach that the Government espouses in terms of its overarching ethos for governing.

By definition, the place-neutral approach pursued by central government within the NPPF lacks a nuanced view of the actual individual stances of LPAs (cities, city-regions and rural counties) across England towards development. 'Negative planning'

stances are frequently driven by political realities in localities where a vocal majority of the local electorate are vehemently opposed to new development (Gallent et al., 2013). Bramley and Watkins (2014: 877) expand the critique of the Government's place-neutral approach to planning for housing, by illustrating that LPAs across England exhibit significant spatial variations in their approach to development,

...areas with more positive planning stances for new housing are a mixture of urban areas, particularly older industrial conurbations in the North and Midlands, and sparsely populated rural and agrarian regions ... Areas with a more negative stance comprise a solid belt of London suburbs and surrounding areas (much of which contain Green Belt) extending to the south coast and westward to the Welsh border...

Significantly, most of the areas identified with a 'negative planning' stance are prosperous and/or semi-rural localities, which operate as a commuter belt for London and where additional housing supply is most acutely required. It could be argued that these are exactly the authorities that the more rigorous five-year supply requirements in the NPPF are targeted at. Our research confirmed that the vast majority of authorities in the North East had a 'positive planning' stance (Bramley and Watkins, 2014) and were striving to meet central government aspirations by targeting growth and higher housing targets than under the previous regional system (see McGuinness and Mawson, 2017). Our analysis suggests that perversely these are the authorities that are most often penalised by the more rigorous five-year supply requirements in the NPPF. Furthermore, simply because land has been designated for housing, and has planning consent, does not guarantee that new homes will be built. Ultimately, the decision

to build is reliant on the business models of a small number of major national housing developers (see below) who operate a drip feed approach to housing supply. The planning system can only facilitate housebuilding it does not put spades in the ground.

Housing affordability

The UK housing market is characterised by weak responsiveness of housing supply to demand change and spatially varied levels of supply and demand (Dixon and Adams, 2008; Hinks et al., 2013). England has a tangible spatial mismatch between the agglomeration of people and jobs (growth areas) and the distribution of available and vacant housing (declining areas). Recent history suggests that private sector housebuilders will only build around 150,000 residential units per annum and in terms of housing affordability, English housing markets have become increasingly polarised, both nationally and subregionally. The National Housing Federation (2017) states London has the highest average house price in England (£563,000) approaching quadruple that of the comparable figure in the North East (£153,000). In 2014, the average home in England cost circa eight times the average salary (Lyons Review, 2014), since when the average salary has increased marginally to approximately £27,680 (NHF, 2017); however, in central London markets,⁸ the salary multiplier required to afford the average house is surging beyond 15 times the average salary (see Figure 1). Many commentators have described this situation as completely unsustainable (IPPR, 2017; Localis, 2017; Lyons, 2014; Shelter and KPMG, 2014).

