Underrepresented Neighbourhood Plan Areas in Middlesbrough

Final Report

January 2023

This is the final report that consolidates the *Underrepresented Neighbourhood Planning in Middlesbrough* research commissioned by Middlesbrough Council[1]. The research was carried out by Kingfisher Commons led by Dr Tessa Lynn, in association with Prof. Gavin Parker (University of Reading) and Dr Matthew Wargent (Cardiff University).

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[1] As part of the DLUHC bidding fund for local planning authorities in under-represented areas, see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/neighbourhood-planning-two-funds-to-support-greater-uptake/two-funds-to-support-the-uptake-of-neighbourhood-planning#fund-2-bidding-fund-for-local-planning-authorities-in-under-represented-areas

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Contents

Executive summary

The research was funded by Middlesbrough Council to explore factors inhibiting take-up of neighbourhood planning in their administrative area. It is already known that the take-up of Neighbourhood Planning (NP) in England has been skewed towards more rural and parished areas. The research reported here explored barriers and issues constraining neighbourhoods from participation in Middlesbrough. The research looked at six cases in Middlesbrough where communities had embarked on NP and others where this tool had not been taken-up. The work also involved focus group discussions about barriers and opportunities and reflects on ways forward in the light of both wider existing knowledge about neighbourhood planning dynamics and the evidence collected from Middlesbrough. In total, eleven wards were represented in this research.

Assumptions about prior knowledge and understanding of NP must be treated with caution. The key findings are that the neighbourhoods not participating involved in the research felt they had too little information and encouragement to participate in neighbourhood planning and there appeared a relatively undeveloped understanding of the scope and process of NP, as opposed to skills gaps within these communities. Much of what was uncovered in relation to take-up of NP in Middlesbrough resonates with existing known evidence, although fear of participation was a new feature not reported elsewhere.

The principle of Neighbourhood Planning Statements as a light touch approach seemed to be greeted positively but questions about their status were also asked. Those already involved were seeing value in NDPs and were also positive about offering peer-support.

The key conclusions and recommendations are set out across five themes of: information, resources, relations, shared learning, and leadership. Overall communications need to be improved, that the approach to support be more proactive and tailored to specific neighbourhood circumstances, while using existing social infrastructures.

1. The Brief

The project brief involved undertaking the following tasks:

a. To undertake research into the reasons why some areas of Middlesbrough are underrepresented by the neighbourhood planning process.
b. To undertake interviews/workshops with at least two existing relevant bodies (i.e., Neighbourhood Forums & Parish Councils) to establish:
     i. their reasons for undertaking neighbourhood planning;
     ii. how they heard about neighbourhood planning;
     iii. what were the barriers (if any) or negative/positive aspects of neighbourhood process; and,
     iv. what improvements would they like to see the Council undertake in making communities more aware of the neighbourhood planning process.
c. To undertake interviews/workshops with at least two community groups in the north of the town to establish:

     i. what level of awareness do they have about neighbourhood planning;
     ii. if they are aware of neighbourhood planning, have they considered in preparing a Neighbourhood Plan for their area;
     iii. what barriers (if any) perceived or otherwise are preventing them from undertaking neighbourhood planning; and,
     iv. what improvements would they like to see the Council undertake in making communities more aware of the neighbourhood planning process.
d. To identify any other areas of research that may be suitable in undertaking this study and apply them as appropriate (subject to agreement with the Council).

e. To draw upon the research undertaken to prepare a study report that details the work undertaken, provides conclusions about underrepresented areas, and makes recommendations on how the Council could increase neighbourhood planning activity within the local area.

The data collection work was undertaken between September and December 2022.

2. Context and existing knowledge

2.1 Middlesbrough

1. Middlesbrough has a population 143,900 (2021) set across 20 wards, which make-up the Council area. Middlesbrough is rated the 5th most deprived Local Authority area in England (2019). The local plan was adopted in 2008 and the emerging Plan has recently been halted but a housing plan was adopted in 2014. There are several forms of community action and schemes operating in Middlesbrough, including Big Local in North Ormesby.

2. While several neighbourhoods have taken up NP, there were 15 non-participating Neighbourhood Planning Wards in Middlesbrough (see Table 1) when the study commenced. The selection of interview candidates for WP2b and WP3b were drawn from these in liaison with Middlesbrough Council and bearing in mind the range of IMD (2019) ranking scores found across those non-participating 15 wards i.e., from North Ormesby (2nd / 7,219) as most deprived, to Acklam ranked at 5,215.

2.2. Known Barriers and Issues in Neighbourhood Planning

3. Since its inception in late 2010 and formal basis in the 2011 Localism Act (amended in the 2017 Act) and 2012 regulations, Neighbourhood Planning (NP) has prompted a substantial amount of attention in both planning practice and academia (Wargent and Parker, 2018). The recorded higher take-up in affluent and rural neighbourhoods (Defra, 2013; Vigar, 2013; Parker and Salter, 2016, 2017; Parker et al., 2020) has been accompanied with ongoing pessimism about the ability of NP to promote local regeneration in the most deprived areas, particularly those that lack market interest and development opportunities (Bailey and Pill, 2014). Conversely, there are examples of innovation as a positive outcome of NPs (Neighbourhood Planning), for example, interest in community-led initiatives such as community land trusts, self and custom-build projects, co-housing, and other models (Field and Layard, 2017), preserving local architecture and heritage and the production of design codes (Wargent, 2021), and linking consultation exercises to cultural events that explore issues of local representation in (Cowie, 2017). Individuals' motivations for participating in NP are various and complex (Cao and Sturzaker, 2022) but also inextricably linked to the socio-economic, cultural, and political make-up of the wider neighbourhood.

4. Despite alterations to support that have been made over the past few years, including improved funding for deprived areas (MHCLG, 2020), it is yet unknown how these changes have helped uptake in deprived areas. The above has led to calls for sustained funding for direct professional involvement in NP to maintain the policy's efficacy (McGuinness and Ludwig, 2017; Wargent and Parker, 2018). It is against this backdrop that take-up in urban

and deprived areas has been low, whilst overall take-up of the policy has also dropped (Parker et al., 2020). This report sets out both the range of issues identified thus far in existing research and findings from the primary research. We also highlight aspects that in our view merit further exploration in Middlesbrough.

2.3 Barriers

5. NPs in urban areas are often overlaid on **complex social fabrics** - instigating a plan can entrench local divisions and fuel existing conflicts, particularly in diverse neighbourhoods (Colomb, 2017)

6. For those able and willing to participate, the literature also points to significant **burdens** (Parker et al., 2015; Parker et al., 2020)

   - Key issues faced by volunteers included understanding **technical** issues, navigating the regulatory hoops, and learning 'planning speak' and writing policy (Parker et al., 2014).

   - There are questions for some areas regarding hidden **costs** (Inch, 2015), in terms of time inputs and financial costs beyond that allowed for in support grant allowances. These may be higher in some situations (larger neighbourhoods or those that need more support or resources to mobilise action / involvement).

   - Local plan status and **uncertainty** over implementation and **primacy of** plans (Parker and Wargent, 2017; Parker et al,; 2020)

7. Anticipation of the effort involved in NP may produce a **collective action problem** (Holman and Rydin, 2013)

8. **Local Authority support** has been widely recognised as crucial to successful NP, this has proven uneven and difficult at a time of stretched local government resources; LPAs are expected to 'do more with less' and resourcing issues have been exacerbated by contradictory priorities from central government (Ludwig and Ludwig, 2014; Salter 2018)

9. Research with a focus on Forums, produced a review of NP and highlighted a need for **training** - for officers and elected members, to hone the duty to support and to ensure better support for communities across the stages of NDP production, and to look at improving the funding arrangements for Forums (London Assembly, 2020)

10. Similar to the degree of support offered by Local Planning Authority officers, research has revealed variation in the attitude of local councillors, with negative responses ranging from disinterest to hostility (Sturzaker et al., 2022)

11. Concerns have also been expressed over the politicisation of **voluntary** effort (Parker et al., 2021) and the burdens involved in neighbourhood planning, both of which point to **ensuring appropriate support** - from both LPAs but also **consultants** and other advisors (Parker et al., 2015; 2017). Such issues are also linked to a lack of information, support, or

orientation (Bradley and Sparling, 2017), as well as motivation to participate when other priorities exist (Parker et al., 2020).

2.4 Issues with Neighbourhood Planning output

12. **Content** concerns that neighbourhood plans 'double up' on local plan policies rather than creating innovative and value-adding policy has been identified (Brookfield, 2017)

13. Research shows that some communities' plans reveal a **modest scope** and conservative positions in anticipation of legal challenge (Parker et al., 2015)

14. Similarly, some communities have found their **NPs limited by officers, consultants, and examiners** (Parker et al., 2016) acting to encourage 'norm enforcement' (Parker et al., 2017)

15. There is also an apparent issue with lack of **issue awareness** given some coverage of NPs (Lee et al., 2022)

16. Prior research has raised questions over NP's **representativeness** (Davoudi and Cowie, 2013), **legitimacy** (Gunn and Vigar, 2015), and possible 'double exclusion' where NP runs a risk of excluding already marginalised groups (Parker, 2008) - inclusionary methods are therefore important and to ensure NPs are a true reflection of community wishes (Wills, 2016)

17. Some evidence has indicated a promising concentration on 'socially inclusive' growth and sustainable housebuilding with a social purpose (Bradley and Sparling, 2017; Bradley et al 2017) but this remains limited; NDPs focussing on locally relevant locations, housing mix, occupancy, and design (Bailey, 2017). Others have considered that the take-up and focus of NDP activity is not delivering socially inclusive and environmentally just outcomes (e.g., Gunn and Vigar, 2015).

18. Evidence on the ability of NP to deliver new **housing** is particularly patchy (Lichfields, 2016; DCLG, 2016) and particularly hard to calculate, however, assorted studies have found new development to be better tailored to local needs (Parker et al., 2020; Salter et al., 2022)

2.4 Calls for change

19. Several reports have made recommendations relating to NP, notably the 2014 User Experience of NP research (Parker et al., 2014; Parker, et al., 2015) which identified recommendations including: clarity over the **duty to support** placed on LPAs; **simplification** of the process of designation stages (subsequently addressed), and clearer messaging regarding the future **role and status** of NDPs.

20. A further national study into Neighbourhood Planning impacts set out a longer list of aspects for attention (Parker et al., 2020), including *inter alia*:

- Support for NP – particularly funding and targeting that could be better directed, including to aid the relationship between the LPA and neighbourhoods
- Uneven uptake – lower take-up in urban deprived communities should be addressed and which could be linked directly to the levelling up agenda
- Scoping – triaging of local issues and help to recommend the appropriate tools and policies for communities (that may or may not include NP)
- Training for local planning officers and community leaders about NP process and key skills
- Relationship with Local Plans – clarity and guidance in terms of data, linkage, value-adding and sequencing
- Place-making and participation – to nestle NP activity into wider agendas and concerns and to build from pre-existing activity
- Knowledge exchange – particularly the sharing of experience and support across neighbourhoods and LPAs.

