

# ESPON TANGO

## Territorial Approaches for New Governance

Applied Research 2013/1/21

Case Study Report  
Is small really beautiful?  
Neighbourhood Planning in the UK North Shields Fish Quay

Final Version December/2013



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# 1. Introduction to the case study

Neighbourhood Planning is part of a suite of mechanisms connected with the UK Coalition Government's broader agendas of 'localism' and the 'Big Society'. They chime with global agendas of subsidiarity, participation and citizen engagement but have particular manifestations. Expressed by Greg Clark, Localism Minister (on 3.12.2010), the agenda seeks to "*hand over power and responsibility so that local communities have real choices, and experience the real consequences of those choices*".

Localism is seen partly as a reaction to failures of centrist, big state practices and in the UK the Westminster model of representative democracy (Parvin 2011). That is, both to the sorts of state apparatus that grew up under the Labour administrations of 1997-2010 and to general citizen dis-satisfaction with experts and politicians. Its rhetoric suggests that it can be both more efficient and equitable, although many are sceptical about this claim and also point to the problems of trying to achieve broad environmental objectives from a myriad of ultra-local practices (Cowell, 2012). Critics of the Coalition's manifestation of localism are sceptical about its commitment to genuine local empowerment, seeing it as an opportunistic window to roll back the state (e.g. Parvin 2011). Localism in this context is then not good or bad; rather it is to be evaluated.

Neighbourhood Plans (NPs) are advocated by central government to be light touch, empowering of communities, led by neighbourhoods, innovative, and permissive with regard to development. And here we see some, inevitable but interesting, shaping of what can and cannot be decided on locally. For three decades the core concern of central government has been to deliver more housing in the South East of England where the opposition to such developments has remained fiercest. Labour's approach was to assign targets for regional bodies and local authorities to overcome local opposition. The Coalition Government has dismantled those targets and instead hopes that empowered communities will opt for more development / growth and see it as a positive choice (Davoudi, 2012).

Neighbourhood plans are promoted by either a Parish Council <sup>1</sup>, a partnership between a number of Parish Councils, or a Neighbourhood Forum which can be established by a minimum of 21 local individuals or 'stakeholders' if no Parish Council exists. Neighbourhood Forums propose themselves to local planning authorities who assess Neighbourhood Forums for 'representativeness' and decide whether a Neighbourhood Forum can proceed. They have a duty to 'support' Neighbourhood Plan preparation but this can be very light-touch, steering them through the various regulatory elements such as environmental appraisal for example. £20,000 was available from central government for the process and is given to local

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<sup>1</sup> A Parish Council is the 'third tier, or lowest layer of governance in the UK system, and derives from the old system of church parishes, although they are now secular bodies with authority over a range of local infrastructural issues (cemeteries, bus-stops, allotments, highways etc.). Approximately 40% of the population of England and Wales lives in parished communities, and areas without parishes are mainly larger urban areas. Parish Council powers recently increased under the Coalition

planning authority, who may then reallocate it to the Parish or Neighbourhood Forum or retain it for the ‘support’ process. Neighbourhood Plans are thus self-selecting, both in terms of areas that come forward and in terms of who participates. In terms of the former, it can be hypothesized that areas rich in certain resources are more likely to come forward and this is partly proved through analysis.

At present, neighbourhood planning in England is at early stages. As at 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2013, 27 neighbourhood plans had been completed and published for consultation (DCLG, 2013). Our case of the North Shields Fish Quay has just finished the process of producing a Supplementary Planning Document.

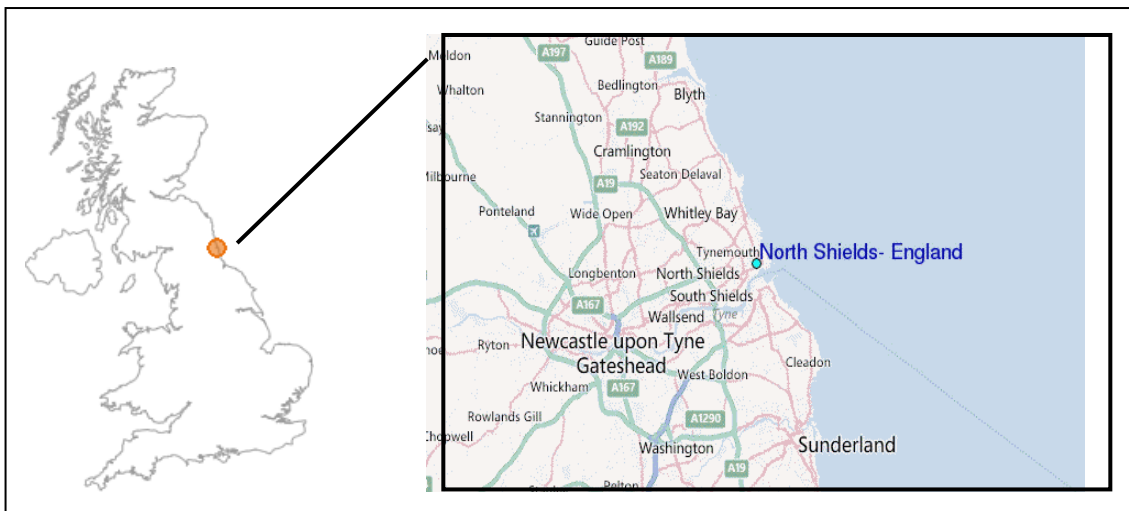


Figure 1: North Shields in the UK and regional context

The Fish Quay, in the North East of England (see Figure 1), is located on the north bank of the river Tyne at its mouth and lies approximately nine miles east of Newcastle. North Shields is one of a number of self-contained towns within the Tyne & Wear conurbation. North Shields Fish Quay has been subject to a myriad of initiatives over the years. Between 2003-and 2010 it is estimated that around £20m of regeneration and heritage funds have gone into the area (Interviewee A, 2012). In 2003 the area was designated as a conservation area (see Figure 2), giving it greater protection in terms of planning and design.

