

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 16 Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
Title of case study: Understanding and integrating communities through neighbourhood planning processes.
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The research highlighted here has had a major impact on the design of community led planning (CLP) and neighbourhood planning in England since 2006; initially within the voluntary and community sector and subsequently on policymakers' thinking. This has shaped the trajectory of policy development nationally since 2010 and influenced the way in which local authorities and other intermediary organizations (such as the Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) / Action in Communities in Rural England (ACRE) / Rural Community Councils (RCCs) in England) have approached community-led planning (CLP) and subsequently Neighbourhood Planning (NP). The work has had a significant impact on the NP approach and therefore on the public through the 2011 Localism Act. This legislation led to the 'Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning' (SCNP) programme, funded by Communities and Local Government (CLG) since 2011 to a value of circa £20m overall (which includes a 2013-15 tranche of £9.5 Million). The case study lead researcher (Parker) is now co-ordinating a large part of this programme while on 80% secondment at the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)/Planning Aid England (PAE) (2012-2014).</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Local resistance to new development and associated political antipathies towards developers and traditional planning processes, offer significant barriers to the effective implementation of developments that seek to fulfil important social, economic and health needs. The research which underpins the impact of the present case study was undertaken as part of a wider agenda examining the engagement of local communities in agenda setting at the local planning level, including CLP and parish planning, underpinned by variations of 'localist' thinking. A central theme of the CLP approach is that locally and community co-produced plans and actions support the development of more constructive relations between community members, local authorities and other key actors, which serve to reorient attitudes towards particular forms of development; for example, affordable housing. The Reading research programme led by Parker (appointed in 2000 as Lecturer in Planning Studies; Senior Lecturer, 2005; Professor, 2009) has sought to understand and measure the operation and characteristics of CLP. Commencing in 2006, the research programme includes consideration of affordable housing provision and the link to forms of NP. This work was prompted by a general trend towards more inclusive and partnership-based models of governance and a perceived need to better understand the practice of neighbourhood-scale planning activity. It aimed to develop both theory and practice in this new and emerging field. Moreover, as the lead researcher, Parker, was embedded in relevant local and regional activity, this allowed for a nuanced and deeper understanding of the politics and agendas being pursued which were beginning to shape the operation of community/neighbourhood planning in England.</p> <p>The research took place in three phases: in 2006 on community planning at the local level in West Berkshire funded by the West Berkshire Partnership (LSP); in 2008/9 with further work on community planning within West Berkshire funded internally by the University; and in 2010 on rural affordable housing and CLP in England funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).</p> <p>The first phase explored the experiences of those involved in the early stages of parish and then CLP, in a project conceived at Reading. The key questions here related to the methods used, the degree of inclusivity achieved in the process, relations and partnering with support organizations, the costs of the process and the key actions identified in the plans. The research involved interviews with CLP groups, focus groups with 6 communities and interviews with key actors including local authority officers, development workers and national policymakers. The outcome from this research, which focused on Berkshire (which had a high level of CLP activity), identified the need to: i) ensure well supported and designed methodology and quality control over such plans, ii) ensure high quality, robust plans that can claim to speak on behalf of neighbourhood-scale areas, iii) reinforce the importance of intermediaries to support and advise communities in</p>

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this work. Some of these findings have been extended more recently and have been developed in new work around community planning and the post-political condition.

In Phase 2, the key questions centred on how attitudes changed and relations were affected by the process of engaging in CLP. This phase used a survey of all CLP groups in the study supported by key interviews. The research demonstrated that relationships between key stakeholders improved as a result of collaborative working and showed how interactions between the interest groups were facilitated by the CLP process. It also identified how willingness to consider new housing changed as new knowledge, understandings and needs were developed and recognised by all parties – but in particular within the communities themselves.

This led to the third phase work which was conducted on a national scale and funded by the HCA/Defra. This research examined how CLP could actively develop better understanding of the role and need for housing development within local communities. It also examined the resulting local and intra-community issues as part of awareness raising and development of responsible behaviour towards ‘beyond local scale’ needs. This research had a particular focus on housing in rural areas, and on the inter-action of communities and local authorities and other agencies. The main questions were: i) to identify where and how CLP has helped to develop understandings in communities, ii) to deconstruct where and how housing issues are discussed in community planning processes and, iii) to identify how that might be changed in the future. This led to an understanding of the factors that should be considered where housing is needed in such neighbourhoods. It also identified how the CLP approach can potentially inform policymakers nationally and how that feeds through to action and improvements to the process at a local and neighbourhood level.

