



intergenerational foundation

Fairness for Future Generations

A response from the Intergenerational Foundation to the technical consultation on planning

Who we are...

The [Intergenerational Foundation](http://www.if.org.uk) (www.if.org.uk) is a think tank which researches fairness between the generations in the UK, in order to protect the interests of younger and future generations, who are at risk of being ignored by current policy-makers.

Our response...

IF is concerned that the entire rationale that underpins the changes to the planning system – which are promulgated within Section 1 of the consultation document – rests on the assumption that neighbourhood planning has been a successful tool for making the planning system more democratic and increasing the supply of housing, but there appears to be remarkably little evidence to support either of these claims. IF believes that, before we strengthen the position of the bodies that draw up neighbourhood plans even further, it is vital to undertake far more research into exactly what the impacts of neighbourhood planning have been so that we have a better idea of how these changes will be likely to affect the planning system in the future.

IF is particularly concerned by the following points:

The majority of neighbourhood plans have been anti-development

The biggest concern about giving more powers to neighbourhood planning bodies is that this may make it easier for people who are opposed to development (so-called “NIMBYs”) to block new developments in their area. This appears to be tacitly acknowledged within the consultation document itself, where it emphasises that *“For the first time residents and individuals in businesses can produce neighbourhood plans that have real statutory weight in the planning system and can grant planning permission for development **they want to see** through neighbourhood development orders.”*¹

Although there are strong arguments for giving people a greater say in how their local environments should evolve over time, there is clearly a danger that this gives people who may have a vested interest in objecting to developments – especially homeowners who are concerned about house prices – the tools to prevent them from happening.

Very little data appears to have been collected on the impacts of neighbourhood planning, but the small amount of data there is has not been especially encouraging. As the consultation document itself acknowledges, very few communities have so far taken advantage of the opportunity to develop neighbourhood plans – just *“1.9 million English households (8.7%) live in*

¹Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) (2014) *Technical consultation on planning* London: DCLG (our emphasis in the quotation)

a designated neighbourhood area” – which suggests they have done little to improve democratic participation within the planning process.²

One of the few detailed analyses which has been undertaken into the content of submitted neighbourhood plans, produced by the planning consultancy Turley Associates, found that the 750 neighbourhood planning areas which have so far been approved have only submitted 75 neighbourhood plans for consultation between them, and just 6 of these were formally in place by February 2014. This analysis also found that over two-thirds of the plans which have been submitted came from rural areas, so neighbourhood planning has had little impact in the parts of England which are most densely populated. Most strikingly of all, Turley Associates found that 55% of all the published neighbourhood plans primarily focus on resisting new developments, a figure that rises to 63% in rural areas.³ Although there is clearly a need for further analysis of the evidence, it appears that the system has so far predominantly been used as a way of enabling rural residents to resist developments in their areas; therefore the suggestion that it would strengthen the hand of NIMBYs appears to hold some weight.

Neighbourhood groups may not be representative

Underpinning the entire neighbourhood planning agenda has been an assumption that devolving decision-making to a local level will automatically make it more democratic, because the institutions of local democracy are perceived to be inherently more representative of a locale than central government decision-makers can be. However, previous research which has been undertaken by IF has shown that this is not necessarily the case; it revealed that the people who participate in local democracy are likely to belong to a privileged local elite which does not necessarily represent the characteristics or interests of a “typical” person living in that area. Young people in particular appear to be especially poorly represented on these bodies, which makes it less likely that their interests will be taken into account.

IF’s research examined the composition of town and parish councils in England and Wales, and found that the typical parish councillor has an average age of 60 (compared with 46 for the average UK adult), in addition to being significantly more likely to be male and to live in a postcode where house prices are higher than average for the area they represent as a whole.⁴ This chimes with the findings from the research by Turley Associates referred to above, which discovered that 75% of all published neighbourhood plans have been produced in the south of England, one of the most affluent areas of the country, and 73% of them have come from areas which have Conservative-led local authorities, compared with just 9% from Labour ones. These findings are concerning because they suggest that neighbourhood planning may have inadvertently strengthened the ability of wealthy local elites to influence planning policy in their areas. Therefore, far from making the planning process more democratic, it could have effectively disenfranchised younger, less affluent local residents from getting their voices heard. Clearly, there is an urgent need for further research which would assess whether the socio-

²Ibid.

³Turley Associates (2014) *Neighbourhood Planning: Plan and Deliver* Bristol: Turley Associates

⁴Leach, Jeremy and Kingman, David (2012) *How the Localism Act hands power to older generations* London: Intergenerational Foundation

economic make-up of neighbourhood planning institutions appears to be having a concrete impact on the provision of essential projects such as affordable housing developments, but the results so far do not seem to be encouraging.

More evidence is needed

Although there is not much evidence yet on the impacts of neighbourhood planning, what evidence has been gathered suggests that there is a danger that it is failing to make local planning policies more representative of the wishes of a broad cross-section of local residents, and they may be becoming a tool for stymieing the pace of local development rather than increasing it. Young people, in particular, are in danger of having their interests overlooked as neighbourhood planning makes it easier for members of the older generation – who are more likely to already be homeowners – to determine planning policy.

Therefore, IF is concerned that the proposals contained in the consultation document – which seek to enhance the role of neighbourhood planning – are being introduced too hastily; we would advocate that a period of intensive evidence-gathering is necessary so that the full impacts of these significant changes to the planning system can be fully understood.

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For more information about the Intergenerational Foundation and its work, please visit www.if.org.uk or contact Liz Emerson, Co-Founder at liz@intergenerational.org.uk.