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Anti-politics in context: the politics of localism in London

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ABSTRACT

There is a substantial body of theory on the notion of anti-politics, which is characterised as a widespread public disengagement from politics. The Localism Act 2011 was intended to increase engagement. This paper reviews research into the development of neighbourhood planning in London, so as to discern the politics of this leading-edge localism. Anti-politics theory is used as a frame of reference and is contextualised to this London experience of civic engagement. Three forms of anti-politics theory are identified; empirical, process and ideological. The uneven advance of neighbourhood planning across London and the widely varying levels of support from borough councils leads to speculation of a contra-localism at work, which amounts to an additional form of anti-politics; institutional. It is suggested that resistance by some councils might be explained, either by the challenge from an emergent deliberative democracy, or by ideological opposition to some aspects of neighbourhood planning in practice.

Keywords: anti-politics, politicisation, localism, neighbourhood planning

INTRODUCTION

This paper sets out to examine the politics, or anti-politics, of "localism". In particular, to examine neighbourhood planning, as epitomising localism, which is the main provision of the 2011 Localism Act. It is intended to review the ways in which neighbourhood planning in practice may exhibit features consistent with the various ideas around "anti-politics" and the related ideas of "politicisation" or "de-politicisation". Definitions of these prevailing notions of anti-politics and de-politicisation derive from mainstream political science. The evolving practice of neighbourhood planning, thus far, has been empirically and theoretically reviewed mainly by researchers in planning, urban studies and geography. These vocational disciplines are entirely politically literate and have adopted some of the ideas about anti-politics. Political science as a discipline has perhaps been economical in its applied studies, so that anti-politics theory may benefit from wider contextualisation and use as a frame of reference. Employing ideas across disciplines and attempting a synopsis risks a conceptual blurring. In the field however a geographically widespread and substantial transfer of power has been legislated for and put into effect, so that a new political dynamic is being generated (according to the planners

and geographers). That is, a transfer of authority from representative local government to community groups, self-mobilised and engaged in planning and shaping their own identified neighbourhoods. Thousands of practical arenas have been created in England where the tensions between deliberative and representative democracy are being played out. The prevailing context is a so-called "anti-political" climate of popular disenchantment and disengagement. The active citizen (especially a non-partisan one), who gets involved in local politics, is acutely aware of the practicalities of this political climate. Indeed, a community campaigner for change who hurls themselves against the barbed wire of unresponsive officialdom, party political insiders and bureaucratic complexity, is likely, sooner or later, themselves to become disillusioned and disengaged; and thus become part of the problem. On the other hand, an ambitious individual, intent on a political career, knows what to do. It is not public service to "place" which matters, but service to party. That is to say, across swathes of the UK, career access is determined by the spatial distribution of entrenched party political power; meaning safe seats, council or parliamentary. Incumbency and winner take all, has disabled opponents and discouraged dissent. This is to argue that the exclusionary conduct of political parties in power locally may constitute a form of anti-politics and that consequent challenges to the mainstream political parties represent an insurgent reaction. There are over 2500 neighbourhood planning groups in England re-defining the significance of place and asserting local identity by exercising new statutory planning power. This must have profound implications for the prevailing ideas about anti-politics. A case will be made, that at the extreme, unaccountable officials and local career politicians are, tactically, obstructing neighbourhood planning in London, so as to operate anti-politically. Some London boroughs are demonstrably one-party states and a professional hegemony can be seen at work. As local government elections regularly take place, a minority only cast their votes. There is a democratic dysfunctionality (perhaps causally associated with anti-politics) which operates both locally and nationally (allowing that general election turnouts are somewhat larger). Although the top of the blighted tree at Westminster has all the profile, and the misconduct of MPs tends to define much of the anti-politics commentary, it may be that the rot originates at the roots, in local governance and local party politics. An antipathy to neighbourhood planning, or contra-localism, in London may be precluding the democratically restorative possibilities of neighbourhood engagement in planning. Three mainstream schools of thought about anti-politics will be identified and briefly examined using key literature focussed upon an exemplary author in each case. These schools of thought will be identified as; empirical, process and ideological anti-politics. The ideas around deliberative politics are a recurring theme and also appear in some of the research into neighbourhood planning. A fourth depiction will be proposed, arising from London's contra-localism, and given the term institutional anti-politics. Some of the grounded research into neighbourhood planning by the geographers and planners will be reviewed to see how far anti-politics theory has been consciously employed or is reflected. The justification for such an eclectic approach is of course the need to situate theory in the real world so as to better illuminate problems while appraising the explanatory power and utility of anti-politics theory.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING IN LONDON: INSTITUTIONAL ANTI-POLITICS?