Dominance of volume housebuilders in England

Ultimately, Government and the public sector has limited influence over the

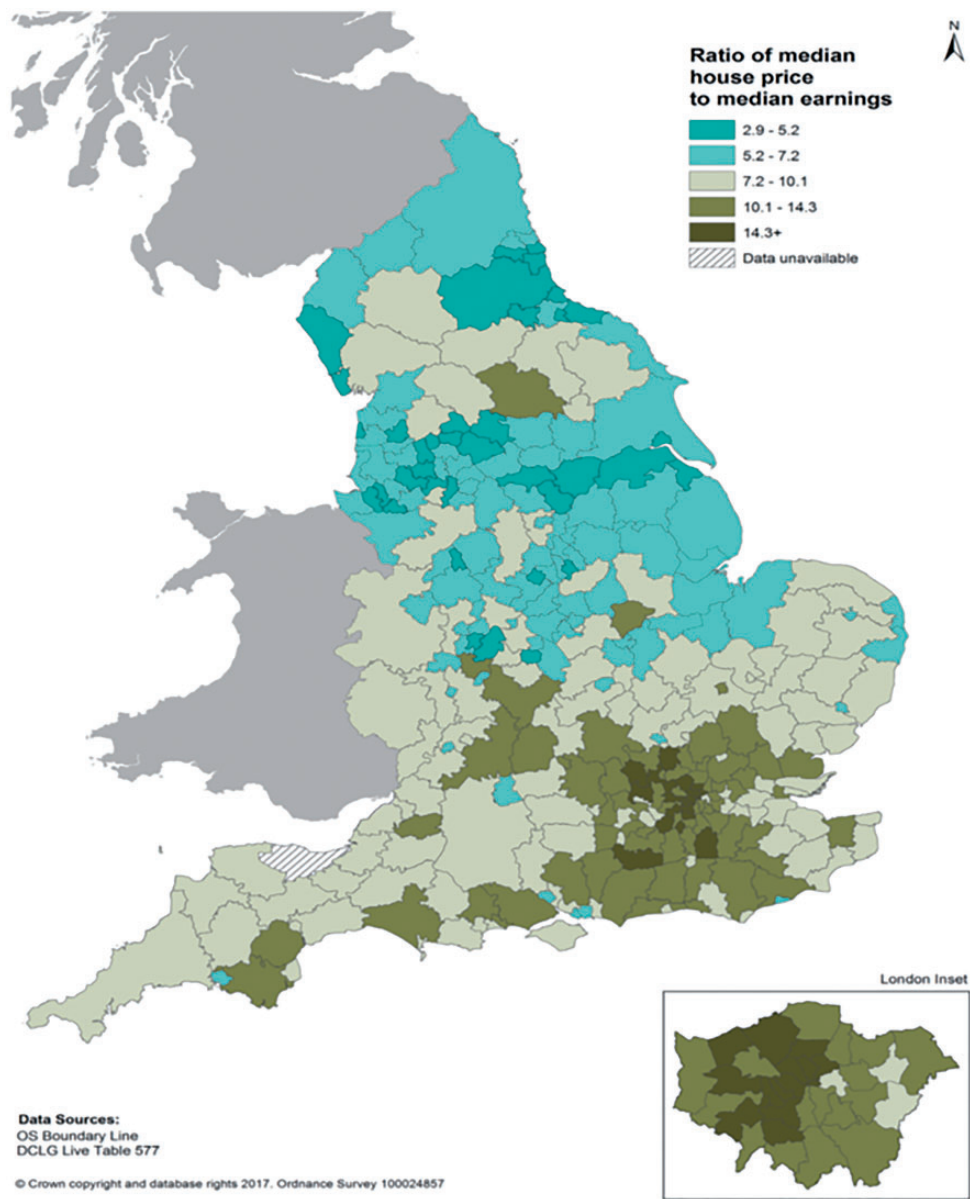


Figure 1. Ratio of median house prices to median earnings. Source: DCLG (2017).

supply of housing in England, which is increasingly determined by a few large private sector (volume) housing developers (IPPR, 2017; Lyons, 2014) (see Figure 2). The Home Builders Federation reports that since 1992 the number of small

housebuilders in the UK has declined by 80%.⁹ In terms of output, Archer and Cole (2014) state, that in 1960, the top ten national housebuilders accounted for approximately 9% of all new housing production; the latest figures in the Housing

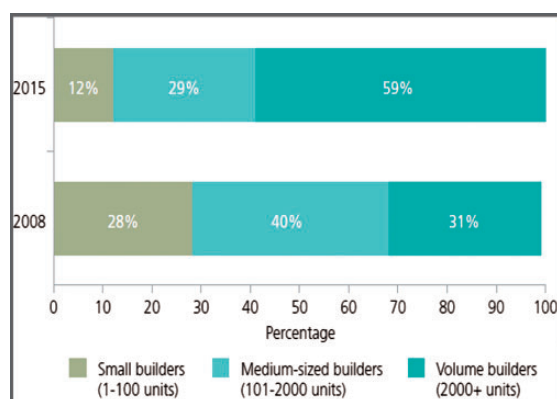


Figure 2. Market share by housebuilder size. Source: DCLG (2017).

White Paper (DCLG, 2017) state that 60% of new private homes in Britain are built by the top ten national developers (see Figure 2).

There is no incentive for volume housebuilders, operating a ‘Return On Costs’ (ROC) business model, to increase the supply of new housing units, if it saturates the market, reducing house prices and returns or profit. This view was substantiated by the CLG Select Committee in its report on *Capacity in the homebuilding industry* (HoCCLGC, 2017: 8) which states,

The high volume homebuilders dominate the market and are therefore able to shape how it operates. Having purchased land at a given price ... they will not risk over-saturating a local market to the extent that house prices will fall and their profits decrease. This is rational commercial behaviour ... when developers say they build to meet demand, what they mean is that they build to meet demand at a certain price.

Consequently, most volume housebuilders tacitly tolerate restrictive planning because it creates scarcity and inflates market values, underpinned by ‘drip-feed’ or ‘trickle-out’ approach to supplying the market in

order to maintain prices (see Adams and Leishman, 2008; Cochrane et al., 2015; Diacon et al., 2011).

Archer and Cole (2014: 108) state, ‘The big beast just grows bigger, rationalisation and risk aversion prevails, public subsidy is mis-directed and developers show little interest in sharply increasing output to meet public policy objectives’.

Payne (2013) concludes that major housebuilders in England are inherently conservative and housebuilding rates in England remain historically low, as policies devised to increase housebuilding have, seemingly, been conceived without an understanding of the behavioural practices of speculative housebuilders. There is growing political concern over the ‘big beasts’ alleged monopolisation (via land banking) of development land which excludes smaller developers who may be prepared to expedite development of land (Cochrane et al., 2015; DCLG, 2017). The Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017) acknowledges this issue and suggests that the largest housebuilders should commit to publishing aggregate figures on build out rates. However, there are divergent views in terms of alleged land banking by major housebuilders and the Callcutt Review (2007: 37) contends there are sound

commercial reasons for housebuilders accumulating a sizeable land bank, as they need: ‘...to assure their investors that their land banks are sufficient to cover their needs in the short to medium term; otherwise, the investors would see the companies as being “at risk” and ... depress the share price’.