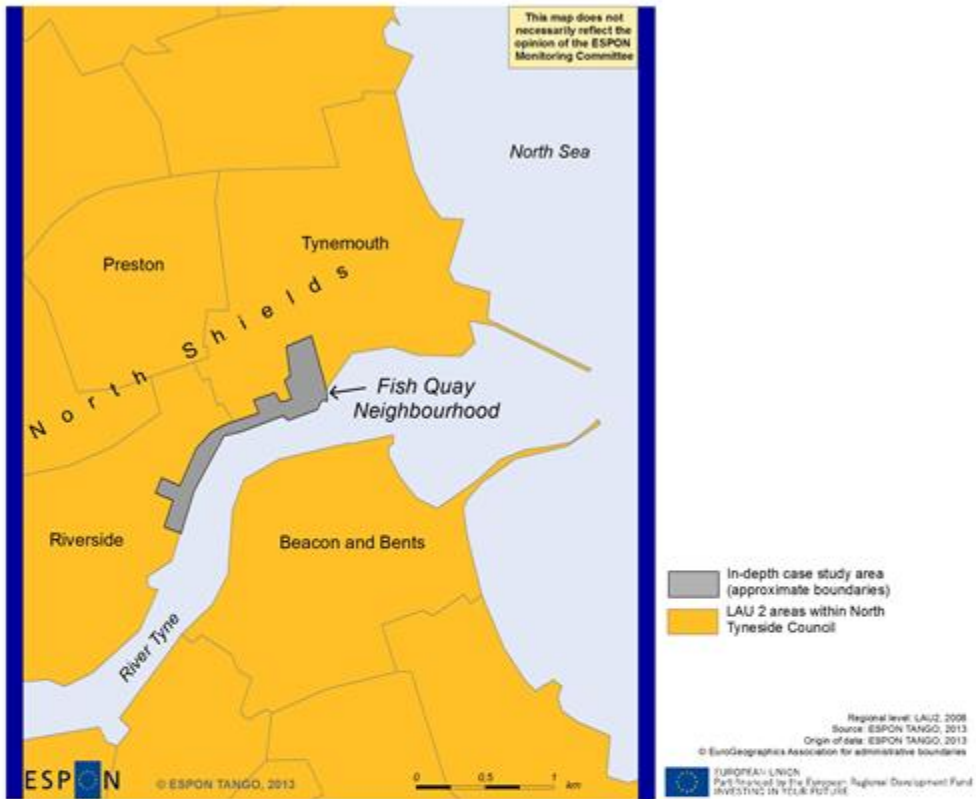
In contrast to the legislation’s aims, the North Shields Fish Quay Neighbourhood Plan was proposed by the local authority rather than by the local residents themselves. Its selection for neighbourhood planning reflects the curtailing of regeneration funds in 2010 upon the election of a new central government alongside local political desire to take the initiative for the Neighbourhood Plan. Indeed an Area Action Plan for a wider area is being prepared since 2008 (now forming part of North Tyneside’s emerging Local Plan) and has paralleled the Neighbourhood Plan.



Figure 2: The Neighbourhood Plan boundary which corresponds to the two conservation areas

In parallel to government-led Neighbourhood Plan initiatives there has been citizen mobilisation in the area. In 2002 heritage, arts and residents' forums were developed with North Tyneside Council. At the same time, FISH (Folk Interested in Shields Harbour) was established directly by citizens as a pressure group. FISH generated a 'wish list' of things they wanted to see happen in the area. FISHcast, a sub-group of FISH, led the production of a conservation area character statement to guide future development. This statement was 'highly commended' in the Cultural Heritage category of the 2006 Europa Nostra Award and was adopted by the local authority, North Tyneside Council. The Fish Quay Heritage Partnership (FQHP) was created in 2005 to steer a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) and Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) scheme, guiding the funds and helping to formulate proposals for the area. The FQHP comprised of a partnership of representatives from the Council, local businesses, residents and conservation specialists. Members of FISH and the FQHP are now central to the Neighbourhood Plan process along with the Council and the North of England Civic Trust, a charitable body charged with providing independent advice in the neighbourhood plan process.

## CASE STUDY AREA 8: NORTH SHIELDS FISH QUAY



Map 1: Case study area: North Shields Fish Quay



## 2. Integrating policy sectors

The North Shields Fish Quay Neighbourhood Plan officially started in June 2011. The development of the neighbourhood plan had a number of distinct phases as described by all the stakeholders. Figure 3 gives an overview of the various governance stages the neighbourhood plan passed through as it developed.

The first phase was essentially a *capacity building phase* when the stakeholders of the neighbourhood plan were identified and officers and members of the Neighbourhood Plan committee were organised. It should be noted that although the process was termed a neighbourhood plan the committee predated the Localism Act and therefore was not formally constituted as a Neighbourhood Forum under the provisions of the act. This phase was also a time when the governance of the plan was passed over to the local community for them to take the initiative. From then on the day-to-day requirements of dealing with the neighbourhood plan were established. The committee elected a chair and deputy chair and appointed a secretary.

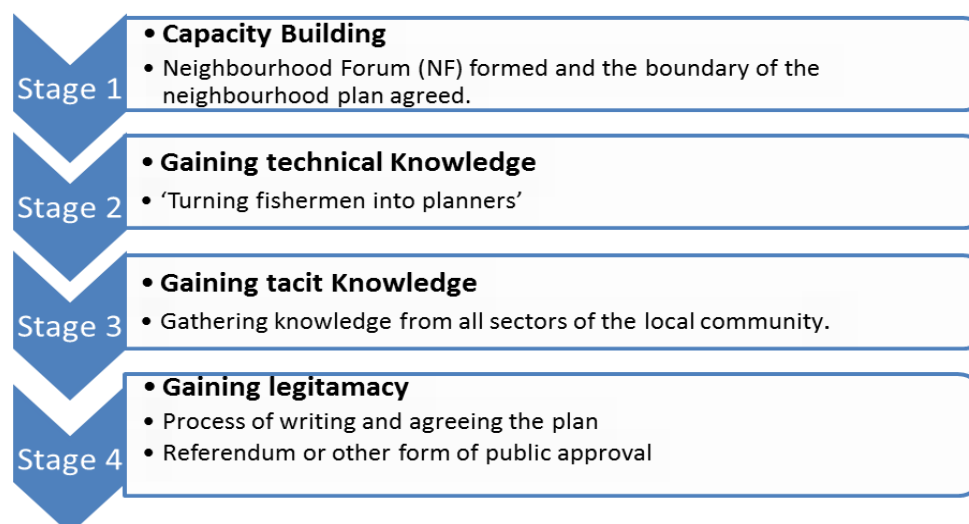


Figure 3: Governance stages in the development of the NSFQ neighbourhood plan

This was then followed by a *learning phase*. During this phase the community began to acquire the necessary knowledge and developed the technical skills to allow them to, in essence, become lay planners. The neighbourhood plan is a technical planning document and as such needs to conform to a number of legal requirements and must contain certain technical information to act as the evidence-base for the plan's proposals and future planning decisions.

