

**NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING IN LONDON:
INVESTIGATING ITS POTENTIAL IN AREAS EXPERIENCING
HIGH LEVELS OF DEPRIVATION**



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FOREWORD

Since 2011 local communities have had the right to draw up planning policies for the development of their neighbourhoods. The take-up has been steady and there are now nearly 80 volunteer-run neighbourhood forums in London designated to prepare a neighbourhood plan. A growing number of plans have been finalised and these have the same legal weight as the Local Plans prepared by London Boroughs and the Mayor’s Development Corporations.

Neighbourhood Planners.London was set up in response to the demand for support and information from the growing neighbourhood planning movement and to provide a voice to influence the Mayor, central Government and others. We’re run by volunteers and guided by the priorities of neighbourhood planners. One of our first tasks was to map where neighbourhood planning is going on. It is a complex picture and we wanted to know more about whether communities in the less advantaged parts of London were benefiting from the power that neighbourhood planning provides.

We are immensely grateful to Trust for London for its forward thinking support and for providing a grant allowing us to commission Publica to delve deeper into London’s neighbourhood planning experience. Our thanks also to Centre for London for supporting the project.

Publica’s findings are compelling. Neighbourhood planning is working for different communities across London but they all need more support and encouragement to realise its full potential. The insights into the experience of communities coming together to influence the future of some of the most diverse and challenged neighbourhoods are both inspiring and salutary. Civic minded volunteers are using neighbourhood planning to make a real difference but too often face unnecessary obstacles and a lack of support from established institutions and powers. There are lessons for the Mayor, London Councils and the councillors and officers in London’s boroughs. We are also looking at how Neighbourhood Planners.London can do more to help.

The research shows that Central Government’s support programme needs to adapt to make sure the funds and support it provides are adequate, effectively used and reach all neighbourhoods wanting to use their community rights. Neighbourhood planning needs to be valued as much for how it brings communities together and inspires projects and initiatives to improve the local quality of life as for the policies in a neighbourhood plan. Local communities need more incentives to support them at different stages on the often long road to producing a neighbourhood plan. They also need more direct influence over spending some of the funds generated by the community infrastructure levy on the development that follows.

Neighbourhood planning is now part of the mainstream. There are already more than 700 neighbourhood plans in force across England. London mustn’t fall behind. All of its communities should be able to benefit from the power neighbourhood planning provides to shape their rapidly changing neighbourhoods. We hope this report prompts further debate and points the way forward.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2018 Publica was commissioned by Neighbourhood Planners.London, a volunteer organisation supporting neighbourhood forums across London, to undertake research into neighbourhood planning in areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation. The study was funded by a grant from Trust for London.

Since the introduction of neighbourhood planning with the 2011 Localism Act, many of London’s communities have seized the opportunity to begin developing neighbourhood plans for their local area. True to the purpose and aims of neighbourhood planning, these groups have sought to steer incoming development and regeneration in ways that are informed by the needs of local people. Led by dynamic and dedicated individuals, the process has often been part of, or led to, other grassroots projects and funding streams. In the areas profiled in this study, where a large proportion of residents experience socio-economic deprivation, neighbourhood forums saw enormous potential to deliver positive change for their communities, and substantial value in the process of neighbourhood planning. This was true in spite of additional challenges relating to funding and other resources.

London’s fast-paced regeneration, a densely-developed urban fabric, and the complexity of neighbourhood planning in a three-tier planning system make for a unique context in which to undertake neighbourhood planning. By studying where and why neighbourhood planning occurs, and engaging with those involved in developing neighbourhood plans, this study provides insights into its potential in London. It also makes recommendations for ways in which it can be strengthened to deliver greater benefits for communities and leaders of neighbourhood forums. These recommendations focus on areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation among residents but, as a result of their urban nature and policy context, many are applicable across all London’s neighbourhood forums.

Socio-economic deprivation is defined in this study as the top 20% of areas in the indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) scores (2015). Although this measure cannot present a fully comprehensive picture of the range of factors that constitute the experience of poverty and socio-economic deprivation, the IMDs have been selected for use in this study as it incorporates a range of metrics, is widely used, and data is available at a granular scale. Nationally, only 4% of ‘made’ neighbourhood plans are in the 20% most deprived areas (by IMD), whereas 35% of ‘made’ plans are in the 20% least deprived areas (by IMD) (Lichfields, 2018). This study identifies the particular challenges for neighbourhood planning in areas with high levels of deprivation, also emphasising its potential to bring local benefits.

The research includes a literature review, found in Chapter 3, which outlines the existing debates around neighbourhood planning in London and in areas with high levels of deprivation. Key themes were identified which informed the selection of seven case study neighbourhood plan areas, as outlined in Chapter 4. Interviews were conducted with chairs and key members of the steering committees of each of these neighbourhood planning groups between October and December 2018, and a workshop was held in January 2019 to share experiences and discuss recommendations for policymakers. Publica also conducted interviews with two local authorities, Camden and Brent, and two localism organisations, Locality and Local Trust, which further inform this study.

Chapters 5 brings together the key findings from the analysis section, and Chapter 6 sets out recommendations for policymakers and Neighbourhood Planners.London to better support neighbourhoods with high levels of deprivation in the development of their neighbourhood plans. Chapter 7 includes detailed profiles of the seven neighbourhood forums interviewed as part of this study, outlining their formation and development. These profiles identify particular innovations and challenges for each forum and its key members.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the introduction of neighbourhood planning through the 2011 Localism Act, a range of studies and literature has been produced on the subject. This generally comes from the following sources:

- Academic literature, which tends to focus on the intersection of neighbourhood planning with other social, economic and political trends. This takes a normative approach: it often examines the ideology behind localism, and does not always support it.
- Reports from Government and NGOs, that look at how the policy is being implemented, and identify and explain gaps in take-up. These contrast with the academic work by assuming that increased take-up should be the aim; for example, in 2018 Locality published the findings of the Commission on the Future of Localism, which found that “strengthening localism offers the potential to tackle disadvantage, rebalance our economy, and revitalise democracy” (Locality, 2018b). These reports tend to be survey-based, featuring case studies.
- Advice and guidance from Government and its agencies, which outlines the intended purpose of neighbourhood planning, and supports neighbourhood forums and local authorities to develop a neighbourhood plan.
- News articles and think-pieces in industry-specific and local media

Literature emerging from the Mayor of London on the subject of neighbourhood planning has been notably absent (NPLb, 2018). In 2012, the London Assembly published a report on the potential role of neighbourhood plans, which set out recommendations for the previous mayor (London Assembly, 2012). In 2014, this was followed by a second report, which noted the slow progress and emphasised that the same factors identified in the 2012 report continued to hold back neighbourhood planning in London (London Assembly, 2014). Since then, City Hall has released no further policy, guidance or reports on neighbourhood planning. Similarly, London Councils has not produced any publicly available guidance on neighbourhood planning, and it is unclear to what extent their network offers guidance on the issue for planning departments.

This section of the report sets out the emerging themes in neighbourhood planning in experiencing poverty and deprivation, and identifies those that might particularly affect neighbourhood forums in London.

FUNDING

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)¹ assessments published in 2013 suggest a cost of between £20,000 and £86,000 per plan (Place Studio, 2017). Fundraising may be more difficult in more economically deprived areas where the neighbourhood forum cannot call upon financial support from individuals or the private sector in the local area.

Until 2018, additional funding for the most economically deprived areas was available through Locality, as a forum’s location within the top quintile for deprivation was a criterion for access to a ‘technical grant’. Now, changes to funding for neighbourhood planning from 2018 mean that to qualify for additional funding a neighbourhood forum must demonstrate that they are:

- Allocating sites for housing
- Including design codes in their plan
- A designated business neighbourhood plan
- A cluster of three or more parishes writing a single plan
- A neighbourhood area with a population of over 25,000 (Locality, n.d.)

Since neighbourhood areas in London tend to be small, unparished, and in built-up areas with limited potential for housing site allocation, they may be disadvantaged in accessing this additional funding in comparison to rural or suburban areas. This particularly affects economically deprived areas, many of which will now receive no more funding than neighbourhood plan areas with more affluent residents.

However having a ‘made’ neighbourhood plan can unlock access to a proportion of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), and the potential for access to additional financial resources for the community may be a driver for neighbourhood planning, particularly in more economically deprived areas which may currently suffer from underinvestment (Renaissi, 2017).

SKILLS

All neighbourhood forums must grapple with understanding the terminology used in planning policies, which tends to be technical and legalistic (Wilson, Tewdwr-Jones and Comber, 2017). Central government has also failed to provide an image of success for neighbourhood planning, which neighbourhood forums must determine themselves (Wargent and Parker, 2018). This presents particular challenges to deprived urban areas where there is often a deficit in the professional skill-sets that the neighbourhood planning process often requires (Renaissi, 2017). The report of the Commission on the Future of Localism recognises that neighbourhood planning is under-represented in disadvantaged areas, identifying tools and resources as the best way to tackle this issue (Locality, 2018b). However a lack of locally-available skills and resources may put some communities off engaging in the neighbourhood process at all (Parker, Salter and Dobson, 2018).

In London this is compounded by the additional tier in the planning process; neighbourhood plans must be in general conformity with local plans, but also with the London Plan, which can complicate the process. Some commentators have argued that neighbourhood planning was not designed for this context (Bailey & Pill, 2014).

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

The engagement of professional consultants is frequently found to be a necessary element of neighbourhood planning, as they provide the technical expertise required to produce a planning document which will become policy for the local planning authority. This constitutes a substantial cost for any neighbourhood forum, and may be more so in economically deprived areas, where planning skills within the forum may be more limited and communities may be more reliant on consultants. They are also expected to engage face-to-face and visit the area, which is resource-heavy and can drive up the price (Parker and Wargent, 2017).

¹ DCLG was renamed the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in 2018

Parker and Wargent’s survey of individuals producing neighbourhood plans determined that a lack of support was the most commonly cited obstacle to neighbourhood planning, identified by 28% of those asked (Parker and Wargent, 2017). Another 2017 study determined that a lack of encouragement and support hindered the development of neighbourhood plans in economically deprived areas (Renaissi, 2017).

TIME

Neighbourhood planning requires motivation and time; the scale and complexity of this is often underestimated by groups. It can be difficult to sustain engagement and involvement in a long process, which may be exacerbated in more economically deprived areas where forums have more urgent priorities and uncertain access to resources long term (Renaissi, 2017). Although a number of plans have been designated in London, three years after the Localism Act few had made ‘significant progress’ (London Assembly, 2014).

LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT

The relationship with the local authority is important to all neighbourhood forums. All local authorities have been affected by sustained budget and staff cuts over an extended period since 2010, as well as the imperative to focus on the delivery of local plans, and therefore capacity to support neighbourhood forums is generally limited (Tibbalds, 2016). Local authorities also vary in their support for neighbourhood planning, which Neighbourhood Planners.London have shown correlates to the progress of neighbourhood plans in London (Neighbourhood Planners.London, 2017). Neighbourhood Planners.London have emphasised the range of support set out in local plans, with some local authorities adopting a “minimum compliance” stance, or having “pointed their residents to perceived pitfalls or drawbacks in the neighbourhood planning process” (Neighbourhood Planners.London, 2017). This may be due to a lack of clarity in the terms of their ‘duty to support’ neighbourhood planning. Additionally, more economically deprived areas may lack the confidence to confront local government due to (erroneous) fears of sanctions like the withdrawal of benefits or tenancies (Renaissi, 2017).