21. The relationship between the local plan and the production of a NDP is also recognised as bearing on time taken and likelihood of take-up, with better integration and cooperation required. Publica (2019), commissioned by NP. London, also focused on urban and deprived areas, they identified four areas for action, set across:

- **Process** - improvements to aid neighbourhoods in navigating the complexities of formal planning
- **Mainstreaming** or integration of NP activity – particularly with regards to local plans and to wider agendas
- **Funding** arrangements and alignment that recognises diverse needs
- **Support** improvements and the fostering of capacity in neighbourhoods (and local authorities.

22. The Locality report People Power (2018), called for an extension of 'the powers which can be designated to neighbourhood forums in non-parished areas' (2018: p.19). Taken together, existing research shows remarkable consistency across identified issues and barriers for participation in deprived areas and the solutions proposed. Much of the latter is directed toward levers controlled by central government. Discussion of reforms in **specific localities**, considering local context, is typically **overlooked** in the above literature.

2. Methodology

3.1 Reflections and Questions

23. The value of this research has been in interrogating known barriers and exploring issues *specific to Middlesbrough* and its constituent neighbourhoods and reflecting on reinforcement and divergence with widely known issues with Neighbourhood Planning. Much of the influential research on NP to date has been conducted on at a national level, seeking to discover widely applicable lessons regarding NP (see Parker et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2020). A particular research gap has existed concerning local and hyper-local dynamics – in other words, we have known less about how the relationship between local councils and individual neighbourhoods can affect uptake of NP, and how issues particular to 'left behind' areas cut across these dynamics. It has therefore been important is to understand the reasons for non-take-up expressed in the places under study i.e., in Middlesbrough.

24. Non-participating neighbourhoods can be separated into three categories: 1) neighbourhoods that have started a plan only to abort or pause the process; 2) neighbourhoods that have heard of NP but decided against initiating a Plan; and 3) neighbourhoods that have not heard of NP. The focus of this study is primarily the second group although group 1 and 3 are also of interest. The study also assumes that undertaking NP is beneficial for both participating communities and the wider Middlesbrough area.

25. The approach taken was to initially produce a literature review (Work Package 1; WP1) that provided context and informed the selection of questions to feed into the WP2 and WP3. An overview is provided in the following section. Work Package 2 (WP2) comprised of interviews that were designed to address the main scope of the project. WP2a set of interviews were held with existing participating Qualifying Bodies (QBs). WP2b set of interviews were held with people from non-participating wards. The non-participating wards were defined as those who are not currently formally engaged in the neighbourhood planning process. These interviews were conducted as each participant preferred and lasted for around 1 hour.

3.2 Research questions

26. The research focusses around several core questions explored in the context of Middlesbrough:

- How do past attempts at community engagement effect uptake of NP?
- Are other (current) community efforts or initiatives crowding out NP activity?
- Is NP primarily 'undersold' (i.e., communities are unaware of the potential benefits) or 'unattractive' (i.e., communities are aware of the process but deem it irrelevant or not worth the effort)?
  - Where do communities get their information from?

o What is it about NP that acts to deter or conversely not enthuse possible participants?

- Overall, how can the above be rectified (and by whom)?

27. Across the issues known in the wider literature is seems apparent that a central theme is likely to be 'what additional measures (e.g., funding, support) can be brokered via DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities), Locality and Middlesbrough council?' to foster NP activity productively.

3.3 Overview - Middlesbrough

28. Middlesbrough has a population 143,900 (2021) set across 20 wards which make-up the Council area. Middlesbrough is rated the 5th most deprived Local Authority area in England (2019). The local plan was adopted in 2008 and the emerging local plan has recently been halted, but a housing plan was adopted in 2014. There are several forms of community action and schemes operating in Middlesbrough, including *Big Local* in North Ormesby.

There are 15 non-participating NP wards in Middlesbrough (see Annex 1) and the selection of interview candidates for WP2b were drawn up in liaison with Middlesbrough Council and bearing in mind the range of IMD (2019) ranking scores found across those non-participating 15 wards (i.e., from North Ormesby (2 / 7,219) as most deprived, to Acklam at 5,215 / 7,219 ranked as least deprived of those 15). Contributing wards are marked in Table 1 (F/Y).

29. The eventual group of selected neighbourhoods were Newport (Gresham), Nunthorpe, Stainton and Thornton, Park, Linthorpe, Longlands and Beechwood. Overall, 11 of the neighbourhoods were represented in WP2 and 3 activities. WP1 desktop research has been incorporated into this final report.

3.4 Interview design scope for Work Package 2

31. The interviews were designed to address the main scope of the project and as such to:

- elicit reasons **why** some areas of Middlesbrough are underrepresented by the NP process - draw on prior research.

- cover issues relating both to **NP in its current formulation**, as well as **barriers latent** in the neighbourhoods themselves and wider institutional dispositions.

- identify opportunities to increase **awareness** of NP (and thence provide recommendations associated with any localised barriers identified).

- explore how **emerging policy ideas** (e.g., neighbourhood priority statements) could assist neighbourhoods to mobilise, formulate and engage with other actors involved in local planning.

Community interviews WP2a - participating Qualifying Bodies

32. For WP2a one set of interviews were held with existing participating QBs. The following were invited to participate Gresham Neighbourhood Forum, Marton West, Nunthorpe, Coulby Newham, and Stainton & Thornton (Table 1).

33. These interviews were conducted as each participant preferred and lasted for around 1 hour. We covered questions on:

    i. reasons for undertaking neighbourhood planning (motives, aims)

    ii. how they heard about NP (and wider information)

    iii. how neighbourhoods assessed whether to embark on NP (i.e., what factors influenced them)

    iv. what were the barriers (if any) or negative/positive aspects of NP process (difficulties, lessons for other Middlesbrough neighbourhoods)

    v. what support was drawn upon and how effective it was (inc. improvement)

    vi. what improvements would they like to see to make communities more aware of neighbourhood planning (and enabled to embark on NP)

    vii. Utility of alternatives, such as emerging Neighbourhood Priority Statements.

Community interviews WP2b - non-participating neighbourhoods / wards

34. For WP2b one set of interviews were held with people from non-participating wards. People from the following were invited to participate: Ayresome, North Ormesby, Brambles & Thorntree, Berwick Hills & Pallister, Park End & Beckfield, Longlands & Beechwood, Linthorpe and Park (Table 1). Invitations to participate were sent to ward councillors, community councillors and people associated with third sector organisations.

35. The issues explored in WP2b were:

    i. what level of awareness they have about neighbourhood planning

    ii. *if* they are aware, have they considered preparing a NP for their area (and what factors influenced them)

    iii. what barriers (if any) perceived or otherwise, are preventing them from undertaking NP

    iv. what improvements would they like to see the DLUHC / the local authority undertake in increasing awareness of NP

    v. what other changes or support could induce them to undertake a NP or Neighbourhood Priority Statement or both.

35. The above themes were probed with follow-up questions relating to reasons for existing neighbourhood barriers, with NP design and with the wider environment (see annex 3 for interview questions).

3.5 Focus group design and scope for Work Package 3

36. The focus groups were held with representatives from neighbourhoods who were already participating (WP3a) and with community councillors, a ward councillor and local resident from neighbourhoods not currently engaged in NP activity (WP3b). The sessions were organised around themes derived from existing knowledge of NP and from the WP2 interviews (and see annex 4 for focus group themes).

3. Case studies

A. Participating neighbourhoods

4.1 Newport (Gresham Neighbourhood Area)

Note: The community interviewee was a resident of Gresham and a key leader in the community who plays an active role in a local charity and indicated as 'G1'.

37. The Newport Ward is identified as North ward area and was ranked IMD: 26th most deprived (see table 1) with a population of 11,839. Located in Newport Ward, Gresham NF has been established since 18 February 2019, after the required 21 signatures to create the Qualifying Body (the neighbourhood Forum) was achieved, with some partner agencies on board. It was garnered from the interview that there is a strong local identity. The Newport ward is known locally as Gresham (a review of the wards saw Gresham being merged with another area to bring the population up). Yet, for the neighbourhood plan, "it made sense to keep it to the Gresham area rather than the Newport ward, because the Gresham area is quite closely defined. It's our terraced housing and the other Ward isn't … it's as the residents wanted it" (G1).

38. Streets Ahead, a charity that was originally funded by the Single Regeneration Budget, and now funded by the Big Lottery, provides significant support to the local community including a drop-in centre for residents and this organisation chairs the Neighbourhood Forum. Streets Ahead was described by the resident interviewed as a charity that hosts various events in the local community and attempts anything that needs doing in the town, as well as helping people with homelessness and addictions. They also share a 6-weekly newsletter with the residents. As such, Streets Ahead performs a key role in the life of the community. The local authority view was that the local community just want 'something' to happen, highlighting that for example, along Parliament Street, the retail units are very popular and vibrant but are limited in their offer. So, engaging in planning appears a means of addressing the performance of their 'high street.'

39. It was felt by the local authority that the NF is very enthusiastic about NP but considered that getting started and the lack of skills are the issue. Progress on their NP has been slow and a point about progress of the NF being stifled due to other local priorities and pressures was made too; this was allegedly due, as the respondent expressed that in 2018 "neighbourhood tensions [had] became really bad, so we had to shelve everything ... and then COVID-19 struck" (G1). One of the barriers with engaging the local community is that "tenants don't really have anything that actually holds them to the area," and because it is seen as a very transient population, "there's a complete lack of, of ownership" (G1). This was due to people who rent and are more transient due to the high private rental market. Together, this speaks to a set of challenging factors.

40. Also, residents of Gresham question whether their landlord will be able to identify that they have participated in the neighbourhood planning process, as they are concerned about security in their accommodation if they express their concerns about development in the area. Fear of personal ramifications such has this have thus far been overlooked in NP research; indicating an implicit assumption of likely NP participants are secure (regarding housing tenure, financial status etc.) and confident in civic / professional environments (e.g., confident of personal rights, safeguarding personal information, wider feelings of precarity). In responding to the questions about "what's in NP for me?" concern was expressed not to over promise to residents, to be "clear and transparent about what is going to happen, what the level of their input will be, and what the level of council response will be" (G1).

41. Streets-Ahead have been working in the community since 2006 and have "built up trust" with the community. The respondent expressed that they "wouldn't want to lose it over something like the planning statement" (G1). They believe that there is a link between community activity and interest in neighbourhood planning:

    "… because we tend to find that, whatever we do, whatever we promote, it's the usual suspects that attend… we've got a very good audience. And we picked up most of them during COVID because we [streets ahead office] had to stay open and it was then that we built up a good relationship with people through that" (G1).

42. The main approach to engaging the community was described as "via stealth … as we do a lot of most things, most consultations, and we've got several Christmas activities coming up." Furthermore, trust is a crucial factor in the willingness of residents to engage in community activities:

    "it's taken a long time for us to actually build up that level of trust… If the residents don't know you, or trust you, you're not going to get anywhere with them. You know, they'll say hello to you, but they won't share the details of what is going on and that they need support" (G1).

43. This nuances existing research that suggests trust is a prerequisite to up-take and successful participation: here, the fear of losing trust, built up over time, made community leaders cautious of risking carefully curated relationships.