The next phase of the process was the *production* of the plan itself. This lasted for around 12 – 14 months and was, understandably, the longest phase of the process. A Supplementary Planning Document has been produced and was adopted by the Council in April 2013.

For some this phased approach to the neighbourhood plan process was vital in establishing the group and its credibility.

“There was no great optimism at the outset .....but never mind it was worth it because it distilled down into what was, or certainly tried to be, a constructive group, that tried to forge a holistic approach given the diversity that is the Fish Quay. (Interviewee B - 2012)

For others the formality and institutional nature of the process was a barrier to getting things done and wider participation:

“The idea that you have to meet bi-weekly for a year that's a big ask, a disaster. Unpaid, undefined and we spent the first three months of those deciding what structure we wanted. What's all that about? So that killed any enthusiasm going on” (Interviewee F - 2012).

The final phase of the planning process was to gain legitimacy for the plan. In the case of the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan this will be achieved through further public consultation on the plan and a vote by elected members of the local planning authority as to whether to accept the plan as part of the local statutory spatial plan. This phase in the plans developed is discussed in more detail in section 3 later.

## **2.1 Public Policy Packaging**

Although a neighbourhood plan is mainly concerned with the spatial development of an area, there was a concerted effort to include a range of policy sectors in the Neighbourhood Planning process. This presented a particular problem given the nature of the process which, whilst rooted in a place-based community, sought to integrate communities of interests as well. In this case, the main community of interest that was not located within the territory was that associated with tourism and leisure. The NSFQ has been developed, and is continuing to be developed, into a tourist destination. Tourism and leisure are seen by the local authority as key drivers for the future development of the area. Despite this, it was found to be a significant task to incorporate views from the tourism and leisure community adequately within the process. A number of interviewees commented that groups with an interest in the development of the area but with no permanent physical presence within the territory were difficult to engage with. This often meant certain policy sectors, notably tourism and the environment, did not gain the prominence they perhaps should have in the deliberations. In particular, it seems that the environment was somewhat sidelined as a policy sector as it was viewed as a barrier to development. A number of stakeholders suggested that those raising concerns about the natural environment were to be listened to as a matter of courtesy but did not really have much to contribute to the final plan. This may have been due to the framework for producing NPs which only allows the plan to discuss what development should go ahead with rather than what development should be prevented. In many ways environmental concerns are often seen as being in opposition to development and this is perhaps reflected in the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan. The Council has argued

that is has an adopted Sustainable Design and Construction Guide that readers of the NP are directed to; the Council did not considered appropriate to repeat existing policy/guidance in the NP.

Those policy sectors which were directly represented within the process were those related to housing, the fishing industry, property development / real estate and other businesses located within the neighbourhood plan area. As outlined in the introduction there was a period within the process when the various sectoral interests played something of a 'wait and see' game before fully committing to the process.

This was partly due to the novelty of the process and a lack of understanding of the affect and importance of the resulting plan. The two interviewees from the business community described how they were unsure, to begin with, about fully committing to the planning process.

The relationship between a particular policy sector and the wider policy environment was also mentioned by the interviewees from the business community as being important. Some of those representing these policy sectors initially saw their key institutional relationships as being with those outside the neighbourhood plan area. For example the fishing industry has a strong relationship with regional fishing institutions and is predominately affected by national and EU policy institutions in their everyday lives. Accordingly it took some time before they could be convinced of the benefits of being part of a local initiative.

One aspect of the uncertainty was related to the outcome of the process. This will be discussed in more detail in sections 4 & 6, but it certainly seemed that in some policy sectors there was a lack of appreciation on the part of those involved as to what the outcome should look like and which policy sectors it should and could address.

## **2.2 Cross-Sector Synergy**

One of the stronger elements of the NSFQ planning process was its ability to engage with a variety of public and private sector actors during the course of the planning process. This was done in a variety of ways. A number of external institutions representing particular sectoral interests were invited to give evidence to the committee. This evidence gathering took place in the *learning phase* of the planning process. Two of the interviewees suggested that this level of interest and access to institutions from a range of sectors might have been due to the fact that the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan was one of the first in the country to undertake this form of plan. Therefore, several institutions were keen to be associated with the process and become involved at an early stage. Whatever the reason may have been for external institutions becoming involved, the level of information available to the group and the range of opinions on offer were welcome and added to the strength of the groups' final output. A key question for future consideration, however, is whether this level of institutional, cross-sectoral, involvement can be sustained in future planning or indeed territorial governance processes in the locality.

Another potential pitfall in this wealth of sectoral support is the risk of information overload. Time and again the members of the neighbourhood plan committee indicated their discomfort in being asked to carry out what to them seemed to be the role of professional planner. As the development of the plan progressed the number of people directly participating in the meetings and contributing to the planning document itself fell substantially. A number of the stakeholders interviewed attributed this fall of interest and participation to the complexity of the process. This was particularly acute in the final stages of drafting the plan. The majority of the final drafting was carried out by the committee chairman and local planning officer with contributions from a developer and a representative of the fishing industry. This could mean that the final output of the process risks not capturing the complete picture provided by all the sectors involved in its production.

### **3. Coordinating the actions of actors and institutions**

The aim of neighbourhood planning, as stated in the Localism Act 2011, is to achieve a bottom-up, community-led process. However, this process has to be facilitated by a range of institutions in order to conform with the formal requirements of the planning system in England. There were three main institutional groups which had an impact on the governance of the neighbourhood plan: the local authority; other non-governmental civic institutions such as English Heritage; and the business-related institutions such as those within the fishing and tourism industries. In other words, the governance of neighbourhood plan was influenced by the government, the market, and the organised civic society groups.