One factor may be that attitudes have not sufficiently adapted to the changing role of local authorities. Localism has to an extent compromised local government power by the devolving power to civil society actors, including neighbourhood forums (Bailey & Pill, 2014). Local authorities may struggle to adapt to a newly empowered community, and a changed role where they enable rather than drive policy (Tjoa, 2018). This could lead to resentment on the part of both the local authority and community groups like neighbourhood forums (Tjoa, 2018). At its most extreme, Locality found that local authorities have engaged in poor practice including “misinformation; statements that Neighbourhood Plans will not be taken into account in making planning decisions; and delaying or failing to deal with applications for the designation of neighbourhood areas” (Locality, 2018).

Another challenge is the possibility of pre-existing resentment and conflict between community groups and the local authority, which could be a driver for neighbourhood planning as groups seek to assert greater control in their area through a neighbourhood plan (Parker et al, 2015). Resentment towards previous policy and decisions made by local authorities that may not suit the needs of the residents has been highlighted as a key motivational factor (Parker et al, 2015). However other sources have highlighted the potential of the neighbourhood planning process to build trust and contribute towards an improved relationship with the local authority (Renaissi, 2017). Building trust and opening dialogue with local authorities might also help to encourage future investment that directly meets local needs (Renaissi, 2017). Local authorities also seek opportunities to build trust with communities; for example the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea’s Building Stronger Communities programme is a platform for residents to share ideas for council priorities.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

In coming together and uniting behind a shared vision, neighbourhood planning can develop relationships between residents and may help to overcome previous lack of faith in local government. This is supported in a study on user experience of neighbourhood planning where community relationships were thought to have improved (Parker et al, 2015). Renaissi’s study suggests that areas experiencing poverty and deprivation are often perceived to have lower levels of “civic pride”, volunteering and social action; neighbourhood planning might be a positive framework to help recapture community spirit (Renaissi, 2017).

However neighbourhood planning may also impact relationships negatively. There is a potential for tension within communities due to emotional connections to people and place (Parker, Salter, and Dobson, 2018). This is also highlighted in a study where one area reviewed claimed the neighbourhood plan provided a source of internal division, with a ‘worsened relationship between the steering group and wider community’ (Parker et al, 2015). Locality’s guidance, Keep it Simple, claims that successful neighbourhood planning is only feasible through compromise: “not all ideas need to be turned into a policy” (Locality, 2014).

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE

A key difference between neighbourhood planning in urban areas like London and the rest of the UK is that neighbourhoods are not already divided into parishes as in more rural areas London neighbourhood planning groups must first form a neighbourhood forum, adding an additional stage to their process (Pycock, 2018). Civil Parish Councils have much broader powers than a neighbourhood forum (including the option of preparing a neighbourhood plan) and levy a council tax precept which can be spent on local project and the development of their neighbourhood plan. By contrast, neighbourhood forums only have powers to produce neighbourhood plans, and no given funding to do so – this must be granted by application to Locality or another funder (Bailey & Pill, 2014). This is a considerable disadvantage for community groups in London seeking to develop neighbourhood plans, which may be amplified in more economically deprived areas where funding is more limited.

LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

A neighbourhood plan is often started due to concern over the future of a local area. According to Parker et al, three of the key motivations for starting a neighbourhood plan are retaining and conserving the identity, culture and heritage of an area, protecting the desirable characteristics of the area, and reinvigorating the local area (Parker et al, 2015). Genuine involvement in steering the future of local areas to represent the needs of residents is a motivator for the majority of neighbourhood participants. This is sometimes ranked as a more important aspect for those in disadvantaged areas where there is a sense that areas have been neglected and overlooked in terms of investment (Renaissi, 2015).

In engaging and valuing comments taken by local people, neighbourhood planning can help identify how people use space and the civic value attached to particular areas (Wilson, Tewdwr-Jones and Comber, 2017). Invoking a sense of community identity through shared desires for future planning can impact the amount of support and convince more residents to join. A neighbourhood plan can highlight the area’s assets, such as historic buildings, social infrastructure and green spaces, and maintaining these is often a driver for neighbourhood planning (Renaissi, 2017).

There may also be a belief that past or future developments sometimes lack consultation with residents, or that regeneration in deprived areas may prioritise different aspects to what the residents would wish. In more economically deprived areas where regeneration projects tend to be focussed, neighbourhood planning may be seen as a way to manage gentrification and new housing developments, an emotive issue in London (Renaissi, 2017). Neighbourhood planning has been proposed by some activists as a tool for resisting estate regeneration through planning policy, although some scholars have argued that it is instead a means of gaining unofficial community assent for pre-determined top-down policy (Sagoe, 2016).

However in economically deprived areas, more immediate and acute pressures on communities may mean that planning and land use change are not always prioritised in terms of community action (Renaissi, 2017). A related issue is that neighbourhood plans need to establish a clear link between spatial and social needs – often the social aspirations and spatial planning don’t speak to one another, which can cause tensions when communities have expressed aspirations for social programmes (Renaissi, 2017).

KEY THEMES

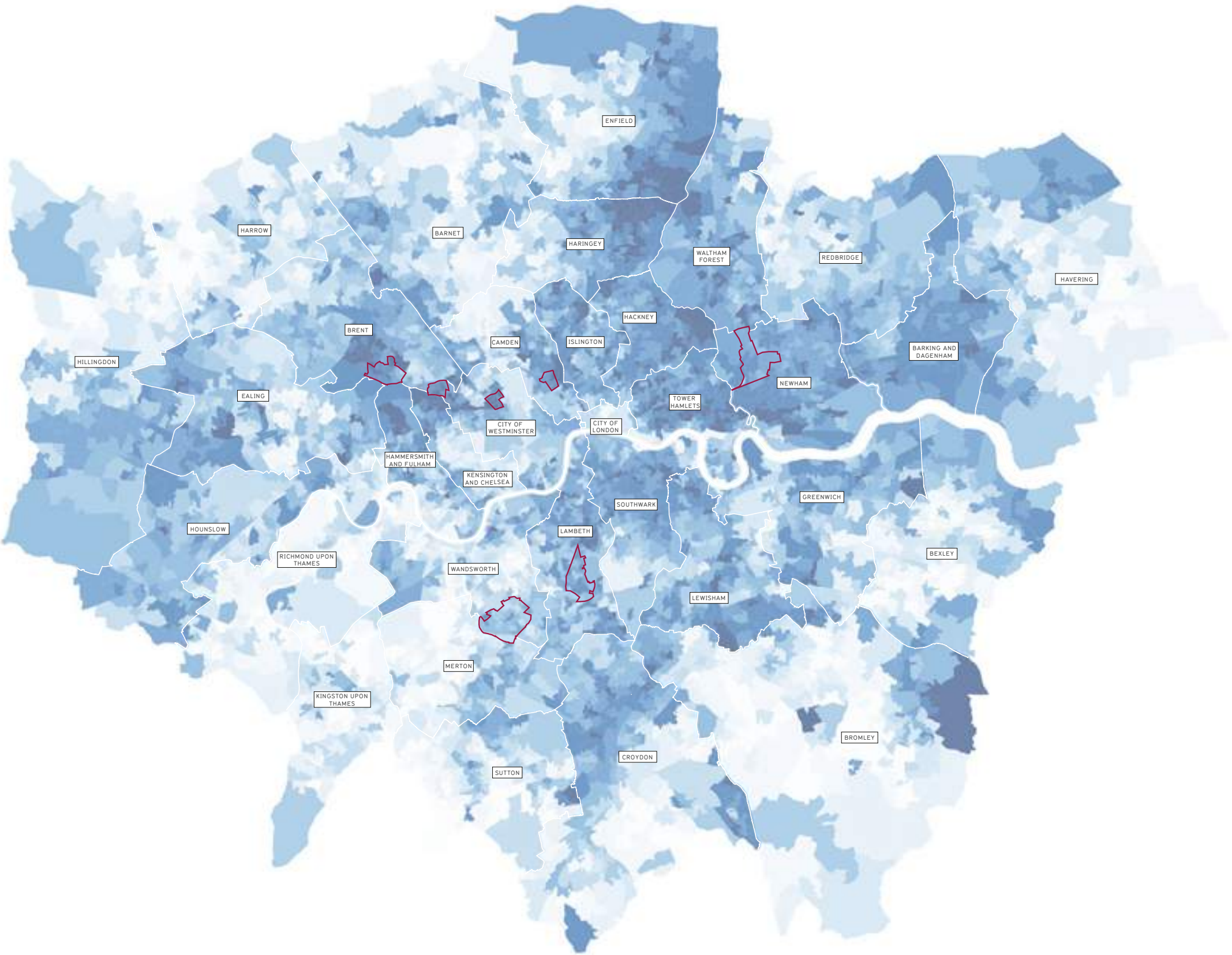
From the review of existing literature, neighbourhood planning groups in areas of London with high levels of deprivation are expected to face a number of additional challenges in the development of their neighbourhood plans, including:

- Lack of funds and high costs
- Lack of skills
- Limited engagement and membership




However the existing literature suggests that neighbourhood planning can also present a range of opportunities for areas with high levels of deprivation, such as:

- Input into incoming development
- Social benefits and community leadership for the community
- Improved relationship with the local authority

CASE STUDIES



KEY

-  Case studies
-  Most disadvantaged
(Top 10% of socio-economically
deprived areas by LSOA)
-  Least disadvantaged
(Bottom 10% of socio-economically
deprived areas by LSOA)

Data sourced from 2015 combined Indices of Multiple Deprivation (GLA, 2015)

ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES

CASE STUDY SELECTION

Seven case study areas were chosen, enabling the themes highlighted in the literature review to be explored in greater depth, and new issues to emerge. These case studies all have areas within them with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, and are at different stages of preparing their neighbourhood plans. They also include some specific innovations in the process of neighbourhood planning in their area.

The metric for deprivation used in this study are the 2015 indices of multiple deprivation (IMDs) (GLA, 2015). IMDs were selected as this measurement incorporates a range of metrics, is widely used, and recent data is available at a granular scale. The metrics aggregated within an area’s IMD ranking, and considered in the selection of case studies are:

- Employment
- Education, skills and training
- Health deprivation and disability
- Crime
- Barriers to housing and services
- Living environment

Case study neighbourhood forums were selected by overlaying maps of the different indices of multiple deprivation distributed by decile (GLA, 2015) with a map of current neighbourhood plan areas (see p14). Neighbourhood plan areas that included lower super output areas (LSOAs)² that were in the 20% most deprived decile for the aggregated IMDs and most of the disaggregated IMDs were shortlisted. The final seven case studies for the detailed analysis were then chosen on the basis of their capacity to illuminate key issues, in consultation with Neighbourhood Planners.London. They include a strong geographic mix, with areas in inner and outer boroughs.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The literature review suggests that there may be a number of challenges and opportunities for neighbourhood planning that are unique to, or particularly acute in more economically deprived areas in London. These are set out in the table on page 17, identifying where the challenges and opportunities are applicable to each case study.

Key members of all the case study forums were interviewed between October and December 2018, with guided walks around the neighbourhood plan areas where possible. Six of the seven forums were also represented at a workshop in January 2019, with representatives from the remaining forum submitting comments in writing. The following analysis builds on the literature review to consider the specific challenges and opportunities highlighted by neighbourhood forums working in economically deprived areas in London.

Challenges	Stratford & West Ham	Harlesden	Somers Town	Queen’s Park	Tooting Bec & Broadway	Tulse Hill	Church Street Ward
Insufficient funding to meet costs	•		•		•	•	•
Lack of planning skills		•	•	•		•	•
Limited engagement and membership	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

Opportunities	Stratford & West Ham	Harlesden	Somers Town	Queen’s Park	Tooting Bec & Broadway	Tulse Hill	Church Street Ward
Incoming development	•	•	•			•	•
Social benefits for the community	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Improved relationship with the local authority	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

² By lower super-output area, the smallest geographic unit of census data

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS

Stratford and West Ham’s neighbourhood planning group is led by Torange Khonsari, a founding member of the not-for-profit architecture practice, Public Works. She has been involved in a number of neighbourhood plans previously. However like most of the case studies, the group has struggled for resources, both in terms of funding and time to contribute to the project. The group is currently in the process of agreeing the neighbourhood plan area boundaries with the local authority, the London Borough of Newham.

