

Community Engagement with Housing Land Supply Policy and Practice

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The rhetoric behind policy debates and initiatives to ensure that land is made available for housing is very clear in its framing of the problems that need to be addressed. On this account the heroes are the house builders who want to provide much needed homes. Key among the villains are existing home owners who oppose any change to their current advantageous position. They are caricatured as NIMBYs (Not In My Back Yard) – with the implication that they have no principled objection to house building (and indeed may well support the provision of homes for those who need them) but object to changes which they fear will affect their property values or amenities. The other villain from this perspective is the planning system which, it is claimed, is slow, bureaucratic, and restrictive rather than facilitating. This is the context in which the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was passed in 2012, creating a presumption in favour of ‘sustainable’ development. It includes policies intended to ensure a 5-year housing supply (based on an assessment of need) and a strategic housing land allocation assessment (SHLAA) process which should ensure that sufficient sites are identified. The NPPF underlines this focus on housing provision by restricting Councils’ ability to refuse planning permission if appropriate allocation is not met.

Recently there have been some challenges to this narrative through publicity about sites with planning permission being ‘land banked’ by house builders; about houses, particularly in London, being sold to foreign buyers purely for investment purposes; and regeneration schemes leading to houses which are unaffordable to the majority of those in need (Guardian, 2015). The commercial interests of large house building companies which are enhanced by restricting housing supply to keep prices high have also been highlighted (CPRE, 2015a). However, these arguments remain marginal to the main narrative and are yet to lead to changes in housing or planning policy. Additionally, debates have remained largely at the level of total housing numbers (both builds and needs) rather than more specific discussions about the appropriate location of housing permissions.

There has also been some critical reflection on the term NIMBY. The term was originally invoked in the context of disputes over siting facilities, such as hazardous waste disposal, where there was a mismatch between costs, experienced locally, and benefits for wider society. Wolsink (2006) argues that such “assumption of mere economic rationality” (87) has rarely been tested empirically and, where it has, is not supported. Burningham (2000) reviews the literature and concludes that dominant uses of the term attribute ignorance, irrationality or selfishness to local opponents of planning applications. While there are some studies of such opposition being understood as prudent, well-grounded, or drawing on distinctive knowledge bases they are very much in the minority. On this basis she argues that researchers might study the discursive use of the term by parties to a dispute to attribute (negative) motives to others. However, such labelling, she concludes, is of little value “(f)or those seeking to understand local responses to proposed developments” and “is likely to be counterproductive and to add little of

analytic value” (66). McClymont & O’Hare (2008) concur that the term is used to de-legitimize certain forms of opposition and point to the tension between this and the stress in planning documents that public participation is desirable. In this context they suggest that the use of the term NIMBY seeks to create a distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (or welcome / unwelcome) forms of participation.

This chapter draws on these approaches by exploring, rather than assuming, the basis for local participation in the planning process. The empirical material used is distinct from most published studies in that it is based on a longitudinal participant observation study rather than a dispute over a specific application. This allows an account of how a community has constructed a sense of place both in response to specific applications and as a result of independent place-making activities. Both forms of participation allow residents to develop and express their sense of place and the role of new housing within it – and indeed to retain a sense of community. The chapter argues that a construction of a sense of place and defence of its characteristics are intertwined. That is, it aims to develop an understanding of how “practice is implicated in the constitution of place” (Pink, 2012, 88).

The extended period of analysis also allows reflection on the opportunities for, and experience of, such engagement across different regimes of planning policy. The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) has been seen widely as pro-development in comparison with previous regimes. However, in common with previous regimes, this document contains many statements about the importance of including the views of local people and retaining distinctive places. These include: the core planning principle of “empowering local people to shape their surroundings” (para 17); that Local Plans should “... establish a strong sense of place ... respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials” (para 58); local planning authorities should “create a shared vision with communities of the residential environment and facilities they wish to see” and should aim to “involve all sections of the community in the development of Local Plans and in planning decisions” (para 69); and that the planning system should “contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by ... protecting and enhancing valued landscapes ...” (para 109). Such statements would appear to be in line with a ‘localism’ agenda. There are two important caveats to this interpretation: in line with the previous planning legislation the NPPF gives a subsidiary role to ‘objectors’ in relation to ‘developers’ (most obviously the non-symmetrical rights to appeal local authority decisions on applications); and that there are many levels at which ‘local’ views can be determined, some of which may feel quite remote to residents. Furthermore, beyond the formal statements contained in the NPPF, there is the way they have been interpreted in practice (CPRE, 2014). Two years in they concluded that decisions showed “(t)he NPPF policies on housing land supply have given more power to large developers” (6) although they express cautious optimism that recent decisions could give more weight to local plan making.