LPAs not providing planning consent on enough development land

The evidence outlined in this article substantiates the viewpoint that in many parts of England, in the short to medium term, land supply is not, per se, the problem in terms of housing supply (Adams and Leishman, 2008). Cochrane et al. (2015) challenged orthodox explanations of the housing crisis from major developers, contending that any simple equation between land availability and the delivery of new homes is ultimately unconvincing. Colenutt and Field (2013) analysed data from the big five housebuilders¹⁰ in the UK and found that they have short- and medium-term land banks for 518,000 units but built only 44,000 units per annum; this could be attributable to the need to assure investors that developers have sufficient land for their business needs (outline above, The Callcutt Review, 2007). In terms of existing planning permissions, the Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017: 13) reports that more than a third of new homes that were granted permission between 2010/11 and 2015/16 have yet to be built. However, in England it is a myth to suggest that major housebuilders are the largest holders (hoarders) of developable land; the Callcutt Review (2007) noted that 61% of land was owned by non-property companies (including the public sector). Herein lies the longer term threat to housing land supply highlighted by Shelter and KPMG (2014: 37) in their report *Building the homes we need*, which exposes the

growing corrosive role of land speculators in the development process, stating,

...much developable land seems to be held out of production in the hands of owners who do not intend to develop it, but seek to make speculative profits from land trading. there is evidence that since the financial crisis hit, a growing proportion of developable land has come to be held by non-development firms.

These facts unequivocally challenge the thesis that the planning system is largely at fault for the housing crisis, as there are clearly significant issues in terms of developable land and outstanding permission, which are not (for whatever reason) being converted into homes. This evidence is irrefutable and has tacitly been acknowledged by the government in launching the Letwin Review to explore the factors that lie behind the sluggish build out rate of existing planning permissions.

An abundance of (unviable) brownfield land

Achieving a five-year supply (and an up-to-date local plan) has proved particularly problematic for peripheral Northern post-industrial areas (e.g. Stockton Borough Council) that have a legacy of vacant urban brownfield sites, formerly associated with either heavy industry or deprived social housing estates; with low demand and high levels of vacant property. Schulze Baing and Wong (2012) demonstrate a spatial correlation between the location of brownfield land and deprivation, confirming that although the supply of brownfield land is dynamic, in terms of long-term brownfield sites that are suitable for housing many of the easiest residential sites, were redeveloped during the Urban Renaissance (1997–2007). During this

period the incumbent Labour administration set a target of 60% of new housing to be developed on brownfield land, a target which was comfortably achieved, peaking in 2008 at 80%. With the development of the 'lowest hanging fruit', remaining brownfield sites often have more intractable problems, such as contamination, that require de-risking or are not of a scale to be attractive to volume housebuilders. LPAs in post-industrial Northern cities are often compelled to take a pragmatic stance on existing brownfield regeneration sites; from a social regeneration dimension LPAs cannot ignore these urban brownfield sites, but often their inclusion in potential land supply calculations is part of an ambitious attempt to meet onerous land supply targets and is *in hope* rather than expectation.

The following section reports the main findings from the empirical research, derived from analysis of responses from local authority planners and private sector housing developers active in the North of England about the challenges facing both in achieving a robust five-year housing land supply.

The impact of place-neutral planning for housing in the North East of England

Our primary research focuses on the 12 LPAs located within the North East of England, which has *the least* dynamic housing market in England, with poor development viability affecting large tracts of land with potential for housing development. The analysis explores wider questions of whether planning is actually the problem (anti-growth) or whether in some localities the real barriers are a more complex blend of intractable structural issues (relating to industrial decline, stigma, creeping dereliction), demand-side constraints around finance (mortgage availability, wage levels, savings) and the profit maximising approach of volume housebuilders. Such problems will not be addressed successfully by place-neutral planning policy that

has been predicated on paradoxical economic and market conditions prevailing in large parts of the South East. At the time of conducting the original empirical research (spring/summer 2015), only three of the 12 LPAs in the North East of England had a five-year supply and one claimed to have a '*marginal*' five-year supply. Subsequent progress has been limited, with a further two authorities having achieved a five-year supply with the adoption of their joint plan and two authorities claiming to have a '*marginal*' five-year supply by Spring 2017 (see Table 1). Our interviews with developers revealed that they are sceptical about whether *in reality* any of the LPAs in the North East have a defensible and robust five-year supply and suspect that claims by LPAs to have a five-year supply will unravel in subsequent appeals, inquiries or court rulings. Savills (2017a) confirm this trend nationally by highlighting that 61 LPAs in England have had lack of five-year supply confirmed at appeal by April 2017.