44. Gresham undergone a lengthy period of notable change with large scale clearances of terraced housing and an increase in the private rented sector (PRS). The clearing of houses in the area (c2006) has meant that "rather than it being an up-and-coming thing for the area, it became a bit of a blight… we still haven't got any houses built on that site" (G1). This has affected attitudes as explained below.

45. Due to the high private rental market, the area is more transient and diverse in nature. As long-established community networks have ceased to exist, there is an atmosphere of

physical and social decline within the area, due to the clearances and people moving out of the area. The interviewee described that the development is not considered as a secure investment or get a good return on investment. They stated that owner occupier rates dropped because mortgages were not available because of the uncertainty on the life expectancy of the homes.

46. There is currently a drive, by the NF, to engage residents to identify how the new build could integrate with the existing properties, it was suggested that a sensory pathway running through the new development as a shortcut through to the town centre would be well received, however "everybody thinks there's a big wall going up" (G1). The respondent commented that they share with the local community that "just because you live in Gresham doesn't mean to say you have to put up with this" (G1), referring to the lack of investment in the clearances and the social decline in the area. The respondent indicated that engagement with the community requires overcoming misconceptions about the new development, whilst at the same time not being well informed themselves about the upcoming plans for the area. This presents challenges in maintaining and developing further trust with the community as there was a concern raised about being as transparent as possible.

47. The Forum is part of the Simplified Neighbourhood Planning pilot, run via Middlesbrough Council using DLUHC pilot funding. They about to begin work on a Neighbourhood Priority Statement (NPS). When asked if a NP would help address neighbourhood priorities, the respondent stated:

"No, because it will get done and forgotten about; that'd be the residents view of it. That it's a document that's done and put up on a shelf and gathers dust. Whereas the neighbourhood statement, being a much shorter document allows us to work with residents to use as a checklist almost where a neighbourhood plan doesn't do that. Because it's got the word priorities in it. And I think residents will have a more positive reaction to NPS than NP" (G1).

48. This suggests that the NPS could negate the collective action problem by reducing upfront 'costs' for the community. The interviewee was not sure if the NPS would lead to a NP: "I don't know. It depends on what we get back from residents after this. I'm not sure, I think we would need to wait and see some movement on the new build. And then that might be the catalyst to actually consider a neighbourhood plan."

49. Despite the initial claims from the community that the NP would not lead to change in the area, the NF promote that NP is "providing them with an opportunity to have their voice heard" (G1). They attempt to mediate the responses that the community make about the council and respond with the tone that "at least the council have to take into account the community's views when setting up their plans for what's going to happen. And that becomes quite the thing that people are interested in," to have their voice heard via

formal and institutional routes. This echoes the extant research whereby guaranteed influence is a primary motivation for communities. Middlesbrough reflects the national picture however concerning knowledge of NP: "NP is certainly undersold until we mention it. They [the wider community] haven't got a clue what it is."

50. It was recognised that NP is an opportunity to focus on a holistic view of community development as opposed to it just being about preventing development: "to have them for more affluent areas [NDPs] have certainly been about stopping development, rather than improving your area for the good of the community." This may indicate that 'left behind' neighbourhoods, such as Newport, are more amenable to change, and may view new development as positive, if it brings socio-economic benefit to the community and therefore is conceived as improving the area.

51. When asked what influences uptake of NP in Middlesbrough, the view expressed was that: "NP is a flipping nightmare and [even] partners at Newcastle University take some time to resolve problems. Not everybody has a planning degree and there are also language barriers" (G1). This suggests that the source of support, and the term of its delivery is important to foster productive relations with communities.

52. Other key challenges in the area were identified as property owners not keeping up the houses to a good standard (regulatory breaches), the impact of HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) and related issues of cleanliness, and fly-tipping. It was felt that "we need to get a younger population, seeing Gresham as a place they want to live for 5-10 years." Establishing and communicating what local issues can be ameliorated through NP would therefore be of interest to prospective NP communities. However, the focus of residents is "survival" now, with "the cost of living and whether to eat or heat was more of a concern, not even thinking weeks ahead but about tomorrow," therefore it can be a challenge to encourage dialogue about longer term thinking and neighbourhood planning. This relates to wider findings reported elsewhere about commitment to open-ended or intangible activity when other pressing needs exist.

53. It may appear that Gresham could be used as an example to build from as NP moves forward in Middlesbrough, "if Gresham can do it then anyone can do it" was a message received and if people from Gresham are talking to others about it there may be some traction, although given the lack of substantive progress care and attention will be required if this is to be credible.

Emerging Recommendations (by neighbourhood)

54. The following ideas and suggestions were raised by the participant to increase awareness and acceptance or feasibility of NP in the Middlesbrough context.

a. *Awareness raising* - Firstly, a greater emphasis on raising awareness of NP remains important; this should be supplemented by records of outreach activity (community leaders, NP regulations, LPA officers etc. Who all experience turnover, so a dashboard to keep up-to-date records will aid institutional memory. This could involve creating clear single points of contact to ensure consistent communication and to build trust.

b. *Community Forums* - the question of revitalising community forums more widely across Middlesbrough was considered a positive move, such fora could then act as the basis or initial focal point for NP activity. This is a recommendation which must tie well to foster better relations between the community and Council. It was noted that such arrangements used to be held bi-monthly with a mix of residents and officers from the local authority. This was seen as having been a productive activity in building relationships.

c. *Memoranda of Understanding* (MoU) – these are not a new idea and were promoted in the 2014 Report on NP. Such MoU between NF and LPA may be useful in delineating responsibility for future action and retaining trust built up by Streets Ahead programme.

d. *Shared learning* – a wider recommendation relates to the question of learning and capacity that could be enhanced through access to clear case studies, and example policies via NP networks - such resources can act to inspire and motivate in demonstrating the scope and influence of successful NDPs.

55. A final suggestion that we include speaks to *wider awareness* of NP and is clearly not in the remit of any given local authority; it was suggested that popular examples in the media could assist in mainstreaming NP "get it on Albert Square or Coronation Street or Hollyoaks! Somewhere people would actually see it."

4.2 Nunthorpe

Note: The interviewee for Nunthorpe was a local councillor of Nunthorpe, indicated as 'N1.' Representation from the parish council was made within the focus group A, and an interview was carried out with a Redcar and Cleveland Council officer indicated as 'N2'[2].

56. Nunthorpe is a Southern ward in the Middlesbrough district, it is Parished and is ranked 6,778 according to the IMD and has a population of 4,907. The Nunthorpe Neighbourhood Area incorporates parished and unparished areas of Nunthorpe and extends into Redcar and Cleveland. So far this is the only interest in NP within Redcar and Cleveland.

57. The Nunthorpe Neighbourhood Area was designated by Middlesbrough Council and Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council in September 2022. The area is considered as the

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[2] There was some observable disparity if not conflict between the parish council (participants in the focus group) and the local councillor in interview.

last green space between Middlesborough and Redcar and Cleveland. Nunthorpe has recently seen several sites either allocated or developed for housing, and this has raised tensions between residents, Parish Council and Middlesbrough Council.

58. Given the cross-boundary issue there was a significant amount of legal assistance given to the local authorities and Parish Council, to establish whether the application complied with the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations, and which may have caused the Parish Council to have additional frustration with the two Councils involved. Additionally, Redcar and Cleveland Cllrs. raised concerns about the Neighbourhood Area application because part of the area applied for overlapped with that of another parish council, Guisborough, within the Redcar and Cleveland area. The parish council there did not want to pursue a joint NP and therefore that piece of land was removed. Guisborough Parish Council were initially unaware of what NP would mean for their area. However, the land included within the Redcar and Cleveland boundary is considered as a natural boundary due to shared facilities and a retail centre that is in the Redcar and Cleveland side. It was suggested that there are no distinctive physical or community differences between the Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland parts on Nunthorpe, other than the Middlesbrough side is more engaged because those on the Redcar and Cleveland side have not shown "a strong interest" (N2).

59. An officer at Redcar and Cleveland expressed that their involvement was minimal because the parish council is located within the Middlesbrough boundary. This involved ensuring that the right paperwork and decision-making processes are in place and leave it to Middlesbrough Council to take the lead. There have been other cross-boundary Neighbourhood Areas designated, however what makes the case in Nunthorpe unique is that there is not a parish council in the Redcar and Cleveland side, therefore "it doesn't have the same representation that Middlesbrough side does" (N2). As the NP process progresses, Redcar and Cleveland would be concerned to ensure that "it is not all just biased towards the parish council" (N2).

60. As with Newport, one of the challenges of engaging the community was to get beyond the same faces attending the community groups. There is about 20 people that participated at the beginning of the process and are aware but that is "generous," (N1), the main driving force is about five or six people. The challenges of wider community engagement are well-established in the literature; however, it is not unusual for an NDP to be driven by even one or two individuals, suggesting this should not be a barrier for Nunthorpe. There the participant expressed that there is some confusion about different sub-groups forming and how they relate to neighbourhood planning – e.g. Our Greenways, whereas the Parish Council participants identify this as a way of 'hooking' people into something that is relatable to them and then relate to NP. The interviewee noted that getting people "interested in anything other than their own lives was difficult" (N1).

61. In attempts to engage beyond the 'usual' participants, a variety of community activities are facilitated, as they are important in raising interest in neighbourhood planning and wider events in the community:

> "They are not related to anything political… such as a family fun day, where people could literally turn up, didn't cost them anything, they could get the kids entertained for hours" (N1).

62. Stalls present at these activities raise awareness of NP, however trying to make it not "boring" was considered as being key to the success in engaging. Communicating the relevance of planning issues to prosperous and even enjoyable community life may therefore be important to note.

63. Public meetings were considered by the respondent to "trigger active and proactive responses from the council" (N1) who have, from experience attended a public meeting recommending a neighbourhood plan and was also considered as an effective way to capture "names of volunteers who want to get involved" (N1). It was considered that this is a successful way of directly getting a response from the council, otherwise it is considered as challenging to get hold of information or potentially support from the Council;

> "you've got more chance of getting blood out of a stone because the officers themselves are too stretched, it's too much work for them and they haven't got time for it" (N1).

64. This highlights the perception that the council are not equipped to handle supporting neighbourhood planning activity across Middlesbrough and is regarded as a potential reason other areas are not pursuing it. The participant described that the people of Acklam had mobilised in response to a planning application that has received 5,000 objections and about a 100 core of people who wanted to do something. They had been interested in neighbourhood planning but after attending a meeting with Nunthorpe Parish Council they have potentially lost interest "because they've seen how nonstop bureaucratic it has been…" (N1). It was felt that at this stage it is not helpful for people to visit to ask for advice because they are at an early stage and have experienced many hurdles associated with the Neighbourhood Area designation.