Harlesden’s neighbourhood plan was started in 2014, and has recently completed independent examination. It will go to public referendum in late May 2019, and if successful, will be ‘made’ as part of the planning policy for the area. Based in the London Borough of Brent, with a very small section in the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, the neighbourhood forum successfully applied for a grant from the Oak Foundation, which has supplemented their Locality funding. It has also benefited from support from the local branch of Crisis and substantial pro-bono work from its committee.

Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum began its neighbourhood plan in 2011 but has met substantial delays. The neighbourhood plan area is made up predominately of housing estates, and is bordered by the new developments at King’s Cross St Pancras on one side, and Euston’s regeneration for HS2 on the other. The area, in the London Borough of Camden, is home to a wealth of community groups and initiatives but has limited planning skills within the forum, and currently has no funding.

Queen’s Park’s neighbourhood plan was also started in 2011. Unlike the other case studies, it is being led by Queen’s Park Community Council, the only urban parish council in London. It therefore also has access to greater funding than the other neighbourhood forums, although there are many demands on the community council’s resources, beyond neighbourhood planning. Queen’s Park Community Council is currently finalising its neighbourhood plan following feedback from the local authority, the City of Westminster.

Tooting Bec and Broadway neighbourhood plan area in the London Borough of Wandsworth was designated in 2017. Although the neighbourhood forum includes professionals in community organising and the built environment, they struggle with funding. The area has a wealth of community organisations and initiatives underway already, which the forum can build upon. The forum has been designated, and is now developing its evidence base and policy priorities.

Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum is a subcommittee of the pre-existing community group of Tulse Hill Forum in the London Borough of Lambeth. Like many of the case studies, it has limited access to resources in terms of skills and funding. Although mainly comprised of estates, it has kept itself separate from the issue of estate regeneration, being focussed instead on meeting residents’ social needs. The forum is currently developing its policy priorities and objectives based on their extensive consultation process.

Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum in the City of Westminster has been working on its plan since 2014. Although the committee has access to planning and other professional skills, they lack funding. The forum has been particularly active in resisting a large masterplan proposed by the local authority, which covers the majority of the neighbourhood plan area. It is currently developing its planning policies as well as continuing to campaign against aspects of the proposed masterplan.

ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS

Publica conducted interviews with two local authorities, the London Boroughs of Camden and Brent, both of whom have a neighbourhood forum represented in this study (Somers Town and Harlesden respectively). Short interviews were undertaken with members of the planning team who have been involved with neighbourhood planning to better understand the process from the perspective of the local planning authority. These two councils were selected as they represented both inner and outer London, and had ‘made’ plans in their boroughs and therefore experience of the full process of neighbourhood planning.

Interviews were also undertaken with two additional localism organisations, Big Local, an initiative funded by Local Trust and Locality. Big Local was selected to understand how neighbourhood planning intersects with other grassroots improvement projects at the neighbourhood level. Locality is responsible for allocating government funding to neighbourhood forums, and providing limited guidance, and were approached in order to better understand the grant allocation processes.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This section sets out the ways in which the neighbourhood forums in areas of London with high levels of economic deprivation approach neighbourhood planning. It includes insights from the interviews and workshop with leaders of neighbourhood forums, and from the interviews with local authorities and other localism organisations. It is structured around the challenges and opportunities identified in the literature review, examining these themes in more depth and highlighting additional considerations. These are:

- Costs and access to funding
- Technical skills
- Engagement and membership
- Incoming development
- Social benefits for the community
- Relationship with the local authority

The key findings are summarised at the end of each section, and collated on page 40.

COSTS AND ACCESS TO FUNDING

SIZE OF GRANTS

Most interviewees expressed frustration at the limited funding for the development of their neighbourhood plan. A number of the neighbourhood forums noted that they found the grant funding provided through Locality to be insufficient, and at times this has meant that they are self-funding costs of the plan’s development such as paying for printing and the use of premises. Administrative costs were commonly cited as the most onerous, with the need for ‘creative funding’ to ensure that they could be covered. There was a sense among some forums that grant allocation does not reflect imbalances on the ground. Locality confirmed that neighbourhood forums no longer qualify automatically for an additional grant allocation, nor is a high level of deprivation a criteria for eligibility, although neighbourhood areas are still requested to state whether they fall within an area scoring highly in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMDs), when applying for funding. Brian O’Donnell from the London Borough of Camden predicted that the changes to funding will cause problems for London, as groups become “stuck” at their current stage due to an inability to access additional grant funding. By contrast, Erica Tate welcomed the initial grant Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum received which enabled her to scope the local interest in setting up a neighbourhood forum without committing to delivering a neighbourhood plan.

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT AND CONSULTANTS

Most neighbourhood forums engage consultants at various points in the neighbourhood planning process, often at significant cost, for tasks including building the evidence base and drafting planning policies. The proportion of the grant being spent on consultancy was a concern for Tooting Bec and Broadway Neighbourhood Forum; with such a high cost relative to other expenditures, it leaves little money to put back into the community. Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum also identified an early collaborative project with a large architecture practice as a very large investment, which used almost all of their initial tranche of funding. Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group, led by Torange Khonsari from the architecture practice Public Works, sought to creatively engage expert help at minimal cost: Public Works handed a large proportion of the planning and engagement work to an individual on a placement through an Erasmus Entrepreneurship programme, and much of the initial research was carried out by students from School 21, a local high school.

IN-KIND SUPPORT

In-kind support has been a key factor for all neighbourhood forums, from the free provision of premises to pro-bono administrative support, however the particular types of in-kind support available varies by forum. A number of interviewees expressed a sense of guilt attached to asking volunteers to give their time, with no scope for rewarding them due to the limitations of their budgets. Tulse Hill has been able to use the premises made available by other social projects as its base, and Harlesden has benefitted from pro bono administrative support from the local branch of the homelessness charity Crisis, formerly a local organisation called Lift. Stratford and West Ham has collaborated with the local high school, School 21, to produce the application for designation through a new curriculum. The exhibition of this work also provided an opportunity for engagement

and consultation with the wider public. Somers Town neighbourhood forum has benefited enormously from the support of Voluntary Action Camden, including brokering relations with various universities and experts. Currently, projects that will form part of the forum’s updated evidence base are being undertaken by University College London (UCL), and have their own budgets independent of the forum.

PROFESSIONAL REMUNERATION

The voluntary aspect was particularly acutely felt where committee members were built environment professionals as they felt they were undertaking complex and skilled work for which they would usually be paid. For these interviewees there was particular concern that despite knowing the area very well, they or their businesses could not be engaged to undertake any paid planning work, and a less qualified business would have to be engaged. One interviewee pointed out that the neighbourhood forum was undertaking work that would usually be done by the local authority, on a pro bono basis, emphasising a sense of injustice. Another neighbourhood forum leader with no experience in planning described how “jarring” it felt to see consultants be paid to do a poor job.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications was highlighted as an important cost by a number of neighbourhood forums. Websites can be expensive and time-consuming to build and even the maintenance of a social media presence involves a regular investment of time and attention. Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum noted that many residents may not have internet access, so posters

Neighbourhood forum	Technical support
Stratford & West Ham	Public Works, a local architecture practice, of which the chair of the neighbourhood planning group is a founding member; Hanna Ivansson, Wi Arkitekter, on an Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs programme placement at Public Works
Harlesden	Ken Hullock, a local planner, formerly employed by the London Borough of Brent; administrative support from Crisis, formerly Lift; Aecom (through Locality)
Somers Town	Donna Turnbull, Voluntary Action Camden, capacity and development support: facilitating meetings and workshops; brokering partnerships with key people and organisations, including Michael Parkes, Planning Aid representative
Queen’s Park	Evidence base development, neighbourhood plan consolidation and ongoing support from Publica, and policy-writing support from Urban Vision
Tooting Bec & Broadway	A tender for work on the evidence base has been sent to consultants but none has been engaged yet
Tulse Hill	Angela Koch, ImaginePlaces; Aecom (through Locality)
Church Street Ward	Farrells (for the ‘Urban Room’ exhibition and community project 2015)

in the area might be more efficient, but with limited human and financial resources, this was not an option. Similarly, Tooting Bec and Broadway Neighbourhood Forum emphasised that ostensibly small costs like printing leaflets can add up, particularly at the earliest stages where Locality funding hasn’t been secured. Many economically-deprived neighbourhoods have large proportions of residents who are not native English speakers, and Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum translated key forum materials into locally-spoken languages to reach these groups. Both Somers Town and Church Street Ward forums noted that funding for translation might be an advantage, as well as providing in-person assistance to ensure people with disabilities can travel to meetings.

PREMISES

A lack of premises available free of charge was noted as an obstacle by some neighbourhood forums. Although some groups have been able to secure access to free meeting spaces, Somers Town has been reliant on the use of tenants’ halls which cost money, and others have mentioned a sense of guilt when they are unable to repay the kindness of businesses and faith groups who offer rooms for use. This issue may be more of a challenge for neighbourhood planning groups in London, as unlike parish councils, the provision and maintenance of a village or town hall is not part of their usual role.

OTHER FUNDING STREAMS

In addition to the Locality-managed government funding available to all neighbourhood planning groups, some neighbourhood forums had been able to access alternative forms of funding. Harlesden’s grant from the Oak Foundation provided additional support, and Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group is considering exploring corporate sponsorship for future stages of its neighbourhood plan, and suggested that opportunities for grants and funding could be better signposted. Queen’s Park was able to access limited funding from the community council’s budget, and received a substantial grant from the GLA for the establishment of ‘On The Street’, a shop where residents could drop in to offer suggestions for the neighbourhood plan. This latter funding opportunity was identified through the consultants, Publica; identification of funding streams could be part of the role of technical consultants in future.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The majority of forums found that Locality grants were insufficient for the costs involved in producing a neighbourhood plan, particularly since additional funding is no longer available for areas with high levels of deprivation
- The engagement of professional support is a considerable cost for neighbourhood forums, although some forums had individuals willing to work on the project for free. Where the planning skills are available within the forum the inability to pay local members for their services can create feelings of resentment
- Additionally, relatively minor costs like printing leaflets, setting up websites and hiring premises for meetings could constitute a significant expenditure for groups with a constrained budget
- Some forums had found creative ways to secure funding or in-kind support for their neighbourhood plans and supportive evidence, sometimes supported by their consultants
- These areas have not attracted corporate sponsorship or wider funding and investment that other areas might be able to access

TECHNICAL SKILLS

PLANNING SKILLS

The availability of planning skills in the area is almost random, which can challenge all neighbourhood forums; however those in economically deprived areas may be at a particular disadvantage as generally residents tend to have fewer professional qualifications. Four of the three neighbourhood forums interviewed lacked any planning expertise within the forum’s members, and relied on external consultants for this element of the plan’s development. The complexity of planning in London, where a complex planning system combined with regeneration projects being undertaken by a range of actors, make this task particularly complex. The need for consideration of local plans, the London Plan, and wider masterplans and development schemes can be testing even for professionals: in the case of Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum, the uncertainty arising from this context has proved to be a significant obstacle to neighbourhood planning.

The process is complex with many barriers; as one member from Tooting Bec and Broadway Neighbourhood Forum said, “the process is so, so arcane, even for professionals”. All the neighbourhood forums interviewed emphasised the steep learning curve involved, but that ultimately they had benefitted from the new knowledge. Slaney Devlin from Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum emphasised the deep knowledge many people have of their local area, despite a lack of formal training. This is both an advantage and a challenge: while it could be beneficial to have a small group of highly skilled people who could drive the plan and lessen the work on key individuals, the finished plan must be representative of the people living in the neighbourhood.

