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Implications for 'community influence' following the instigation of the Coalition Government's National Planning Policy Framework

Presentation to CURS conference
'Planning Resilient Communities in Challenging Times',
Birmingham University, 14 September 2011

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ABSTRACT

“Implications for community influence following the instigation of the Coalition Government’s National Planning Policy Framework”

This presentation examines the proposed interaction of “local communities” with future planning decisions, as framed in the new National Planning Policy Framework. It notes the focus on “helping make sustainable development happen” and the Framework’s commitment to promoting development that “reflect the vision and aspirations of local communities” via “meaningful engagement and collaboration with neighbourhoods”. Yet the emphasis of the Framework on “a presumption” in favour of sustainable development, and the clear emphasis on growth and economic factors as a policy imperative, may run up against the Government’s simultaneous commitment to both Localism and Community Rights and the presentation notes two very clear differences in tone within the one document.

Using the contentious issue of new housing development to tease out likely implications for community influences, this presentation explores the potential contradictions contained in the new Framework and who could be the winners and losers in how future planning decisions are made.

Finally some suggestions are raised for undertaking future research into this subject, particularly into what ‘local aspirations’ may influence how proposed ‘developments’ are considered to be sustainable or *un*-sustainable.

Contents of presentation

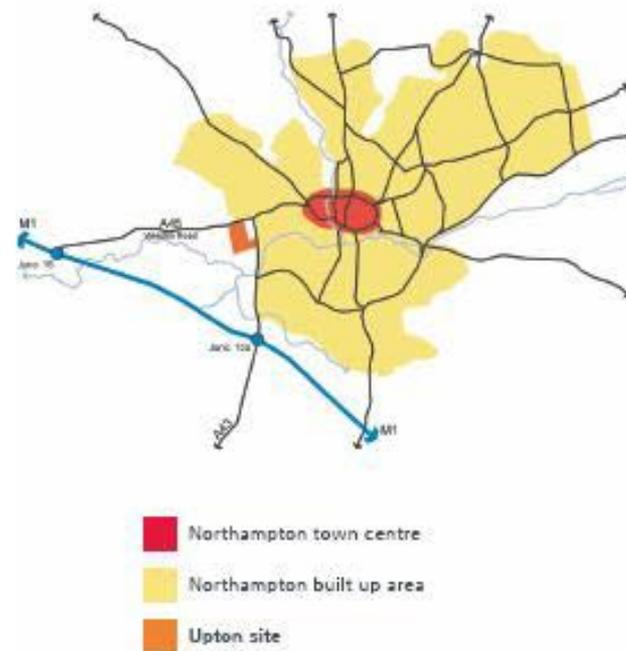
- Purpose of draft NPPF
- Community ‘interaction’ on planning decisions
- Note mixed policies and potential contradictions
- ‘Housing’ as an arena for community influence
- Potential winners & losers
- Ideas for future research



Purpose of draft NPPF(1)

NPPF notes 'Planning' :

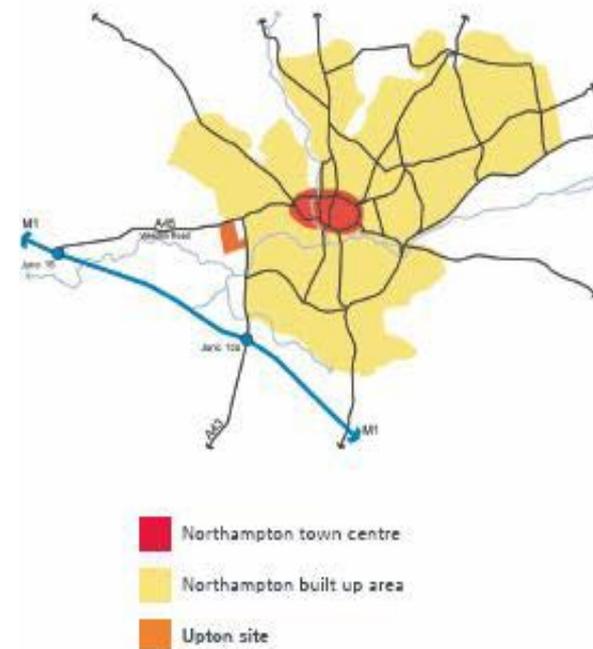
- is to help achieve 'sustainable development'
- must not simply be about 'scrutiny'
- should be a creative exercise to enhance and improve places
- should be a collective enterprise
- should be 'simple and clear'



Purpose of draft NPPF(2)

‘Sustainable Development’ means:

- Planning for posterity - to build a strong and competitive economy, with sufficient land for growth and innovation
- Planning for people - to promote vibrant communities, with an increase in housing supply and local services that reflect needs
- Planning for places – protecting the natural & historic environment