65. Finally, the respondent highlighted a community feeling of being done to and presented an example that 'Nunthorpe 19' – this refers to 19 pledges for Nunthorpe[3], many of which are associated with development. The respondent expressed that there was "no prior engagement, just a press release put out by the mayor," and it was voiced that "…they

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[3] See: extension://elhekieabhbkpmcefcoobjddigjcaadp/https://nunthorpepc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Nunthorpe-19-Commitments-1.-Housebuilding-on-Nunthorpe-Grange-will-be-limited-to-a-maximum-of-250-houses.-2.-A-proportion-of-the-housing-at-Nunthorpe-Grange-will-be-bung.pdf

are missing the point, they're focusing on keeping to those pledges as opposed to what residents want." It was considered that the NP is a potential way of doing this.

Emerging Recommendations (by neighbourhood)

a. *Approach* - Community engagement is all about "the way you present the information and what it means to people." It was seen as important that information be shared in a digestible and easy format. Improving communications with interested groups and bringing information to people, not expecting them to come to sessions dedicated to NP. Placing information our where the nodes are and where there is going to be development considered in the future. Then follow up with an online briefing.

b. *Accessibility* – there were several points here including make it easier to navigate the LA website, about ensuring a dedicated point of contact at the Council. Furthermore, that greater clarity over the distinct types of plans and what they do/ mean to people is needed as it was argued that people lack understanding of what different plans and initiatives are.

c. *Good practice / shared learning* – this was recognised as useful to present good examples to demonstrate why NP may be worth the effort. This includes offering written briefings to people that are interested was considered to be a good step forward in developing understanding of the possibilities of NP.

d. *Leadership* – having key people leading the plan is important, however it was recognised that finding people to mobilise the diverse needs of the community was challenging and that engagement with the residents has dropped, possibly because the energy and presence in the wider community needs revitalising. It was noted that there was a previous community member, [Bob Mullen] that was often described as a key mobiliser in the community and was a mediator that navigated local conflict and 'politics.'

4.3 Stainton and Thornton

Note: There were two participants in this interview, one was from the parish council and another from the community council, one was a resident of Stainton, the other a resident of Thornton. They are both indicated as 'ST1.'

66. Stainton and Thornton Ranked is a ward located in the South of Middlesbrough, ranked as 1,532 on the IMD and with a population of 2,609. The area is formed of two villages with development land around it. The area has an active parish council and community council, with the village hall "always booked" with classes and clubs, and volunteers who maintain the local green spaces. The Stainton and Thornton Neighbourhood Plan was adopted on the 25th of May 2022 and is seen a more comprehensive type of NP covering

numerous policy concerns. The Plan is available on the Council's website to download [here](#).

67. In the early 1980s Stainton had a stock of around 500-550 dwellings, the Rose Cottage development recently added 376 dwellings and a further site, Hemlington Grange, has been given permission for between c2000 dwellings. The respondent clarified that the area has "55% of all development planned, available to the council… And that is why we wanted the neighbourhood plan; to make sure that the area didn't develop willy nilly" (ST1). Therefore, the core motivations for developing a NDP were to have greater input into how the expansion of the villages progressed:

> "We want to control the building so that we least we have a say in it, so they don't build everywhere we turn into a suburb of Ingleby Barwick, which is where we're heading" (ST1).

68. In the beginning, Marton West went to their first meeting and gave them quite a bit of help. Also, like Nunthorpe, Stainton and Thornton working group began with about 20 volunteers, who "did care about the community, and they did care about what was going to happen," but towards the end it was more like 5-6 people that provided the most input:

> "I think it was the desire of the of the hardcore group of people to make sure that it that it worked. I mean, everybody felt strongly about it" (ST1).

69. It was also considered that they were successful because the community council and parish council fully backed it. Updates to the wider community were made regularly via the community council, and this was also an avenue to gather feedback from the residents.

70. The working group received support from council officers who had attended meetings and assisted with the phrasing of policies into "planning speak" (ST1). Got grant, researched other plans. They stated that they "basically took Martin West neighbourhood plan and turned it into ours" (ST1). Locality were regarded as providing a great deal of help, specifically the office based in Newcastle.

71. The respondents implied that a core motivation to pursue NP is to 'preserve' something. When reflecting on why the northern parts of Middlesbrough might not be pursuing NP at this stage, the respondents questioned:

> "If you went into say, Gresham, or central Middlesbrough, I'm not quite sure what you would want to preserve?" (ST1).

72. However, they also considered that the redevelopment of the areas that had been cleared would be a core motivation, and in responding to why more areas in the north aren't pursuing NP, they stated:

> "The answer is, is very, very simple. I mean, what they want are decent houses of a size that is acceptable. We're talking now in terms of social rented

accommodation. And there just isn't the money available to develop the areas that can be developed in the north to get a decent return" (ST1).

73. This was expanded upon, and the view expressed that:

"If you have knocked 5000 houses down on a space of 10 acres, you are not going to be able to build 5000 houses to replace them to modern standards. And likewise, you are also not going to get the return on investment to build the type of properties or housing that is currently needed" (ST1).

74. Therefore, there was a question about whether the local people would want to go to the efforts of a NP if there was not the possibility of the market meeting their requirements for housing.

75. When asked if the respondents would recommend NP to others in Middlesbrough, they expressed that it is worth pursuing to ensure that the housing needs of the community are considered in new developments:

"yes, I would purely and simply because the type of housing that developers want to build is not necessarily what the local community actually want. The classic example is that in our neighbourhood plan, we surveyed the residents, obviously Stainton as is a lot of older people... they want bigger bungalows" (ST1).

76. Furthermore, they felt accomplished upon completion of the NDP; "it's a complicated thing that what we have achieved, I think it will stand the test of time" (ST1). However, they already "don't feel like completely accomplished what they wanted with the neighbourhood plan because there isn't even a community centre in the new development" (ST1).

Emerging Recommendations (by neighbourhood)

a. *Communications* - Given communications problems were cited (with low turnout to respond to consultations) - Creating materials to support in Plain English and be considerate of the language barriers that may be present given there is "such a terrific cultural diversity in the centre of Middlesbrough whether it be Asian, East, Eastern European, you know... go where they are, church, mosque etc.

b. *Support materials* - Nuancing materials for specific neighbourhoods – for example to have a pre-prepared template for the type of area in mind.

c. *Leadership* – this centred on the view that elected councillors should be more involved - because 'they should be representing their wards;' "you would need community leaders, you would need groups of people who work."

    B.   Non-participating neighbourhoods

4.4 Park Ward ('NP interested')

Note: The respondent is a local ward councillor and resident, they are identified as 'P1' below.

77. Park is identified as a ward in the North of the district, ranked on the IMD at 1,807 with a population of 9,787. Linthorpe Ward have considered preparing a joint Neighbourhood Plan with a part of the adjoining Park Ward. The extent of any proposed Neighbourhood Area is not clear yet, and it could be that Park Ward may even decide to prepare their own Neighbourhood Plan. The two wards tend to be known together and sometimes labelled locally as 'leafy Linthorpe.' There is evidence of several types of community activity around several churches and schools in the ward. Linthorpe cemetery is the biggest area of woodland in the town and Albert Park, within Park Ward, is the biggest park in the town.

78. A key motivator in considering NP is that past development has created bad feeling:

> "We think we need a NP in the area, because so much is being done that the community don't like" (P1).

79. Examples were cited of the General Hospital being demolished and a housing development built there, with the loss of many trees. It was considered that not only influence on development being a motivator but also the natural environment:

> "That's the sort of things that people object to because we are very proud of our trees in this area" (P1).

80. Other examples presented were a local football ground, arts college, and a children's home were demolished, including the loss of trees on those sites were lost and it was claimed that the quality of the housing built on some of those sites is not good. It was also expressed that the local plan designated the art college for house building but because the local plan was stopped it has caused significant problems and led to an unneeded supermarket being built. They stated that a few planning appeals have been lost because of not having an up-to-date plan in place. Therefore, there is a motivation to pursue NP, not only to protect their green spaces, the trees in the locality but also to have a say in the way future demolitions and new developments take place.

81. The respondent highlighted that there is a group of local people mobilising as they "want to do something, they're not quite sure what but they want to do something to stop a lot of what's happening. So that you know that there wouldn't be a barrier" (P1), in terms of getting community momentum to create an NDP. This group started forming since there was an application to convert a house into an HMO, it was a key component in a trigger in the community as they turned up to object at the planning committee and formed a group from that. However, what was considered as the biggest barrier to people participating in NP was that Middlesbrough Council have "been punished so much by this government, that we lack resources. And we are finding it hard to do things that we would normally be able to do, but everybody will be keen to get involved" (P1). They realized that NP might be a tool they can use when talking with planning officers about the wants and needs of the community.

82. Key challenges in the area, and hence motivators to pursue NP, were seen as maintaining the *conservation areas and developments* that are not in keeping, specifically people purchasing homes in conservation areas and wanting to change windows to PVC etc. The impact of *HMOs* was also cited as a problem with there being no due diligence or reference checks made by local property owners to monitor the types of people that move in. This is considered as a cause of drug activity and anti-social behaviour. Property owner selective licensing, which is utilised in other areas of Middlesbrough is seen as a resolution. There is a motivation to prevent the "local community from being changed by local landlords" (N1). They want to maintain the feeling of it being "a community for families" (N1).

83. The local community is requesting greater transparency about the local people in administration that are property owners and concerned about how this influences decision making. Finally, parking is seen as a local issue as many homes were not built with parking provision in the past and therefore little or no off-road parking, causing traffic issues.

Emerging Recommendations (neighbourhood)

   a. There were two main points here, both about information and engagement – it was felt that sessions for people to attend, "where they could find out what it's about" could improve appetite for NP. The second element was to produce a locally specific briefing paper on neighbourhood planning.
   b. Greater transparency about land ownership of those in administration and how that affects decision making. Information sheets designed for urban areas to highlight the extent to which NP can influence the following topics were cited in respect of this point: HMOs; Parking; Takeaway food outlets; Landlord licensing; Site clearance/Demolitions.

4.5 Linthorpe ('NP interested')

Note: The respondent is a local ward councillor and resident that volunteers in the local community, they are identified as 'L1' below.

84. Linthorpe is a North Ward which has been described as a "community-centric" neighbourhood where neighbourly relations are high and community activity is present, including voluntary planting schemes where members of the community volunteer to maintain small green spaces and planters. It is ranked as IMD: 2,532 on the IMD. The Linthorpe Ward Councillor expressed an interest in pursuing a NP for the area, including part of Park Ward (part of Park Ward to include Linthorpe village local retail centre). Linthorpe is quite a mixed Ward, with affluent and not so affluent areas and consists of some large Victorian houses, dating from the 1930's to more recent housing developments. Linthorpe was developed to house white-collar clerical/professionals

when the docks were active. The Ward is more diverse culturally and economically, and this has contributed to the area. One of the issues cited by the Ward Cllr. for wanting to prepare a NP has been the proliferation of take-away outlets within the area, and in particular number of outlets within Linthorpe Village local retail centre and those along Roman Road.

85. Neighbourhood concerns expressed were about protecting the Linthorpe Conservation Area, reducing the number of HMO's and takeaways, and parking. However, it was considered that "there is very little that a neighbourhood plan could cover" (L1) in their area due to there being little space for development to take place. They stated that "as far as I am aware" a neighbourhood plan would not be able to cover the things that they would like to influence through the planning system, and specifically highlighted that they would not be able to reduce the number of HMO's and takeaways and to encourage an increase in the number of independent shops. This highlights that there is a misunderstanding over what NPs can achieve and a need for greater clarity about what they can influence.