PLANNING CONSULTANTS

A number of neighbourhood forums described how having consultants undertake much of the technical work separate from the forum created a sense of alienation from the process. This is also true of the jargony, specialised language used by consultants and local authorities. The condition against using grants to pay volunteers can be demoralising for local professionals, and discourage them from getting involved. Torange Khonsari from the Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group expressed concern that having driven the neighbourhood plan process so far, she may no longer be able to be involved as she is both leading it as a resident and providing expert advice, and would not be able to afford to continue.

A key issue with engaging consultants is knowing how to select the right type of technical support without any prior understanding of planning issues. Neighbourhood forums with a lack of planning skills can have no way of knowing if technical consultants are producing high-quality work, or even undertaking the right work. One neighbourhood forum felt that a contracted consultant undertook unnecessary work causing a delay. As the leader of the neighbourhood forum has no background in planning, this waste of funding and time was only fully recognised when the work was completed and the local authority queried it. Some forums were concerned that consultants had delivered, or

may in future deliver poor work, having a limited grasp on the real issues in the area. Others, like Harlesden, were fortunate to have consultants who were happy to continue working on the project when funding ran out, although Queen’s Park Community Council pointed out that it can be hard to press consultants who are charging a significantly lower fee or working pro bono.

Some of the most successful collaborations with consultants were where they had extensive local knowledge and were personally invested in the development of the neighbourhood plan. In Harlesden, for example, were “doubly fortunate” as they secured funding to commission expert support, and were able to find an expert with an unusual level of knowledge of the area and local authority and commitment to supporting the work of the forum.

OTHER SKILLS

Some neighbourhood forums noted the importance of other skills beside planning, and were concerned that while external planning expertise was funded or directly provided through Locality, other skills like project management and leadership were ignored. For example, Torange Khonsari from Stratford and West Ham pointed out that building a trusting relationship with the local authority is a skill in itself. As Erica Tate from Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum noted, the process has given her understanding of where power lies, and how to work best secure improvements from policymakers for her neighbours. Gill Fitzhugh noted that for Queen’s Park Community Council’s neighbourhood planning group, which she leads, a lack of IT skills has been a problem, particularly when applying for funding. Locality interviewees also highlighted that capacity and building consensus were likely to be an issue, and could limit forums “sense of the possibilities”.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- The skills and capacity that many neighbourhood forums rely on are not present in all areas, and are often lacking in areas of high deprivation
- Neighbourhood forums learned a lot about the planning system through the process, although some argued that the complexity of the process was off-putting
- Knowing what to look for when engaging consultants and assessing the quality of their work can be a challenge when starting from a position of very little knowledge of planning
- Neighbourhood forums felt alienated from the process when technical consultants didn’t include them in those elements of the plan, and when jargony language was used
- Others suggested that the project management and administrative needs of the process are underestimated and support should be given for these functions

ENGAGEMENT AND MEMBERSHIP

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Neighbourhood forum leaders often highlighted consultation as one of the most successful and beneficial aspects of the neighbourhood planning process. Slaney Devlin in Somers Town pointed out that the neighbourhood forum has considerable research into what people in the area want. Tooting Bec and Broadway Neighbourhood Forum found having consultation responses to be a valuable resource in themselves, allowing the committee to see how the wider community outside their social networks feels about the area. They also mentioned that it could be advantageous in making funding requests. Similarly, in Somers Town, they saw their consultation and research evidence base as an important tool to push for developers and the local authority to make decisions that benefit residents. In Tulse Hill, consultation responses have already informed community projects that are currently live, such as Glow, a local workspace and maker-space. Erica Tate, chair of the Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum found that fun, party-like engagement and consultation events encourages involvement, rather than dry, planning-focussed meetings.

Getting local people together was highlighted by a number of neighbourhood forums as a key benefit to the neighbourhood planning process, and through this it offers the possibility to find out new things about the local area and the people living in the neighbourhood. For Erica Tate from Tulse Hill, it was also an opportunity to prove “bad press” about their area wrong, knocking on doors and meeting residents on estates with poor reputations.

Stratford and West Ham used a range of creative approaches to engage local people in the process of neighbourhood planning, including partnering with School 21, a local secondary school. Students undertook much of the initial mapping research, and school events were used to attract people who might not otherwise attend a formal planning meeting. Sixth form students facilitated the boundary consultation using interactive maps, which attracted parents to the event, and gave students an opportunity to take a leading role in the planning process and feel a sense of ownership over the project. Using interactive maps, the boundaries were also consulted upon at Christmas Markets, bowling club and at the local library, and adjusted several times.

Most neighbourhood forums reported very limited interest in planning as an end in itself, with residents preferring to focus on social projects or campaigning on a specific issue. The tension between advocacy and planning can be eased by ensuring that both are represented in meetings to retain interest. Both Harlesden and Queen’s Park neighbourhood forums reported very few responses to their formal public consultations, speculating that wealthier areas might experience greater engagement from the local communities. The responses that were received from members of the public also tended to be from “the usual suspects”.

Neighbourhood forums interviewed took a number of creative approaches to the consultation and engagement process, shown in the table on the next page.

Neighbourhood forum	Approach to engagement
Stratford & West Ham	Students led the boundary definition process, and used School 21’s annual Exhibition of Beautiful Work as an opportunity to engage with students and their parents, also used interactive maps to undertake consultations at community events
Harlesden	Had a stall on the street using the refurbishment of the Jubilee Clock (a local landmark) as a topic to engage people in planning, surveyed users of local services, translating key materials into locally-spoken languages
Somers Town	Open meetings, residents’ surveys, youth forum, interviews and focus groups, workshops, walkabouts, neighbourhood planning events, seminars on housing, CLTs, CIL, and greening.
Queen’s Park	Surveys, questionnaires, “On the Street”, a pop-up shop and events programme opened on Harrow Road for August 2015
Tooting Bec & Broadway	Online survey through SurveyMonkey, local media, stalls at community events
Tulse Hill	Stalls at community events, engaging individuals through other community groups, knocking on doors
Church Street Ward	Launch event 2014 facilitated by Paddington Development Trust (PDT), “Urban Room”, a pop-up shop opened for three months in 2015

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

A number of neighbourhood forums raised the issue of a lack of diversity within their neighbourhood forums, at engagement events, and in the responses to formal consultations. Most expressed concern that they were dominated by white, home-owning professionals despite feeling that they had done their utmost to boost engagement outside of that group. Although the existing literature sets out some general barriers to involvement in neighbourhood planning, the forum leaders interviewed offered a number of possible reasons specific to their forums in urban areas with high levels of deprivation, including:

- Barriers to civic engagement and fewer cohesive networks;
- Lack of interest in, or understanding of, planning;
- Mistrust of the planning system and local government;
- Limited emotional investment in the future of the area among social tenants;
- Reluctance to oppose the local authority among council tenants for fear of eviction;
- High churn of people moving in and out of the area;
- Other demands on the time and attention of residents, and specifically lower-income residents;
- The inability to pay people for their time; and
- A perception that white, middle-class people can dominate meetings and events, deterring other groups from getting involved.

Neighbourhood forums like Tooting Bec and Broadway that struggled with the issue of diversity noted that although they might have the skills in the neighbourhood forum to ‘drag a neighbourhood plan across the finish line’, the plan would suffer if it reflects a limited range of views and backgrounds. Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum held meetings in varied locations such as a shisha café and a Somali restaurant in order to attract forum members from a range of backgrounds but this had limited success.

Two of the case-study neighbourhood forums have successfully formed committees that are more representative of the local area. Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum was created as the neighbourhood planning wing of Tulse Hill Forum, a pre-existing community group, and its chair, Erica Tate has focussed on engaging people through other social programmes and by expressing their wider aspirations for the area beyond planning. Community and family events in Tulse Hill, such as Mandela Day celebrations, have been an opportunity for the neighbourhood forum to engage the public in a fun and positive way, and this has contributed to wider engagement and involvement. Stratford and West Ham’s neighbourhood planning group was established to overcome the lack of diversity in neighbourhood planning. School 21 was selected as a collaborator for the project as the student population represented a cross-section of the community, and the Exhibition of Beautiful Works was a way to expand this to the students’ carers and family members.

LEADERSHIP

Many of the neighbourhood plans are heavily reliant on the leadership of a key, dynamic individual. This leadership role can be particularly challenging as they are situated in the midst of a hyper-local process involving their neighbours and friends, quite different from the external viewpoint of professional planners. When the neighbourhood planning work is being driven by a single person, serious delays can occur as a result of changes in personal circumstances. Locality noted that it is not unusual for a neighbourhood plan to go into abeyance some years when a key individual moves on. In the case of Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum, the plan “fell by the wayside” as a result of Erica Tate being unable to work on it for several months. This high level of responsibility means that the chair also needs to boost interest again when motivation is lost, an additional responsibility that Torange Khonsari from Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group also mentioned.

Many of the leaders of neighbourhood forums which had been engaged in the neighbourhood plan process for a number of years emphasised the considerable responsibility and workload that forum chairs and senior committee members take on. Most emphasised that over time the work tends to fall on the shoulders of a very small group of people, particularly the forum’s leader. In the case of Queen’s Park, Gill Fitzhugh recalled that a disadvantage of their parished status was the community council’s workload, leaving limited human resources to support her in neighbourhood planning. It can also therefore be quite an isolating project.

DURATION AND MORALE

A related and central issue is that of the duration of the neighbourhood planning process. Neighbourhood planning takes several years to complete, which affects motivation and morale of the team and local residents alike. This has been particularly true for the earliest forums like Somers Town and Queen’s Park which began the process in 2011. As there were no examples of similar plans in London, it was difficult to plan the process efficiently, and they found that the Locality guidance underestimated the time required to do each task rigorously. For others, awaiting decisions or feedback from the local authority, as well as delays due to other demands on the committee or chair can contribute to a loss of momentum. Often, key members of the committee have left, which can create further setbacks, an issue that may be particularly difficult for forums in London where the turnover of residents is very high. For both forum members and the public motivation can wane over four years, and having some “interim” wins or outputs built into the neighbourhood planning process could give people a better sense of the progress that is being made. Neighbourhood forum leaders described the value they had found in the process of neighbourhood planning, often in terms of new projects and initiatives, and this should be captured and the benefits shared for community members.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- While enthusiasm for improving their local area is high, interest in planning is limited. Forums found creative ways to engage people in the process where initial interest was lacking
- Forums found engagement with the local community to have been an enjoyable and informative part of the neighbourhood planning process
- Forums struggle to attract ethnic and social diversity proportional to their areas, although some forums are experimenting with new approaches to ensure diversity
- The workload and responsibility for driving the neighbourhood plan forward can be overly concentrated on the forum’s chair. This makes the process very vulnerable to changes in that individual’s circumstances
- The duration of the neighbourhood planning process contributes to a loss of morale and, in the long-term, reduced interest and membership
- Interim progress, outputs and ‘wins’ are very important and can allow recognition of the value of the process and its other outcomes

INCOMING DEVELOPMENT

REGENERATION

Incoming, large-scale regeneration is a key issue for urban neighbourhood forums, particularly in London where greenfield sites for development are scarce. This is also often aimed at areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation, which can be earmarked for regeneration projects. The neighbourhood forums adopted a range of positions in relation to incoming development in their areas. For Harlesden, Somers Town, Stratford and West Ham, and Church Street Ward neighbourhood forums, a key driver for neighbourhood planning is seeking to have a voice in the large new developments in their neighbourhoods. Harlesden sits on the edge of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation, Europe’s largest regeneration project, and the forum sees it as an important opportunity for the area. A key aim of the plan was to ensure that Harlesden is able to see the benefits of the new developments. Claire Jones, from the planning department of the London Borough of Brent, predicted that having a neighbourhood plan that genuinely expresses the needs of residents will engender a more positive attitude to development.

