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Disruptive Localism – *How Far Does Clientelism Shape the Prospects of Neighbourhood Planning in Deprived Urban Communities?*

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a study of Neighbourhood Planning in more deprived urban areas of the North West region of England, revealing that the stance of elected representatives is important in shaping the processes and outcomes of this new more citizen-led form of planning. The paper considers how far barriers to Neighbourhood Planning, and the variable support offered by local planning authorities to deprived urban communities, might be accounted for by practices of clientelism. It concludes that clientelism provides a useful lens through which to interpret attitudes towards Neighbourhood Planning as a disruptor of established patterns of influence and powerholding.

Introduction

The period since the 1960s has been marked by significant changes in views about how planning interacts with society/ies. Most accounts of planning thought in liberal democratic contexts tell a story of a gradual shift from a normatively infused activity, whose legitimacy resides in the processes and institutions of representative democracy guided by the counsel of planning professionals, to an activity whose purpose is to facilitate and mediate various societal claims and interests around development with a more direct, or participatory, input from citizens ('the governed'). How far this narrative captures the realities of practice in different contexts has often been questioned. Some have argued that whilst planning may have evolved to make it a more open and relational process of societal deliberation, its fundamental knowledges and conception of space remain wedded to earlier notions of rationalism and immutability (Davoudi & Strange, 2009).

Consequently, there are renewed calls for planning to become more responsive to the spatial needs and wishes of those it serves, in policy statements such as the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations, 2016). But the implications of such imprecations to greater participation and the complexities which may arise in seeking to evolve planning practice, remain matters of debate. One such area of debate is how the 'micro-politics' of new, more participatory forms of plan-making might interact and compete for legitimacy with 'traditional' representative modes of local government.

Informed by this context, this paper considers the potential of more localist and citizen-led forms of planning to disrupt established patterns of power holding. It does so by using the notion of clientelism to reflect on the progress of statutory *Neighbourhood Planning* introduced in England by

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the 2011 Localism Act. Specifically, the paper considers the take-up of Neighbourhood Planning in one of the most urban and most deprived regions of England – the North West. It draws on interviews with those who have succeeded, and those who have failed, in producing such plans. The findings suggest that attitudes of local politicians appear a particularly significant factor in success or otherwise, and that this attitude can be helpfully analysed through the lens of clientelism. The evidence explored in the paper reveals that the opposition evinced by some of these elected representatives may arise from their desire to protect existing networks of power and relationships with both the development industry and communities. The paper therefore questions how Neighbourhood Planning, which draws its legitimacy from participative and direct – rather than representative democracy (Sturzaker & Gordon, 2017) – is fitting, or not, within existing governance arrangements.

To establish the research context, the paper firstly presents an overview of the emergence of Neighbourhood Planning in England, highlighting key issues and questions which have arisen from nearly a decade of practice and scholarship. Secondly, the concept of clientelism is introduced and reviewed. Thirdly, the research questions explored, and methods employed, in the empirical study of the experience of Neighbourhood Planning are introduced. Fourthly, the findings of the study are presented with attention to how far barriers to Neighbourhood Planning; the variable support offered by local planning authorities; and, Neighbourhood Planning processes in deprived urban contexts, might be accounted for by practices of clientelism. Finally, the paper reflects on the extent to which Neighbourhood Planning as a new form of planning might disrupt established patterns of clientelistic powerholding in local planning practice and induce friction between competing political legitimacies.

Localism and Neighbourhood Planning in England

The 2011 Localism Act introduced a range of reforms to the planning system in England with the rhetorical aim of decentralising power from central and regional government to local government and the community/neighbourhood level (DCLG, 2011a). Comprehensive discussions of the neighbourhood-scale powers introduced can be found elsewhere – for example, Sturzaker and Gordon (2017) or Brownill and Bradley (2017). Some particularly important elements of the new powers are:

- Neighbourhood Plans are part of the "statutory development plan" so carry legal weight in making decisions on planning projects, but are optional so not produced everywhere.
- They are produced on a voluntary basis by unelected, but in theory representative, groups of local people on behalf of their communities, not by professional planners in the employ of the state.
- To be adopted they have to pass a neighbourhood referendum – a vote of everybody who lives and works in the area.

This unusual combination of a non-compulsory, volunteer-produced, statutory plan which must receive endorsement via direct democracy has sparked a great deal of interest from researchers, both in the field of planning (for example, Davoudi & Cowie, 2013; Parker et al., 2015; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015) and in other areas of study (for example, Bradley & Sparling, 2016; Lord et al., 2017; Wills, 2016). This wider interest reflects the understanding that "In no other case study of devolution, across a broad international canvas, do we see so visibly the liberatory and regulatory conflicts that

arise from the assemblages of localism, or the tangled relations of power and identity that result" (Bradley & Brownill, 2017, p. 251).