Local Community Groups focussed on Planning Issues

Residents often come together to form a community groups to fight a particular planning application. Depending on the type of application, and the length of time it takes to resolve,

this shared focus may ensure group's existence for a few years. If they dissolve after that time the issues they have identified as important may also be lost rather than contributing to the development of 'a strong sense of place' via, for example, consultation submissions to developing local plans. There may also be a loss to 'collective memories' such as the history of applications on a particular site which could be utilised by future objectors. Shemtov (2003) tries to identify factors that lead local groups, formed in opposition to a particular issue, to continue by expanding their goals or activities. Interestingly the focus is on internal or external social networks rather than whether their initial campaign was successful or not. The sample is small but it does appear to support the views that continuity and expansion of remit is sustained by strong networks between group members (formed as a result of the initial activity) and a lack of trust that links to external bodies (such as local political groups) will be sufficient to carry their cause forward.

In the absence of such on-going local groups calls by the NPPF for planning authorities to engage residents and their representatives in Local Plan development and specific applications are likely to be responded to by formal representatives or specialist planning groups. In rural areas, the focus of this chapter, Parish Councils are statutory consultees for both. However, Parish Councils (and councillors) vary enormously in their interests and capabilities and there is no guarantee that they will engage effectively in the details of planning policy. National membership bodies with an interest in planning include the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE), but this organisation operates primarily at a national level (with County level groups). CPRE and the National Trust were major players in public debates around the NPPF but are much less evident in local campaigns.

Phase 1: Origins of the Group

This chapter is based on the activities of a village-based community group who have been active over the last 25 years on planning issues including those relating to housing supply. While clearly a specific case, it does provide an opportunity to reflect on place-making practices by local people, with specific relevance for housing supply under different planning regimes. Appleby Magna is a village on the North West borders of Leicestershire. It is separate from, but close to, main roads including the M42 motorway joining Birmingham to Nottingham. The parish (which includes a separate hamlet and outlying farms) has around 500 houses. The community is mixed – including 'original' villagers, those who had moved to the area to work in the coal mining industry which, up to the 1980s was a major employer, and more recent professionals commuting to nearby Midlands towns. Appleby's oldest buildings date from medieval times and there is also a cluster of 17 / 18th Century buildings. There was significant housing development on orchards in the 1960s and further new housing in the 1980s and '90s. More recently there has been a rural exception site to accommodate affordable housing and various small scale developments. There is a village shop / post office, a primary school (located in a Grade 1 listed building alongside other facilities) and two village pubs. The village originally developed from farms clustered down to a stream in what is now the centre of the village. The legacy is a distinctive settlement pattern which includes a green (private) centre to the village

and fields coming into the heart of the village. This pattern has been eroded over time, but important elements remain.

Appleby Environment and Heritage Movement¹ (Ahem!) was formed at the end of 1991. The specific impetus was a planning application for a hotel to be located close to the motorway next to a Georgian listed building (originally a Rectory, by this stage a private house) and outside the limits to development. This was recommended for refusal by officers as against local policies, but passed by councillors and then called in by the secretary of state². The new village organisation was first involved at the public enquiry stage. As is clear from the name, those setting up the organisation were keen from the outset that this should not be solely a 'stop the hotel' campaign but instead provide an on-going focus for investigating, celebrating and protecting the characteristics of the village including its countryside setting. Founding members of the group included residents with experience of community organisations and with academic research and other professional skills but, no specific planning expertise. There was a demographic mix in terms of age, length of time in the village and political affiliations. The public enquiry proved to be a steep learning curve in terms of national and local planning policies and their operation, specifically in terms of what the planning system deems acceptable forms of argument and evidence. The campaign generated wide support with over 300 letters of objection from local residents. Outline permission was granted in 1992 but nothing was built until 1999. The hotel is now due for demolition as part of the government's preferred route for HS2 (high speed railway Birmingham to Leeds)!