Somers Town expressed a similar aim – to see the local community gain from development – as infrastructure and residential development is underway in King’s Cross and Euston, as well as the growth of the knowledge quarter group of cultural and academic institutions. However their chair was also concerned about the pace and scale of change, and a fear of being ignored or displaced as a community of predominantly working-class residents in council housing which occupies expensive land in central London. The projects they are seeking to influence, such as HS2, are of national scale, a unique challenge. Rather than seeking to stop development around them, Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum sees its role as setting out plans for a more equitable approach to regeneration, and responds to planning and policy consultations to this end. Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group’s chair, Torange Khonsari, also identified neighbourhood planning as a tool to guide development and push for high standards. Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum, which is in its final stages, emphasised that while having a neighbourhood plan in place can offer a voice, it is limited and should not be exaggerated. For some neighbourhood forums, the aims for the plan are modest: as Erica Tate from the Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum stated, “it can stop developers riding roughshod, even if it just forces them to pause for a moment”.

Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum has taken on the role of campaigning for changes to regeneration plans on behalf of local businesses and residents. Regeneration is being led by the local authority, the main landowner in the area, and takes the form of an extensive masterplan affecting almost the entire area, published in 2017, following a previous version. Disagreement with some residents and the neighbourhood forum over elements of the masterplan has created an impasse that the neighbourhood forum feels requires discussions with the local authority in order for the neighbourhood plan to move forward. Although most residents and businesses are in favour of regeneration, for some the changes to the masterplan have led to sense of uncertainty over the future of the area.

A different approach has been taken by Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum. Although representatives of the Cressingham Gardens estate in the neighbourhood plan area are engaged in a high-profile battle with the local authority, Lambeth, over the proposed demolition of the estate, the decision was made that this is a separate issue to the development of the neighbourhood plan. Although the neighbourhood forum is closely following developments and some residents are also involved in the neighbourhood plan process, the neighbourhood plan will progress rather than awaiting the outcome of the local authority’s decision. Broadly, the neighbourhood forum’s position is that regeneration is likely, given the number of large estates of mainly social housing, however it should represent the interests of residents who struggle with issues like overcrowding.

Residents often express frustration that they are unable to affect incoming developments, particularly those that have already attained planning assent. The decision to close the Jubilee Sports Centre in Queen’s Park was an important motivating factor behind the commencement of the neighbourhood plan, although since it has already been agreed upon by the local authority, this cannot now be changed. The lack of alignment in the timetables of neighbourhood plan development and consultation processes mean that the neighbourhood plan is not able to impact incoming development, and development plans may miss valuable insights and evidence from emerging neighbourhood plans. In the cases of Somers Town and Church Street Ward neighbourhood forums, the task of responding to consultations on major development projects can take up most of the forum leadership’s time and attention.

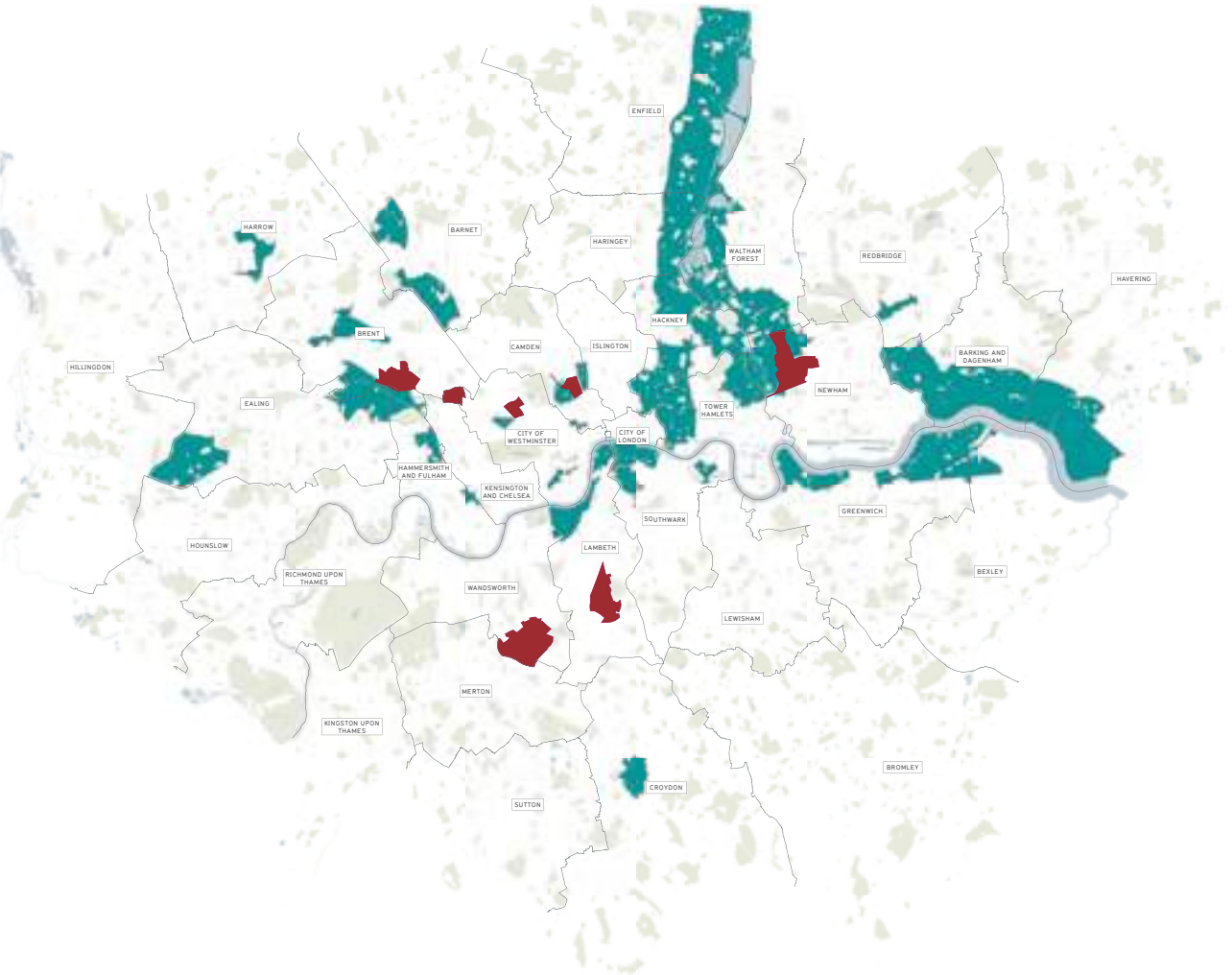
CONSERVATION

None of the neighbourhood forums saw their role as maintaining the status quo, even in the cases of Queen’s Park and Tooting Bec and Broadway neighbourhood forums where large-scale regeneration was not considered an immediate likelihood. Although most of Queen’s Park’s neighbourhood plan area falls within a conservation area, policies are focused on improving these areas in terms of public realm, land use and amenity. Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum, home to a number of historically important housing estates, also saw neighbourhood planning as distinct but complementary to conservation efforts. Slaney Devlin described conservation areas as considering streetscape, while neighbourhood planning embraces a wider remit of “how we live”. Erica Tate from Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum agreed that conservation took a back seat, stating, “we have gangs on our streets, kids with nowhere to do homework because of overcrowding – we don’t care what colour things are painted!”

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Incoming, large-scale development is often a driver for neighbourhood planning, with forums seeking to influence it and ensure gains for their communities
- Forums were also realistic about the limitations to their ability to influence major decisions
- Frustration can arise when neighbourhood planning is unable to reverse unpopular planning decisions
- Although development can be a galvanising issue it can also be difficult alongside developing a neighbourhood plan, creating inertia and damaging the forum’s relationship with the local authority

CASE STUDY NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUMS AND OPPORTUNITY AREAS IN LONDON



KEY

- Case studies
- GLA opportunity areas (2018)

Opportunity areas are defined by the GLA as sites for major housing, commercial and other development. Map drawn by Publica using data on the December 2018 adopted Opportunity Areas (GLA, 2018a)

SOCIAL BENEFITS

TACKLING SOCIAL ISSUES

Most neighbourhood forums cited improved social outcomes as a key driver for neighbourhood planning. As the chair of Tooting Bec and Broadway Neighbourhood Forum noted, social issues are the point of neighbourhood planning; the built environment is not abstract, but important in relation to its impact on communities. For some neighbourhood forums social projects took precedence over issues of planning in their neighbourhood plans.

However neighbourhood planning is limited in its scope to respond to many of these issues. Councillor Gill Fitzhugh, Chair of Queen’s Park Community Council had hoped that the neighbourhood plan might be able to tackle its social issues, but although some social issues like youth club provision and food poverty could be addressed through the community council’s other social programmes, the limited power to tackle social and planning issues like the under-provision of social housing through the neighbourhood plan is challenging. In Harlesden, it was felt that this disconnect limited the ability of the neighbourhood planning process to bring people together; people’s aspirations for the area weren’t necessarily related to planning, causing frustration. Equally, Slaney Devlin from Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum pointed out that the difficulty in translating aspirations was a challenge for planners at the council, as well as for the neighbourhood forums. Neighbourhood forums were highly supportive of the idea of neighbourhood plans that were led by both social and planning projects rather than policies, feeling that these could be more effective at galvanising community support behind the plan, as well as offering tangible outcomes sooner.

However forums also noted the ways in which they could bridge the gap between social and planning issues. For Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum, embedding social projects in the neighbourhood plan is proposed as a way to give them some weight and a number of projects are already underway, informed by the results of the engagement process. Similarly, Tooting Bec and Broadway understood the limitations, but drive or support projects that “have a life outside the neighbourhood plan”. Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum sees the forum, rather than the plan itself, as the bridge between the two. Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum is exploring how planning can reduce the health inequalities affecting the area, for example air quality and access to fresh food. The forum also points out that Section 106 provision in new developments and community interest levy (CIL) monies offer a way to link the neighbourhood planning and social projects; spending of an increased percentage of CIL could be spent by the neighbourhood forum once a plan is ‘made’. Newham has recently introduced ward assemblies as sounding boards for local priorities, and Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group highlighted the potential for neighbourhood forums to share knowledge and work with these groups to tackle social problems.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

All of the neighbourhood plan areas in this study already had a number of other social and community groups in the area, so neighbourhood forums are not “starting from scratch” in terms of social projects and gathering committee members – they are able to build on more organisations and networks. While in some cases this can be an opportunity to collaborate or run complementary programmes, it can be difficult for multiple voluntary groups to co-exist in the same geography without treading on each others’ toes, a problem experienced by Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum. Slaney Devlin noted that one problem for areas with a number of organisations, all lacking funding, was that large grants to one group in the area can cause problems and rifts between different groups.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Some neighbourhood forums have begun to consider their role once the neighbourhood plan is ‘made’. Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum also has a clear vision around the role of the forum once the neighbourhood plan is ‘made’: they have some funding for the longer-term development of the forum, and intend to register as a charity. Atara Fridler mentioned that the Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum was “really looking forward to getting the plan out of the way so that we can move forward with some of the community development projects, tangible projects that people can see and get involved with”. Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group described their role as an “umbrella” which could bring together a number of other initiatives in the area.

Queen’s Park Community Council, the only parish council in London, already has the right to begin a neighbourhood plan without forming a separate neighbourhood forum. Once the plan is complete, the community council will focus on implementing the projects in the neighbourhood plan, some of which have already been started. The potential for this approach to be used by other neighbourhood forums was discussed at length as part of the workshop. Councillor Gill Fitzhugh suggested that in her experience, having a community or parish council can be very positive in disadvantaged areas as this delivers a council tax precept that the community can use. As an urban parish council, Queen’s Park is one of the largest in the UK in terms of population, which can enable it to raise funds through a very small precept.