In the later sections of this paper we present new evidence of these conflicts and "tangled relations of power", which have come about in part because, despite the claim from the Government that Neighbourhood Plans would allow "communities to decide the future of the places where they live and work" (DCLG, 2011b), the scope for truly radical action through localism, and specifically Neighbourhood Planning, is heavily constrained by framing from "above", i.e. from central and local government (Gallent & Robinson, 2012; Gallent, 2013).

This framing flows from the essentially centralised nature of the English planning system. Whilst, in theory, municipal authorities (known as Local Planning Authorities) retain the power to make their own decisions on where and in what form development takes place within their area, this power is circumscribed. Since the 2011 Localism Act, Governmental rhetoric about the need for the planning system to deliver more homes has risen to fever pitch. This has resulted in de-regulation – allowing the conversion of some non-residential buildings into "shockingly poor housing" (Clifford et al., 2019, p. 204); and more central intervention in local planning, including the re-imposition of housing targets which Local Planning Authorities must deliver through their local plans and through their decisions on development proposals (known as planning applications). Neighbourhood Plans in turn, by legislative design, must be pro-development and must not propose less development than pre-existing local plans do (Bradley, 2017). Local Planning Authorities then hold a great deal of "framing" power over both the constitution and content of Neighbourhood Plans (Parker et al., 2017; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015), and retain their decision-making power on planning applications.

So, it must be acknowledged that, to put it mildly, there have been contradictions in both rhetoric and policy since the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans – it is possible to see them as a subtext to a wider picture of centralisation in planning. However, Neighbourhood Planning does represent a genuine shifting of power to communities, however small (Parker & Street, 2015; Wills, 2016). Neighbourhood Planning has been described as "a 'foot in the door' that maintains interest in and 'hope' for local politics" (Parker et al., 2017, p. 450). At a time when confidence in the ability of politics and democratic collective action to bring about positive change is often questioned (Goodwin & Eatwell, 2018; Grayling, 2018), Neighbourhood Plans are a way for communities to obtain some leverage in the development process. If the plan is 'made', in the jargon of the legislation, it joins the local plan as being a document which the Local Planning Authority must refer to when determining planning applications. Furthermore, whether or not it is "rational" for them to do so (Mace & Tewdwr-Jones, 2019), there are an increasing number of communities who are pursuing their own plans (MHCLG, 2020).

Early evidence supported the supposition that Neighbourhood Planning would be more widely taken up in wealthier communities who had the capacity to volunteer in this way (Hall, 2011; Inch, 2012; O'Connor, 2010), with the majority of Neighbourhood Plans produced in the first few years being in wealthier, often rural, areas (Parker & Salter, 2016). Correspondingly, much of the work published so far on Neighbourhood Planning has focused on these "early adopters" (Ludwig & Ludwig, 2014; Parker & Street, 2015; Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015).

Informed by the context and critique outlined above, and the focus of much existing research on more affluent areas, this paper deliberately focuses not on where the majority of Neighbourhood Planning activity has occurred, but places which are the exception – urban communities, particularly those which are more socio-economically deprived. It is commonly argued that such communities are generally less likely to include individuals who have the capacity to volunteer for activities such as Planning in their spare time (Sutcliffe & Holt, 2011), but that this lack of capacity makes them no less

likely to evince strong attachment to where they live (Livingstone et al., 2008). A further factor brought home through ongoing discussions held with Neighbourhood Planning activists working in various contexts across England is that Local Planning Authorities have approached Neighbourhood Plans in very different ways – some have been positive, some ambivalent and some strongly negative (see also Parker et al., 2017). The anecdotal evidence was that this was then reflected in how well urban communities, particularly those in more deprived areas, were able to engage in Neighbourhood Planning. It further appeared that a major question which has been underexplored was how Neighbourhood Plans fit into the patterns of powerholding and patchwork of statutory and non-statutory planning which are now a feature of urban England. In the following section we introduce the concept of clientelism and suggest that it can provide a way of framing the investigation of such issues.

Clientelism

There is a "vast and growing literature on clientelism" (Hicken, 2011, p. 290). In this section we explore the potential of the concept to inform scholarship on Neighbourhood Planning at the 'micro level' of the observable attitudes and behaviours of some elected representatives towards this form of planning.

What is Clientelism?

In broad terms Kettering (1988, p. 419) suggests that clientelism is "a system of patron- broker-client ties and networks that dominate a society's politics and government". Briquet (2007) further suggests that clientelism refers to a "relationship between individuals with unequal economic and social status ('the boss' and his/her 'clients') that entails the reciprocal exchange of goods and services based on a personal link that is generally perceived in terms of moral obligation". Such links are sometimes referred to as 'dyadic' relationships, though Piattoni (2001, p. 10) notes that whilst "Personalism and dyadicity may indeed have characterized traditional clientelism in subsistence (particularly agrarian) societies, … they are hardly typical of political clientelism in contemporary societies". Similarly, Hicken (2011, p. 291) notes that "Although there is still an acknowledgment of the importance of personal, face-to-face relationships, the emphasis has shifted toward discussions of brokers and networks".