86. The respondent stated that they "don't know as much as I would like" about neighbourhood planning. They had spoken with Council officers but felt that they:
    "W[ere] not given a good understanding of what it could affect… we do not know
    enough about them. And when you try to do research online, there is not that
    much. Unless you have a planning background, it is not easy to understand. And I
    do not have a planning background."

87. Furthermore, "I am not on the planning committee," they expressed that this is because of not having that understanding of planning. They acknowledged the lack of a local plan that does not limit the number HMO's is the main problem now, which was considered "obviously would be a preference" over and above what a NP could achieve, and also that:
    "I think what would be helpful is if neighbourhood plans weren't actually needed,
    and we had strong local plans, that would be absolutely brilliant, because that's
    what the councils are supposed to be doing anyway."

88. Instead, they highlighted that greater efforts to make sure that "everybody is able to have their say" should be a priority, specifically to "make sure community groups are really well engaged with the process and that they are being heard too" (L1). They expand on this further:
    "I think engaging, like I said, about engaging groups, not just individuals would be
    very helpful. And talking to schools, because then you can engage parents, it's
    much easier for schools already have that relationship with parents, the council
    does not do that. So, I think using the relationships that other organisations have
    with the public is the best way to build new relationships with those people."

89. Interviewees reflected on NPS as being something that needs to be adaptable over time:

"If you're going to do statements, it would have to be something that could be amended or adjusted, again, very easily for the community. But when changes happen, you can take it out of the statement, because you know, it's being dealt with, on a bigger level anyway" (L1).

90. Finally, the felt that there is a lot of time to pull together a plan and was concerned that it would be too much of an issue with planning officers' time and that "their ability to produce neighbourhood plans is going to be significantly reduced as well." Again, raising awareness of what support the council can provide to these groups will do well to manage perceptions about what capacity is available to guide groups through the process and respond to any queries.

Emerging Recommendations (neighbourhood)

a. *Information* - In common with other cases the question of information was raised "having information that will be easy for people to digest and understand to what effects a neighbourhood plan could have in the local area would be extremely helpful and make it easier for communities to decide if they want one or not." Furthermore, they highlighted that being in a vulnerable area where there "isn't a high level of people who have internet access who have laptops, people have an Android phone, that might be their only internet access. You cannot do a lot of research on a mobile phone." Another factor raised was sharing information about what capacity the council must support groups through the process.

b. *Relationships* – again the question of community and LA relations were voiced and a desire for "each ward would have a Planning Officer assigned so that people would know who to go to with any issue with any issue relating to planning that would include local plans, it would also give those particular officers the opportunity to develop a very in-depth knowledge of that particular local area."

4.6 Longlands and Beechwood

Note: The respondent was a local resident that works for a charity that serves the northern wards of Middlesbrough, they are identified as 'LB1' below.

91. Ranked at 98th of 7219 on the IMD and with a population 10,593, Longlands and Beechwood is identified as a Ward in the North of the district. The Ward includes Beechwood, Longlands, and Grove Hill housing estates. There has been significant residential development within the area, which includes parts of Longlands and Grove Hill. The Ward has a good mix of social and owner-occupied type housing, with Beechwood and Grove Hill areas providing most of the social housing within the Ward. The Beechwood and Longlands area has been a focus of redevelopment. Grove Hill has been

the subject of a regeneration clearance programme to deliver up to 700 new homes. Due to the financial downturn and reduction in public funding, this replacement housing has progressed slowly. This has resulted in parts of Grove Hill (where clearances have occurred) left vacant for several years.

92. There is a strong community network within the Ward, and this is represented by the Ward Cllrs. The respondent was vaguely aware of neighbourhood planning and has resided in the area most of their life. They expressed: "I like it because it is easy to get to town, not got the challenges that town has. Easy to get to the bus station" (LB1).

93. When reflecting on housing in the area, they stated that you "have to earn a good wage to buy, and properties don't often come up to rent." Although they had not an awareness of NP, they talked in detail about key neighbourhood issues. Namely, there is considered to be a significant issue with transport routes to connect people with surrounding areas, specifically they refer to having new families relocate to the area, for example to the University and are restricted in terms of accessing the natural areas surrounding Middlesbrough: "there's beaches, hills etc. but because people haven't got cars, they cannot access them" (LB1). Furthermore, a significant concern was that there are "No playgrounds to take children to, and don't feel safe going to Albert Park in Park ward. The parks further in town don't feel safe." Therefore, the question of safe green spaces is considered as a key local priority - although of course such matters tend to fall beyond the narrower remit of land use planning. The interviewee described how the:

"nicer wards 'hug' the more deprived wards" (LB1) and the areas of knocked down housing, "do not feel safe to go to. I only go there if I have another adult with me" (LB1).

94. It was argued that "people tend to be quite negative [about the council], and I suppose it does feel like a disconnect between council and people... this is representative by how many independent people there are – Labour haven't done what they have said, but independent people haven't been as cohesive with officers. Labour within the council officers" (LB1).

95. Overall, there was a concern that the area is "not a good place to live" and that they are "quite worried about what is going to happen to the children and families that need help. Worried about criminality, safety, children's services... Mental health for the whole area" (LB1). To raise awareness of NP, they felt that the use of billboards around the area, some electronic now, could be useful. However, they expressed the view that "I think most people do not get involved until there is a real issue affecting them" (LB1). They suggested that it is a case of work with the representatives of the areas and empower local leaders to offer incentives (vouchers) to participate. They expressed that the church that they attend is in the centre of Gresham, and "to my knowledge nobody has contacted the church" about the NP activity locally there.

96. To revitalise the centre of Middlesbrough from being "dead," they felt that creating a safe space for evening activities and shopping, like modelled abroad" would be beneficial. However, they do not go to the centre in the evening "because lots of drunk people are about" (LB1).

Emerging Recommendations (neighbourhood)

a. *Dissemination of information* – To provide key information to key community leaders, who have a network across Middlesbrough and for example display relatable information on billboards.

b. *Incentives* – To offer incentives to increase participation in neighbourhood planning activity, vouchers were suggested.

5. Focus groups

The focus group data has been organised by theme below and to allow the voices of participants to been seen clearly. The participants have not been labelled to maintain anonymity (see annex 4 for Focus group themes).

5.1 WP3a: Focus group A – Participating wards

97. The participating ward focus group was held on the 7th December 2022 with five people from Marton West; Stainton and Thornton; North Ormesby; and Nunthorpe. The latter is at an early stage of the NP process, having recently established a neighbourhood area, the others have a published NDP. Marton West has reviewed the 2016 Neighbourhood Plan which has been adopted.

98. A discussion was held about the **motivations** to pursue a neighbourhood plan. Having a greater say in the future developments in the area was regarded as a key motivator:

> "...trying to exercise some control over what happens in the in the area, and really more than anything to bring people together to try and do what most people want in the area."

99. Specific infrastructural improvements were also considered important to improve the local area, including a new GP surgery and community centre, school expansion and improvements to local roads. The legal influence of NP was important to reinforce neighbourhoods having a greater say. It was discussed that policies can be written into neighbourhood plans and used as a material planning consideration, and this meant that it gave more power to their voice. It was felt that it is like wearing "half a suit of armour into planning committee, as opposed to going in there naked." Furthermore, with "neighbourhood planning, you've got more laws, and a bit more strength behind what you what you're saying." Another stated that "you can have your say on what that development should look like" and questioned "if you don't do a neighbourhood plan what kind of say do you have?" highlighting that there are very few avenues to have your voice heard about planning matters and upcoming development. It was also raised that neighbourhood plans can affect other things such as advertising boards and where they are located. The neighbourhood plan policy has been used to approach people about change and "it actually works." The local councillor said that they had influenced people that had breached rules on advertising and where there was a conflict with the NDP.

100.   It is felt that through neighbourhood planning, there can be more longer-term thinking applied to the future of the area, as "currently it feels like a short-term approach is made to planning, and developers want to build on greenfield sites because it is quicker and more profit for them." One person mentioned that "council tax farming" is occurring, and raised questions around whether the approach is from a place of housing demand but about the need to raise a certain council tax revenue, for adult social care etc., that determines how many houses to build and to increase council tax income:

> "There's been a feeling that really, we pay a lot of council taxes, but we don't get actually much say."

101.   Related to this, it was raised that in one area, new developments had not been planned to incorporate community spaces, and with no shops, community centre, or no place to meet.

102.   Therefore, in this case, considering how community spaces were incorporated into new developments was another motivator and forward thinking about where people of large developments would go to vote or congregate as a community.

103.   The demand for and lack of supply of housing in their villages and towns to downsize to, so that they can remain in the area they have come to enjoy, is a core motivator. But there is no appropriate accommodation locally to be able to do that, so they remain in accommodation that is larger than needed. In one neighbourhood plan they have specifically requested a percentage of new homes to be bungalows.

104.   Preservation of greenfield land was another core motivator; in one area it was the protection of an area of woodland that was going to be chopped down to make way for development that was the key motivator in the beginning of the process. However, it was felt by the group that the Council had slowed down the NP process.

Success factors

105.   When discussing success factors in mobilising communities to pursue NP, various things were raised. There was consensus on there being the need for leadership and vision:

> "What it probably boils down to, is you need a strong leader, or a group of people to be able to not force the issue, but to stick with it."

> "It takes the energy of people like us to make these things happen…"

> "how can you try and get those people involved in the community?"

106.   This was backed up by another area, who "initially considered [NP] as 'all too difficult,'" and felt impossible to achieve. However, it was considered as being "sheer bloody mindedness and determination by me and some other people to actually to actually keep at it." In addition to local leadership, the funding for expert assistance was seen as crucial to success; "if we weren't getting the grant from Locality, I don't think we would have the people or expertise to do it."

107.   Creating a long-term vision for an area was considered as the best way to begin the "enabling of the neighbourhood plan," and "trying to persuade people to think about your kid's future." However, it was highlighted that there are often challenges around encouraging people to think about the future – i.e., what the area could be like in 5-10 years' time – what would new developments mean for the area? In response to this, it

was felt that "politicians have got to exercise a little bit of leadership in terms of trying to think of a vision, a longer-term vision."

108.   Community activity prior to starting the process was considered important. In one area, there has been a lobbying element to community involvement in the past, that feeds into NP activity. The focus of this was particularly on design codes and the way s106 monies were spent. In one area they have been sharing a community magazine, social media activity and a website, which is considered as important to developing momentum and sharing information with the wider community.

109.   Relating to understanding the benefits, the participants were asked 'is neighbourhood planning worth all the effort?' There was a strong "yes" from one participant who expressed that "there are things that we have managed to get" because of the NDP. Another participant was positive and stated that "I would actually say that a neighbourhood plan is well worth doing" but raised concerns about how it "fits in with the local plan as well."