It also provides a body which can undertake social projects, of which one of the most successful has been keeping the local youth club open. Their work includes organising the annual fireworks and summer festival, producing the Queen’s Park Voice newsletter, and supporting groups like Friends of Queen’s Park Gardens and allotment-holders. More recently it has been involved in supporting their local youth project through grants, and representing the interests of retailers on Harrow Road, the main shopping street in the area. Queen’s Park Community Council benefits from having working groups made up of councillors and local residents, which report on a monthly basis to council meetings where decisions are ratified. These include air quality, children and young people, environment and open spaces, events, grants, planning, public and community arts, resident engagement and social action. As well as all supporting the development of different parts of the neighbourhood plan, the structures are in place through the community council for their work to continue following the completion of the neighbourhood plan.

However the process is lengthy and complex: Queen’s Park Community Council was designated in 2014 following a long campaign by residents. The Community Council’s designation was made possible by Westminster City Council’s 2012 Community Governance Review, which also allows future community groups in Westminster to establish parish councils. The process was supported by the Paddington Development Trust a local, community-led regeneration charity, focusing on skills and jobs, volunteering, and social enterprise.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Tackling social issues is often the driving force behind neighbourhood planning, often taking precedence over planning issues
- The limitations of neighbourhood planning to deal with social issues with any statutory weight is a frustration for many forums
- Social projects and local benefits can come out of the process, regardless of whether a plan has been ‘made’, and the engagement process gives neighbourhood forums a mandate to work on these issues
- Neighbourhood forums are often seen as a useful organisation to represent the area, take on social projects and boost social cohesion (including once the neighbourhood plan is ‘made’)
- Neighbourhood forums have the potential to become broader community leadership organisations; urban parish councils provide one model for this process

LOCAL AUTHORITY

RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Most of the neighbourhood forums interviewed emphasised their recognition that local authorities currently lack resources, which has had a variety of effects across boroughs. Planning officers from the London Boroughs of Brent and Camden also noted their limited capacity to support neighbourhood forums. One neighbourhood forum suggested that the result of funding cuts to local authorities was that work like the development of the Memorandum of Understanding, a document some councils require as part of the neighbourhood planning process, was being passed on to neighbourhood forums, which they found unfair. Tulse Hill Neighbourhood Forum found that cuts in local government meant that staff members who moved on were often not replaced, leaving neighbourhood forums without a main contact in the council. Forum members argued that local authorities should have to engage with neighbourhood planning groups to a greater extent, perhaps designating a single point of contact, an approach used in the London Boroughs of Brent and Camden. Forums agreed that having a go-to person in the council is important, even if the person in question isn’t actually a planning expert, so they can point neighbourhood forums in the direction of relevant information or people and respond to queries. However Claire Jones from the London Borough of Brent emphasised that it is important that the plan is community-led and not written by the council on the communities behalf.

It is striking that the ‘made’ and almost complete neighbourhood plans tend to be concentrated across a few local authorities (see map on page 37). The enthusiasm with which neighbourhood planning is embraced appears to vary between local authorities. Brian O’Donnell from the planning department at the London Borough of Camden describes their position as “we don’t actively encourage or discourage forums”. Locality noted that some local authorities took the view that neighbourhood areas should be designated everywhere in the borough, which meant that some times groups were asked to add or subtract some streets at the edges of their neighbourhood area. Others mentioned a passive attitude from local authorities; although they may express support, they are not forthcoming with resources or guidance. Understanding and experience of the local authorities’ role in neighbourhood planning may be an obstacle; an informal cross-borough neighbourhood planning group exists between London borough planning teams to facilitate peer-to-peer learning. Although not all boroughs participate at every session, the majority of boroughs do participate and only three have never attended.

The schedule of a local authority’s planning programme can have a significant effect on the neighbourhood planning process. Two of the forums interviewed were advised to wait for a forthcoming Local Plan before finalising their own plan, and this can cause or exacerbate delays. Similarly, the consultation process for major developments can hold up plans, as forums may prioritise responding to urgent planning consultations over finalising their plan.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Most neighbourhood forums reported generally positive working relationships with teams within their local authority. Harlesden Neighbourhood Forum found that, although there were some objections over particular aspects of the plan, the local authority was genuinely trying to help the plan. Slaney Devlin of Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum also emphasised the excellent support of Camden’s place-making team prior to the Act, and subsequent support from the neighbourhood planning team, despite disagreements with other parts of the council. Both Tulse Hill and Tooting emphasised the positive experience of working with community engagement officers, outside of the planning process. Brian O’Donnell, from the London Borough of Camden agreed that the relationship between council officers and neighbourhood forum is crucial as compromise and criticism are necessary to the plan’s development.

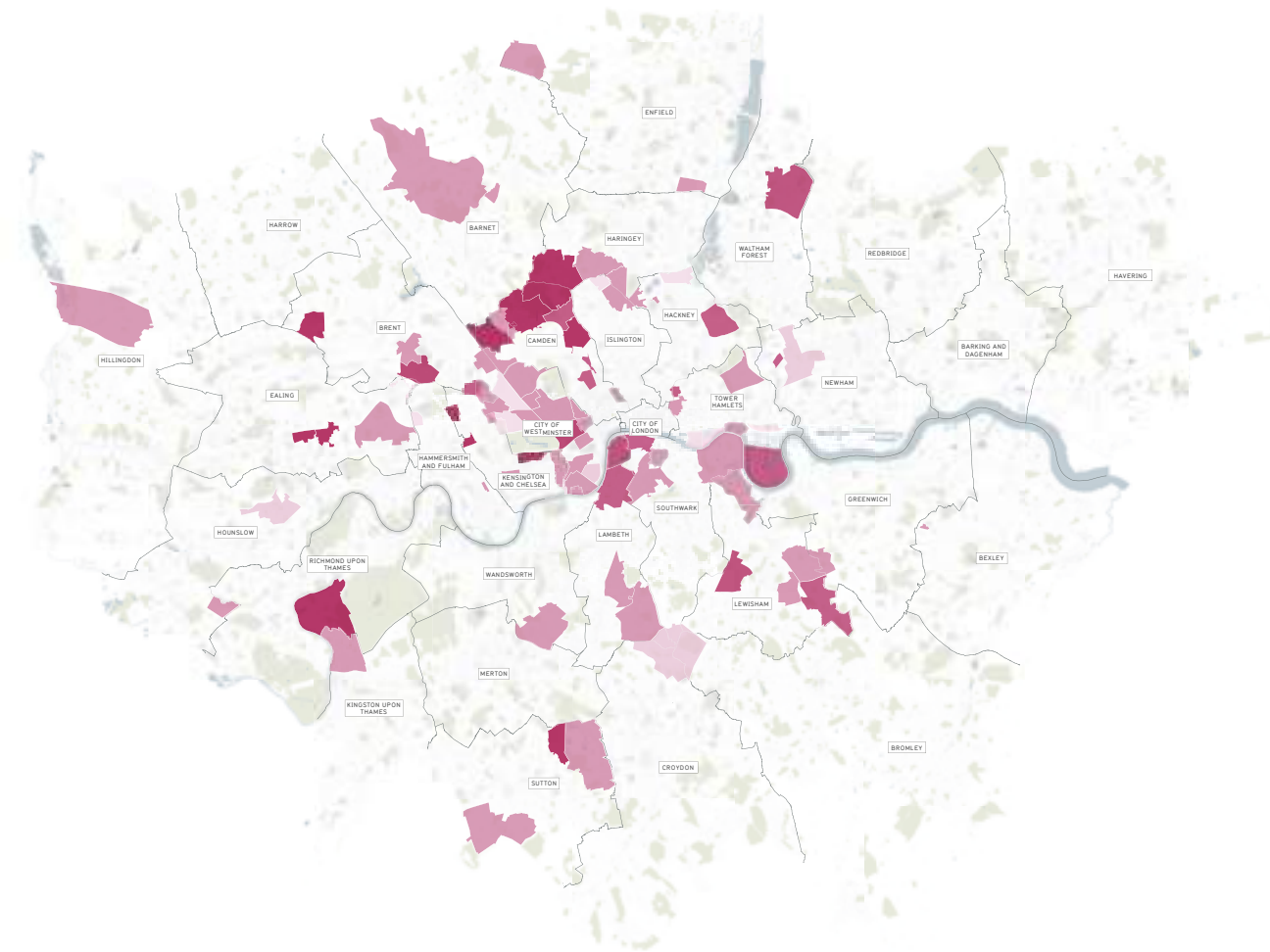
Relationships with the local authority often changed over the course of the neighbourhood planning process as key individuals shifted and both organisations learned more about the process. Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group found that as they were the first proposed neighbourhood forum their local authority, Newham, had worked with, they had to learn alongside one another. This could throw up problems, for example delays caused by bureaucratic hierarchies. Torange Khonsari notes, however, that the council’s focus on working with communities meant the council was not sceptical, and wanted to see the plan succeed. Queen’s Park Community Council have found that since the early years of the neighbourhood planning process, “the whole climate has turned around” and the community council and Westminster City Council are currently working together on additional projects including improvements to Harrow Road, the local shopping street.

The relationship between Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum and the wider local authority is complex and has become difficult at times despite the positive relationship between the forum and the neighbourhood planning team. The forum has been focussed in recent years on challenging planning decisions it believes to be against the interests of residents, and in some cases these developments have been council-led. This strained relationship has also contributed to a sense of mistrust of the council among local residents. Similarly, the relationship between Church Street Ward Neighbourhood Forum and the local authority, Westminster City Council has been damaged by the forum’s resistance to elements of the masterplan for the area. Although many of the members of the forum have positive relationships with individuals at Westminster City Council, the relationship can currently be described as antagonistic which is restricting the progression of the neighbourhood plan.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Forums had a range of experiences with local authorities, but the most positive were where the planning team were helpful and hands-on, with a single point of contact who could stay in touch
- The schedule of a local authority’s planning work can impact the neighbourhood plan process
- A good relationship with the local authority can be a positive outcome of the neighbourhood planning process
- A strained or poor relationship with the local authority can create a major obstacle to neighbourhood plan development

COMPLETED NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS AND BOROUGHES



KEY

- Applied for designation
- Developing vision & objectives
- Writing policies & projects
- Pre-submission consultation
- Plan submitted to LPA
- Examination
- Plan made
- Other

Neighbourhood plan areas are shown in darker colours the closer they are to completion. The forums that are ‘made’ or nearing completion, the darkest colours on the map, are concentrated across a few boroughs, and often clustered together. A number of boroughs, particularly in outer London, have no neighbourhood forums designated at all. Map drawn by Publica using data from Neighbourhood Planners.London and Publica (Neighbourhood Planners.London, 2018b).

