

Appendix 1

Summary of Responses to Localism Report, November 2014

Why is interest so limited?

- Are the requirements for designating neighbourhoods, in terms of boundaries, membership and competing interests, simply unworkable in London?
- **AECOM** suggest that the extensive powers granted to communities have failed to bring together different interest groups and have not resolved boundary tensions. It points to a lack of guidance on the recognition of sub-neighbourhoods and the poor understanding of the role, power and long term influence of spatial plans as applied to small areas.
- **AECOM** argues that the report does not recognise the potential spinoffs from this planning opportunity, including housing, asset, environmental, sustainable communities, public safety at street level, transport and mobility, economic and place-making initiatives. It suggests that more scoping, development and educational work at the inception stage is therefore needed to promote the benefits of a plan and see it through to completion.
- **AECOM** believes that there should be a more strategic approach for London, using the GLA to promote neighbourhood plans and identify 'functional neighbourhoods' among community networks and councils. It also stresses that cross borough co-operation needs to be facilitated, with forums straddling boroughs having found the designation and liaison burden particularly high.
- **Pinner Association** argues that there is a significant difference between estate agents' and people's definition of an area and government designation of an area. It suggests that Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) have been undermined by 'inflammatory statements' from the Housing Minister in 2011, as well as having no powers to say that an area is saturated. Furthermore, it argues, an NDP is limited in the same way as the London Plan and borough plans as they are trumped by government 'permitted development' rights.
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** argues that while NDPs may extend the statutory regime in London, the city is not a 'blank slate', posing a challenge to the introduction of Plans. It may be possible to overcome this with guidance from a higher level planning authority issuing policy and guidance for NDPs in London. There could also be scope for more London plan guidance and a 'London wide framework for neighbourhood planning'. It also argues that there needs to be a carefully tailored approach for each location, noting the importance of local green infrastructure and effective citizen engagement. It argues that legitimacy for NDPs can be given through political, managerial and professional, community, business and trade union leadership.
- How can we overcome the barriers to getting a forum recognised?
- **AECOM** believes that better leadership from councillors would help get a forum recognized although they tend to have reservations about neighbourhood planning posing a threat to representative democracy, particularly as traditional planning has been something done to communities, rather than led by them. AECOM suggests that this creates a culture that is weary, negative, reactive and threatening. AECOM also indicates that bringing together 21 individual is much more difficult in London as they may represent or come from a wide variety of differing interest groups.

- **AECOM** recommends Civic Engagement structures such as those in Lambeth and Lewisham, with these providing for the growth of Neighbourhood Forum Steering groups. It also suggests that a 'scoping' stage is needed to identify interest, boundaries and the name of neighbourhood groups. It points to the example of former NDCs in London which had powerful community boards and significant investment in terms of leadership and member training, officer support and financial resources.
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** supports the government's suggestion that deadlines for neighbourhood area designation would encourage boroughs. It also argues that a change to a more welcoming attitude in boroughs towards planning decentralisation, combined with knowledge sharing and highlighting of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) objectives. It suggests a role for the GLA and the London Plan in facilitating this and raising awareness.

Why is interest so concentrated?

- Do affluent communities with access to professional expertise to drive the formation of neighbourhood forums have an advantage over those with less capacity or history of community organisation?
- **AECOM** suggests time as the most important asset with groups putting up to 5,000 voluntary hours into their plan, with this being incompatible with the long working hours of Londoners. It also suggests that concentration is influenced by successful neighbourhood plan areas challenging and motivating the neighbourhood next door.
- **Seona Lightfoot's** assessment is similar, as she suggests that the people involved require intensive analysis and impartiality, while being mindful of options and consequences down the line, making it difficult for Londoners with limited time and a lower sense of community to set up NDPs when compared to those in rural areas. She also argues that in rural areas Plans are often damaged by personal agendas, manipulation and self-interest, suggesting that community organisation may not necessarily lead to success.
- However, **Pinner Association** suggests that affluence does have an influence, as affluent people have a vested interested interest in maintaining their privileged environment. In spite of this, it argues that in areas that already have a relatively active civic or amenity society or residents' association, people may believe that these organisations already monitor planning in their area and hence do not feel the need to spend time and money on setting up a neighbourhood forum.
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** also agrees that levels of affluence drive formation, suggesting that only 10 per cent of neighbourhood plan applications were being made in 20 per cent most deprived English areas.
- **The Africa Centre** has raised concerns that Westminster Council is avoiding engaging with the Black Diasporan Community that they represent.

Why is progress so slow?

- To what extent are financial considerations and the budget pressures on local authorities slowing down the progress of neighbourhood planning in London?
- Progress is slow, according to **AECOM**, because planning officers are generally very unclear about the DCLG resources they can tap for exercising their duty to support, and although some boroughs such as Westminster may have a full-time officer working on NDPs, the NDP lead will typically only be spending a third to a half of their time supporting groups.
- **Pinner Association** believes that the need for the London Borough of Harrow to make significant cuts will mean that neighbourhood planning funding will be lost.
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** agrees that budget constraints prevent the preparation of borough wide frameworks and policies for neighbourhood planning. It also suggests there is

complacency in relying on 'planning obligations' such as Affordable Housing targets over the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Is enough support being given?