Normative Questions – Is Clientelism a Bad Thing?

Much writing around clientelism adopts a critical normative tone, for example, Piattoni (2001, p. 18, added *emphases*) observes that "Clientelism is just one of the historical forms in which interests are represented and promoted, a practical (*although in many ways undesirable*) solution to the problem of democratic representation". However, as with social and political concepts more generally, its interpretation by different observers is highly subjective and context-dependent (Anciano, 2017).

There is, for example, a "school of thought that emphasizes theoretically salutary aspects of clientelism" and "points to the redistributive and social welfare aspects of clientelist exchange" (Hicken, 2011, p. 302). Meanwhile, whilst clientelism is often evoked colloquially in connection with 'corruption' (Fox-Rogers, 2019, p. 143) the two are not analogous (Piattoni, 2001, pp. 7–8). Not all clientelistic behaviours and relationships can be described as 'corrupt', with criteria such as their formal illegality, or an orientation simply towards 'private gain' (Jiménez et al., 2012 as cited in Fox-Rogers, 2019, p. 143), sometimes being seen as defining a (often blurred) boundary between the two. It is important to draw this distinction, as there have been concerns in England recently about

potential corruption in the planning system – with the government minister responsible at the time for planning admitting to having expedited a planning application to allow a Conservative Party donor to avoid paying a £45 million land tax payment (LGC Contributor, 2020). However, our use of the clientelism lens in the following sections is exploratory rather than normative, and it is not suggested that the practices and behaviours we found around Neighbourhood Planning in the areas studied are necessarily 'corrupt'.

Clientelism and Legitimacy

Hicken (2011, p. 290) notes that clientelism as a "method of contingent exchange thrives in both autocracies and democracies (and in everything in between); it exists in a large variety of cultural contexts; and in the face of economic development it often adapts and endures (contrary to the expectations of earlier analyses)". As political and productive systems have transformed, 'clientelistic practices' have also evolved, becoming part of democratic processes such as elections. Mass democratic participation and swelling electorates changed the context for traditional practices, such as patronage, with dyadic relationships typically being displaced by more impersonal forms of clientelism. Briquet (2007) notes how "the expansion of interventions by states and local authorities generated new possibilities for politicians to control public resources and, in so doing, mobilize electoral support. Social policies, urban renewal, and subsidies for economic development could all be used to fuel these 'political machines'". Thus although clientelism can be defined narrowly as relating to the "the proffering of material goods in return for electoral support" (Stokes, 2011, p. 2), it can be argued that "With clientelism, all public decision-making may become a token of exchange: from a birth certificate to a building permit, from a disability pension to public housing, from a development project to a tax exemption" (Piattoni, 2001, p. 6).

Clientelism, thus, can be taken to encompass the wider 'gift' of 'political services' that elected representatives may provide to their constituents, including influence/advocacy in relation to regulatory/statutory powers. At the local level the proffering of such 'gifts', as part of the elected councillor's vocation to 'make a difference' for their communities, is part of the two-way exchange relations that clientelism (as 'gift') implies. In return for demonstrating their efficacy, the elected representative anticipates continued electoral support, so both parties get something from a process of reciprocal exchange. Such clientelist relations can also be interpreted from a political legitimacy perspective. Scharpf (1999) sees political legitimacy as being composed of *output* (the effectiveness/problem solving capacity of policy) and *input* (the responsiveness of policy to citizen concerns) dimensions (see also Taylor, 2019). Such understandings of the 'legitimacy' of systems of government and representatives can be seen as meeting notions of clientelism. Essentially, the contingent renewal of 'input' legitimacy through electoral support (i.e. votes), from a clientelist perspective, can be seen as an exchange of support in return for the ability of the elected representative to 'get things done' for the citizen/client. The reciprocal nature of such exchanges may diminish if citizens feel that the representative system does not deliver what they asked for, or the output it delivers is ineffective in addressing issues with which they are concerned.

Clientelism, Poverty and Development

According to Hicken (2011, 299) "Perhaps the most common association drawn in the clientelism literature is between the level of economic development and the prevalence of clientelism". Of particular relevance to the present paper's focus is Stokes's observation that "The affinity between

poverty (inequality) and clientelism is settled fact, but the mechanisms linking the two, and the direction of causality, are not" (Stokes, 2011, p. 20). Clientelism is often considered in the context of developing countries as one of the factors that makes effective planning difficult, notably in informal settlements (Deuskar, 2019). The needs of such areas and poor residents may often be provided for by "patrons" or "brokers" who provide certain goods or services "to the poor in contingent exchange for political support" (Deuskar, 2019, p. 2). A weak capacity of 'formal' planning and programmes to meet these needs may open up these other avenues of influence and power.