The most significant barrier for LPAs in the North of England achieving a five-year supply has been the introduction of the additional 5 and 20% buffers for previous under achievement. '...the buffers have meant we are constantly playing catch up ... you are not meeting the 5 year supply on a consistent basis so you have to apply your additional 20%. It is a vicious circle...' (Planner, North East England).

The majority of respondents felt that the NPPF's approach to allocating land for housing development was unhelpful to the North because of LPAs' inability to demonstrate deliverability and a key element of that was establishing development viability. All the 12 LPAs in the North East have a broadly pro-development planning stance and want to provide new housing, principally to retain their economically active populations. Despite this pro-growth approach, there appear to be serious underlying structural problems which are restricting housing

Table 1. Status of North East LPAs with regard to five-year land supplies and up-to-date Local Plans (accurate February/March 2017).

Local planning authority (LPA)	Five-year land supply status March 2015	Five-year land supply status March 2017	Up-to-date Local Plan ¹¹ (February 2017)
Darlington Borough Council	No	No	No
Durham County Council	No	No	No
Gateshead Borough Council	No	Yes	Yes
Hartlepool Borough Council	No	No	No
Middlesbrough Council	Yes	Yes	No
Newcastle City Council	No	Yes	Yes
North Tyneside Council	No	No	No
Northumberland County Council	No	Partial/No	No
Redcar & Cleveland Council	Yes	Yes	Examined (No)
South Tyneside Council	Yes	Partial/No	No
Stockton Borough Council	No	No	No
Sunderland City Council	No	No	No
Total	3/12 (25%)	4/12 (33.3%)	2/12 (17%)

development in many parts of the post-industrial North East.

The NPPF assumes that the only reason land won't come forward is due to planning restrictions and if land isn't coming forward to meet the five year supply, the only solution is to allocate more land ... we could have allocated *every* piece of land in the borough and we still wouldn't have met the housing requirements. (Planner, North East)

This quote epitomises the viewpoint that planning and the availability of land are not the primary issue in the majority of the post-industrial north east and there appear to be deeper more structural problem in housing markets and wider local economies, which exacerbate the current problems with affordability and supply.

LPAs' views on the current context for housing development in the North East

A number of North East authorities reported 'more aggressive' approaches from

developers and there was anxiety amongst the regions' planners that if an authority does not have a five-year supply they were increasingly vulnerable to developers pursuing predatory applications (often on lucrative greenfield and green belt sites). If the LPA subsequently refuse permission on coveted housing development sites there was a bullish indication from major housing developers that they were confident of overturning the decision at appeal. A planner summed up this position, 'Given the recent appeal decision, they [house builders] think it is open season'. Another planner elaborated on a related and crucial strategic planning issue, the difficulty of providing adequate infrastructure for development in a climate of speculative development pressures, 'we would have preferred they [planning applications for significant housing] were dealt with in a more strategic manner through our local plan, to ensure the right infrastructure is in place'. There was a real concern amongst respondents that strategic planning for infrastructures is impossible to achieve in the current fragmented policy environment where a glut of planning decisions can be progressed by appeal or due to successful speculative

applications. This finding was replicated outside the North East within rural areas like the East of England where RTPI (2016: 8) research stated, 'There is real pressure coming on social infrastructure in the East of England ... this is exacerbated by small incremental development that doesn't bring associated infrastructure'. Equally issues about mortgage availability, access to deposits and land assembly were repeatedly stated by respondents: 'We have got 1500 dwellings ... that have planning permission at the moment that are not being built, because not enough people want to buy houses, people don't have money to buy, and there are not enough jobs' (Planner, North East).

One respondent succinctly captured the majority viewpoint, stating, '...the issue in the North is very much about deliverability of land, not availability of land', expanding on the issues the respondent stated:

...we had housing market renewal ... so we could legitimately say, these brownfield sites are going to come forward, we had public sector funding to drive them forward ... With the withdrawal of funding, a lot of these sites became unviable.

The dual factors of a continual period of public sector austerity and, for the first time in 40 years a complete absence of centrally funded regeneration initiatives in England (Work Foundation, 2012) combine to exacerbate problems with some brownfield sites in peripheral post-industrial cities in England. Many of the planners interviewed had identified brownfield sites within their jurisdiction that were, in current market conditions, patently unviable without an injection of public sector subsidy. This findings again corroborates national RTPI data (2016) which states, '... a 'brownfield first' policy will fail to deliver its full potential if there is insufficient available funding for the treatment and assembly of land. New proactive

remedial programmes are needed to remove constraints on development'.

In some instances, the lack of progress with brownfield sites in parts of the North East was due to heavily contaminated former industrial land and a lack of funding to assist towards remediation; in other cases, it was down to low market demand, low-end values and issues with stigma relating to the perceived quality of place within particular communities.

