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What Localism means for Civic Organisations: The case of Neighbourhood Planning

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Localism and the Planning System

- Background of Coalition changes to planning i.e. abolition of regional authorities and strategic planning; but at the same time, shift of balance between the public and the property market e.g. reduction in obligations on private developers; viability given more prominence
- This is the context for Neighbourhood Planning; Local Planning more needed than ever but less power over development

What are Neighbourhood Plans?

- NPs are community-led plans for neighbourhood areas which have legal status within local authority Local Plans
- They must follow strict rules: The Neighbourhood Area must be approved by the local authority; The Neighbourhood Forum drawing up the plan must also be approved; The Plan must be formally Examined; and get a majority in a Neighbourhood Referendum
- They cannot be used to oppose development; and must conform to local authority and national planning policies

What has been the reaction and impact?

- A lot of initial enthusiasm; tapping into a demand
- 233 Front Runners with more queuing up
- Signs of disappointment – because they can't be used to oppose policy or create alternatives to development schemes; and are about land use only. LAs want to dampen down expectations
- Many communities put off by bureaucracy and lack of funding support
- NP process favours already skilled and resourced communities

Are NPs a sham? Should Civic Organisations get involved?

- The Coalition version of NPs is a sham because NPs do not allow challenge or deviation from POLICY OR EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS i.e. they deny localism below LA level
- There is a class bias because there is no extra support for more deprived areas
- They do allow communities to get their own ideas about design, layout, and type of development (up to a point) into a legal plan
- Can anything be gained? In spite of the rules, NPs can be a tactic to challenge policy and the developer led planning system, and put forward alternatives (even if LAs try to block them)
- NPs are an opportunity for organisation and mobilisation around space and place if approached with eyes wide open, and if communities are prepared to push the boundaries of the rules

What do NPs tell us about Localism?

- Localism measures are tightly controlled by Government and local authorities. This is the contradiction at the heart of localism because it does not allow challenge to policy; it maintains the status quo
- Poorer communities need skills and resources to combat threats and create alternatives; the Coalition version of Localism does not provide this support
- Yet NPs and other Localism Act measures can potentially be a tool to challenge and organise around place and space?