110.   When considering the **barriers** that are in the way of starting and progressing a NP, the participants raised several issues. Firstly, the creation of the plan is only one factor, one of the challenges is the ongoing pressure to keep up to ensure that the policies are applied. "Enforcement is a tricky issue;" participants questioned 'why put in all this work if it is not going to be enforced?' Related to this, one respondent felt that:

> "Our biggest problem is that when the application goes in, our planning department, actually should say to the developer, as with what they are doing now, which is going to be 1.5 stories high… and tell them to come back when it is a proper bungalow… but we are going to be there again, fight, fight, fighting, where it could be stopped before it started."

111.   Concerns by the focus group participants, a theme raised in the interviews, were also raised about the council officers being under pressure from politicians, budgets, and short-term pressures, and how that affects people's motivation to pursue neighbourhood planning as it is felt that there will not be the support to assist completion. Another consideration by the group was the way section 106 is used:

> "They appear to be treated by the council as a cash cow in that s106 money is meant to compensate the immediate area for disruption and [for] having the extra housing."

112.   The participants described breakdowns of how s106 had been spent, and concern that the monies were not spent in the wards that had received development; "If you have had the inconvenience in your ward, you should receive reconciliation for it in your ward." They also felt that decisions about how the monies are spent are made without community input; "the community should be involved before there is a legal agreement made by the council as to where the s106 goes." It was also recognised that CIL does not exist in Middlesbrough and could be a key motivator for other wards to pursue NP, particularly where infrastructural improvements are key priorities.

113.   A fruitful discussion then developed, and they shared their reflections on **why there is not as much take up in the north.** In the north it was felt that "it is more difficult to get people involved in thinking about their neighbourhoods and feeling that their say will actually have some sort of impact." This is particularly prevalent because there has been a "feeling of helplessness" within communities as their voice has felt unnoticed. Particularly as some communities have been fragmented due to the demolition of housing, someone expressed that there were "actually good houses that had only been there about 15 years," with local people questioning why the sites remain vacant after all these years. Non-participating wards are more likely to question how much power NP has due to the erosion of trust and perceptions of lack of resource input into the more deprived wards. In response to this, participants considered that "people have got to believe that this plan actually means something" and "the council has got to give out messages, robustly, that it is worthwhile putting the effort in." It was felt that "to encourage more people in Middlesbrough to do a neighbourhood plan, the council has to follow what they say for it to have meaning."

114.   The number of applications received in the north is much less than the south as therefore was considered as being a factor in why the northern wards have not been as motivated to pursue NP. A member of the planning committee was present in the focus group, who raised that "very few planning applications that come through for in the northern parts" and that most applications received for the northern parts are change of use, mostly for food takeaways, and the knocking the insides of houses down and making two- or three-bedroom houses into student accommodation and flats." They highlighted that there is "no greenfield land," and therefore it was felt that "to talk with them about joining a neighbourhood plan I think would be difficult to explain to them what they would get from it [NP] planning wise." Therefore, increasing understanding about what NDPs can influence in urban areas was considered as crucial to gaining interest in NP.

115.   The levels of deprivation in the northern parts of Middlesbrough were also considered as being a barrier to people's ability to participate in NP, particularly as it is not likely to feature as a priority, one respondent argued that:

> "If you're struggling to make ends meet... if you're struggling with a family, you haven't got the time to do some of these things. And those individuals in the community that maybe have the energy maybe don't get supported to nurture that spark into a flame."

116.   Increasing the levels of support offered in these areas would be important to gaining momentum, as it is likely that those who are struggling within the communities have the passion and enthusiasm to get involved but not necessarily be part of the leadership.

117.   Those participating in NP expressed a keenness to support the other areas of Middlesbrough develop a NP. Interestingly, there was an expression of personal stake by the southern wards in the northern wards of Middlesbrough doing a neighbourhood plan;

"it is all in our mutual interests as citizens of Middlesbrough and it's all in our interest in thinking more longer turn." One person expressed that they like to see the brownfield sites being developed on instead of the greenfield sites in their wards; "Being brutally honest about it, we would like to get Gresham, Grove Hill and Middle Haven and certain extent, Trindon and the like to develop an NDP."

118.   But there was also an expression of wishing to see an improvement in Middlesbrough as a whole:

> "If we were to meet our counterparts, or community reps in the town centre, it isn't a question of us pushing development back there, it's about keeping their area alive. But at the same time some of the central areas… [raised problem with homelessness, alcohol, drugs] they want a plan as well. They don't want to have to get on a bus to get to the shops or the pub… it's that kind of feeling."

119.   Acknowledging that the motivators are likely to be different in the urban areas. They also expressed that they "want to see… the centre of Middlesbrough be a hub and hive of activity." One person envisioned that the wards around the centre could be great "city life for younger people" with people living and working in the central areas and no need to get in the car to go to work. An example was presented where in Spain, "families live in the centre, keep in touch with each other and care for each other. They have a sense of community. Care homes near to home and places of work so that it is easy to visit... it is that kind of thing that needs to be in there."

Ideas for others interested in NP

120.   Overall, there was a keenness to support others in the neighbourhood planning process; "we are quite happy to speak to others." But they also reinforced that they "wouldn't want to impose our thoughts on what people of Middlesbrough would like."

121.   When reflecting on ideas to increase NP activity in the north, many voiced advice directly to those who might be considering developing a NP for their area:

> "There's another reason to write a neighbourhood plan… [the rewriting of the local plan] get it in before it is too late."

> "It is better to have an imperfect neighbourhood plan than no neighbourhood plan at all. You are never going to write the perfect plan… You can always amend it and review it."

Neighbourhood Priority Statements (NPS)

122.   There was a general positivity about the introduction of NPS, perceived as "a good taster to start with," and it was felt that upon completion of the community input into the 'vision,' "you are halfway there." Beyond this was difficult to ascertain opinion as there is a lack of detail available to assist a more insightful discussion.

Ways forward

a. *Information* - Aiding community leaders who are managing community assets in the local areas is considered as a good starting point to raising awareness: "in these deprived areas, they love their hubs... a lot of people go to these hubs... the people running the hubs might be able to give the help they need." It was raised that some members of the planning committee might not be aware of the publication of NDPs and had not got a copy of the plan.

b. *Transparency* – related to information, there was a recommendation of raising awareness as to how the NP will be implemented and used.

c. *Consultation and engagement* – Reflecting on wider processes of the council, there were feelings like consultation process could be significantly improved, suggestions on doing this were to improve the visibility of consultations on the website and to put more efforts in raising awareness that consultations are running. More meaningful engagement was suggested to improve trust and build relationships between the people of Middlesbrough and the council; "Meaningfully look at what people have asked for... at the moment it seems that you might have a wish list of 100 and you might be lucky to get 1 if you are very lucky. I wouldn't say the ideas are set in stone, there seems to be very little room for manoeuvre..."

d. *De-politicise the process* – "people are so defeated by politics generally." There was a feeling that this acted to demotivate local people from engaging in initiatives such as NP.

5.2 WP3b: Focus group B – non-participating wards

123.   There were six people in attendance of the focus group held on the 8th of December 2022, who were from non-participating wards. People were located across four wards located in the north of Middlesbrough: Park End and Beckfield; North Ormesby; Brambles Farm and Thorntree; and Berwick Hills & Pallister (see table 1 for information on the Wards). The people attending ranged in their connection with their ward; one was a local councillor; another a local resident and four people that are either chair / secretary of their local community council. One of which was also a representative from North Ormesby Big Local Partnership.

124.   All participants were familiar with neighbourhood planning and what it could mean for their area. There was limited understanding about the process and support available. One participant found out about neighbourhood planning through involvement with a local think tank. One area held a meeting the previous evening about starting the process of writing a neighbourhood plan, an external agency had presented information about it. Another had been in conversation about working with other wards to submit one that was across three wards.

125. The potential importance of NP was recognised by all participants, one felt that "they [NPs] are needed everywhere," and another respondent reflected that it is the more deprived areas that really need it:

> "The more affluent areas have neighbourhood plans and have the resources to do it, **they are not the areas that really need it. It is the more deprived areas that do.** They are not really implemented in the deprived areas because the information isn't put there, people don't have the opportunity to engage in these things. It does take one or two people that understand it to bring it to the table. Just have to be the people in the right place at the right time."

126. The participants of the focus group reiterated the core local challenges and influencers in considering NPs are "about putting more hurdles in place" to reduce the number of HMOs, improve parking, but really it was about responding to the number of things that had been 'done to' rather than 'done with' the local community. A few participants expressed that a core motivation for their consideration in neighbourhood planning was the Southland Centre, which was a geographically centre hub of three wards. When it was up and running it attracted people from all around Middlesbrough and beyond (Leeds, Newcastle, and Tees). It was also a business centre. The land been passed on to Sport England because they wanted to build houses on sports pitches on another area of town where houses are of higher value, gave it to Sports England because they objected to that development and would not release the objection until the sports field appears on the Southland site. This meant that the centre got knocked down, they are now trying to get a centre rebuilt on the site. They raised the importance of this centre in the area:

> "What we lost when the Southlands closed is that place where you get that casual contact. It is that casual contact that was lost... passing within the place and go to the café and have a talk"

> "There was such a lot of activity, when it was going to close down, people came back to protect it".

Core barriers with engagement and progression of NP

127. It was considered that one of the biggest challenges that prevented participation in NP was local Politics and general cynicism by the population of Middlesbrough. People expressed that there are feelings like consultation is considered by the council as a tick box exercise, with a lack of meaningful engagement and an erosion of trust. It was expressed that people generally "don't want to go to meetings because they think it is going to be a waste of time." Feelings of "a lot of done to, rather than with, the community" and "always top down." An example was presented, with City Challenge, where it was felt like decisions had already been made about what is going on before engaging with the community, and that decisions about where the money goes is made by people outside of the communities.

128.   There has also been an erosion of trust within local projects too, for example an investigation into the mismanagement of monies at a Big Local project. The "problem in town hall is the constant mudslinging" and that "we haven't got a council that brings people together. It is very divided, Middlesbrough." One respondent felt challenged by the lack of mobilisation in the community, they described that there is a strong community 'voice,' "a lot of opinions," but little 'action,' as "when it comes to actually doing work and putting feet on the ground it is hard... it's too much trouble for them." They shared that their view is that "if you want your word to carry strength around the table, you have got to be prepared to shoulder some of the responsibility with it." This respondent was particularly passionate to identify tools such as neighbourhood planning to proactively act upon challenges in the local area, "instead of going on about everything" and "use neighbourhood plan as an opportunity, rather than complaining, there is a way to do something about these things."

129.   Discussion was had between the participants about whether the neighbourhood plan area could be across wards. It was raised that several people had explored creating a neighbourhood plan across three wards in East Middlesbrough that encompass- Park End and Beckfield; Berwick Hills and Pallister; and Brambles and Thorntree. However, one of the participants raised strongly that they should be ward by ward, "because each ward has very differing needs." Difficult to communicate across ward, the person that raised it felt that "it makes sense" because it is hard to raise interest, particularly hard in areas where there is not a strong community council and low interest in being involved.

