

Title: One tool amongst many: Considering the political potential of neighbourhood planning for the Greater Carpenters Neighbourhood, London

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Abstract:

Currently within English planning literature there are polarising debates about whether neighbourhood planning represents a politically useful tool for communities to utilize to challenge and shape top-down government development plans for their neighbourhood. One side of the debate optimistically presents neighbourhood planning as a radical and exciting opportunity for communities who wish to shape development plans for their locality. On the other side of the debate neighbourhood planning is denounced as a post-political governance technology which does not enable communities to meaningfully challenge and shape government development plans for their neighbourhood. This paper will engage with these competing perspectives whilst exploring how the Greater Carpenters Neighbourhood Forum (GCNF) are using neighbourhood planning to try and protect housing on the Carpenters Estate, a council estate in Stratford, east London.

This paper begins by providing a brief introduction to community participation in planning in England. Subsequently, this paper discusses benefits and challenges communities face engaging with formal planning mechanisms before specifically exploring perspectives on the challenges communities face using neighbourhood planning to realise their development aspirations for their neighbourhood. Drawing from interviews, planning document analysis and ethnographic research carried out over the last year this paper then reflects on how neighbourhood planning is being deployed by the GCNF within a wider repertoire of community activities aimed at ensuring the protection and refurbishment of housing on the Carpenters Estate. Throughout this paper there will be reflection on whether participation in state planning processes represents a politically effective way for communities to shape development plans and outcomes for their neighbourhood. It will be argued that the political potential of neighbourhood planning for communities may be unlocked when it is pursued strategically in concert with a range of other actions aimed at challenging and shaping state development plans for a community's neighbourhood.