Developers' views on five-year housing land supplies

The majority of both major national and regional developers interviewed held a perception that the majority of the LPAs in the North do not have a defendable five-year supply. One developer reflected:

...most local authorities we ... [have come] ... across weren't able to maintain a five year supply, and it ... created an opportunity for developers to come in on former employment land and push for consent for that land to be released. (National Housing Developer)

Another respondent from the development industry concurred and questioned whether the minority of LPAs that claim to have a five-year supply could withstand legal scrutiny, pointing to the evidence of a number of recent successful appeals on the issue (see Savills, 2017b). Most developers we interviewed had been involved in appeals against planning decisions based on the lack of, or suitability of the five-year supply. There is a perception that, as authorities edge towards delivering a five-year supply, there is less likelihood of appeals. Where five-year supplies are not in place there is a widespread view amongst both planners and developers that appeals are likely. However, at a macro scale for most respondents aggressive appeals were not the preferred option with

developers preferring a more collaborative (long-term) approach with LPAs where they felt ‘maintaining trust’ was in the longer term interests of their business, rather than a short-term ‘smash and grab’ approach which may sour future relations with LPAs.

The developers interviewed were generally positive about the NPPF and its ability to deliver the housing needed for the North East, although there was a tendency for them to see housing need purely in terms of expressed market demand. Typical of comments reflecting this view was, ‘...it is not the theoretical allocation of sites which makes up the local authority’s land bank, it is actually sites that are attractive to the market, which are viable and will be built’. Developers were confident a gap exists in the five-year supply identified by the LPAs, not because the sites do not exist, but because some of the sites identified in the five-year supplies are not viable or commercially attractive to developers.

It is our view that the five-year housing land supply requirement represents a crude centralising move by central Government, *paradoxical* in terms of localism¹² and failing to appreciate the nuanced (place based) circumstances of local housing markets. Our primary research focus is on North East England but recent RTPI (2016) research reports highlight comparable problems in other peripheral economic regions like the East Midlands and Wales, where LPAs have also struggled to achieve a five-year housing land supply. The RTPI’s (2016) research reveals that issues of viability of brownfield land and difficulty of providing a robust land supply in under-bounded cities without the co-operation of neighbouring authorities (see also Hamiduddin and Gallent, 2012) are common and recurring issues in many post-industrial urban areas across the U.K. The current Government attempted to resolve the issue of LPAs collaborating

across boundaries to meet housing need via the ‘light touch’ duty to co-operate (2011 Localism Act). The duty to co-operate has proved largely ineffective (see McGuinness and Mawson, 2017) and has recently evolved into the more formal Statements of Common Ground with the Government reserving the right to compel LPAs to collaborate on joint plans where it feels it is necessary. National research by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS), published in May 2014, two years after the publication of the NPPF, found that only 54% of LPAs had a five-year supply. The PAS (2014) study, which received responses from 289 LPAs, found stark regional disparities, with an impressive 85% of authorities in London reporting they had coverage, but only 36% of LPAs in the North East. More recent research by Savills (2017b) suggests that 44% of local authorities outside of London still do not have a five-year housing land supply. This indicates that a place-neutral ‘one size fits all’ policy is likely to be *failing* particularly in some of the least dynamic economic regions of the England.

Conclusions: The impact of place-neutral planning policies

As the Barker (2004), Callcutt (2007) and Lyons (2014) Reviews all note: ‘*land is key*’ and within the English context of acute shortages of developable land in some urban growth areas (especially the prosperous South) control over land (and the parasitic activities of land speculators) is a critical issue; site assembly and infrastructure investment may also be required in order to unlock strategic development areas identified in local plans. However, the research in the article shows that housing and land markets in England exhibit strong *local* (place based) nuances which cannot be addressed by a ‘*one size fits all*’

(place neutral) national planning approach to designating land for housing development. This finding has been corroborated by national research undertaken by the RTPi (2016) which found in terms of planning and housing policy, ‘...there are regional differences and one-size-fits-all policies come with problems’. The empirical content of this paper confirms that in parts of England (e.g. North East England) planning (and the planning system) are not the pivotal problem in terms of increasing the supply of housing. Innovative new solutions and policy measures beyond deregulating planning and increasing the supply of land for housing development are required if the government is to be successful in its attempts to solve the housing crisis in all parts of England. Our research substantiates the key finding of Hildreth and Bailey (2014) of two seminal weaknesses in central state policymaking, namely that the national scale lacks a nuanced knowledge and understanding of the local scale and central government is prone to the policymaking influences of ‘capital city elites’ over other sub-national spaces.