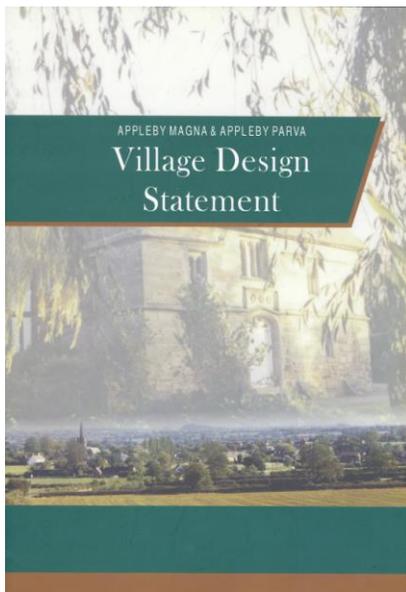
This learning served well in the following few years when the village was faced with an 'out of town' shopping / warehousing application which raised similar concerns about the erosion of the countryside between the village and the road network, the potential erosion of separation of settlements, and impact on an important historic building. Additionally, a new local plan was under consultation and subsequent submission for inspection prior to adoption. Awareness of the need to establish protection for valued features of the village within the planning system led to representations which gained additional protection for some fields within the Local Plan and the establishment of a Conservation Area in the historic part of the village. Significant designation of land for new housing had been agreed in an early stage of the local plan and this was not contested except where it threatened historically important features. However, attempts were made to influence design and materials to make houses more in tune with existing buildings. The group was keen to engage in wider activities including planting trees and bulbs, visiting local historic buildings, improving access to footpaths in the parish and organising walks. Invited speakers gave talks on the local natural and built environment and its historic

¹ Appleby Heritage and Environment Movement changed its name to Appleby Environment in 2006. Further details of the group and its activities can be found at www.applebyenvironment.co.uk. The author was a founder member and has been a committee member in various roles ever since. The group's membership and activity level has waxed and waned over the time period in response to other activities and levels of perceived threats.

² Objectors have no right of appeal against planning permissions. In this case the fact that the permission had been made against the recommendation of the officers was used by a local resident to lobby for an enquiry. However, since the enquiry was into the decision reached by the council the officers were required to defend it, leaving local objectors as the only parties arguing against the permission.

features. As such the group fits Shemtov's (2003) category of a group that survived through goals which were broader than the original application focus. As described above these were envisaged by those who established its name and goals but this is no guarantee that these wider activities would be pursued in practice. The group did form strong internal networks but individuals also became involved in a number of village initiatives that only partly overlapped with, or were completely separate from, the original group. Some core individuals did establish positions on formal bodies (parish council, district council, CPRE etc.) but at no point did the group feel that this representation invalidated the need for a village-specific group.

Phase 2: Village Design Statement – Constructing a sense of Place



In 1999 the village embarked on a Village Design Statement (VDS) process that eventually led to a VDS adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the Local Plan. This process was led by a Village Design Team. It actively involved over 50 residents in its development (and consulted all residents) and was supported by the Parish Council. Village Design Statements were promoted at the time by Rural Community Councils as a way in which local rural communities (usually at parish level) could identify the distinctive characteristics of their locality and to provide design guidance to influence future development. As such they have similarities with Neighbourhood Plans (NP) introduced as part of the Localism Act (2011). However, VDSs were far less prescriptive in terms of a development focus and did not require a formal referendum prior to adoption. CPRE (2011) provides a useful overview of the uptake and outcome of VDSs

in the wider context of communities, planning and localism.

The decision to proceed with a VDS did not meet with universal approval from those who had been active in earlier campaigns with the environment group. Concerns were raised that such a process was constrained by the need to comply with the Local Plan (at least in terms of the guidelines that might be adopted as formal supplementary planning guidance); that it implied further development which was not a shared objective; that the need to reach consensus would lead to compromise and not help those wanting to object to future proposals; and that stressing the positive features of the village would only attract more developers. However, experience of fighting specific planning applications led most active residents to feel that an explicit statement of what local people valued about their village would provide a much needed counterbalance to the perceived indifference of local politicians, to say nothing of national inspectors, to the natural and built environment of the village. Neither the format of the VDS process nor the motivations of those involved in this specific case focused on housing land supply³. There were

³ The VDS process had been preceded by a Village Appraisal (village wide questionnaire and report) which was initiated by a separate group of residents. This included questions about whether there should be significant new

a number of housing permissions extant (from the Local Plan process) which were not open to challenge. Nevertheless, a significant incentive for carrying out a VDS was to ensure that future housing development respected valued village characteristics.

Village Design Statement methodology

The recommended process for developing a VDS includes exercises for building consensus on village characteristics. These included an initial discussion with prompts such as a 'what would you show a friend', 'how do things change at different times of the year', 'where do different groups congregate?'. This was followed by a village character workshop where four groups of residents (focusing on buildings and design; landscapes and settings; historical influences; roads, paths and transport) undertook a two-hour walk taking a map to mark important features, a notebook to record why they were important and a camera to capture images.