This Phase 3 study involved a mix of quantitative analysis of the CLP database and interviews with key actors involved in CLP.

In addition to the lead researcher in all three projects (Parker), other researchers involved were:

- Dr. Rachael Luck – RA, University of Reading (West Berkshire Partnership 2006);
- Dr. Claudia Murray – RA, University of Reading (Reading University Research Endowment Trust Fund 2008-9);
- Ms. Tessa Lynn – RA, (now PhD researcher), University of Reading (HCA/Defra 2010)

The Reading contribution has been to examine the scope and capacity of communities to plan and construct local agendas effectively and then to reflect on the issues that this presents for planners and policymakers attempting to harness or work with communities in creating evidence bases and policies for their own neighbourhoods.

3. References to the research

The work was funded in three stages by:

West Berkshire Partnership (£10,000) *Evaluation of Parish Planning in West Berkshire*; May-December 2006.

University of Reading Endowment fund (£3,000) *Motives and Expectations of Parish Planning Participants in West Berkshire*; March-October 2008.

HCA/Defra (£10,000) *The nexus of community-led planning and rural affordable housing*. December 2009- April 2010

There has been an ongoing stream of publications, reports and overviews, presentations made to audiences and organisations regionally and nationally since 2006. Indicative outputs include:

1. Parker, G. (2012) Neighbourhood planning: precursors, lessons and prospects. *Journal of Planning and Environmental Law*, Vol. 40 (supplement, Winter 2012)
2. Lynn, T. and Parker, G. (2012) Localism and growth? Neighbourhood planning and new housing. *Town and Country Planning*, January 2012, Vol. 83(1): p15-19.
3. Parker, G. and Murray, C. (2012) Beyond tokenism? Community-led planning and rational choices. Findings from participants in local agenda-setting in England, *Town Planning Review*,

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4. Parker, G., Lynn, T., Kersley, A. and Ward, S. (2010) *The nexus of community-led planning and rural affordable housing*. April 2010. Report for Defra / Homes and Communities Agency, Exeter.
5. Parker, G. (2008) Parish and community-led planning, local empowerment and local evidence bases. An examination of 'good practice', *Town Planning Review*, Vol. 79(1): 61-85.
6. Parker, G. and Luck, R. (2006) *Evaluation of Parish Planning in West Berkshire*. Report to the West Berkshire Partnership, December 2006.

The outputs from this work have been published in quality peer reviewed journals (1-3, 5), with further high quality outputs forthcoming. The quality of the work has been recognised by peer reviewers of the academic outputs (e.g. publications 3 and 5 which have been also internally assessed at above the 2* threshold).

4. Details of the impact

The impact claimed for this work, disseminated by journal papers, reports and presentations since 2006, is the influence on practitioners and policymakers at local and national levels extending a critique of the practice of CLP/NP. Specifically, it has impacted on the development of understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of CLP/NP as practiced since 2000, and in driving actual practice modifications. The research has influenced a wide range of stakeholders such as neighbourhoods and neighbourhood forums, local authorities, central government, and agencies supporting NP (such as RTPI/PAE and ACRE) as well as the public and the planning profession who undertake NP/CLP activity as volunteers. This work has also informed debates over incentivisation and behavioural change in planning and has influenced how CLG subsequently linked incentivisation to NP through mechanisms such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

The nature and profile of CLP in the early period cited here was relatively unrecognised. It was a concern for rural policymakers more than their urban counterparts and it was not seen as a policy priority for the then Labour government; although a stated principle of active and engaged citizenship by that administration clearly corresponded to such activity. Therefore the work has been conceived and developed from an academic research agenda operating at a local level, rather than a Government agenda.