#### **3.1 *Governing Capacity***

The most complicated and perhaps the most problematic of the institutional relationships was that with the local planning authority. There was a tension built into the process as a result of a professional planning task being handed over to an unskilled group of individuals called the neighbourhood forum. There was a feeling, expressed by professional planners, that this was perhaps a step too far in terms of subsidiarity. The problems of seeking to balance local knowledge and ideas with the requirements of a statutory planning process were acknowledged both by the planning officers within the local authority and by members of the neighbourhood plan committee. This balance between the professional nature of the planning process and the neighbourhood group being asked to undertake the work was initially a source of trepidation for both the group and the local authority

“We shall go through this process, we shall do whatever, come up with a document for which we will be thanked, which will go on a shelf and gather dust because no one has a cat in hell's chance of doing this. Because you know, these guys, planners have been doing this for donkey's years and they are not going to give up their jobs for the likes of us.” (Interviewee D - 2012)

The neighbourhood plan committee were, however, able to draw upon the knowledge of other institutions from the region to develop their planning knowledge. As part of the capacity building phase of the process, a number of civic institutions and professional planning organisations were invited to make presentations to the group on particular aspects of the spatial planning process. However, a number of interviewees pointed out that this may have involved a degree of self-interest on the part of those institutions whose motivation may have been involvement in a novel planning process. Whether similar institutions would be interested in assisting others involved in drawing up neighbourhood plans is therefore unclear.

The neighbourhood plan committee were lucky in that a facilitator, with a professional planning background, was appointed to help the group with the planning process. The facilitator was a key figure in the process of knitting together the contributions of the various institutions and connecting the neighbourhood plan committee to those external institutions. At an early stage the facilitator made a decision to be neutral in his comments. The facilitator therefore chose not to express an opinion about whether a decision was good or bad or where there were various options available which would, in his professional view, be the best.

The local authority interviewee also expressed concern about the role the local authority played in the technical aspect of the process. A number of times the wishes of the group were questioned by the local authority in terms of the validity. This was on the basis of evidence for the decision or in terms of its conformity with planning legislation or other policy at a higher spatial level.

### **3.2 Leadership**

The leadership of the Neighbourhood Forum was initially problematic. The process of forming the group and organising a governance structure was somewhat haphazard. The first chairman of the group left soon after the process began, with the deputy chairman stepping up to fill the gap. The skills of the two individuals were in marked contrast. The first chairman had little experience of such a role and interviewees expressed the view that this individual had failed to offer the leadership required to drive the process forward. In contrast the second chairman has experience of such a role and further brought additional project management skills to the process. This is a wider issue for bottom-up territorial governance. The territorial governance structure is essentially a self-selecting one which may or may not possess the required leadership skills needed to drive forward such a process. At the end, NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan, through both luck and management, developed a coherent leadership structure with a good mix of skills and resources. The strength of leadership may therefore be directly related to the socio-economic make-up of that area. Areas which lack the necessary store of human and financial capital to engage successfully in territorial governance of this nature may suffer. NSFQ was fortunate to have areas of educated and willing residents in and around its boundary so was able to tap into this human resource to underpin the leadership it needed.

### **3.3 Subsidiarity**

By its very nature the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan is an experiment in subsidiarity. It is an attempt to devolve the development of spatial plans to the lowest possible level. The risk in doing this is that those undertaking the neighbourhood planning process are too far removed from those who determine how the planning process should be undertaken. There is a question as to whether the process has been devolved too far with the result that those individuals who are being asked to govern the neighbourhood plan do not have the necessary tools to do so. As outlined above, both the community members who have taken part in the planning process and the institutional actors supporting the process, expressed concern that they did not have the skills, or access to those with the skills, necessary for effective territorial governance of neighbourhood plans.

One possible solution suggested by the group was to have an expert planning advisor seconded to the Neighbourhood Forum. In contrast to the current role of facilitator, the advisor would provide advice, based on their expert opinion, on the decisions being made by the committee. It was felt that professional advice of this nature would overcome some of the problems encountered by the group when they were asked to make judgments and decisions as part of the planning process. The danger with this approach is the risk that the plan relies too heavily on the advice of the expert and the planning process ceases to be truly the work of the neighbourhood.

## **4. Mobilising stakeholder participation**

The mobilisation of a range of stakeholders at the local level was one of the main aims of neighbourhood planning. The success of the neighbourhood planning process, in terms of its legitimacy, was to a large extent dependent on its success in mobilising stakeholder from all sectors.

### **4.1 Democratic Legitimacy**

In the case of neighbourhood planning the legitimacy of the process is firstly secured through the participatory nature of the process. Once the plan has been produced a second stage of the process is to have a local referendum. Through this two stage process the neighbourhood plan seeks to gain both participatory and democratic legitimacy. In the particular case of NSFQ, because the process was started before the statutory rules and procedures for neighbourhood plans were set out by central government the decision was made to make the plan a Supplementary Planning Document. This carries less weight in the local planning process than a neighbourhood plan as it is only advisory in nature. This is in contrast to other neighbourhood plans which set out planning policy which must be adhered to. Once the government set out the rules and procedures governing neighbourhood plans the NSFQ committee did consider the possibility of switching to produce a neighbourhood plan which with more statutory weight. However, they decided

not to for two main reasons. The first related to time. The process had been underway for about 6 months when the option arose. To produce a neighbourhood plan would have meant starting all over again. The group were not prepared to do this.

The second reason, which links to the democratic legitimacy of the process, related to the referendum. It was not clear during the development of the NSFQ neighbourhood plan, who would be entitled to take part in the referendum. In the view of the local authority, it would be the residents of the wider district. This could have two consequences. First, it could exclude those individuals who had businesses in the area but did not live there. Secondly, it could also mean that the majority of the people voting in the referendum would have lived outside the boundary of the territory designated for the neighbourhood plan. Whilst there was an argument that these people had an indirect interest in the territory it was felt by the group that there was too high a risk to include them in a referendum because they thought that all their hard work would have been undone if the majority of voters outside the area decided to vote against. This could have happened for political reasons; for example the neighbourhood plan initiative was initially promoted by the Conservative Mayor. The national government has now issued statutory guidance which states only eligible voters within the neighbourhood plan area can vote in the referendum save in exceptional circumstances.