As Deuskar (2019, p. 6) also notes, "An established literature exists on the decline of clientelism in advanced democracies in North America and Europe" with the trend being seen as the result of a number of factors, such as better access to education and opportunities, public sector reform, centralised welfare states and programmes, the rise of technocracy and widening spatial and social networks. The contemporary association of clientelism with developing contexts and informality in political brokerage and exchange may be one reason why its enduring relevance and potential, as an explanatory lens to elucidate new forms of citizen-led and localist planning in more 'developed' planning contexts, has arguably been neglected in recent debates. However, as noted by Cinar (2016, p. 78) "patron–client relationships do not simply wither away with enhancements in socio-economic development and political institutions" rather "They usually evolve into new forms".

We acknowledge that the intensity of material social deprivation varies immensely between developed and developing countries, and it is not our aim here to suggest false equivalences between these. However, one contribution of this paper is to highlight how the 'poverty-development-clientelism' dynamics highlighted by planning practice and scholarship from the global south might furnish valuable insights into practices surrounding Neighbourhood Planning – notably in deprived urban communities, where variability in capacity has been identified as a major potential constraint to the success of Neighbourhood Planning (Hall, 2011; McGuinness & Ludwig, 2017).

Clientelism and Neighbourhood Planning – Research Questions and Methods

Drawing on the contextualisation and conceptualisation in the preceding sections, this paper now explores whether and how any capacity, or other barriers, experienced by Neighbourhood Planning can be accounted for in terms of its potential to disrupt established clientelist relations.

The research questions we have sought to answer are (1) Can clientelism help us understand variable support offered by Local Planning Authorities to deprived urban communities? and (2) Does clientelism provide a useful lens through which to interpret the attitude of existing powerholders and interests towards Neighbourhood Planning in the context of deprived urban communities?

The research reported here is part of a larger project which sought to establish the extent of Neighbourhood Planning activity in the North West of England and how this correlated with Local Planning Authority support for Neighbourhood Plan groups; and with deprivation, both at the Local Planning Authority and neighbourhood scale. This included a desk-based study of all Local Planning Authorities and all Neighbourhood Plans in the North West region of England. Full results of that study can be found in Sturzaker and Nurse (2020), but in summary we found a clear correlation between deprivation and (lack of) Neighbourhood Planning activity, with most activity in less deprived Local Planning Authoritiess and less deprived neighbourhoods.

That study acted as a sampling frame for our qualitative work. We identified eight neighbourhoods in urban parts of the North West – seven in some of the most deprived parts of the region, spread across four Local Planning Authorities in the Liverpool and Manchester City Regions, and one in a comparatively less deprived place, in another Local Planning Authority within the Manchester City Region. A significant amount of existing research has been undertaken in less deprived locations, so we wished to focus upon deprived neighbourhoods, but the inclusion of a less deprived neighbourhood, which had been successful in producing its Neighbourhood Plan, provided a helpful contrast. Our interviewees were split between chairs of Neighbourhood Plan groups and Neighbourhood Plan support workers. The latter are employed by the Neighbourhood Plan groups in question to help them work on their plan, funded through small grants from central government to the Neighbourhood Plan groups.

To protect the anonymity of our interviewees we do not name them nor the specific locations they are active within, but the table below shows when the interviews were carried out and their deprivation ranking within the 157 Neighbourhood Plan areas in the North West (Table 1).

Table 1. Our interviewees.

Area	Role of interviewee	Date of interview
3rd most deprived (NP in the North West)	Chair of NP group	7 June 2018
4th most deprived	NP support worker	7 June 2018
8th most deprived	NP support worker	5 June 2018
9th most deprived	NP support worker	29 May 2018
13th most deprived	NP support worker	17 July 2018
14th most deprived	Chair of NP group	22 June 2018
21st most deprived	Chair of NP group	7 June 2018
112th most deprived	Chair of NP group	18 June 2018

These interviews were semi-structured in nature, with the interviewees' responses guiding the direction of the conversations. As such, a range of issues was discussed across the eight interviews, but we used a common set of prompt questions which focussed upon the support offered by local authorities to Neighbourhood Plan groups, either specifically or in general; whether this differed between planning officers and local politicians; and what the interviewees perceived as the reason(s) for that support or opposition. We did not explicitly frame the interviews around concepts of clientelism and power relations, but used more open questions such as "how much support have you had from the Local Planning Authority in producing your Neighbourhood Plan?". This allowed the interviewees to speak freely about their experiences without 'steering' them to account for these in the conceptual language of the researchers. With the interviewees' consent, the interviews were recorded, and these recordings transcribed. We then analysed the transcripts to explore recurring themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which related to the questions specified above. We now move on to discuss some of these themes.

Clientelism and Neighbourhood Planning – Evidence from Deprived Urban Communities in England's North West

Can Clientelism Help Us Understand Variable Support Offered by Local Planning Authorities to Deprived Urban Communities?

A first observation is that some barriers to Neighbourhood Planning in (deprived) urban areas were as expected, and as found/predicted by others. These barriers included a lack of capacity for Neighbourhood Planning, or indeed any other voluntary activity in deprived communities (Hall,

2011); the lack of support and decision-making infrastructures in the absence of Parish and Town Councils which operate across most of rural England (Taylor et al., 2019); and, an issue common to different areas, that despite the rhetoric around a "light-touch" approach from Ministers, it turns out that producing a Neighbourhood Plan is a long and difficult process (Inch, 2015).