- Would greater promotion for neighbourhood planning in London's opportunity areas both further the aims of localism and regeneration and boost a sense of legitimacy and support in these areas?
- **AECOM** considers there to be a strong need for further promotion, coupled with on the ground development work and dependable technical support vital. It suggests that in order to encourage embryonic groups into the support system, a more dedicated post for this kind of activity within the GLA should be created. It points to White City where getting community buy-in and integrating new areas into the neighbourhood can ensure social sustainability as well as spreading the White City Opportunity Area benefits.
- **Pinner Association** again argues that any development will be of limited value so long as government is able to impose 'permitted development' rights.

Are boroughs interpreting the legislation consistently in London?

- Why are there so few listed assets in some boroughs?
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** reports that the forum attempted to register the local Barclays bank as an Asset of Community Value (ACV). However, it reports that this was rejected by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames on the grounds of commerciality. It was advised to make fresh application as it could not appeal short of a judicial review. It says that commerciality is not a valid reason for rejection under the Localism Act, citing the example of the listing of public houses. It is also the forum's view that the Council's reason for refusal is a material consideration in the assessment of any planning application, such as the application for a Sainsbury's Local on the site.
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** suggests that there may be need for legal clarification, for example on exemption from ACV status in planning decisions.
- Are boroughs interpreting the legislation consistently?
- **AECOM** disagrees with the example of Hammersmith and Fulham designating the boundary first of a NDP and then consulting separately on the qualifying body, instead proposing the integration of the two stages, with development work to resolve tensions between groups.

Can assets of London-wide importance be covered by the guidance?

- Given London's city wide communities, is the legislation supportive of recognising assets on the basis of communities of interest rather than communities of locality?
- **AECOM** agrees with the notion that assets could be based on communities of locality.
- **Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum** points out that ACV is a designation and not a policy as such. It recommends that positive planning for assets of London wide importance may be required to be explored, to complement this approach for cumulative benefits to be realised.

Questions raised by responders

Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum -

1. Knowledge sharing on the processes and priorities for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and highlighting CIL objectives, via neighbourhood planning may be a challenge for boroughs. How could the GLA assist the boroughs on this point?
2. How could the London Plan raise awareness of the resource benefits for neighbourhoods under the new system?
3. How could the London Plan and GLA enable greater neighbourhood planning in non-affluent areas, with an apparent lack of professionals? Are these areas possibly the most dependent on public resources, in terms of planning for community infrastructures, health and wellbeing, that could benefit from neighbourhood planning?
4. Are indices of environmental wellbeing (a 'happiness index'), relevant to assessing the prevalence of neighbourhood planning, as an alternative and or together with the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)?
5. Would the London Assembly be in position to determine: How many London boroughs, made applications to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for 'forerunner' status?
6. Out of any applications made to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for 'forerunner' status, what proportion of these were successful or not in gaining said status?
7. How many neighbourhood groups in boroughs have made application for government support, for example under the Building Communities Consortium, the government 'Supporting Communities in Neighbourhood Planning' or any other grants and support programmes?
8. Out of those neighbourhood groups in boroughs applying for support in question 3, what proportion of these were successful or not, in gaining support?
9. Could the GLA Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) 'Character and Context' of June 2014 provide a model for preparing evidence bases to ensure that 'communities of locality' can be supported in the city neighbourhoods using the ACV designation?

AECOM-

1. Do NP groups have a role in delivering growth as well as planning for quality lifetime neighbourhoods?
 - **AECOM's** experience from around the country, however is that groups do come to terms with their housing allocations, some exceed it and the main reason for this is that they get to grips with the extent of local housing need which in urban areas has become a regular part of a neighbourhood plan process .
 - In other words NP may be a very useful and under-used mechanism for getting buy-in for significant housing growth and the change this implies.

Recommendations from responders

Ham and Petersham Neighbourhood Forum -

1. The issue of housing, despite CIL currently not supporting Affordable Housing, may remain acute in NDPs and as such guidance on economic viability assessment from the GLA for boroughs may be welcome.

AECOM-

1. **AECOM** suggests that the GLA, being more detached from local politics, could play a useful catalytic role in identifying functional neighbourhoods in London. It estimates there are between 600 to 700

neighbourhoods in London with most boroughs having 15-20 functional neighbourhoods with distinct names and boundaries.

2. That the GLA integrates NDPs into its Housing Zone approaches and the 100,000 units it estimates will be delivered on small sites of less than 0.25 hectares. This not insubstantial number of small sites and other windfall sites are the ones that Neighbourhood Plans could most help in bringing forward.
3. That the GLA appoints a dedicated NDP Officer to progress the above and to provide support to fledgling forums and LPA Planning Officers struggling to deliver their Duty to Support

Update on progress in London, March 2015 - Department of Communities and Local Government

As of March 2015, in London:

- 85+ areas interested in Neighbourhood Planning
- 49 areas designated as Neighbourhood Forums
- 2 Neighbourhood Plans had passed Examination in Public
- 1 Neighbourhood Plan had passed referendum and is in force

DCLG has now introduced regulations to speed up the process of Local Planning Authorities recognising Neighbourhood Forums. From receipt of application the authority must decide within:

- 20 weeks where the area falls within the areas of two or more local planning authorities
- 13 weeks in all other cases

The time period runs from the date immediately following that on which the application is first publicised by the local planning authority.

An additional £12 million (nationally) of funding has been announced for 2015/16

- £5k for each area designation
- £5k for each forum designation
- £5k for each plan submitted to local authority
- £20k for each successful examination
- Plus £10k for successful business examination

Average cost of Examination in Public is £7,500

Average cost of referendum is under £5,000