In a follow-up a couple of days later the groups organised their photographs into a display and prepared a five-minute talk on their findings. These presentations and displays were discussed and, together with research on issues including the history of settlement patterns, architectural styles and planning policies, led to the first draft of the VDS.

The draft was launched at an open meeting with a photographic display and then circulated to all households in the village with encouragement to comment. Revisions followed as did discussions about the design of the document and how it should be illustrated. Discussions were also held with local authority officers on guidelines that were likely to be acceptable in planning terms.

The village sense of place meets the wider world

Formal adoption of the VDS by district council required its guidelines to be compliant with the local plan and national planning guidance valid at the time. When the council was sent the final draft they launched a consultation with a range of bodies including the County Council's highways department and the House Builders' Federation (now the Home Builders' Federation). The local authority's planning officers also reviewed the document themselves in a report for councillors on whose formal vote depended the decision to adopt the VDS as part of planning guidance.

After so much work, and pride in producing a finished document, residents were not surprisingly concerned that it was open to challenge by a range of bodies that seemed almost certain to disagree with the document. This raises a different aspect of contestation – that between community level organisations and others over planning issues. Those who are invited to spell out what they value about 'their place' and how they want it to develop; be it through a VDS or a neighbourhood plan, may well feel that this means their views will carry significant weight. Such a view would appear to be supported by the policy framework of a Localism (sic) Act. However, what communities are being invited to do here is to develop their place-making

housing for the village. The responses showed decisively that majority of residents were not in favour of this kind of development.

claims within a pre-existing framework of national and local planning (and indeed economic and social) policies. Thus, in line with Luke's (1974) second face of power, power is exercised not directly through decision-making but rather through agenda setting whereby only certain issues or approaches have legitimacy. Without making a judgement about the pros and cons of this form of community engagement, it is understandable that residents who thought they were being offered a form of 'citizen power' (Arnstein, 1969) risk becoming disillusioned by the constraints of the process in practice.



The outcome

The format adopted by the Village Design Statement combined the constrained planning guidelines with a wider account of the place from a community perspective. This approach is shown in the sample page here. Only the formal guidelines were adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance within the Local Plan in 2000. However, the wider account was included in the printed document which was given to all residents – and, for some time, to new residents. From conception to adoption took about 2 years. Despite the limitations of the process it did help to crystallise a shared sense of place and provide a bridge between this and generalised planning documents – at least until the next iteration of the Local Plan to whose policies the VDS planning guidelines must be compliant. The full document is available from the District Council's or Appleby Environment's

website. (www.applebyenvironment.co.uk).

Reflections on constructing a sense of place

Although implicit, the VDS process does acknowledge that articulating the key characteristics of a place and how it should develop will be a contested social process. This is in contrast with notions of place as something which can be objectively described. However, it is in line with recent writing by geographers who see place as "a way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world" (Cresswell, 2004, 11). From this perspective places are inevitably emergent and contested. Different community views are often caricatured in terms of conflict between incomers (who are claimed not to be active community members) and established residents

(whose views are seen as more legitimate and valid). In this case, at least, these were not helpful distinctions. The team running the process were drawn from across the community on a range of demographic factors. Rather than seeing different conceptions of place as separate trajectories where one can be judged to be more valid or correct, Massey (2005) writes about the 'event of place':

What is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or of the eternity of the hills. Rather, what is special about place is precisely that thrown-togetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and a geography of thens and theres); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman (140).

Pierce et al (2010) take a related approach which they characterise as 'place-frames' in the more specific context of planning conflicts. Place-frames are defined as "shared place understandings" which emerge "(a)s competing discourses about places are contested (and, in their contestation, shaped and adopted by others), they become constitutive of new, shared place identities" (55). This focus on contestation contrasts with analyses that present community place-making activities overly internal or consensual. Holman & Rydin (2012) argue that there is an "inherent tendency of localism to produce inward-orientated plans at the community scale" (20) due to strong bonding networks. This approach appears to assume that participants have networks only with each other (rather than additionally with the wider world), no wider interests, and a view about the future of their neighbourhood that is pre-formed and coherent. That was not true in this case. McClymont (2011) celebrates the agonistic approach of planning enquiries against attempts to move planning decisions into a 'neutral' area of consensus and collaboration. Pierce et al (2010) also conceptualise disputes over how a place might change as agonistic conflicts between the 'place-frames' of, say, developers and communities. However, their approach additionally provides a way of understanding how a community can produce a strong shared place-frame through its own internal processes where conflict is also present.