These issues merit further discussion in themselves (see Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020), but here we focus further on the support offered by Local Planning Authorities to communities to undertake Neighbourhood Plan activity, which has emerged as a strong determining factor in the opportunities available to Neighbourhood Planning groups. This is in large part because of the "framing" opportunities available to Local Planning Authorities in relation to Neighbourhood Plans, much analysis of which has focussed upon their content and use (Sturzaker & Gordon, 2017). The emphasis in our interviews, however, was on the earlier stages of Neighbourhood Planning – the preparation of Neighbourhood Plans, and 'pre-preparation'. In urban areas, Local Planning Authorities must approve (or not) the membership of new Neighbourhood Forums which must be formed in urban areas to produce Neighbourhood Plans, along with the boundaries of the newly defined neighbourhoods. Some have proved very reluctant to do this (Parker et al., 2017), and loath to support Neighbourhood Planning more generally. In what follows, we explore this reluctance and possible reasons for it, including the potential of Neighbourhood Planning to disrupt establish patterns of powerholding and exchange.

One Neighbourhood Planning support worker noted that there was "massively variable" support offered by Local Planning Authorities – "some are very, very supportive . . . some are more hostile". This variability was likened to a "postcode lottery"[1] by another support worker. Descriptions of the attitudes of Local Planning Authority planning officers varied from "really encouraging" through being supportive "without much enthusiasm", to actively discouraging communities from undertaking Neighbourhood Plans.

One reason suggested for the lack of support offered by some Local Planning Authority officers was lack of capacity – due in large part to the cuts of 50% or more to planning budgets in Local Planning Authorities as a consequence of the UK Government's "austerity" policies. This appeared to explain slowness or inability to respond to requests for information or help of different sorts – "we have had difficulties getting feedback . . . on the actual draft plan, so I think part of that is officer capacity" – rather than an outright unwillingness to get involved. One Neighbourhood Plan support worker also highlighted that lack of Local Planning Authority resources meant that there was a shortage of demographic data at the community level, needed to ensure Neighbourhood Plans are robust. A contrasting example can be found in the least deprived of our case studies, in a Conservative controlled Local Planning Authority which "prides itself on having the lowest community charge [council tax] in the world". Here, Neighbourhood Planning appears to have been seen as a low-cost alternative to statutory land-use planning, with the Chief Executive of that Local Planning Authority approaching the Neighbourhood Planning group leader to suggest he investigate the production of a Neighbourhood Plan. In that case, the Local Planning Authority was so supportive of the Neighbourhood Plan group that it voluntarily gave up a proportion of its income from planning gain from *section 106* agreements to provide direct financial support for the Neighbourhood Plan.

Beyond the financial position of the Local Planning Authority, or indeed the attitude of officers themselves, the approach taken in response to communities wishing to produce Neighbourhood Plans appears to be in large part a function of the attitude of the elected 'members' of Local Planning Authorities, otherwise referred to as local councillors – the individuals elected by local

people to represent 'wards' of the Local Planning Authority. Councillors typically represent a political party, but they may also be independent.

As with the degree of support offered by Local Planning Authority officers, there was some variation in the attitude of local councillors. One of our interviewees was positive about their councillors, two identified the predominant attitude of councillors in their areas as disinterest, but the predominant attitude, across chairs and support officers, appeared to be one of hostility and opposition to Neighbourhood Planning. In some places, activists "met with staunch opposition from the very beginning" from local councillors – this was described as "appalling".

This opposition was sometimes expressed covertly, identified by communities indirectly as they tried to work with the Local Planning Authority – the Chair of one Neighbourhood Plan group told us, "We got the feeling that the goalposts kept moving, once we complied with something, there was something missing … "; whilst a Neighbourhood Planning support worker referred to the actions of one Local Planning Authority as "very sneaky … they [the Neighbourhood Plan group] had to go through a lot of 'no's' before they were told it was the leader [of the Local Planning Authority] who was against it".

In other instances the opposition was clearly expressed to our interviewees, if not stated on the record. This was sometimes linked to party politics, with one neighbourhood plan group Chair noting that "Labour were not on board at all" with Neighbourhood Plans. This theme was taken up by others, another Chair referring to an "Ideological approach to the whole concept" from some elected members from the Labour party, because "it was Conservative policy, part of the Localism Act, even though it had been initiated – supported – by a previous Labour government". This would not be the first time that local Labour politicians had resisted the efforts of the national party to promote more community power over development (Lowndes & Pratchett, 2012).