In peripheral post-industrial areas like the North East of England, constraints on the housing market are complex and contributing issues include availability of development finance, mortgage finance, wider land viability issues, a surplus of former industrial brownfield sites, a related lack of government subsidies to remediate unviable brownfield sites and corrosive negative place-based stigma. A place-neutral, capital city-driven national planning policy calibrated to coerce (mainly southern) LPAs that have a negative planning stance is proving largely unsuitable for areas with less dynamic land and housing markets. This paper also illustrates that national planning policy is making it extremely difficult for LPAs in post-industrial communities to achieve defensible local (development) plans and without a robust local plan,

these LPAs face ceding control of shaping development in their locality to central government (via the NPPF) and predatory major national developers.

Finally, the monopolistic approach of ‘big beast’ volume housebuilders and their profit maximising (ROC) approach adds a further layer of complexity to attempts to increase housing supply throughout England – a factor that is almost completely beyond the jurisdiction of the planning system. Large developers are extremely selective about the sites that they will pursue and the speed at which they will progress development once planning permission has been achieved and they are not averse to using the appeals process to coerce LPAs into accepting speculative development on the most lucrative sites (often greenfield or green belt sites), at the expense of other less desirable regeneration (brownfield) sites that have been allocated through the plan-led system. As many reports have stated (IPPR, 2017; Lyons, 2014; Shelter and KPMG, 2014) progress with the housing crisis requires more SME developers active in the market and a return to some model of local authorities developing affordable homes (see Morphet, 2016). There have been calls from the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee (2017) to lift the local authority borrowing cap entirely so the councils can build more homes but it remains to be seen if central government has the stomach for such radical steps.

Therefore, in the short to medium term significant responsibility still lays with private sector developers to attempt to alleviate the housing crisis. Ultimately, it is clear that developers have to attend to the requirements of investors and creditors, and if land identified as part of local authority five-year supply appears to be too expensive to develop, or is likely to be unpopular with buyers, the decision on whether to progress will be based on the

economic bottom line. The Government's imposition of national aspatial, place-neutral planning policy, rather than being a centralising solution to problems of housing supply across England, is actually penalising some of the places that have the most positive stance towards development. A future revision of the NPPF should respond to these deficiencies in current national planning policy with a true localist agenda reflecting a more flexible, place-based approach to solving issues around land and housing supply.

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Notes

1. Planning is a devolved responsibility in the UK and although the basic structures of the four systems in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are similar, there are differences in the detail and in how each system works. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper we will be focusing solely on the English system.
2. Referred to as a five-year supply from this point forward.
3. Brownfield land refers to previously developed land, the legacy of which often results in significant sunken costs involved in remediating contamination and removing dereliction.
4. In November 2017, 15 local authorities were warned that they had run out of time to prepare a local plan by the Secretary of State.
5. Steps are being taken to remove the plan-making function from these local authorities.
6. All the planning practitioners interviewed had directed responsibility for developing a five-year housing land supply for their authority.
7. An economist and member of the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee.
8. Former Planning and Housing Minister, Gavin Barwell MP quoted in *Planning Magazine*, October 2016.
9. The Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017: 9) goes on to state the astonishing fact that in 21st century Britain it is no longer unusual for houses to 'earn' more than the people. For instance in 2015, the average home in the South East of England increased in value by £29,000, while the average annual salary in the region was just £24,542.
10. The Planner (RTPI), 5 November 2015, available at: www.theplanner.co.uk/news/small-developers-must-be-at-heart-of-housing-revival-say-experts?utm_source=Adestra&utm_medium=email&utm_term=.
11. The big five housebuilders – Bellway, Berkeley, Persimmon, TaylorWimpey and Barratt.
12. We classify an up-to-date Local Plan as one adopted after the publication of the NPPF (March 2012). Many of the councils studied are in the process of developing a Local Plan and some Plans are currently being examined by the Planning Inspectorate.
13. The government has proposed in the Housing White Paper (DCLG, 2017) to allow local authorities to develop one-year (annual) housing supplies but this proposal currently lacks detail so it is difficult to assess whether it will reconcile some of the existing issues with five-year supplies.

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APPENDIX:

Conference Papers and other Academic Outputs not included in Prima Facie submission

Contains list of Conference Papers, which have evolved into the six Academic Outputs within this submission

Please note: These conference papers are not included to suggest **additional** Academic Outputs, they are include to show the reader how research ideas have evolved from conference papers, through iterations and peer review into the published Academic Outputs that are included in this submission.