The initial research had a direct impact on NP practice at a local level in West Berkshire as it informed the local authority's developments around NP and CLP. As the work was developed in partnership with several key organizations, including the Community Council for Berkshire (which Parker subsequently chaired between 2007 and 2011), it informed these organisations' plans. Other organisations have later used this knowledge to inform their own approaches and decisions (for example, the Regional Empowerment Partnership in the East of England as stated in their 2009 report 'Community Led Planning National Overview (<http://bit.ly/19q2dpO>)

ACRE had previously designed a national toolkit to help practitioners guide community groups through the CLP process. In light of new experiences in CLP, ACRE re-shaped and updated this toolkit. Reading's research has influenced the development of this toolkit by "*help[ing] to reshape the CLP toolkit and therefore influenced the individual RCCs (the ACRE Network members) and local communities on the ground in designing and carrying out parish and community-led planning*". This occurred "*through [Parker's] work carried out in Berkshire looking in depth at the experiences and practices of Parish Planning*" [5:1]

Latterly, this impact has been extended to both Government policy and practice. Parker has been seconded to the RTPI/PAE in 2012 – 2014 (0.8 FTE) as their Director of Professional Standards. Through this role, Parker is responsible for coordinating part of the Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning programme (<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-aid/neighbourhood-planning>) funded by CLG and being performed by PAE (using a total budget in the period April 2011- March 2015 of c£3.5m). This work includes extensive use and training of volunteers and development of guidance for communities. According to the RTPI, the lead researcher's role on secondment to the RTPI has "*given a unique opportunity for academic research and learning to feed even more directly into the development of policy.*" This has helped "*shape and give depth to the Institute's*

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position on NP and Localism” and “has guided the approach and understanding of staff and volunteers in PAE, as well as DCLG and other organisations, in terms of shaping the SCNP programme” [5:2].

The research outputs, together with the active engagement and professional activity of the lead researcher, have directly influenced Government. According to the Deputy Director of the Decentralisation and Neighbourhood team at CLG, impacts on Government policy linked to the research include: *“helping to shape the Policy on NP and the support contract for communities doing NP”, extracting “the practical lessons emerging from the early phases of NP” and providing “a rich and considered evidence base for our considerations about how to ensure the policy is successfully delivered”* The Deputy Director also comments that the RTPI/PAE, under the lead researcher’s leadership, *“are part of the successful consortium alongside Locality and they are now delivering the contract, drawing once again on the practical research and evidence base”*. [5.3] In addition to the work for ACRE and RTPI, Parker has briefed the House of Lords during the passage of the Localism Bill.

The Defra/HCA funded work commissioned in 2009 has had a direct impact on the delivery of rural housing. According to the HCA, it indicated to the *“funders, Government and other agencies that on the ground engagement with communities ... could assist in opening the way for the delivery of [rural] housing.”* This subsequently *“helped support the aims and approach taken since 2011 towards NP in England and encouraged other organizations such as the RCCs to continue to work with communities to set local agendas”*. [5.4]. The outcome of this work has been used by organisations such as ACRE as stated in their briefing <http://www.billingshurst-community.org.uk/Key/ACREbriefingCLPandhousingAugust2010%5B1%5D.pdf> as well as local community groups (for example, the Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing, <http://www.actionhants.org.uk/index.php?id=121&type=98>)

The pathway to impact of this case study is soundly based in the School strategy which identifies collaboration with user communities, targets research on core policy or practice areas and knowledge exchange and capacity building. The strategy also encourages secondment to user organisations. In this particular case collaboration with industry could not be closer with the lead researcher sitting on the CLG sounding board for NP and on 80% secondment to the RTPI and PAE. NP has become a key policy area for Government and a core area of professional practice. The impact on the implementation of the policy has been demonstrated and this has also led to the development of materials for knowledge exchange through PAE. The RTPI believes that these materials, developed by Parker, and their support for the implementation of policy have *“helped persuade Government to commit to funding NP by up to £9.5 Million for the next 2 years [2013-15], despite the constraints on spending”*. [5:2]

The reach of the work covers a very wide range of stakeholders, given the significance of planning policy on society. The research has had an impact on a policy that forms a central feature of the Coalition government’s programme under the banner of ‘Localism’. It informed ACRE, HCA and subsequently CLG to argue for and then continue a mainstreaming of a form of NP in England. The research and the researcher has had significant influence on dissemination and implementation, regularly briefing local authorities, communities, and others including the London assembly and shadow ministers on NP, with consequent impact on the wider community, including planning and property professionals, local government and neighbourhood groups.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (†) Available upon request

- 5:1 Letter from the Director of Policy and Research of the Action with Communities and Rural England (ACRE) - dated 10/10/2013. (†)
- 5:2 Letter from the Chief Executive of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) - dated 29/07/2013. (†)
- 5:3 Letter from Deputy Director of the Decentralisation and Neighbourhoods Team of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) - dated 30/07/2013. (†)
- 5:4 Letter from the Rural and Communities Manager of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) - dated 11/10/2013. (†)