Phase 3: Wider Environmental Projects

In subsequent years the Village Design Statement guidelines were regularly quoted in representations made to planning applications and appeared to carry some weight. This was a period without major applications so this influence focused on issues of design and location of small scale housing applications and, importantly, on issues of signage, advertising and kerbing. In this context the group became involved in wider campaigns including the use of a major historic building and, in 2010, a door to door survey about shopping and travel patterns. The results highlighted sustainability issues caused by the very high dependency of residents on car travel for shopping, work, leisure and other services (and the social isolation of those without car access, particularly the elderly). A public meeting to present these findings drew on historical data from the village website to show that services and public transport were actually far more extensive in the 1950s despite the village having a much smaller population at that

time⁴. This comparison with earlier patterns contradicts claims, made in support of ‘social sustainability’, that more housing is needed to sustain village facilities such as a shop.

Our thermal community 2011



In 2011, a project on thermal emissions from buildings was carried out by the group. This was funded as part of the county-based Rural Community Council’s low carbon communities campaign⁵. The project led to a thermal ‘map’ of virtually all the buildings in the village (as shown here).

There was extensive local publicity prior to the thermal survey. A day-long exhibition was held to launch the results and explain how householders could respond. This led to community-wide interest in the built environment. The project subsequently won the Leicestershire village environmental achievement award for that year.

Phase 4: NPPF, SHLAA, SHMA, 5-year land supply and Developer pressures

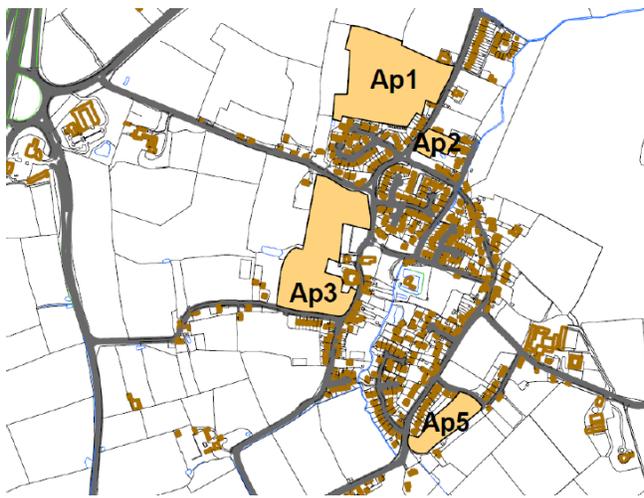
The group listened with concern to national debates about proposals to reframe planning policy under the National Policy Planning Framework. Powerful voices, including the National Trust, expressed concern about its potential impact on the natural environment. The terms of this debate, and its eventual resolution, focussed on the protection of the green belt. This is a designation which applies to the boundaries of towns. For village residents, policy towards land designated as countryside (described in local plans as land outside the defined limits to development) is of far greater relevance. This distinction was missed in the national discussions. The group wrote to their MP explaining their concerns and, by reference to earlier planning conflicts, the potential significance of loosening protection for the countryside. Reassurances were received but the final version of the NPPF does give less protection to countryside with, for example, the core planning principles (para 17) saying that land-use planning should take account of “the different roles and character of different areas, ... protecting the Green Belts ..., recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside ...”.

⁴ A presentation of the results can be found at www.applebyenvironment.co.uk/news/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/presentation-of-results.pdf

⁵ A poster summarising the project can be found at www.applebyenvironment.co.uk/news/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Sharing-our-Stories-Poster-Appleby.pdf

The group only belatedly became aware of other changes to the planning regime relating to assessing housing needs and identifying land which might be appropriate for their location. As part of the government's localism debate there was a stress on the removal of regional housing targets in favour of local decision-making. However, this did not mean a simple return to housing land designation within local plans and determination of individual applications. Instead there is a requirement on local planning authorities to undertake strategic housing market assessments (SHMA) and strategic housing land availability assessments (SHLAA). The methodology for these assessments is centrally determined and a key part of the NPPF's requirement to identify specific deliverable sites to meet housing need (para 47).