On the face of it democratic legitimacy has been lost. The opportunity to gain legitimacy through democratic means (i.e. referendum) has been missed. However as will be discussed in more detail in the next section, the stakeholders interviewed felt strongly that this was unnecessary and participatory legitimacy was sufficient to secure the overall legitimacy of the neighbourhood plan.

#### **4.2 Public Accountability**

The process of forming the neighbourhood plan committee and subsequent governance of the process of producing the neighbourhood plan was very much open to public scrutiny. All meetings were held in public and the committee were very conscious of the need to make as many people aware of the plan as possible. A range of participatory processes were undertaken during the development of the plan. The committee held monthly meetings and there were also a number of drop-in events held in the centre of North Shields. For the first event the facilitator went so far as to organise a special radio programme on the local radio station to publicise the event and elicit participation in the process. Also publicity materials including posters were produced and distributed (see Figure 4).

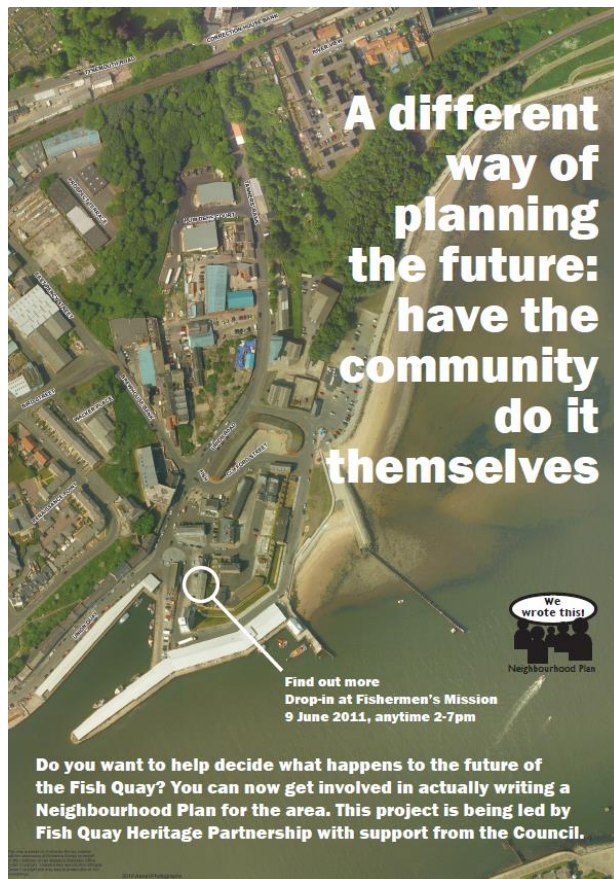


Figure 4: Poster produced by NSFQ Neighbourhood Forum to mobilize stakeholders' participation

The committee was aware of the fact that holding meetings in the evenings would exclude certain groups so they also conducted a household survey to gain the views of stakeholders who perhaps were unable to attend regular meetings. One interesting aspect of the household survey was the various interviewees' reaction to the response rate of 25%. The institutional interviewees, particularly from the local authority, were pleased with this response rate which was significantly higher than their usual rate for planning consultation. On the other hand a resident who was a member of the neighbourhood plan committee expressed disappointment at what they perceived to be a low response. The feeling was that a plan which involved only ¼ of the population could not be said to be representative. As one member of the neighbourhood plan committee put it:

“The idea of reaching out, the idea that a questionnaire was suitable and [name removed] reassuring people that 25% was a fantastic percentage back, well it the council never achieve that.... but that's the Council, we're not the Council and we are the neighbourhood. It's not acceptable to say 25% is OK.” (Interviewee F - 2012).

For them there was a risk that the neighbourhood plan would be perceived as being produced by “the usual local worthies” (Interviewee F - 2012).



Even with these efforts to include as many stakeholders as possible there were still some that did not engage with the process. A notable omission was younger people living and working in the territory. It is not entirely clear why this was the case and there is a need for further research into this. One suggestion was that it is a cultural difference in the sense that today younger people use online communication tools to engage in various debates. It was pointed out by one interviewee that the Fish Quay has a vibrant online community using Facebook, but there was little engagement in the process by that on-line community which was centred around the fishing industry. It is not clear why that group failed to get involved when they seem to have a strong community voice and interest in the neighbourhood. Conversely there seemed to have been little attempt on the part of the neighbourhood plan committee to reach out to that group either. The neighbourhood plan committee chose to adopt more traditional engagement techniques such as drop-in sessions and the above discussed household questionnaire survey.

### **4.3 Transparency**

As outlined above there was a fairly long initial period in the neighbourhood plan process to mobilise stakeholder participation and build the stakeholders' capacity to undertake the planning process. Interviewing the various stakeholders who became involved in the NP, it became clear that each brought their own expectations and preconceptions to the process. To a certain extent, the dominant reason for engagement of all the stakeholders seemed to be the desire to protect some aspect of their lives. For example for stakeholders from the fishing industry there was concern that further residential development would impinge on their ability to continue and grow as a 24 hour operation. For the residents in the area it was a concern that the built environment within the area was enhanced, and more specifically, the majority of residents on the Neighbourhood Plan Committee came from one block of flats that had concerns about future development affecting their sea views.

The initial stages of the process therefore included a period where each of the stakeholders began to learn more about the other stakeholders within their territory, and to understand them better. A good example of this was the common perception held by various stakeholders of the state of the fishing industry. There was a common assumption (indeed also among the authors of this report), that the fishing industry was in decline and hence the neighbourhood plan was essentially planning for a post-fishing neighbourhood. This is not the case. North Shields has actually benefited from the decline of other ports and is expanding. Whilst not comparable to the boom time, it is none the less thriving and continuing to develop. Through the neighbourhood planning process the local residents began to appreciate this and accepted the North Shields Fish Quay does have a future which must be protected.

Previous regeneration efforts for the area have centred on modernising industrial property which has, in turn, freed up the older industrial buildings for redevelopment. It was this change that was the original catalyst for the community action in the neighbourhood. The Neighbourhood Plan Committee

is officially a sub-committee of the Fish Quay Heritage Partnership. This was formed as a partnership between the local authority and the community to plan the redevelopment of the redundant buildings and was a way of attracting investment to the area. The fact that the genesis of the neighbourhood plan was from those with an interest in the physical regeneration could have coloured the process and potentially marginalised other stakeholders.