There is an uneven and much slower pace of neighbourhood planning in London compared with the rest of England. There are about 100 planning groups in London with five "made" plans (following a referendum) as against over 2500 groups in England overall with over 280 "made" plans (DCLG 2017). Very much in character with the voluntarist nature of neighbourhood planning, the most reliable and regular source of data about Greater London is gathered and published by an activist network known as "Neighbourhood Planners London". This unofficial and independent group has an informative website; it calls occasional conferences and it has gently lobbied in support of neighbourhood planning (Neighbourhood Planners London 2017a). The majority of members are active citizen planners supplemented by participation from the cottage industry of neighbourhood planning consultants. It is well understood that the generally slow progress in London is largely attributable to the absence of parish councils and the consequent difficulties of defining neighbourhood planning boundaries, together with the absence of precept funding that parish councils can command. Thus, aspiring neighbourhood planning groups in London have to agree precise boundaries and apply to their local planning authority (or more than one if cross-borough) for "designation" of the boundary and of their status as a "planning forum" (or "qualifying body"). The same designation hurdle operates in the other English cities. Unlike in rural England, where parish councils have statutory status, the disposition of each London borough to neighbourhood planning is therefore critical in obtaining designation, enabling entry to the process. The politics of localism in London appears to vary greatly from borough to borough. Neighbourhood Planners London (NPL) has monitored the progress of designations and referendums across London with an online interactive map and database (Neighbourhood Planners London 2017b). The London boroughs of Westminster and Camden have strongly supported local groups, so that respectively 15 designated groups and 12 designated groups are in being. Of the 12 Camden designated groups, two have "made" plans following referendums. These two boroughs are the exceptions and NPL has conducted an assessment of borough council support by reviewing their Local Plans to assess compliance with the national guidance on promoting neighbourhood planning (Neighbourhood Planners London 2017c). It is intended to "deepen the debate on why neighbourhood planning is taking off in some parts of the city, and not in others" (ibid p2). The support provided at three assigned levels is assessed as to how far neighbourhood planning is promoted through the Local (borough) Plan. Only six Local Plans fully recognise neighbourhood planning and provide guidance, and these include the Local Plans published by Westminster and Camden. Fifteen Local Plans supply partial recognition, while nine Local Plans give little or no recognition to neighbourhood planning. There is a general correspondence between these categories and the actual levels of neighbourhood planning activity in each borough. Bromley and Croydon appear to have no designated neighbourhood planning groups. According to the NPL report, "the distribution of neighbourhood planning activity in London is

patchy, with significant concentrations in some boroughs and little or no activity in others" (ibid p4). The reason for such differences is ascribed to a matter of council policy and "cannot easily be explained by differences in urban form, geography or demographics" (ibid p4). Party political control was not examined. In fact the Localism Act had cross-party support in parliament in 2011 and this generally remains true. In London the two boroughs with an almost complete neighbourhood planning geography are respectively, Conservative controlled Westminster and Labour controlled Camden, while the two averse borough are likewise split between Conservative Bromley and Labour Croydon. The wide neighbourhood planning variation is not just a matter of London party politics as usual.