- 1 **McGuinness, D.** and Mawson J. (2019) Back to the Future? The demise and rebirth of strategic spatial planning in England *Regional Studies Association Annual European Conference*, Pushing Regions Beyond their Borders, Santiago de Compostela, 2019, 5th-7th June 2019
- 2 **McGuinness, D.** and Mawson, J. (2018) Back to the Future? The demise and rebirth of strategic spatial planning in England AESOP Annual Congress, Malmo, July 10th – 14th 2018
- 3 Muldoon-Smith, K. and **McGuinness, D.** (2017) Tacit planning: transferring practitioner know-how into contemporary practice, *Royal Geography Society Annual International Conference*, London, 29th August – 1st September, 2017
- 4 **McGuinness, D.** and Greenhalgh, P. (2017) Is it Time for Area Based Regeneration Initiatives to come in from the Cold? *Regional Studies Association Annual European Conference*, Dublin, 5-7th June 2017
- 5 **McGuinness, D.** and Mawson, J. (2016) Strategic planning – myths, old chestnuts and reinventing the wheel, *Regional Studies Association Winter Conference 2017* (Smart, Creative, Sustainable, Inclusive: Territorial Development Strategies in the Age of Austerity), London, 23rd November 2017
- 6 **McGuinness D.** (2015) The Demise of Regional Planning in England: Will the Turn to Localism and Downscaling of Planning Disadvantage English Cities? *Regional Studies Association Annual European Conference*, Piacenza, 26th May 2015
- 7 **McGuinness, D.** and Ludwig, C. (2014) Emerging lessons from neighbourhood planning frontrunners: Does the reality of localism match the rhetoric? *Royal Geography Society Annual International Conference*, London, 28th August 2014
- 8 Pugalis, L. and **McGuinness, D.** (2013) *Where next for regeneration in age of austerity? Challenges for regeneration professionals. PAC Annual Conference 2013* (Public Service Innovation), Edinburgh, 9th - 11th September 2013,
- 9 **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P. and Pugalis, L. (2013) It's the economy stupid; An analysis of similarities and disparities in regeneration policy between England and Scotland, *Housing Studies Association National Conference*, York, Thursday 12th April 2013

- 10 Pugalis, L. and **McGuinness, D.** (2012) *Austerity-era regeneration: weathering the storm or political marginalisation? Regional Studies Association Winter Conference 2012* (Smart, Creative, Sustainable, Inclusive: Territorial Development Strategies in the Age of Austerity), London, 23rd November 2012,
- 11 **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P. and Pugalis, L.(2012) Envious glances north of the Border: An analysis of the growing disparities in regeneration policy between England and Scotland, *Royal Geography Society Annual International Conference*, Edinburgh, 3rd July 2012
- 12 **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P., Davidson, G., Braidford, P. and Robinson, F. (2011) Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood looking to rediscover its 'reason for being'– a case study of South Bank, Teesside, *Regional Studies Association Annual European Conference*, Newcastle, 17th -20th April 2011

Additional Publications (not part of formal submission)

- 13 Joas, M., **McGuinness, D.**, Theobald, K., Garzillo, C. and Kuhn, S. (2013) *Informed Cities: Making research work for local sustainability*, Abingdon: Earthscan
- 14 Pugalis, L. and **McGuinness, D.** (2013) *The retreat of the state: The challenges faced by regeneration managers in a climate of austerity*. In: Looking for Consensus?: Civil Society, Social Movements and Crises for Public Management. Critical Perspectives on International Public Sector Management (2). Emerald, pp. 59-85
- 15 Davidson, G., **McGuinness, D.**, Greenhalgh, P., (2013) 'It'll get worse before it gets better': Local experiences of living in a regeneration area. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, 7 (1). pp. 59-70
- 16 Pugalis, L., Greenhalgh, P. and **McGuinness, D.** (2012) Chalk and Cheese: A comparison of England and Scotland's emerging approaches to regeneration, *Town and Country Planning*, 81 (2). pp. 84-88

Glossary

ABI	Area Based Initiative
CAs	Combined Authorities
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government
HMT	Her Majesties Treasury
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LPA	Local Planning Authority
MCHLG	Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government
MLG	Multi-Level Governance
NP	Neighbourhood Plan
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategy
TTWA	Travel To Work Areas

Co-author declaration forms



DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP OF PUBLISHED WORK

(Please use one form per co-author per publication)

Section A

Name of candidate: David McGuinness

Name of co-author: Paul Greenhalgh

Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):

McGuinness, D., Greenhalgh, P and Pugalis, L (2015) Is the grass always greener? Making sense of convergence and divergence in regeneration policies in England and Scotland, *Geographical Journal*, 181 (1), pp.26-37

Section B

DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE *(delete as appropriate)*

I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:

- (i) principal author

My specific contribution to the publication was (maximum 50 words):

Significant role in research design and data collection, presented paper at RGS/IBG Conference in Edinburgh (03 July 2012) which led to an invite to publish paper in Special Issue of *Geographical Journal* from Janice Morphet and Ben Clifford (Eds.). Significant role in writing and editing final paper.

Signed:

(candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

Section C

STATEMENT BY CO-AUTHOR *(delete as appropriate)*

Either (i) I agree with the above declaration by the candidate

or

(ii) ~~I do not agree with the above declaration by the candidate for the following reason(s):~~

Signed:

(co-author)

6/3/20

(date)

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(candidate) **02.03.20** (date)

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Signed:(co-author) ...**18 March 2020**..... (date)

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Name of co-author: Lee Pugalis
Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):
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Section B
DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE (*delete as appropriate*)
 I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:
 (ii) joint author
My specific contribution to the publication was (maximum 50 words):
 Involved in research design and collected half of the empirical data, involved in writing final paper, supporting role in editing the final paper.