However, this did not happen, as conscious efforts were made by the group, the facilitator and the local authority to contact and include other stakeholders. The inclusion of stakeholders from the fishing industry has resulted in a statement within the planning document which confirms that fishing and its associated industry are at the heart of the neighbourhood and its culture and that other activity must, to a certain extent, defer to it. This is clearly set in the vision statement of the North Shields Fish Quay Neighbourhood Plan Supplementary Planning Document:

3.2.6 The Fish Quay and related fishing industry area will essentially continue to be available for economic activity on a 24 hour, 365 days a year basis. (NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan, 2013 p14)

## **5. Being adaptive to changing contexts**

The ability to be adaptable, in the face of numerous uncertainties about the future, is seen as being critical in terms of territorial governance. The scale at which the process of territorial governance took place in North Shields offered both advantages and disadvantages. A limited pool of people willing and able to take on the responsibility of territorial governance meant that on the one hand decisions could be made quickly when faced with changing circumstances. On the other hand the loss of key individuals, from such a small group, could limit its ability to adapt to change. The ephemeral nature of the neighbourhood plan committee (the committee has now disbanded) also limits its ability to adapt to changed circumstances in the future.

### **5.1 Reflexivity**

The NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan offers evidence of reflexivity, capacity building and learning within the community. Other current territorial governance structures at the neighbourhood level do not offer the opportunity to capture the learning and knowledge gained through the neighbourhood plan process for the longer term. This is an important issue which is partly caused by the design of neighbourhood planning process. As noted in section 1, in non-metropolitan areas of England and Wales the neighbourhood plan are undertaken by Parish Councils. These are local governance institutions which have a continuing role to play in the territory in which they are situated. In contrast, metropolitan areas have no such local governance structures (i.e. no Parish Councils). As in the case of NSFQ, a neighbourhood committee must first be formed before the governance process can begin. In turn once

the plan has been produced there is no reason for the governance institution to continue. As the facilitator for the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan commented:

“In 5 years time the thing will need reviewing. Heaven knows whether the group, a group, any group would come forward to want to do that. That’s a whole big thing with neighbourhood plans that no one has addressed yet.”

“.....there is a lot of debate about, well we have made a difference, we have had influence, the community has used us as a consultation forum, has come to us to ask our opinion so why can't that continue?”

“How will this thing continue will the momentum run out? Because there is no purpose, no focus, official status for the group.” (Interviewee A - 2012)

In some ways therefore the process as it stands risks wasting the learning and capacity developed during the course of the planning process. However this may overstate the loss. The interviewees indicated they felt there were two ways the experience and learning could be maintained for the future. The first was the stronger working relationships between the various stakeholders involved in the plan. Prior to the neighbourhood plan there were few arenas where all these stakeholders could share ideas and get to know and understand each other better. One of the main examples of how understanding has been enhanced is in relation to the fishing industry and its place in the neighbourhood. All interviewees expressed the view that there was a greater understanding of the needs and aspirations of the fishing industry among the various stakeholders. It remains to be seen whether this can be carried forward into other aspects or incarnations of this level of territorial governance in the future.

The second way in which the experience of producing the development plan has been carried forward is in the way the local authority seeks to engage with local communities. At the outset of the process there was some trepidation on the part of the local authority as to their role within the process and what the outcome would be. Following the completion of the process there is a better understanding of the needs of the community and some useful insights as to how to engage with other communities in the future. The local authority confirmed they are not actively seeking to start a neighbourhood plan in any other community but agreed that producing a planning document through the neighbourhood plan process had produced a document that better reflected the aspirations of the community than the usual consultation methods.

## **5.2 Adaptability**

This is perhaps the weakest territorial governance element within this case study. The plan, once adopted by the local authority as a legal planning document will remain as it is for the foreseeable future. Stakeholders understood it would be at least 5 years before the neighbourhood plan would

be reviewed and possibly amended. This could leave it vulnerable to external changes or shocks to the system.

Strategic Planning in England takes a long time to change and adapt to changing circumstances either at a local or national level. This can be illustrated by the fact that a number of the key issues facing the NSFQ as outlined in the current document closely match those identified in a regeneration strategy document dating from 2001 (EDAW, 2001). This problem of adaptability may be an issue with the planning system in general rather than a specific issue with Neighbourhood Planning.

On the other hand a number of the stakeholders argued that the plan itself was flexible enough to be interpreted to accommodate a number of scenarios. This was particularly the case in relation to the future regeneration of specific sites with the area. During the process of drawing up the neighbourhood plan there seems to have been a tension between being quite prescriptive in terms of the nature and design of any redevelopment (an approach view favoured by the local authority), and setting out more general principles of development and allowing each case to be judged on its merits. This second approach was one favoured by the developer involved in the neighbourhood plan but was also a view adopted by the majority of the community as the neighbourhood plan took shape. There are two related factors that may have led to this second approach. The first is the need for the neighbourhood plan to slot into an already complex landscape of planning policy at both the local and national level. The NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan was being developed at a time when both national and local planning structures were (and still are) in a state of flux. For example whilst the community were deliberating the plan, several 1000 pages of national planning policy were replaced with a much reduced single National Planning Policy Framework. At the same time the planning framework for the local authority was also undergoing change with the old Unitary Development Plan being replaced with a Local Planning Framework. This uncertainty and additional complication within the planning system may have resulted in reluctance on the part of the community, particularly the residents within the plan area, to engage with the technical aspects of planning policy. This was expressed by a number of the 'professional' stakeholders who confirmed that they wrote the majority of the policy and evidence section of the neighbourhood plan.

## **6. Realising place based/territorial specificities and impacts**

The small geographical nature of the neighbourhood which was subject to the neighbourhood plan meant the place based specificities and impacts were clear to all involved. The strong commitment to place making within the neighbourhood planning process may, however, come at the expense of wider territorial integration. The very local nature of the process could result in a very narrow perspective being taken on territorial specificities. This was

acknowledged as a risk by the neighbourhood forum and attempts were made to look beyond the neighbourhood plan boundary.