There has been very little research into the political and constitutional consequences of neighbourhood planning in London, either reviewed systematically, or by case study. The absence of parish councils or their community council equivalent is critical. London's first community council (equivalent to a parish council) was set up in Queen's Park, Westminster in 2014 and there is a lobby "to promote and support the creation of new community councils to lay the foundations for devolution to the neighbourhood level" (NALC 2015). Westminster and Camden have demonstrated that despite the absence of parish councils, local people can mobilise to establish neighbourhood planning in London. A key question is whether the negligible progress in other boroughs is by default, of the statutory duty to support neighbourhood planning, or is actually wilful opposition. Local authorities are not in a position explicitly to defy an act of parliament. Even so Richmond has a declared policy of promoting its "village plans" and not neighbourhood plans. An 18 page Neighbourhood Planning Protocol makes the case "to ensure communities interested in developing a neighbourhood plan are fully aware of the village planning process before committing to the development of a neighbourhood plan" (London Borough of Richmond 2014). Waltham Forest's Statement of Community Involvement proposes to retain control of the process by "encouraging the preparation of neighbourhood plans as 'Community Plans'. Depending on the scope and nature of the proposals, these may be adopted as a "Supplementary Planning Document" (London Borough of Waltham Forest 2014). A position paper produced for the Neighbourhood Planners London group listed eight blocking tactics employed by local authorities which included the imposition of various delays, now largely prevented by tighter DCLG regulation (Burton T. 2015). There appears to be an institutional reluctance to replace in-house community planning or community engagement programmes with the more radically autonomous neighbourhood planning approach. There are examples of more direct opposition. For example Lambeth Council spent £140,000 producing a "refreshed masterplan" in preference to supporting an aspiring neighbourhood planning group, "The programme will feed into Lambeth's Local Plan in 2016, and a co-productive approach will be undertaken throughout the large scale engagement strategy" (London Borough of Lambeth 2016). Neighbourhood planning was mentioned once, as one of five identified risk factors (ibid p7).

In a PSE conference paper exploring localism as a form of "restorative politics", some of the many obstacles to neighbourhood planning in London were

identified. These included weak civic leadership, the problem of contested boundaries, shortage of planning officers, reluctance of councillors to compromise their positional power and a lack of appropriate or sufficient organisational capacity in the community (Pycock G. 2016). The professionals and experts interviewed for the paper were well aware of the problems but remained very positive, for example; "previously planning was 'decide then consult' but localism was 'consult then decide'. This involves an intensely democratic process" (ibid p15). There was concern about unreasonable and unrealistic demands placed upon citizens. Neighbourhood planning requires professional knowledge or access to paid consultants. It requires administration, continuous community engagement, and of course political skills. These factors apply London-wide so how to explain the variation in neighbourhood planning activity between boroughs? It is remarkable that several London boroughs may be withholding support or even actively opposing neighbourhood planning. Such a phenomenon of contra-localism would explain the limited progress in such boroughs. It may be that the radical shift of power implied by neighbourhood planning, from the local authority to the community, has provoked a (multi-party) political resistance. A comprehensive critique of London borough governance is hard to find in the literature, but the case for a massive democratic deficit is easily if polemically summarised. Some London councils have become oligarchic and centralist. The cabinet system introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 has created an executive elite of councillors meeting and determining policy in private (the "informal cabinet") with like-minded officers. This so-called informal cabinet is a one-party cabal prone to group think and confirmation bias. Formal cabinet meetings in public are simply a publicity platform for announcing policy. The necessary checks and balances are ineffectual. Poorly serviced scrutiny committees are not part of the policy community and are routinely ignored. Generous special responsibility allowances enable cabinet councillors to operate as professional politicians and equip them with a powerful system of financial patronage. Ward councillors are encouraged to concentrate on casework and the promotion of council policy, locally. Opposition councillors, who should provide the critical element of accountability, are marginalised and poorly supported, where they exist. Five London boroughs have four or fewer opposition councillors, of which councils, two have none (London Councils 2014). With consistently low percentage turnouts at elections, the ruling parties typically represent a derisorily low proportion of the electorate. In this scenario, resistance to the fundamental challenge of neighbourhood planning would not be surprising.

