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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?