130.   As experienced in participating wards, "it's the same people using it [local community hub], they are not representative of the whole community." However, it was raised that community hubs are well used in these areas, a community presence and activity. Participants expressed that initially, "it's about finding those people that want to do something and making their voices louder." For example, a dozen people might come, but then they become a catalyst and "word of mouth gets people in."

131.   Again, local leadership was recognised as important to shifting from blaming others to a greater positivity and proactive action, in the room:
        "We can make the difference. But because there is a lack of resilience in the communities, need the right person in place to make things happen. If you don't have that person there, things aren't going to change, and people are going to moan and complain about things that haven't happened. Instead of being like you know what, actually there are actions that we as a community can take. That unwillingness to try."

132.   The discussion progressed and a keenness to share resources to build momentum across the wards was expressed. One area had recently had a community meeting where they identified next steps were to do workshops with the wider community about what neighbourhood planning is. They said that they wanted to do this "to identify what the

appetite is and what the engagement might look like. We do know that people will engage, and it is the same people." It was considered that community engagement needed to be discussion based, rather than rely on a questionnaire/survey.

133.   The general information about what a NP is, who can be involved in it and the procedural and technical aspects are the same no matter which ward and this was picked up by a participant who suggested that the next step of holding workshops in the community can be done as a single model, as needed. There was an enthusiasm in the room to develop a "support system" and create an "opportunity to share." One person expressed that they felt encouraged by the idea of not having "to do it in isolation. Have that network if we want to pursue this and lean on each other… Having that sounding board is really important" and "No reason why we can't do that together with neighbouring wards" and "sharing the resource in terms of what a neighbourhood plan is how it can be implemented. That is something we can do together that does not have to be done Ward by Ward, that can be shared resources. But then when it comes down to actually writing the neighbourhood plan, then that is when you go into your own areas."

134.   However, there was some suspicion too: there is a "possibility but a certainty that they [the council] want total control and not give any control to the community. The mindset needs changing in the council." Another expressed concern from a participant stated concern "because it happens again and again...the people in community do not have the trust. It is challenging for community leaders to go to the community and say, "we can do things differently," they straightaway say no, we've been there and got the t-shirt."

Ways forward

135.   A few concerns and recommendations were raised by the participants. There was feeling that the council purposely do not communicate about neighbourhood planning with the northern wards, there's little understanding about neighbourhood planning from the citizens, as well as belief that the council will enforce and apply the plans. Get planning to the table "so hard to pick up the phone and have a conversation… I am even trying to go through the mayor and getting nowhere." The recommendation from the room to respond to this challenge was to open lines of communication and having a point of contact for someone who can lead on communications with other council officers, specifically on neighbourhood planning; someone that has the information and can garner interest. It was felt that "that one post would make such a difference." To present information to the communities and be active in promoting what the process is. This was seen as useful also in assisting how to apply for Locality funding available to local groups to pursue neighbourhood planning - as well as the NP process and stages to go through.

136.   The erosion of trust was a key barrier voiced and when asked 'What needs to happen to rebuild trust?,' participants responded by expressing how there are strong feelings of "disempowerment" and division: "having to talk about the better and cheaper wards,

shouldn't feel like that because we are one town… it's like we are all divided… we should all feel equal" and "That's what it's like, a them and us"

137.   Therefore, they presented suggestions towards anything that led to meaningful support from the council, rather than feelings of resistance, such as: "Opinions and words carry equal weight to council officers." "As a resident I would want to feel like it is a partnership" and "that we are all working towards the same thing." One participant questioned how "...do you change the mindset of the council officers?" in response to this, someone else felt that it is "not just a mindset but a whole culture" that needs to change. Another respondent felt that "officers have got to learn when to lead or when to support… they have got to lead all of the time… they need the ability to step back and say you lead on this because you know what you are wanting, and we will support you."

Views on Neighbourhood Priority Statements

138.   There was knowledge in the room about NPS before it was raised as a discussion point. The first question posed was about its identity as a "neighbourhood plan light" queried "how much legal teeth does it have?", this surfaces a concern that NPS may not be listened to.

139.   The NPS is seen a potentially a good step forward because something that is important to a community, which cannot be included in a NP (i.e. a non-planning matter), could be recognised and that this could address people being deterred from participation on local agenda shaping.

Conclusions from focus group discussions

140.   The FG issues coincided with the issues raised in the interviews with information and clarity. The view was that existing information is not disseminated well and through the right channels, or in a way that people can understand it. Focus groups also saw that how NP is depicted and facilitated is important. Firstly, in terms of how perspectives are oriented, and positivity created, one group argued that: "there are good things that are going on, people focus on the bad things, but aim is to bring people along." Highlighting positives from elsewhere could help and it was recognised that 25% of CIL monies could be available for neighbourhoods and that this would be useful, if Middlesbrough had CIL charging in place[4].

141.   Better working with the LA and local politicians coming through. There is clearly some frustration about lack of progress on improving the town and tacking some of the processes of development and land use affecting north Middlesbrough. Neighbourhoods want the LA to do more and to have clearer lines of communication between

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[4] See: https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Infrastructure-Funding-Statement-2021-22.pdf

neighbourhoods and the Council with the apparent gap left by a lack of community council activity as a base for interaction being lamented.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Synthesis

142.   In general terms the possibility of weakened appetite and stamina for civic engagement in so-called 'left behind areas' has been established in the wider literature and this must surely account for a some of the NP take-up patterns nationally. In the case of Middlesbrough as a relatively underrepresented NP area, there are a set of issues that came through the research, many of which resonate with the existing literature and evidence concerning NP experience in England. However, some are specific or not unearthed in past studies. Here we synthesise the findings before outlining a set of recommendation areas in 6.2.

143.   Firstly, the reasons for undertaking or not undertaking neighbourhood planning are not linked to a lack of awareness of neighbourhood planning in the town. There was some clear appetite in the currently non-participating wards for neighbourhood planning, with largely a clear understanding of what it can and cannot achieve. This is promising, as existing research suggests that the catalyst for participation often only requires one or two individuals to lead. However, there remains some uncertainty in places about what NP can achieve – for example, in one ward there was some misunderstanding about the extent to which NPs can influence HMOs and takeaway food outlets. There were perceptions from the southern wards that the northern wards do not have the need to 'preserve or protect' greenfield sites and therefore may not be motivated to pursue a neighbourhood plan. However, the findings show that there is a keenness for the redevelopment of the areas of clearance, as well as even if there are no development sites in an area, there are concerns about the demolition of buildings to develop new housing, as well as wanting to ensure that trees and their green spaces are protected.

144.   Secondly, another reason is linked to the lack of support – both in terms of council support, and concerns about capacity available to help assist formally, but also peer support - in both the participating and non-participating areas there was a keenness to develop a network of support as there are overlaps in interest and passion to see Middlesbrough thrive in becoming more involved in the future development of the area. Talk of cross-ward working and shared resources, retaining individual NPs to attend to "differing needs," suggests an appetite for peer-support to be developed across Middlesbrough.

145.   Thirdly, experience of engagement in planning and development in their wards seems a factor too, with some sections of the population in Middlesbrough appearing to suffer

from cynicism stemming from prior initiatives (such as City Challenge). This fed into a wider feeling of 'top down' management, rather than 'bottom up' or collaborative exchange. Stressing the community control over the NP process may therefore be helpful. Related to this, the culture of the council – whether perceived, historical, accurate – was a significant barrier for non-participants. Working to achieve a clearer, more collaborative style of communication would be a significant step forward. A single point of contact was also desired by community leaders. Many of the points below indicate that existing advice, guidance, and support has not reached Middlesbrough communities, the elements cited are:

a. *Messaging* - identification and clarification of messaging about what resource and support the Council can offer to help groups through the process. There are perceptions of the council do not have the resource to support groups and provide the information about the process.

b. *Deepening understanding* - workshops and briefing notes to share information with community leaders and the wider community to increase understanding of what neighbourhood planning can and cannot achieve are seen as important.

c. *Clarification of NP power/effect* - clarity around the power of neighbourhood plans – statements about how the council will implement or enforce neighbourhood plans would encourage participation.

d. *Sharing of information* - regarding the stage-by-stage process with templates to guide action advocated.

e. *Peer support* - some involved in the research thought that offers of support to form neighbourhood planning networks would be useful. Wards participating in NP demonstrated positivity about the NP process and recommended it to others, this is because they had seen some impact of their Plan and feel they have some control over new development. Furthermore, such neighbourhoods are happy to share and support others.

146.   A fear of retribution was a new issue identified within this research. It could be that concerns that property owners might find out about their involvement and thus risk insecurity where they are living.

6.2 Recommendations for improvements

147.   The findings presented here lead to a series of suggestions to assist in take-up and successful navigation of the NP process in Middlesbrough. The main recommendations that came through the work centred on the following five headings, with around a dozen constituent ideas sitting under those: **i. Information; ii. Approach taken; iii. Relations; iv. Shared or peer-learning support; v. Leadership.**

Information

148.   *Awareness raising* – given that communication problems were cited (with low turnout to respond to consultations), a greater emphasis on raising awareness of NP remains important; this would ideally be supplemented by records of outreach activity and a dashboard to keep up-to-date records that could aid institutional memory and form a communications database to engage with. Such action could be the starting point in building trust.

149.   *Materials* - the creation of locally relevant materials in Plain English and consideration for the different languages spoken across Middlesbrough was seen as useful in raising awareness and building momentum. NP materials must explain and provide examples of how NDPs can be used to improve urban communities over and above the standard information available about neighbourhood planning.

Approach

150.   *Reach the community where they already are and build from the existing networks* - the work confirmed that the approach taken by the LA and by those leading NP needed to be more careful. Successful community engagement was posited as hinging on "the way you present information and what it means to people." When sharing information, it is important to identify whether the community nodes are involved and, when hosting workshops, including identifying whether neighbourhoods would rather the use of existing fora/meetings, or to create independent workshops.

151.   *Consultation and engagement approach* – reviewing the council wide approach to consultation and engagement, particularly with regards to planning and development would be a good step towards building trust with the local community. Addressing the way consultations are advertised, and the messaging around the purpose of the council's engagement activities, doing so meaningfully will increase participation and transparency. The culture within the council is considered as being an important shift needed for consultation and engagement to improve.

152.   *Incentivisation* – this was mentioned and links also to information and better understanding of the value of NP activity. CIL monies were also recognised as useful by some (although Middlesbrough do not have a CIL charging regime in place).

Relations

153.   *Consistency and de-coupling with local politics* - there was a feeling of tiredness regarding local politics and a wish to 'de-politicise' the process of local agenda setting because "people are so defeated by politics generally." Yet, how this relates to NP

specifically is more difficult to discern, different elements relating to leadership and other arrangements set out here may assist.

154. *Community Forums* – these were raised as a way of improving relations with the community, community forums could act as the initial interaction about NP. Participants saw merit in creating clear single points of contact to ensure consistent communication between neighbourhoods and the local authority.

155. *Clarity* - there were several points here including make it easier to navigate the LA website, about ensuring a dedicated point of contact at the Council. Clarifying the difference and the nexus between the local plan and NDPs, as well as nuancing the materials for specific neighbourhoods will improve understanding of the planning system and how NPs fit.