SHLAA sites in the village



In Spring 2012, as a result of rumour and observation of survey activity on various fields around the village, the group became aware of the SHLAA designations for the village (as shown). This identified four sites with a total estimated potential for 288 houses over the next 10 years. If all were built this would mean a 60% increase in housing numbers for a village with very limited facilities. Only the smallest site was inside the limits to development in the local plan, one site included part of the Conservation Area and the sites included

four 'sensitive areas'. This was a designation under the Local Plan, NWLDC, 2002, which said that development would not be permitted on such areas if it "would adversely affect or diminish the present open character of such areas and the contribution they may make to the character, form and setting of settlements, the street scene generally or the relationship with adjoining countryside". Several of the sites were specifically mentioned in the VDS as of value to the village character.

SHLAA process

The SHLAA maps and assessments were published within the planning section of the local authority website but it is unlikely a resident would have found them unless they knew what they were looking for. The group learned that the process involved sites being submitted for assessment by developers and landowners. There had been no notification or consultation with local people or their representatives. When asked about this the officers responded that there was no requirement on them to consult. This may be true in formal terms but seems to be against the spirit of calls for local participation in the NPPF. The officers did not explain why they would want to exclude local people even if they were not formally required to involve them.

As the name SHLAA suggests, the process involves an *assessment* of potential housing sites. This requires an examination of planning constraints and, if the site is considered to have potential for housing, then the time frame in which this could be delivered. This assessment appeared to be very different from that which would be made in the case of a planning application and the group felt that planning restraints were inaccurately recorded and inconsistently assessed in relation to the different sites. The group detailed these issues in written submissions to the local authority. The officers responded that they were required to identify as many sites as possible and that a positive assessment did not imply that a planning application would be approved. They did however agree to look again at their assessments and did change at least the constraints recorded in subsequent iterations. These remained at the level of site specific policies and made no reference to the sustainability assessment of the emerging Local Plan which said that any more than limited development in rural villages would “reinforce an unsustainable pattern of development in the district”. This assessment underpinned a settlement hierarchy which proposed locating the vast majority of new housing in the district at larger villages or urban settlements.

Local Plan developments

The local authority’s current Local Plan was intended to be valid up till 2006 (running from 1991 but adopted in 2002). Thus, in 2012, applicants were arguing that it was out of date and should only be given limited weight. The council had been developing a new plan with publications and consultation rounds from 2005 but a full core strategy document was not available for submission until 2013. Such a delay is not unusual. CPRE’s (2015b) analysis of Planning Inspectorate data shows that 27% of local authorities do not have a post-2004 Local Plan in place. The Local Plans Expert Group, established by the Department for Communities and Local Government, reported that “(n)early 4 years after the publication of the NPPF, only 31% of local authorities have local plans which can be regarded as being up to date in the sense that have been examined since (and found to be consistent with) the publication of the NPPF in March 2012” and that less than 20% had a plan that included site allocations (DCLG, 2016, para 1.7). A common problem faced by councils attempting to get local plans in place has been issues around the assessment of housing need and the allocation of sites to meet it.

The inspector appointed to assess this local authority’s submitted 2013 plan expressed early, major concerns about the submission in relation to housing need methodology, site allocation and duty to cooperate. He concluded that the plan needed to be withdrawn rather than proceeding to the next stage. At a public meeting with the inspector in September 2013 he reiterated these views – and on this basis could not make any judgement about whether the housing need figures were right or wrong. The council and local residents argued that withdrawal would devalue the extensive consultation that had taken place and provide an ‘open season’ for developers. The inspector did not disagree with this assessment. The council asked for an extension to produce an additional study of housing need. This was refused and the Council withdrew its draft plan at the end of October 2013. This decision required the development of a revised plan which only went out for initial consultation at the end of 2015 and, at the time of writing, is expected to be submitted in July 2016. Before the withdrawal of the plan the village environment group had been discussing revisiting the VDS to ensure it was

in line with the new plan policies and so could continue as planning guidance⁶. With withdrawal of the draft Local Plan, work on a revised VDS was suspended.

Planning applications and their determination

With the withdrawal of 2013 plan, developer-led applications increased across the district often in conflict with the council's preferred locations. The lack of an up to date plan and no clear five-year land supply led the council to pass some of these and to lose appeals in some of the cases where applications were refused. The village in this case saw applications on all SHLAA sites (and an additional site also on land the previous plan designated as countryside). Reports to the planning committee listed points made by applicants and objectors and concluded, in most cases, that the development was 'sustainable'. It was unclear to the group how that conclusion was reached (i.e. what weight was applied to different points against what criteria). One consistent theme was that the de facto criteria for the committee became that applications should be approved on sites adjacent to existing limits of development if they resulted in the same proportionate housing growth to all settlements. This involved an abandonment of the principle of the settlement hierarchy which the earlier plan had argued was a requirement to achieve sustainable development. Applications were approved on all but the most sensitive of the SHLAA sites (and subsequently, on appeal, on a smaller, additional edge of village site).