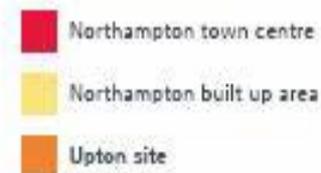
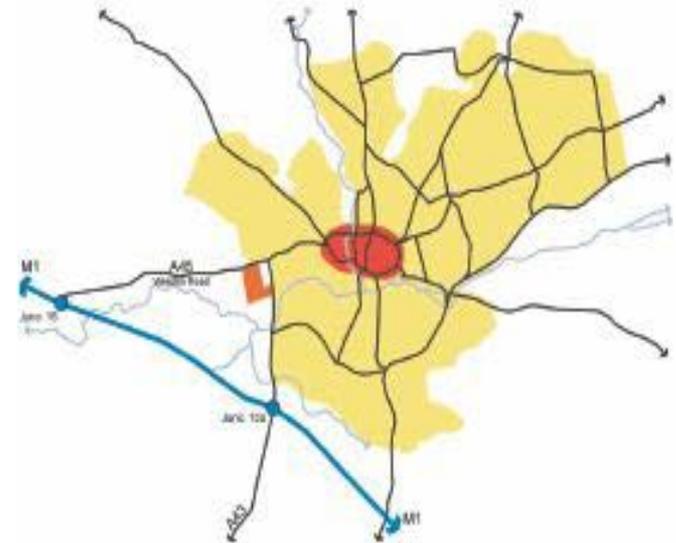


Purpose of draft NPPF(3)

‘Planning’ must be “transparent, effective and efficient”, via a system based upon :

- national policies
- local & neighbourhood plans
- ‘development management’

NPPF is a “framework within which local people and their accountable councils can ... reflect the needs and priorities of their communities”



Routes for community ‘interaction’ on planning decisions

- Contributions to Local Plans
- Lead on Neighbourhood Plans
- Exercise of “community rights”
[via Localism Bill]
- “Communities” will be various
things and operate at various
different scales
- Engagement with wider
‘representative’ (& on-
representative!) bodies
- ‘Interaction’ also as business-led



Boundaries to community ‘interaction’

- NPPF presents overriding guidance on plan-making & planning decisions
- No information that communities can influence ‘national’ policies
- The local authority’s own Local Plan documents will set out policies to which local communities must adhere
- Neighbourhood Plans must conform to both the NPPF and agreed Local Plans, no reduction in the amount of housing
- Professional control of ‘development management’ and any building standards likely to be maintained
- Level of the community’s resources, skills & contacts will vary



'Housing' as an arena for community influence (1)

- NPPF promotes increased supply, quality and choice, wider home ownership, inclusive communities
- NPPF asks question “Is it possible to identify what would NOT be sustainable in a housing application?”
- Question is : what role can the community undertake to decide what housing will not be 'sustainable'?



'Housing' as a particular arena for community influence (2)

- Communities can influence housing aspirations in Neighbourhood Plans
- Government keen to encourage locally-led schemes to undertake housing development
- Housing 'receipts' to use on other priorities



Note mixed policies & potential contradictions

- ‘Presumption in favour of development’ OR community empowerment to direct priorities
- Promotion of varieties under ‘localism’ OR explicit prioritisation on economics
- Increase in ‘affordability’ OR protection of values and ‘reasonable returns’
- New housing supply OR funds directed towards general improvements



Influencing housing supply : potential winners and losers

Potential winners

- House-building industry
- Landowners
- Business-led proposals
- Community-led 'self build'

Potential losers

- Community 'stewardship' for environmental holism
- Communities wanting more affordable housing
- Households wanting long-term stability in housing



Overall community engagement : potential winners and losers

Potential winners

- Proactive communities and local authorities
- Communities with access to resources and skills
- Communities with strong political leaders

Potential losers

- Communities declining or unable to participate
- Communities not wanting 'growth' set out in Local Plans



Future avenues of research

- Assisting 'communities' wanting to create Neighbourhood Plans
- Reviewing impacts of 'Localism' on planning for 'communities', and the effect on participation
- Local views about 'reasonable returns' and financial impacts
- Evidencing local housing needs & ideas for 'community-led' supply
- How 'communities' might define 'sustainable development' in their locality



Initial conclusions (1)

- The NPPF sets out opportunities for community engagement in ‘proactive’ planning, but not necessarily for community *decision-making*
- The NPPF is silent on the ‘standard’ of future development aside from equating “sustainable” development with *financial* returns
- The NPPF (in combination with other incentives, like the New Homes Bonus) will probably help increase housing *supply*, but at a cost of clashing with other aims of local communities

Initial conclusions (2)

- ‘Sustainable development’ will not automatically require community support!
- Decisions adopted under terms of ‘presumption’ will receive increased scrutiny!
- Planning will only be seen to ‘enhance’ & ‘improve’ if there is a solid context of agreed standards
- The ‘collective enterprise’ may be a whole-scale raising of political dissatisfaction
- All that appears ‘clear’ about the NPPF is that community engagement is being approached *too* simply - planning outcomes will reflect the ‘input’

Questions and discussion