Expressing opposition to initiatives such as Neighbourhood Planning, and the broader localism trend it instantiates, is usually perceived as being at least uncommon, if not politically unwise (Inch, 2012; Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall, 2008), because localism is often justified on the basis that it makes planning and other forms of governance more democratic, and "who would be in favour of a system being *less* democratic?" (Lord et al., 2017, p. 350). This does, however, appear to be the position of some elected members of Local Planning Authorities in the North West of England. One of our interviewees claimed that two separate members, one very senior, had described Neighbourhood Plans as being "just an unnecessary level of democracy".

Looking behind this perhaps deliberatively provocative statement we could interpret this opposition on democratic grounds, charitably – the point has been made by others that there are entirely legitimate questions about the extent to which the general principle of moving decision-making closer to the community level makes it more democratic (Clifford & Warren, 2005); and of the democratic credentials and legitimacy of Neighbourhood Planning itself (Sturzaker & Gordon, 2017). It may also reflect a concern with the "output" political legitimacy (Watkins, 2015) of this form of planning – i.e. its ability to resolve, as promised, the planning issues it purportedly seeks to address.

However, it is also possible to detect in such attitudes a concern with redistribution of power and consequent decentring of the role of local elected representatives as potential 'brokers' in the local planning process, and the emergence of competing legitimacies. Interviewees thus reported to us their perception of elected members' views, about "some bunch of unelected people telling us who are elected what we should be doing in the city"; and a member going on record to express his view that "sometimes my worry about Neighbourhood Forums is it becomes a clique, and they're deciding what the community want". Davoudi and Cowie (2013) have explored these issues in

more depth and, again, these concerns are legitimate. However, some interviewees suggested this argument was a fig leaf, and such opposition was rather derived from the power rationalities of certain actors.

One of the Neighbourhood Plan group Chairs argued that the opposition that there had been to several Neighbourhood Plans in their area was due to an "ideological position … [that] councillors know best … it was about gatekeeping, it was about control". Neighbourhood Planning was seen as "a threat to their power". Another Chair summed this up with the pithy quote "some people are power crazy". Whether this perceived obsession with power can be seen as clientelism is to some extent a matter of opinion. But analysing our interview testimonies through the 'lens' of clientelism we can find evidence of perceived clientelism in two distinct interpretations.

Particularly in Liverpool and Manchester, two Local Planning Authorities heavily dominated by the Labour party (at the time of writing holding 84% and 98% of seats respectively), our interviewees identified what they saw as an uncomfortably close relationship between senior Local Planning Authority members and big business. One Neighbourhood Plan group Chair told us that "the real opposition there [to their Neighbourhood Plan], without it ever being made public, but we were informed – came from [XXXX] and the main developer … who had decided they didn't want any interference of any kind in the plans that were being brought forward between the developer and the local authority". Another Chair echoed these sentiments, describing the approach to decision-making in one of the cities as "Deals are done between important people … he [senior Local Planning Authority member] and the big players are used to having discussions that they all agree with, … behind closed doors. And they see it as a hindrance to the smooth running of business as usual to have other people involved". This "potentially adversarial" (Mace & Tewdwr-Jones, 2019, p. 189) relationship between Local Planning Authorities and community groups, in part due to competing sources of legitimacy in Neighbourhood Planning, has been noted elsewhere (Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015).

Clientelism may also be significant in a second sense in terms of modifying the local 'client – patron' relationships of locally elected councillors and their constituents. Under traditional Local Planning Authority committee structures, local members might be power holders as members of a variety of local authority committees. Such positions might give them influence over the distribution of some material benefits, but also, in some cases, varying degrees of power/control over regulatory/statutory levers with which to deliver a local policy agenda. As noted above, Piattoni (2006, p. 6) argues that "With clientelism, all public decision-making may become a token of exchange". Neighbourhood Planning contains at least the theoretical potential to transfer some decision-making powers (as regards land use planning) more directly to citizens.

Depending on the context, and the fine grain of the nature of relationships between specific councillors and the communities ('clients') they represent, such a process may be perceived positively or as a threat by individual elected members. The findings contained echoes of the importance of "dyadic" (or face-to-face) relations (Hicken, 2011, p. 290). In one case, for example, the attitude of one local councillor was described by a Chair as "Brilliant, absolutely brilliant … he's a good friend as well which helps". This friendship was perhaps key, as it appears unusual. Other councillors were dismissed as disinterested – "They just see it as a bunch of locals doing some stuff". More common, however, was active opposition to Neighbourhood Planning because it suggested a loss of control. Again, there were personal elements – "sometimes it's due to the type of political control that some politicians want to have"; and "some of the councillors didn't like the idea that somebody else was going to make the decisions".

This tendency for local councillors to see themselves as the (only) legitimate representatives of local people, echoes experiences elsewhere, both in England (Hewson, 2007) and Australia, where local government has been described as "characterised as much by parochialism as by localism" (Burton, 2017, p. 219). Local politicians, then, might be expected to be resistant to Neighbourhood Planning – although Mace and Tewdwr-Jones (2019) found that not all were. Others have found evidence that Local Planning Authority planners regarded Neighbourhood Planning "as a threat or an inconvenience" (Parker et al., 2017, p. 454). As noted above, this was not identified as an issue by our interviewees. Private sector development interests, which dominate the building and development industry in England, have also expressed resistance to and scepticism about Neighbourhood Planning, usually on the grounds that it might limit their ability to build more houses (Lichfields, 2018; Turley, 2014). We argue, however, that our work in the North West of England has uncovered a particular form of resistance.