### **6.1 Territorial Relationality**

One of the interesting aspects of neighbourhood plans is the ability for those involved in the process to determine the boundary of the territory they are seeking to plan for. There is however a slight difference between neighbourhood plan in a rural context, which are based on Parish Council boundaries, and those in an urban context which are based on the concept of neighbourhood. Whereas a Parish is well defined - indeed it is one of the oldest administrative demarcations in England - the concept of what constitutes a neighbourhood is not as well defined or understood. More than one of the stakeholders interviewed likened the process of forming the neighbourhood plan committee to creating a de facto parish council.

In the case of the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan the original territory for the plan was to be a much smaller area centred around the industrial activity within the area and the Fish Quay itself. As the governing capacity of the group was established there was a feeling that this was too small an area. The proposed area was less than a square kilometre in size and as it excluded much of the residential property in the area had a resident population of less than a hundred people. A larger territory was proposed based on the conservation area<sup>2</sup> boundary. This is perhaps a result of the history of public participation in and around the Fish Quay. The neighbourhood plan committee was formed as a sub-committee of the Fish Quay Heritage Partnership. Whilst this history and continuity was very important to establish the governing capacity within the group, the group was conscious of the fact that this could act as a barrier to wider participation by other members of the community if it was perceived as being just about the historic environment. The group therefore made a concerted effort to widen participation and establish the terms of reference for the group that included the historic built environment, but only as one part of the wider characteristic of the area.

Most of the stakeholders agreed that the neighbourhood plan committee achieved this aim and the group reflected and took into consideration a wider set of policy sectors than just the historic built environment. There was also a feeling that the process was also effective in capturing the particular needs and knowledge of the territory.

Among the other stakeholders there was also a feeling, that having a territorially based planning process which was controlled to a greater degree by those living and working in the territory, improved their understanding of each other. This is best illustrated by the fishing industry. Previous development plans and policy documents have included a commentary which to a greater or lesser degree paints the fishing industry as an industry in terminal decline. This generates a narrative, in planning terms, of an area seeking to plan for a post-fishing future. This in fact is not a true picture,

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<sup>2</sup> A conservation area is a planning designation which seeks to protect and enhance the nature of the historic built environment in a particular location.

because as a fishing port North Shields is thriving. The fish processing industry, whilst no longer reliant on fish landed in the port, is also doing well. Therefore this misrepresentation of the fishing industry in previous planning documents had led to a degree of mistrust between the fishing industry and other members of the NSFQ community. Although initially sceptical about the neighbourhood plan process, stakeholders from the fishing industry did become involved in the process. This resulted in the principle that the NSFQ has at its heart the fishing industry and that should be written into the neighbourhood plan and being accepted by all stakeholders involved in the process. All the stakeholders interviewed agreed this was one of the strengths of the neighbourhood plan.

## **6.2 Territorial Knowledgeability**

The neighbourhood plan was all about looking forward, of seeking to outline the long term future of the neighbourhood. It was hoped by rooting the process in the community the result would be more meaningful on a territorial basis and would also have legitimacy as it interacted with the wider planning process and institutions at a higher level. What this also led to was a limiting of scope. To enable the plan prepared at a local level to engage with the higher governance structures, it needed to conform to their requirements in terms of evidence and knowledge. This required the sacrifice of a certain amount of local tacit knowledge in favour of the codified knowledge which is to be found in economic appraisal and housing market surveys.

This need for codified evidence as a way to establish the plan's credibility as a formal planning document disappointed some of the stakeholders involved in the neighbourhood plan committee. They felt the preparation of a neighbourhood plan was an opportunity to engage in 'blue sky' thinking about the future of the neighbourhood. This was in contrast with the local authority stakeholder who viewed the neighbourhood plan as 'the final piece in the planning jigsaw' for the area. In the local authority's view the plan was needed to add the finer detail to other plans and provide information about the nature of development on particular areas of undeveloped land and the style and design of new buildings. The mismatch of understanding between the neighbourhood plan committee and the local authority (specifically about the nature of the knowledge that was to be valued within the process) led to one of the particularly active members of the neighbourhood plan committee to end their involvement in the process.

It is clear from this case study that it is critical from the start that all stakeholders involved in the process understand the nature of the outcome and the degree to which this can be controlled by them. It was only at a late stage in the process that it became apparent to the participants that whilst the project was called a neighbourhood plan there were a number of constraints on them in the way they validated the process and produced a plan with was 'acceptable' in planning terms. In the case of neighbourhood plans there is in effect a gatekeeper role within the planning process. To enable to neighbourhood plan to pass from the first stage of community development to the second stage (i.e. the local referendum) it must pass the scrutiny of a

planning inspector. In the case of NSFQ, this did not happen because as mentioned above at the later stage, NSFQ was presented as a Supplementary Planning Document and not as a neighbourhood plan.

The stakeholders decided it would add to its credibility if the plan was subjected to a review by a 'critical friend'. This resulted to revisions being made to the document to ensure it conformed to the planning requirements. In other instances of territorial governance this extra-local gatekeeper role may not be as explicit as in the case of neighbourhood plans. However, the legitimacy of any governance procedure will depend on acceptance of the particular form of knowledge that has been used to inform the process. This can risk pitting local tacit territorial knowledge against extra-local codified knowledge in a way that risks undermining the benefits of truly local planning governance.

## **7. Other elements and aspect of Territorial Governance**

One of the key problems for the Neighbourhood Planning process is the combination of a statutory process with individuals who have little or no experience or knowledge of the requirements needed to comply with the statutory procedure. One "good" feature of the NSFQ was that an independent facilitator was appointed to build territorial governance capacity within the group and then guide the group through the process of preparing the plan once they were up and running. This was not without its problems however. A number of the stakeholders, including the facilitator, expressed the view that this role should be altered in the future to more of a professional advisor. As this was one of the first areas to take up the option of preparing a neighbourhood plan it was not possible to learn any lessons from previous attempts. From the outset therefore, the facilitator made the decision to be neutral in all things and merely set out options for the group rather than making a professional judgement as to which option would be best for the area. This was done in the spirit of allowing the community to set the agenda and make their own decisions. However the responsibility of such a level of decision making may have led to a risk averse set of decisions being made by the group. A number of stakeholders expressed disappointment that the final draft plan was somewhat vague in a number of areas and 'lacks bite'.