Signed: (candidate) 02.03.20 (date)


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Section B
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 I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:
 (ii) joint author
 My specific contribution to the publication was *(maximum 50 words)*:
 Involved in research design and collected significant amount of the empirical data (interviews and focus groups). Presented draft version of paper at Regional Studies Association Annual Conference, Newcastle, 18th April 2011 and centrally involved in writing and editing the final paper.
 Signed:  (candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

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Name of candidate: David McGuinness

Name of co-author: Gill Davidson

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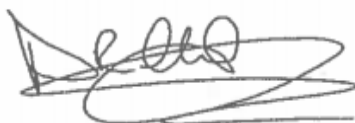
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Signed:  (co-author) 11.03.20 (date)

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Name of candidate: David McGuinness

Name of co-author: Paul Braidford

Full bibliographical details of the publication *(including authors)*:

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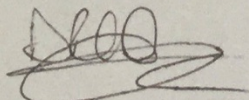
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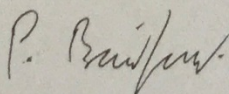


Signed: (candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

Section C

STATEMENT BY CO-AUTHOR *(delete as appropriate)*

(i) I agree with the above declaration by the candidate



Signed:(co-author)8.3.2020..... (date)

DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP OF PUBLISHED WORK

(Please use one form per co-author per publication)

Section A

Name of candidate: David McGuinness

Name of co-author: Fred Robinson

Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):

McGuinness, D., Greenhalgh, P., Davidson, G., Robinson, F. and Braidford, P. (2012) Swimming against the tide: a study of a neighbourhood trying to rediscover its 'reason for being'— the case of South Bank, Redcar and Cleveland. *Local Economy*, 27 (3). pp. 251-264

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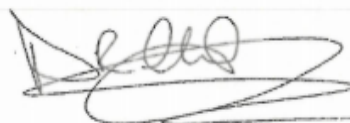
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My specific contribution to the publication was (maximum 50 words):

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Signed:



(candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

Section C

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Signed:





(co-author) 11 March 2020 (date)

DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP OF PUBLISHED WORK

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Section A
Name of candidate: David McGuinness
Name of co-author: John Mawson
Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):
 McGuinness, D. and Mawson, J. (2017) The rescaling of sub-national planning: Can localism resolve England's spatial planning conundrum, *Town Planning Review*, 88 (3) 282-303


Section B
DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE *(delete as appropriate)*
 I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:
 (i) principal author
My specific contribution to the publication was (maximum 50 words):
 Developed research design, conducted desk based literature review and completed all data collection, presented draft of paper at Regional Studies Association Annual Conference, Piacenza (26 May 2015) . Significant role in drafting and editing of final paper.

Signed: (candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

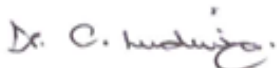
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Signed: (co-author)06.03.2020..... (date)

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Section A
Name of candidate: David McGuinness
Name of co-author: Carol Ludwig
Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):
 McGuinness, D and Ludwig, C. (2017) Developing a neighbourhood plan: stories and lessons from 'community-led' planning, published in: Bradley Q, and Brownhill, S (eds.) (2017) Neighbourhood Planning and Localism: Power to the People? Policy Press: Bristol

Section B
DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE (*delete as appropriate*)
 I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:
 (i) principal author
My specific contribution to the publication was (maximum 50 words):
 Significant role in research design and data collection, presented paper at RGS/IBG Conference in London (28 Aug 2014) which led to invite to publish chapter in edited book from Quintin Bradley and Sue Brownhill. Significant role in writing and editing final book chapter.

Signed: (candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

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Name of candidate: David McGuinness

Name of co-author: Paul Greenhalgh

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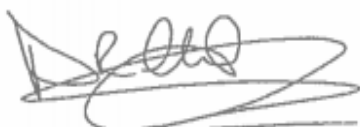
I declare that my contribution to the above publication was as:

- (i) principal author

My specific contribution to the publication was (maximum 50 words):

Principal Investigator on the consultancy research project commissioned by the Institute for Local Governance and Stockton Borough Council, which generated some of the original data which the paper is based on. Significant role in research design and data collection, significant role in writing and editing the final paper.

Signed:



(candidate) 02.03.20 (date)

Section C

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Signed:



(co-author)


6/3/20


(date)

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Name of candidate: David McGuinness
Name of co-author: Paul Grainger
Full bibliographical details of the publication (including authors):
 McGuinness, D., Greenhalgh, P and Grainger, P (2018) Does one size fit all? Place-neutral national planning policy in England and its impact on housing land supplies and local development plans in North East England , Local Economy, 33 (3), pp 329-346

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