Does Clientelism Provide a Useful Lens through Which to Interpret the Attitude of Existing Powerholders and Interests Towards Neighbourhood Planning in the Context of Deprived Urban Communities?

The findings provide evidence that some resistance to Neighbourhood Planning may be particularly acute within some more deprived contexts because of the importance accorded by local governments and governing regimes to two key areas of urban policy: strategies of economic development; and neighbourhood/urban renewal of more deprived areas.

Urban Strategies of Economic Development

In complex urban settings where urban strategies prioritise regeneration and economic development, the emergence of Neighbourhood Planning seemed to be perceived by at least some actors as a potential further hurdle to 'getting the job done'. In such places, often painstakingly assembled entrepreneurial urban regimes and partnerships have developed. These may be underpinned by 'deals' between senior elected politicians and developers, in which access to a favourable planning process could be one of the 'goods/services' the civic 'patrons/bosses' may seek to provide to secure commitment/investment to major schemes, that in turn deliver the regeneration goals of urban strategy. These "clientelist" practices may be considered to boost the "output" legitimacy (Scharpf, 1970), of the local urban "regime" (i.e. its effectiveness/problem solving capacity). Neighbourhood Planning may not be perceived as a welcome addition to such accommodations if it is perceived to have the potential to lead to disruption and/or increased scrutiny of 'deals'. Our interview evidence supports the argument that this is may be a particular issue in cities with a 'boss' political culture (as discussed above), with strong links between local government leadership and the business sector. One Neighbourhood Planning forum chair commented that we "struggled to connect with some of the major players in the area from a business perspective, because the XXXX [local] business partnership took up a position extremely antagonistic towards the [Neighbourhood Planning] project, supporting the council in their antagonism. And that was backed by a significant developer for a huge swathe of the site". Similarly, in another case an interviewee recalled how "I'd spoken to some of the movers and shakers, the manager of the XXXX shopping centre and various solicitors and architects around here, when I was thinking of setting up the Forum, [and] there was general support from them. [However], when it came to putting the [Neighbourhood Plan] designation applications in, they objected". They also noted how "One of the more influential business people" who operated two McDonald's franchises in the town said "'who are these people?', as if we were

somehow – shouldn't be allowed to do a Neighbourhood Plan. So there was quite vociferous opposition from the business community".

Neighbourhood/Urban Renewal

In areas subject to urban renewal there are often a multitude of existing area-based initiatives and networks (e.g. housing, environmental improvements etc.) which link elected representatives and communities/voters. Neighbourhood Planning constitutes an opportunity to strengthen these networks, but may also be viewed as a potential disruption of the role of elected representatives in brokering solutions and channelling resources in such 'policy-rich' contexts. For example, it is reported anecdotally by Neighbourhood Forum members in a part of inner-city Liverpool that a key local councillor suggested to certain organisations that they may lose funding if they cooperated with the Neighbourhood Planning process. This echoes the form of clientelist exchanges identified by Stokes (2011, p. 6) which "tie the client to the patron not by encouraging a norm of reciprocity but by encouraging a fear that the flow of benefits will be cut off". As Hicken (2011, p. 293) puts it "Like any relationship, clientelism contains certain costs of ending the relationship". Thus, in one example, an interviewee from a community group involved in Neighbourhood Planning noted that pursuing certain options "would have put us on a collision course with Mayoral authority and with council officers and other elected members" and reflected somewhat philosophically that "that would be disadvantageous for our work in the city … ". Here communities are discouraged from using Neighbourhood Planning by the threat that the 'gifts' they have enjoyed from their elected members may be cut off. Alternatively, certain elected members might try to co-opt the Neighbourhood Planning process, potentially leading it to become mired in 'run of the mill' party politics and conflicts. One interviewee thus reported how a councillor on a Neighbourhood Plan Forum tried to use what it was doing "for his own political ends and tried to claim credit for what we'd been doing". This was noticed by another political party which then "targeted its own members who are also members of the Forum, and encouraged them to show party loyalty and resign membership of the Forum". Therefore, in contexts where there are pressing issues of neighbourhood and urban renewal and choices to be made about the allocation of scarce resources, the creation of a new space and process with potential influence over the local policy agenda may be contested by those who wish to use it to create leverage for their existing, or new agendas. It is also worth remembering that the places we have studied, in common with many other more deprived neighbourhoods in English towns and cities, contain electoral wards with some of the lowest local election turnouts in the country. In such circumstances, with small numbers of votes potentially being decisive, cultivating and demonstrating exchange relations with specific communities of place or interest in an area may be a particularly attractive electoral strategy for some elected representatives. Our evidence suggests that such strategies may be challenged if reforms such as those promoted under the 'localism' and NP agenda redefine the terms of democratic participation from the question of 'what can a representative do for or 'gift' to the citizen and/or community'? to that of 'what can citizens and communities do for themselves'?