Experiences of community participation in planning applications at this stage

These planning applications exposed residents to another aspect of the new planning regime: pre-application community consultation. One developer, who had submitted two large applications in the village, undertook an intensive consultation exercise including an open evening with a model of one of their proposals and a door to door questionnaire / persuasion exercise. This consultation provided no formal opportunity to say that the development as a whole was unwelcome, only to comment on specific design and layout features. The developer also briefly set up a working group with the Parish Council to discuss, among other things, what community benefits the village would like as part of the application. This was despite a well-attended public meeting demonstrating overwhelming opposition to the proposals as a whole.

The environment group submitted detailed objections to the applications on the grounds of failure to meet the criteria of sustainable development and exercised their right to speak at committee meetings. Their representations drew on travel-to-work distances and lack of public transport, the group's recent high response survey on travel and shopping patterns, and on environmental and planning policies. These objections were included in reports to planning committees and no attempt was made to counter them. The group's use of the sustainability appraisal produced for the withdrawn plan was rejected on the grounds that the 'evidence base' had been withdrawn along with the draft plan. From the group's perspective, even if the

⁶ The choice to go down this route rather than start on the more recent Neighbourhood Plan process was based on a number of factors. The Parish Council was initially unwilling to support a NP having been told (by the district council) that it would be a very expensive process. The developers said that they would have their permissions in place long before the process was completed. The core group members felt that the VDS was still valid and supported and that revisiting this would be a quicker route forward than embarking on an uncertain and demanding NP process.

number of houses required was inaccurately assessed in the earlier plan this would not invalidate an assessment of the sustainability impact of different possible *patterns of allocation* of houses across the district (and indeed the current draft plan includes the same settlement hierarchy policy).

Many village residents made individual representations against the planning applications. They felt that their arguments about recent flooding, traffic congestion, effect on the local school, the characteristics of the historic and natural environment were not adequately addressed. These arguments drew on local knowledge (often backed up by photographs and other evidence) which they felt would help decision-makers understand the impact of the proposed development. In this context the Parish Council supported a village survey of views about the acceptable scale of housing development. This received close to a 60% response rate, stressed the factors already stated in objections and support for VDS guidelines. Nearly three-quarters of respondents said a maximum of 25 houses would be appropriate for the next five years. No respondent said that 100 or more would be appropriate. While such views are not relevant planning grounds for objections it was felt to be important for the community to have an opportunity to express their views, as well as a way to show the strength of opinion to local politicians.

As evidenced earlier in this chapter, the NPPF speaks positively about citizen participation. However, as McClymont & O'Hare (2008) note this enthusiasm does not appear to extend to those contributions which are seen as 'bad' / 'unwelcome'. In line with this analysis, policies underpinning the localism agenda were strongly pro-development in terms of the community rights offered (DCLG, 2015). For the objectors in this case this was far from their understanding of the terms of the invitation to participate. This is not to say that they expected their views to be paramount but they did expect to receive a greater level of recognition than, they felt, was given.

Reflections on Community Place-Making Practices

This chapter shows that people's sense of place is not a simple response to physical or social characteristics but is also influenced by their participation in, or experience of, place-making practices from inside and outside the community. Carrying out a village design statement and learning about local history, landscape and ecology changed how residents felt about their village – and this also influenced new residents. Putting village history on a website led to a changed sense of place as it attracted memories from older residents and previous residents, now living around the world. Place-making was not just an inward looking exercise. It involved engagement with planning policies, different types of expertise, local politicians and planning officers, and consideration of global issues such as climate change. These practices also changed the community who, while of course divided along many lines, do continue to participate in large numbers in response to surveys and consultations of relevance to their environment. For example, in response to a recent village green claim over a 100 detailed user forms were submitted.

In a study of local sustainability initiatives Pink (2012: 104) discusses a UK town participating in the international slow city movement (Cittislow). An interviewee reflecting on what slow means in this context distinguished between 'yokel slow' and 'Cittislow' which is about 'quality and caring'. One might make a related distinction between the view that sees objections as motivated by individual 'dislike of change' and one that sees them as arising from a community place-frame shared by residents who value their 'back yard' and know from experience that they need to articulate, and stand up for, it in order for valued features to be preserved.