KEY FINDINGS

- The engagement of professional support is a considerable cost for neighbourhood forums, although some forums had individuals willing to work on the project for free. Where the planning skills are available within the forum the inability to pay local members for their services can create feelings of resentment
- The majority of forums found that Locality grants were insufficient for the costs involved in producing a neighbourhood plan, particularly since additional funding is no longer available for areas with high levels of deprivation
- Additionally, relatively minor costs like printing leaflets, setting up websites and hiring premises for meetings could constitute a significant expenditure for groups with a constrained budget
- Some forums had found creative ways to secure funding or in-kind support for their neighbourhood plans and supportive evidence, sometimes supported by their consultants
- These areas have not attracted corporate sponsorship or wider funding and investment that other areas might be able to access
- The skills and capacity that many neighbourhood forums rely on are not present in all areas, and are often lacking in areas of high deprivation
- Neighbourhood forums learned a lot about the planning system through the process, although some argued that the complexity of the process was off-putting
- Knowing what to look for when engaging consultants and assessing the quality of their work can be a challenge when starting from a position of very little knowledge of planning
- Neighbourhood forums felt alienated from the process when technical consultants didn't include them in those elements of the plan, and when jargony language was used
- Others suggested that the project management and administrative needs of the process are underestimated and support should be given for these functions
- Forums found engagement with the local community to have been an enjoyable and beneficial part of the neighbourhood planning process
- While enthusiasm for improving their local area is high, interest in planning is limited. Forums found creative ways to engage people in the process where initial interest was lacking
- Forums struggle to attract ethnic and social diversity proportional to their areas, although some forums are experimenting with new approaches to ensure diversity
- The workload and responsibility for driving the neighbourhood plan forward can be overly concentrated on the forum's chair. This makes the process very vulnerable to changes in that individual's circumstances

- The duration of the neighbourhood planning process contributes to a loss of morale and, in the long-term, reduced interest and membership
- Interim progress, outputs and 'wins' are very important and can allow recognition of the value of the process and its other outcomes
- Incoming, large-scale development is often a driver for neighbourhood planning, with forums seeking to influence it and ensure gains for their communities
- Forums were also realistic about the limitations to their ability to influence major decisions
- Frustration can arise when neighbourhood planning is unable to reverse unpopular planning decisions
- Although development can be a galvanising issue it can also be difficult alongside developing a neighbourhood plan, creating inertia and damaging the forum's relationship with the local authority
- Tackling social issues is often the driving force behind neighbourhood planning, often taking precedence over planning issues
- The limitations of neighbourhood planning to deal with social issues with any statutory weight is a frustration for many forums
- Social projects and local benefits can come out of the process, regardless of whether a plan has been 'made', and the engagement process gives neighbourhood forums a mandate to work on these issues
- Neighbourhood forums are often seen as a useful organisation to represent the area, take on social projects and boost social cohesion (including once the neighbourhood plan is 'made')
- Neighbourhood forums have the potential to become broader community leadership organisations; urban parish councils provide one model for this process
- Forums had a range of experiences with local authorities, but the most positive were where the planning team were helpful and hands-on, with a single point of contact who could stay in touch
- The schedule of a local authority's planning work can impact the neighbourhood plan process
- A good relationship with the local authority can be a positive outcome of the neighbourhood planning process
- A strained or poor relationship with the local authority can create a major obstacle to neighbourhood plan development

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are drawn from the key findings, and address the role and potential for neighbourhood planning in areas with high levels of deprivation in London and the special challenges which disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods face. They also consider the different organisations and government bodies which could deliver each recommendation.

IMPROVING THE PROCESS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

1. Consider making provision for neighbourhood plans that are led by their social policies and projects, rather than planning projects alone (National Government)
2. Introduce milestone ‘wins’ over the course of the project to counter loss of momentum and to provide the potential to unlock additional resources. This might include supporting and elevating projects identified by neighbourhood forums through grant funds, such as:
 - The Good Growth Fund, supporting growth and community development (Mayor of London)
 - Citizen-Led Engagement Programme grants, facilitating community-led research (Mayor of London, GLA, National Government)
 - Community Infrastructure Levy (Local authorities)
3. Simplify routes into the neighbourhood planning process for forums, for example making the process of applying for initial funding more straightforward, to remove barriers to entry (Locality, local authorities)

MAINSTREAMING NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

4. Widen access for neighbourhood forums and their technical consultants to digital and mapping tools used by local authorities. This could include software ie. Commonplace, or digitised data sets to inform evidence bases (National Government, local authorities)
5. Consider emerging neighbourhood plans and their priorities in local plans and make explicit that the integration of neighbourhood plans is part of the soundness test of local plans. Local plans should be supportive of neighbourhood plans and leave space for neighbourhood plans to add detail for their areas (Local authorities, Planning Inspectorate)
6. Collaborate with neighbourhood forums to make stronger connections between neighbourhood planning and Community Infrastructure Levy priorities (Local authorities)

FUNDING

7. Revisit the criteria for additional funding for neighbourhood forums, and consider tailored packages of support for urban areas with high levels of deprivation, including:
 - Re-instating additional grant funding for neighbourhood forums
 - Providing supplementary grants for areas which score highly in the indices of multiple deprivation as the current additional grants are difficult for London forums to access
 - Providing additional technical support packages tailored to urban areas with high levels of socio-economic deprivation (National Government)

8. Provide ringfenced funding for neighbourhood forums to spend on administrative support and communications. This might include project management, technology, planning, and community engagement (National Government)
9. Provide information for neighbourhood forums on alternative funding sources and develop networks for corporate sponsorship and other support (Neighbourhood Planners.London)

CAPACITY-BUILDING AND SUPPORT

10. Provide clarity over the ‘duty to support’ neighbourhood planning for local authorities, setting out expected roles and responsibilities in a guidance document that has statutory weight. This should include assigning a dedicated point of contact for neighbourhood planning within the planning team, and ensuring that if this changes, neighbourhood forums are notified (National Government, local authorities)
11. Provide additional capacity-building for neighbourhood forums in urban areas with high levels of deprivation, for example through entitlement to access additional technical support and networking events (Neighbourhood Planners.London, GLA, National Government, Locality)
12. Consider funding a point person over the life of the neighbourhood planning process for forums across groups of around three boroughs. This individual could offer advice on hiring appropriate consultants, project-management support and check in to ensure momentum is retained. They could also mediate relationships with local authorities and consultants where these are difficult (Neighbourhood Planners.London, funded by GLA or National Government)
13. Fund and prioritise peer-to-peer learning between neighbourhood forums across London, which is very effective but rare, particularly supporting small, workshop style events. Feedback from participants in this study indicates that a small workshop is a very helpful format (Neighbourhood Planners.London, GLA)
14. Facilitate mutual support and peer-to-peer learning between local authorities, potentially by formalising the existing knowledge-sharing groups through London Councils (Local authorities, London Councils)
15. Explore ways to link local skills with neighbourhood forums in a way that can deliver professional accreditation or other benefits for volunteers. The Skills for Londoners fund could support local further/higher education organisations to facilitate these skill exchanges (National Government, GLA)
16. Support peer-to-peer learning, facilitated by Neighbourhood Planners.London’s existing networks, to develop a team or pipeline of skilled consultants experienced in supporting neighbourhood forums in London. This group could offer tailored and long-term support to forums (Neighbourhood Planners.London, London Councils, GLA, National Government).

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM PROFILES

TULSE HILL NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM



Current stage	Defining policies and objectives
Plan started	2015
Borough	London Borough of Lambeth

Tulsa Hill in Lambeth has one of the highest population densities in the borough, and a high proportion of residents unemployed. The area has a large proportion of social rented housing, managed by Lambeth Council and a mix of five housing associations.; owner-occupied housing comprises around a third of the housing stock. The area is diverse; over half of residents have an ethnic minority background.

The area characterised by a mix of several large, dense estates and a small number of streets of terraced houses. It borders the large green space of Brockwell Park, although there is limited publicly accessible green space within the neighbourhood plan area.

The neighbourhood planning process was started in 2015. The initial proposed boundary, submitted in 2015 was rejected by Lambeth council, with the final area designated in January 2016. The Tulsa Hill Neighbourhood Forum was also designated as the neighbourhood forum in January 2016. It is a subcommittee of the Tulsa Hill Forum, a pre-existing community organisation set up in 2010.

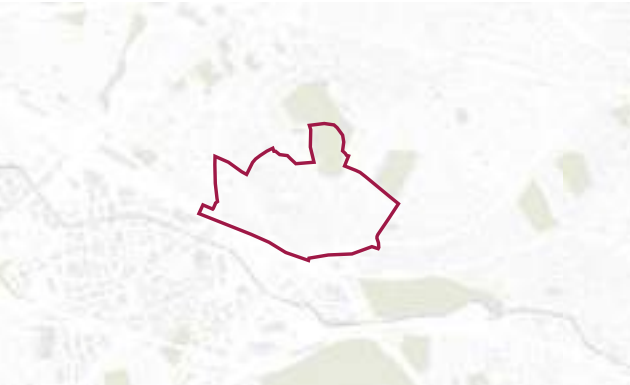
Following designation, the forum began extensive consultation with local businesses and residents. A key concern was to avoid putting people off with intimidating planning jargon, and to ensure that people thought about the neighbourhood as a whole rather than seeking improvements to their own homes. To solve these issues,

the project was called Aspire Space, and consultation took place at other community events, rather than trying to force unwilling participants to attend a meeting for that purpose alone.

Through the consultation, the forum has identified ten policy areas and eight projects to include. The focus is on the social issues affecting the area, which include safety, family-friendly activities and employability. For example, GLOWS Tulsa Hill is a workspace and makerspace for Lambeth residents which reuses the buildings formerly used as the rent office for the Tulsa Hill Estate. Similarly, Parents Organising Play (POP) is a family project organising play space that is inclusive of parents, a concern that was raised by local residents during the consultation. The consultation response was used as part of the funding application and this grant has enabled some of the parents to be employed by the programme.

Erica Tate has chaired the forum since its inception. Although she has no professional background in community organising, her substantial volunteer experience drove her to set up the neighbourhood forum. Due to her personal circumstances the plan has experienced delays, but is due to be relaunched with policy-writing as the main priority. The engagement stage was supported by Angela Koch of ImaginePlaces.

HARLESDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM



Current stage	Independent examination
Plan started	2014
Borough	London Borough of Brent

Harlesden, in the London Borough of Brent, suffers from intense housing pressure and overcrowding which affects 36% of households, exacerbated by a rapidly increasing population, at a rate twice that of Brent as a whole. It is ethnically diverse, and sits within the 2020 London Borough of Culture. In recent years the town centre has been undergoing improvements including the refurbishment of the Jubilee Clock, the enhancement of pocket parks, and improvements to the town centre road layout.

Harlesden is on the edge of the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation (OPDC), a small section of which falls within the neighbourhood plan area. OPDC is the UK's largest regeneration project, which will see the creation of thousands of new homes and jobs on the site of a former railway siding. OPDC has been both the regeneration agency and the planning authority for the regeneration area since 2015.

The neighbourhood forum's administrative functions have been nested in the local service of Crisis, formerly a local homelessness charity called Lift People. Administrative support was provided as a mixture of paid and pro bono support. Lift People (now a local branch of Crisis) also applied for and secured funding from the Oak Foundation to develop place based work to ending homelessness which includes (but is not limited to) supporting the neighbourhood planning process, ensuring involvement

of homeless people in the process, and responding to the acute housing need. The neighbourhood forum has limited planning experience within its committee, but has benefited substantially from the expertise of a retired local government planner in drafting the policies. Local architects have also supported the development of designs for the town centre.

The neighbourhood forum was formed with the intention to tackle the area's persistent social issues in a strategic way, as well as maximising the benefits for the local community of the developments at Old Oak. Over four years, the forum has developed the plan, incorporating the findings of community engagement and feedback from the local authority, Brent, and Locality. The plan has passed independent examination, and will be put to referendum in 2019. While the plan is moving through the processes that should result in it being 'made', the forum is seeking charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) status to enable it to undertake a broader range of activities in the future.

The forum's chair is Revd Dr Leão Neto. The neighbourhood forum's treasurer is Paul Anders, and its vice-chair, Atara Fridler, was instrumental in securing the resources to support the forum and ensuring Crisis Brent support to this work. It has been supported in the development of its neighbourhood plan by Ken Hullock, a former planner at the London Borough of Brent.

QUEEN’S PARK COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Current stage	Updating policies
Plan started	2011
Borough	City of Westminster

Queen’s Park is in the northwest corner of the City of Westminster; the neighbourhood plan area is the same as the local political ward. It includes the Queen’s Park Estate conservation area, made up of Grade 2 listed, nineteenth century workers cottages, as well as the 1970s Mozart Estate and the busy major cross-borough Harrow Road. It has two open spaces, Queen’s Park Gardens and the Harrow Road open space, between the Grand Union Canal and Harrow Road.