Conclusions

The general quantitative analysis undertaken as part of the wider study on which this paper is based (Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020) found a clear correlation between deprivation and (lack of) Neighbourhood Planning activity, with little activity in more deprived Local Planning Authorities

and neighbourhoods. The qualitative components of the study reported here reveal the dynamics of the neighbourhood planning process in such areas at the 'micro-political' level of the attitudes and behaviours of participants. The study found a significant degree of opposition to Neighbourhood Planning on the part of a number of Local Planning Authorities (echoing Parker et al., 2017). A key contribution of this paper is in highlighting the opposition, not of professional planners, perhaps worried about the "de-professionalisation" of planning (Lord et al., 2017; Sturzaker, 2011), but of some elected councillors. We have argued that the influence of clientelist practices and mindsets could be an explanation for this resistance to more citizen-led and 'local-local' scale planning.

Echoing 'developmental' views of what causes the incidence of clientelism to vary, our evidence suggests that it could be a particular issue and hindrance to the practice of Neighbourhood Planning within some deprived yet 'policy rich' urban contexts. We argue this is because of the importance accorded by local governments and governing regimes to brokering urban strategies of economic development and promoting neighbourhood/urban renewal. Such plans, initiatives, and the networks of reciprocal exchanges and brokerage they entail, can sometimes entertain mutually supportive relationships with Neighbourhood Planning – for example, in terms of aiding capacity building within communities. But equally, where there are many initiatives targeting similar neigh-bourhoods, then these can compete with Neighbourhood Planning for attention and scarce volunteer time and commitment. A particular issue here is that other initiatives may come with specific funding which may facilitate the more immediate realisation of neighbourhood projects and improvements, as opposed to the long/medium term statutory and land-use focussed Neighbourhood Plan.

We have found that clientelist practices at both the *strategic* and *neighbourhood* levels are limiting the extent of Neighbourhood Planning activity. In the former, it appears to be seen as a potentially unwelcome additional hurdle to negotiate in pursuit of the finely tuned clientelistic 'deals' of entrepreneurially-focussed urban regimes; and in the latter we suggest that existing power holders perceive it as having the potential to disrupt established patterns of influence through which benefits and support flow between elected representatives and their citizen 'clients'. Based on the interviews undertaken, this paper has used the concept of clientelism in an exploratory way to provide an initial reading of the dynamics of Neighbourhood Planning. This seeks to complement the more common socio-economic or 'structural' readings of why Neighbourhood Planning seems to flourish more in some areas than in others. We acknowledge that our analyses represent a first step in exploring these issues and suggest that future research could develop this approach further by examining in more detail the 'contingent or reciprocal nature of the patron-client exchange'(s) (Hicken, 2011, p. 291) which may be 'disrupted' by Neighbourhood Planning (i.e. how might this form of planning actually modify the reciprocal exchange of benefits between patrons and clients in local planning?). This could include looking again at less deprived neighbourhoods where Neighbourhood Planning groups have been successful in their efforts, and to analyse whether one reason for their success lies in their ability to make more effective use of the disruptive power of Neighbourhood Planning. Similarly, we feel that another useful avenue of future research would be to differentiate 'clientelist exchange' in Neighbourhood Planning "from other forms of political exchange" such as "distributive, redistributive, or particularistic politics" (Hicken, 2011, p. 294).

Finally, these findings raise questions surrounding tensions between different models and concep-tions of democratic decision-making and political legitimacy. For example, the ability to wield influence and "get results" which address the needs of their communities is unsurprisingly cherished by certain elected members as a foundation of their "output" (Scharpf, 1999; Taylor, 2019) – political legitimacy. Such actors of representative democracy may see the ostensibly more participative democracy offered

by neighbourhood planning as disruptive of (their) established power relations and 'ways of doing things' and as potentially undermining their capacity and status as patrons and brokers of influence in local planning processes. Others have noted the "superficiality" (Sturzaker & Gordon, 2017, p. 1325) of the "democratic discourse" (Rodriguez-Pose & Sandall, 2008, p. 57) promoting localism and decentralisation, and our findings illustrate the complexity of attempts to 'deepen' the democracy of planning and other tools of local governance. It is essential to remember that power relationships within planning are not necessarily a 'zero sum game' – empowering communities, as the 2011 Localism Act purports to do, implies a reduction in power held by other actors. Those other actors may not be willing to give up that power, particularly if it brings personal benefits to them, whether pecuniary or otherwise. This paper therefore demonstrates the need for scholars to ensure that they consider the tangled, historic and often hidden webs of relationships which underly the formal structures and processes of governance.

Note

1. The concept of a "postcode lottery" in relation to public service provision originated in controversies over variable provision of NHS services in otherwise ostensibly similar different parts of the UK.

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