The second feature of "good" territorial governance was the process by which the territory in question was chosen. Whilst on the face of it neighbourhood plans are a bottom-up process, in this case it was the local authority that initially chose the territory which formed the neighbourhood. However, once the neighbourhood plan committee had gained the governing capacity to function and take over control of the process, they widened the territory to include areas they felt more accurately reflected their community. This flexibility in the process of determining the boundaries of a territory could be translated into other areas or indeed to other scales. Inevitably there needs to

be a starting point in any process and an arbitrary boundary drawn on the map. Once this boundary appears on a map there is a certain degree of finality to it. This should be resisted and a certain degree of flexibility allowed to change things or indeed to allow a degree of fuzziness to boundaries which are more in keeping with the way individuals and groups relate to their world. This takes into account the concept of non-Euclidean, relational space (Healey, 2007; Davoudi and Strange, 2009; Davoudi, 2012). These fuzzy boundaries would also begin to address the issues around communities of place and communities of interest.

## **8. Conclusion**

### ***8.1 Major findings on the basis of the dimensions and indicators***

Whilst this is the smallest of all the TANGO case studies in terms of the geographic territory it covers there are a number of features of “good” territorial governance that can be translated to other area and at larger scales than found in the case study.

The first feature is the project phases that the neighbourhood plan passed through as it developed and gained governing capacity. This was more down to necessity than to planning in this instance but served as a useful concept to inform future territorial governance practice. Indeed the capacity building aspect of territorial governance has been identified as a key feature in terms of rural development for some time (Ward & McNicolas, 1998). Most of the stakeholders conceded that had they been required to immediately start substantive discussions aimed at developing the plan, the opportunity to fully understand each stakeholder’s point of view may have been lost. As one interviewee commented, “there would have been a lot more butting of heads.” It is interesting that there was a need to have this capacity building phase in the process despite there being a history of community action in the area. This may have been a result of the aims of the process, to engage with a wider cross-section of the community and encompass more policy sectors than had previously been addressed. This will be important for other territorial situations where existing institutions engage in governance activities across new territories. There may be a tendency to rely on existing systems and processes which may be transferred from traditional governance arrangements to the new territory. A period of capacity building and knowledge sharing will allow this to be tested and if needed new processes and arrangements to be developed to better manage the new situation.

This capacity building phase was also found to be helpful in the process of dealing with the different types of knowledge, tacit and codified knowledge, both of which are relevant for the territory in question and which are needed in any governance arrangement. Where there is multi-level institutional involvement and a desire to engage the widest number of policy sectors there will inevitably be issues around the integration of tacit knowledge with more codified or scientific forms of knowledge. In the case of the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan the local authority stakeholder was interested in evidence-based policy making. This required a certain degree of codified



knowledge to be sourced and incorporated within the process to enable formally accepted forms of policy. At times this has proved to be difficult to handle for the non-institutional stakeholders, particularly residents from the area. They rely on a tacit understanding of what is happening in their neighbourhood and what needs to be done to make things better. This is often based on instinct and feeling rather than 'facts' as determined by other institutional stakeholders.

In territorial governance processes, at all scales, allowance must be made to incorporate all aspects of knowledge including expert knowledge. The latter was appreciated by those taking part in the NSFQ whereby the presence of an expert facilitator was seen as helpful but all stakeholders were of the view that in the future this role should be one of expert advisor rather than neutral facilitator.

### **8.2 Relationship between dimensions and indicators**

The NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan was territorial governance at the micro-scale. In the initial stages of the process the first two dimensions were very important. The community had to enlist the support of a range of sectors and stakeholders groups and bring them into the process. The indicators; cross-sector synergy, governing capacity and leadership were crucial in the early stages of the process. During the evidence gathering stage of the planning process the third dimension, mobilising stakeholder participation, and its related indicators became more important.

Finally, due to the very local nature of the process, the territory and territorial knowledge played a key role in the success or failure of the plan. A plan which did not exhibit territorial relationality and knowledge would have been perceived to be a failure.

### **8.3 Promoters and inhibitors of territorial governance**

#### **Promoters:**

- *Cross-sector synergy*: There was a concerted attempt to engage and involve a wide range of sectors.
- *Governing capacity*: The initial stages of the process were focused on building governing capacity for the project. This resulted in the development of a good governance structure.
- *Subsidiarity*: Highest level of subsidiarity, the plan is prepared and produced by those directly affected by it
- *Democratic legitimacy*: No direct representation. A self-selected forum approved by local authority. However, legitimacy was established through a two stage process – participation in the process and then confirmation by elected representatives
- *Transparency*: Diversity of views within stakeholders. Institutions felt there was transparency - community stakeholders did not.
- *Territorial relationality*: Group decided the boundary of territory as part of the capacity building process. While this ensured strong territorial relationality within the Neighbourhood Plan Area it did little to improve relationality with the wider district.

- *Territorial knowledgeability & impacts*: This was felt by the stakeholders to be the NSFQ Neighbourhood Plan's strongest outcome. Territorial knowledge and local understanding of impact being used to develop a local strategic plan.

### **Inhibitors:**

- *Public policy packages*: Limited to knowledge of participants, which put them at a disadvantage when trying to bring together various policies implemented at a variety of scales
- *Cross-sector synergy*: The relative power of the various actors was important, some actors had more experience of this type of process and were therefore better able to engage fully and ensure their sectoral interests were protected.
- *Governing capacity*: There is no mechanism to capture the capacity developed during the production of the plan. Now the plan has been approved and adopted by the Local Authority there is a risk that the governing capacity will be lost.
- *Leadership*: Very dependent on the skills of individuals and volunteers. Conflict between the need to undertake professional tasks and a group of non-professionals undertaking the task.
- *Reflexivity*: Limited but did build on previous community development however the learning gained during the development of this strategic plan risks being lost once it has been completed.
- *Adaptability*: Not very adaptable. Limited strategic thinking and little scope to revisit the decisions in the future.

### **Interviewees**

*Random list of Interviewees (To guarantee anonymity, the order of interviewees does not correspond with the alphabetical references in the text)*

Independent Facilitator for the Neighbourhood Forum  
 Chairman of the NSFQ Neighbourhood Forum  
 Planning Officer from North Tyneside Council  
 Stakeholder from the fishing Industry  
 Land Holder and development stakeholder  
 Stakeholder from the local community (resident & business owner)

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