As explored by Pierce et al (2010) 'place-frames' are not singular. Developers in this case were drawing on a very different sense of place when they suggested that a housing development on a particular field would 'complete the settlement' or that thatched porches on new houses would fit in with the historic village. But they are also engaging with physical features, planning policies and national housing debates. Similar points can be made in relation to planning inspectors whose assessment of buildings and landscapes draw on national, rather than local, comparisons.

Planning applications of the type described in this chapter may trigger conflicts between such competing place-frames. Such "place-contestation is always ongoing, as particular place-frames are tactically deployed toward strategic (though perhaps not always conscious) political aims" (Pierce et al, 2010: 60). While each party will have different resources to draw on, the terms of the debate are mediated, to a large extent, by the planning policies in operation at the time. The value of this longitudinal study is that it allows a contrast between planning regimes. When the village group first became involved in planning battles there was no history of developing shared place understandings, although individuals had made their own representations. Preparing for the enquiry was the first construction of a shared view. At this stage there had been no input to local planning policies or attempt to communicate a community view to local politicians.

The following stage, which included the Village Design Statement process, involved a refinement and widening of that shared understanding of place and attempted to embed its key elements in local planning policies. In addition to the VDS there were inputs to the emerging Local Plan including a campaign for a Conservation Area. These initiatives involved confronting the place frames of others, including those of local planning officers. Of course not all claims were successful. The specific outcomes of a planning system are never going to satisfy all parties but, if effective, they should, on balance, command respect and trust from most participants. This period seemed to provide this, at least from the perspective of residents. In addition to the direct planning conflicts there were shared activities and projects which in different ways built networks and changed understandings. Neither residents nor place-frames are stable categories and shared understandings have to be renewed on an on-going basis.

The major change of planning context, affecting recent applications, is the National Policy Planning Framework. This period has been experienced in far more negative terms by the residents discussed here. There are two key issues of particular relevance to this account. The first is the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This is said to have three

dimensions: economic, social and environmental. “(T)o achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system” (NPPF, 2012, para 8). CPRE (2014) has expressed concern that the economic dimension is being given undue weight and they suggest there is a need to modify the framework to ensure that full weight is given to the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, even without ‘up-to-date’ local plans.

The second issue relates directly to housing land provision. The NPPF requires the calculation of housing needs (in line with particular methodologies) and the identification of ‘deliverable’ sites which are able of meeting this need. As described, in the absence of a compliant local plan and a valid 5-year land supply, local policies no longer carry weight. Absent plans and identified housing sites might be seen as the fault of local authorities but, in practice, many councils have been caught in a vicious circle from which it is hard to escape (CPRE, 2015a). The situation is certainly not the fault of, or under the control of, residents for whom it is “causing frustration and anger at the local level and not delivering the Government’s aspirations for ‘localism’” (CPRE, 2014: 2). The experience of the community which is the subject of this chapter of being a ‘village under siege’ with “multiple developers seeking planning permission on sites ringing a settlement at the same time” is shown by this review to be far from an isolated example (CPRE, 2014: 9).

To characterise this dilemma as a conflict between inward looking residents protecting their assets and progressive attempts to provide much needed housing is simplistic. CPRE continues to argue that current planning practices are inflating housing land needs and forcing councils to give permission for developers’ preferred sites (even when in conflict with emerging local plan policies) without any clear commitment on them to deliver actual housing within a defined period. CPRE does not deny, and indeed is committed to, the provision of housing to address local need in rural areas. The claim is that this can be achieved while still protecting countryside and the character of rural settlements. Most rural residents would concur with this view.

It would also be simplistic to suggest that the residents in this case are dissatisfied with the current situation just because more applications are being approved. The majority of local authorities are without valid local plans. As such they are unable to provide a framework where the shared views of local residents can be effectively represented within the planning process. There is encouragement for the development of Neighbourhood Plans but the government twice rejected Lords’ amendments to the Housing and Planning Bill to allow those with such plans to appeal planning decisions which conflicted with their near completed or adopted plans (CPRE 2016). This context risks alienating concerned and responsible citizens who may no longer feel there is much point in trying to engage with the planning system. In this case current planning practices were experienced as leading to a prioritisation of housing permissions with very limited regard to the views of local communities about appropriate locations. In this context it is not surprising that developers target green field sites around villages where land is relatively cheap and prices of new houses relatively high. Where such applications are not subject to effective local challenge the result will be the destruction of countryside and of boundaries that currently define existing settlements and communities. This

outcome is a significant loss not only to local residents but also to the population at large for whom the countryside and its villages define their wider sense of valued places.

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