Queen’s Park is unique in having London’s only urban parish council, Queen’s Park Community Council, established in 2014. The community council charges an additional council tax precept and is thus able to partially fund the development of its neighbourhood plan, as well as having limited administrative support and access to premises for meetings. The neighbourhood plan is only one of the community council’s projects, which includes the running of the youth club, boxing gym, and supporting community gardening through Friends of Queen’s Park Gardens. Funding for the neighbourhood plan is therefore only a small proportion of the Community Council’s budget.

Key challenges for Queen’s Park include the loss of retail along the Harrow Road, and subsequent poor-quality conversions of shops to residential properties. The loss of local amenity in the area is also a threat; the neighbourhood’s sports and leisure centre closed

in 2014, with local provision moving to a larger centre in the adjacent borough of Brent. As Queen’s Park is a densely built area, a large proportion of which is a conservation area, development sites are very limited.

The neighbourhood plan aims to support the social projects undertaken by Queen’s Park Community Council by improving the public realm, and protecting and developing local amenity. Engagement with the local community has been undertaken since the plan began and with the support of Publica and funding from the GLA, in the summer of 2015, a pop-up shop was opened on Harrow Road which invited local people to give their ideas for the neighbourhood plan. This fed into the development of policy objectives, which were refined into draft policies by Urban Vision, in consultation with Westminster City Council.

The neighbourhood planning group within the community council has struggled to retain membership, and lacks capacity. The neighbourhood plan has been driven by Councillor Gill Fitzhugh, a member of Queen’s Park Community Council since its inception. Although she has no formal planning experience, she has worked in charitable organisations for many years. The plan is currently undergoing revisions in light of the City of Westminster’s draft new City Plan, and will be submitted to the local authority for examination in 2019.

TOOTING BEC AND BROADWAY NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM



Current stage	Evidence gathering
Designated	2017
Borough	London Borough of Wandsworth

Tooting, in the London Borough of Wandsworth, is an area with a strong sense of identity and local civic pride. It is highly ethnically diverse and has the largest proportion of residents born outside the UK in the borough. It has a lower-than-average percentage of social rented properties, but high levels of private renting, with 38.8% living in private rented accommodation in the 2011 census.

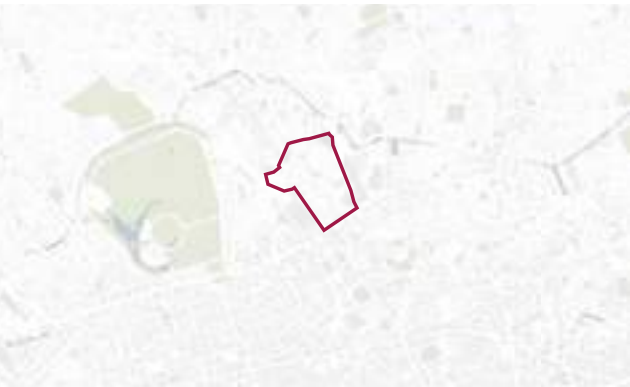
The area is characterised by its suburban, terraced housing stock. Key issues for the neighbourhood forum include improving the streetscape, and reducing traffic domination. Another concern is a lack of open green space; the area borders but excludes Tooting Bec Common, a large public open space. Although gentrification is a concern for some in the area, development opportunities are limited to small-scale infill and public realm regeneration projects, rather than major demolition and rebuild sites.

Tooting is particularly well-known for its food culture - in addition to a wealth of South Asian restaurants and cafés, it is home to two covered food markets. In both markets, international grocers, clothing shops and cafés serve the local community during the day, while small independent bars and restaurants open later, attracting visitors from further afield late into the evening. This diverse offer was identified by locals a key attraction of Tooting, in a survey undertaken by the neighbourhood forum.

The process of setting up the forum itself took around a year, as no group was in place already. The forum has been designated, and is now developing its evidence base and policy priorities. However like many forums, they have struggled with funding, particularly for research and communications.

The neighbourhood forum can call upon the expertise of professionals in community organisation and the built environment. Its chair is Jane Briginshaw, an architect and director of Design England. However the forum has struggled to attract membership from all parts of the community; anecdotally the neighbourhood forum has suggested that the volume of voluntary work that local people already undertake can act as a barrier to wider participation. However the area’s wealth of community organisations and initiatives underway already are a valuable resource with which the forum can collaborate in future.

SOMERS TOWN NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM



Somers Town is a historically working-class neighbourhood in central London, and was one of the first neighbourhood plan areas to be designated under the Localism Act 2011. The area has high levels of deprivation and a majority of residents do not own their own home. However engagement has found that many residents feel a very strong sense of identity and community, particularly in the face of the rapid development in the surrounding area. Publicly accessible green space is very limited, and air quality is an increasing concern for residents due to the proximity to arterial roads and railway hubs. These barriers can give the impression that the area is cut off from amenities such as supermarkets, and limit access to fresh food.

Somers Town is characterised by its historic social housing, particularly early twentieth-century estates. It also has a large number of schools, three primary and two secondary, which brings thousands of children and young people into the area during the school day. The neighbourhood plan area is bounded on all sides by transport infrastructure: Kings Cross and St Pancras stations to the east, Euston Station to the west, and main roads to the north and south. It sits at the centre of some of central London’s largest infrastructure projects, between Euston Station, currently undergoing work related to HS2, and the new developments which surround the rebuilt King’s Cross. The forum has partnered with UCL, the Environmental Law Foundation and Voluntary Action Camden (VAC) to deliver a report on the impact of construction on health and wellbeing.

The area is also within the Knowledge Quarter, a network of museums, higher education and cultural institutions

Current stage	Policy-writing
Plan started	2011
Borough	London Borough of Camden

connecting Euston and Bloomsbury; the British Library. The Francis Crick Institute and the Alan Turing Institute are situated within the neighbourhood plan area, and the neighbourhood forum is developing links with the Wellcome Trust and University College London (UCL). These institutions can be a useful resource for neighbourhood planning, as well as potentially providing jobs and work experience opportunities for local people, but they are also competing for space, and can reduce land available for new homes. A key priority for the neighbourhood plan is capturing the value from this rapid change in the area.

Somers Town was one of the first areas to be designated, and produce a draft plan. However rapid change in the area meant that this was unable to challenge development already underway, and it became outdated. Developing the forum’s response to the HS2 plans has also contributed to the delay in finalising the plan. The forum is currently overhauling the plan in response to these changes, to ensure that new challenges are addressed. It has also been working on a number of specific studies, sometimes with partner institutions, which provide supporting evidence for the plan’s policies.

The neighbourhood forum is currently chaired by Slaney Devlin. She and her colleagues have no professional planning experience, but the forum has benefited from the considerable capacity and development support of Donna Turnbull at Voluntary Action Camden and, through VAC, the invaluable input of Planning Aid representative Michael Parkes.

STRATFORD AND WEST HAM NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING GROUP



Current stage	Applied for designation
Designated	(Pre-designation planning began) 2017
Borough	London Borough of Newham

Stratford and West Ham neighbourhood planning group has submitted a proposal for a neighbourhood plan area to be designated within the London Borough of Newham, with the aim of subsequently being designated as a neighbourhood forum. The area is characterised by its ethnic diversity and economic deprivation. The proposed neighbourhood plan area is large, covering parts of Stratford town centre, Stratford Park, and large areas of West Ham. If approved, it will be the first designated neighbourhood forum in Newham.

The built character of the area is highly mixed, with Georgian and Victorian terraces, low-rise Post-War housing estates, and recently-completed towers. The area’s industrial heritage is visible in the form of historic industrial buildings, warehouses and industrial buildings close to the River Lea, and the continued dominance of the railway tracks in Stratford.

The area is currently undergoing considerable transformation, in large part due to investment in Stratford as part of the 2012 Olympic Legacy. The aim of the neighbourhood plan is to have an entity that is capable of guiding development in the area, ensuring it is of a high quality.

A key concern was ensuring that the forum had an actively engaged membership that was representative of the demographic diversity of the area. The decision was

made to root the early work in the local school, School 21, a unique approach in London. A curriculum was designed that would allow students to feed into the evidence base. It was exhibited at the school’s Exhibition of Beautiful Work in December 2017, where it could also be commented upon by the families of the students involved, thereby including people from a range of ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

The forum has organised five boundary consultations, including the Exhibition of Beautiful Work, through which the boundary was extended to include West Ham Park and Stratford New Town. The neighbourhood planning group has submitted its proposed boundary, and is currently in the process of agreeing this with Newham Council. Once the boundary is approved, the forum will explore ways to innovate in consultation and engagement, possibly building on the borough’s Community Neighbourhood initiative, which offers opportunities for residents and volunteers to run projects and events in their areas.

The forum was established as a collaborative venture between School 21, local residents and a not-for-profit architecture practice, Public Works. The forum’s director, Torange Khonsari is one of Public Works’ founders, and has supported other neighbourhood forums in east London. The forum was also supported by Hanna Ivansson, an architect from Wi Arkitektur in Sweden, via an Erasmus entrepreneurship programme.

CHURCH STREET WARD NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM



Current stage	Determining policy priorities
Plan started	2014
Borough	City of Westminster

Church Street is a neighbourhood plan area and political ward in the City of Westminster, known for its street market and wealth of antiques shops. It is a highly diverse neighbourhood: it’s Simpson’s Diversity Index score (a measure of ethnic diversity where 1 is the minimum) is 8.5, much higher than that of London as a whole, which scored 2.7. 53% of its residents were born outside the UK. It also scored highly in the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation, where it is ranked within the 10% most deprived wards in the UK. Church Street is the most densely populated ward in London (GLA, 2018b).

A history of social housing and slum clearance has defined the modern-day built character of the area. Cottages managed by the social housing pioneer Octavia Hill can be found on Ranston Street, and the predominance of twentieth-century tower blocks and low-rise estates have contributed to its density. Church Street itself has in parts retained its older buildings on the eastern end, characterised by its antique shops. The Church Street Decorative Arts Dealers’ Group was formed to represent the ‘Antiques Quarter’ in Church Street, which is one of many community groups in the area supporting the neighbourhood forum.

A key driver for the neighbourhood forum was the issue of regeneration. For a number of years, Westminster City Council has been planning to redevelop much of the area, with the refurbishment of existing estates kept as a possibility. However a new masterplan was published

in 2017 which will include demolition of existing estates, considerable densification with new tall buildings, and decanting of businesses and residents. Neighbourhood planning is seen as a way to ensure that local stakeholders can guide regeneration, and benefit from its results.

The neighbourhood forum was designated in July 2014, with a launch event beginning the consultation process. With support from the architecture firm Farrells, the forum opened Urban Room, a pop-up shop on Church Street which ran for three months in 2015. Since 2016 the forum has prioritised campaigning against Westminster City Council’s proposed masterplan for the area, which the forum argue has not been sufficiently inclusive of local people’s priorities. Since the publication of Westminster’s draft City Plan in December 2018, the forum has resumed work on consultation and engagement to determine policy priorities and objectives, alongside campaigning against the proposed masterplan.

The neighbourhood forum is chaired by Alan Stirling, and has been supported by Paddington Development Trust. Although there is limited planning expertise in the area, the neighbourhood planning subcommittee is headed by Achim von Malotki who has a background in environmental management and is working towards RTPi accreditation. The forum is also able to call upon the professional skills of its members, which also include law and web development.

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INTERVIEWEES

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Neighbourhood Planners.London exists to support neighbourhood planners in London and raise the profile of neighbourhood planning in the capital. Neighbourhood Planners.London is a volunteer-run initiative set up in response to direct experience of the first wave of neighbourhood planning in London and the recognised benefits of neighbourhood planners getting together to share knowledge and experience.

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