156. *Memoranda of Understanding* (MoU) – having a MoU is likely to be useful in delineating responsibility for future action and retaining trust built up by community leaders and assets. It is likely to be encouraging to the NF and wider community and assist with momentum building.

Shared / Peer-learning

157. *Shared learning* – both the representatives from the participating and non-participating wards expressed interest in forming a local network of NP support. Those from non-participating wards identified that they are at a similar stage of considering NP in their areas and are looking to work together to raise awareness in their local communities. Sharing the journey and resources was considered useful. Furthermore, some from the participating wards stated they were keen to help those in non-participating areas, to help see Middlesbrough increase its vibrancy.

Leadership (and capacity)

158. *Leadership* – whilst working with local leaders was regarded as crucial to the success of NP, it was recognised that the 'right' leader was challenging to identify in some cases, due to needing to be flexible to the diverse needs of communities. Developing and supporting such *capacity* appears important for some neighbourhoods.

159. *Community leadership* - community leaders are key mobilisers and should be the first people to be involved in outreach to and get informed and involved. It was suggested that briefing notes and holding interactive workshops about NP would be an important starting point with such people.

6.3 Further work

160.   Clearly trying to understand how the recommendations could be actioned (by Middlesbrough), both effectively and within resource limits, appears a priority.

161.   A focussed discussion or 'summit' about the role of neighbourhood planning in the wider context of neighbourhood governance for Middlesbrough seems useful.

162.   Linkage between organisations such as Locality, Planning Aid and the LA may need to be addressed. Quick wins could be isolated such as information and existing support sources and materials (for example, clarity of messaging and existing information about NP via the LA website).

163.   More work on facilitating earlier discussions about NP and about Neighbourhood Planning Statements may gauge both appetites, need for better information and support and to give an indication of appropriate policy / governance tools to aid issue resolution.

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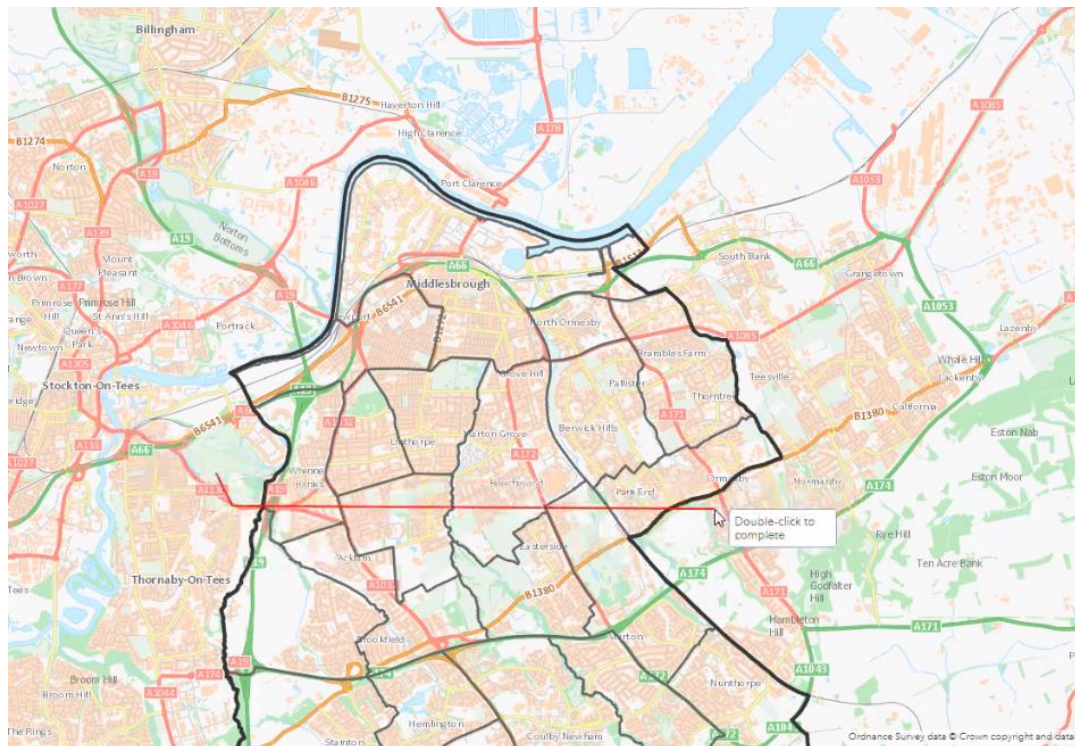
8. Annexes

Annex 1: Middlesbrough Wards

Ward (Non-Participating then participating wards)	IMD 2019 / 7219	Note	Case = Y / FG = F
North Ormesby **(N)**	2nd	1% most deprived, 'left behind place' + a Big Local funded area	F
Brambles & Thorntree **(N)**	6th	1% most deprived, 'left behind place'	F
Berwick Hills & Pallister **(N)**	13th	1% most deprived, 'left behind place'	F
Park End & Beckfield **(N)**	74th	1% most deprived, 'left behind place'	F
Longlands & Beechwood **(N)**	98th	1% most deprived	Y
Linthorpe **(N)**	2532		Y
Park **(N)**	1807		Y
Central **(N)**	75th	3% most deprived	
Hemlington	302	3% most deprived, 'left behind place'	
Ayresome **(N)**	1373		
Ladgate	1207		
Kader	4695		
Trimdon	4676		
Acklam	5215		
Marton East	4875		
Newport (Gresham NF) **(N)**	26th	1% most deprived, (NP started Feb 2019)	Y
Stainton & Thornton	1532	NP Made (May 2022)	Y F
Marton West	6074	NP Made and revised (2016 / 2020)	F
Nunthorpe	6778	NP started (Sept 2022)	Y F
Coulby Newham	1805	NP started (April 2022)	

*note: The identification/classification of the wards in the **North (N)** were selected in liaison with Middlesbrough Council for the purposes of this project. See Annex 2 for area map.

Ward profiles: https://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/open-data-foi-and-have-your-say/about-middlesbrough-and-local-statistics/ward-reports

Map of Middlesbrough with North-South line ——

Community interviews WP2a - participating QBs

1. Please describe your community (including activity, projects etc.) – Tell us about your neighbourhood, is it an active community? Are people engaged?
2. Tell us about past attempts at community engagement in the neighbourhood, what effect has any of that had on uptake of NP?
3. Please could you describe any community development activity prior to NP
    a. To what extent do you think this influenced the uptake of NP?
4. How did you hear about NP? What information did you receive? Who did you receive information from?
5. Have you contacted/received information from others who have embarked on NP?
6. Were there any objections from colleagues or the community to pursuing NP?
7. How was a decision made to pursue NP?
    a. What influenced your decision?
8. What were the reasons for undertaking NP? (motives / aims)
9. What support have you received? (information/templates/funding etc.)
10. Please describe each part of the process:
    a. How did you get started? What were the success factors?
    b. How did you maintain momentum?
    c. What were the barriers, if any, along the process?
11. What improvements would you like to see to made to the **process**?
12. What improvements would you like to see to make communities more aware of neighbourhood planning? Are you aware of the NPS option that is emerging?
13. What are you views on the possibility of alternatives to NP, such as emerging Neighbourhood Priority Statements?
14. Would you recommend the process to other communities in Middlesbrough?
15. What do you think would enable other wards across Middlesbrough to embark on NP? (what tips for Neighbourhoods, Middlesbrough Council, National government)

Community interviews WP2b - non-participating neighbourhoods / wards

1. Please describe your community (including activity, projects etc.) – 'tell us about the neighbourhood.' Would you describe it as an active community? Are people engaged?
2. Have you heard of NP?
    a. If yes, what do you know about it? Has there been a discussion about preparing a NP in your area? What factors have been considered?
        i. Are there any barriers that might be preventing the area from undertaking NP?
    b. If no, *share information*, is this something that you think would be of interest to the community?

3. How has NP been presented as an option locally? Has it been **'undersold'** (i.e., communities are unaware of the potential benefits) or **'unattractive'** (i.e., communities are aware of the process but deem it irrelevant or not worth the effort)?
   a. Where do communities get their **information** from about NP?
   b. What is it about NP that acts to **deter or conversely not enthuse** possible participants? (rules/scope, proves, burdens, outcomes)
4. Tell us about **past attempts at community engagement in the neighbourhood, what effect has any of that had on uptake** or not of NP?
   a. What would you say are the top issues /priorities for the area? (how do those fit with NP?)
5. Are other (current) community efforts or initiatives that might be **crowding out** or prioritised over NP activity?
6. Have there been objections from the community regarding any regeneration or development plans/activities? Where do these stem from?
7. How would you characterise the relationship with the Council? (Prompt by members, wider community etc.)
8. Do you think that NP would help address local priorities? Why/why not?
   a. What aspects of the process do you think would address these priorities? Or alternative mechanisms? (Value in social capital or planning outcomes?)
9. What are you views on the possibility of alternatives to NP, such as emerging Neighbourhood Priority Statements (provide info on NPS)?
10. What improvements would you like to see the government undertake in increasing awareness of NP?
11. What improvements would you like to see the local authority undertake in increasing awareness of NP?
12. What other changes or support could help the community to explore embarking on a NP or Neighbourhood Priority Statement or both?

Participating groups – Focus group A

Local activity:
- To what extent does prior community engagement and local community activities effect uptake and interest in NP?
- What activities/groups are currently working? Has this changed over recent years?
- Who is engagement in the community pursued by? Is engagement pursued by a small groups (local leaders) or more diffuse through community?
- How can mobilisation be encouraged in communities that are not currently active?

NP Support:
- What was core motivation for pursuing your plan?
- What information and support has been crucial to taking neighbourhood planning forward? At what stages?
- What could be made available to assist urban areas taking NP forward?
- What is one lesson you would tell a new group?

Recommendations/future activity:
- What could be changed to encourage more NP activity? (changes to support, process, community e.g., frontloading/comm development)
- Have your relations with Council changed over time (better/worse)?
- Has NP made future community engagement more likely (within comm / with council)? Has community activity changed since NP?
- To identify what can be done to increase neighbourhood planning activity in Middlesbrough.

Non-Participating groups – Focus group B

Local activity:
- How can the local community be mobilised and encouraged to pursue NP?
- What activities/groups are currently working? what do these coalesce around? has this changed over recent years?
- Could any activity form the basis of NP engagement? (prompt for more formal activities e.g., inked to Parish council vs. more informal/organic activity)

NP Support:

- What is specific about Middlesbrough that forms barriers to participating in neighbourhood planning?
- What looks attractive/worrying (refer to briefing sheet) about NP?
- What activities/groups are currently working? has this changed over recent years?
- What information and support are needed to taking neighbourhood planning forward? How involved would you wish the Council to be? Would independent support be useful?

Recommendations:
- What is biggest obstacle to you investigating or taking NP further? (prompt: does not align with community motivations, funding, support, capacity, relations with council etc.)
- What could be changed to encourage more NP activity?
- What can be done to increase trust and improve relationships with the council?
- What is current attitude toward council? (delicate) + prompt for personalities vs 'council' as more general idea.