At its simplest, politics can be described as "winning and using power to govern society" (Collins 2010). Elaboration of this definition encompasses liberal politics, with the necessary conditions of free speech, the rule of law etc. Inescapably, by this basic definition, neighbourhood planning is to carry out the practice of politics. It is a political activity. But many groups engaged in neighbourhood planning, as with community groups in general, reject this definition, describing themselves explicitly as "apolitical" or "non-political". That politics and its practice is deemed as undesirable is a common view (anti-politics), which is not confined to the unsophisticated. In a paper by a former Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office, about a dangerous "politicisation of the civil service", the essential

propriety of "non-political" public servants was emphasised (Mountfield R. 2002). In day to day usage, "office politics" is regarded as undesirable and to be deplored. So, the widespread disengagement and disenchantment of the general public with politics and politicians, described by political scientists as anti-politics, did not suddenly emerge at the time of the MP's expenses scandal in 2014. There is an ambient scepticism. According to Jeremy Paxman (2002) "Does it matter if people stop believing in politicians? In the short term, perhaps not much: the British people have always held them in healthily low regard". Paxman goes on to warn however about the dangers of a complete loss of faith. The little reported democratic deficits discussed earlier, of the allegedly oligarchical London boroughs, arguably constitute a distinct form of anti-politics; institutional anti-politics. Public concern is very much about the conduct of politics, the avoidance of abuses of power and the observance of the conditions of liberal democracy. But these nuances are not clearly discerned. A simplified negative connotation is applied to political activity which is pervasive. There is undoubtedly a strong antipathy to political parties, to 'taking the party line' and to point scoring. Community groups, on reflection, might agree that they wish to be seen collectively as, "non-partisan" rather than, "non-political". It is easy to exploit this popular misconception of politics. The TV Question Time guest able to say, 'I am not a politician of course' is inviting the ascription of unsullied authority and absence of taint. Councillors and especially cabinet members (often indistinguishable from council officers sitting alongside on the platform) will affect to be above politics and apparently impartial. Opponents and critical members of the public (normally excluded from the platform) are vulnerable to the accusation of "being political", thus incurring opprobrium. Suppression of dissent by incumbent politicians in this way further debases the political currency and is profoundly anti-political. Dominant or oligarchical political groups, posited above, have effectively inhibited or precluded healthy political discourse. This phenomenon, of exploiting the popular misconception of politics so as to stifle debate, is another aspect of an institutional anti-politics.

ANTI-POLITICS AS DISENGAGEMENT; AN EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

In his prize-winning examination of anti-politics, Gerry Stoker's (2006), Why politics Matters, supplies a pragmatic, comprehensive and empirically-based synopsis. The general proposition, through an analysis of causes and pathologies, is that there is a widespread disenchantment and disengagement with politics and politicians. Throughout this consideration, of low voter turnout, breakdown in trust and so on, Stoker is posing the question as to how far this is a crisis and if so, is it a crisis of leadership (culpable politicians) or a crisis of followership (apathetic citizens denying their own agency)? In his defence of representative democracy, he emphasises the importance of efficacy in governance and argues the requirement for "a politics for amateurs". "Politics in democratic societies needs more than effective leaders and activists and a silent patient citizenry. It also requires citizen engagement" (ibid p149). His search for solutions and reforms includes a review of localism, defined as, "devolving power and resources towards front-line managers, local democratic structures and local consumers and communities" (ibid p 176). Stoker endorses

localism as; providing a base or site for better engagement in politics, as a means of employing local knowledge and linking this to higher levels of governance. Crucially, localism "enables the dimensions of trust, empathy and social capital to be fostered" (ibid p176). According to Stoker, there are two serious objections. The first is the danger of narrow parochialism and "not in my back yard" (NIMBYism) politics. Nevertheless Stoker welcomes local tensions and says, "conflict between interests and their resolution remains at the heart of politics, wherever it is conducted" (ibid p177). The second objection raised is the need to address inequalities faced by different communities and to recognise "both diversity in communities and a concern with equity issues" (ibid p177). This edition was published in 2006, pre-financial crash, and a third objection, reinforcing the second one, must surely be added, about the difficulty of devolving power within the budgetary constraints and contradictions of austerity in local government. Although localism (and its neighbourhood planning variant) is a reform which may be worthwhile in tackling anti-politics, this is probably conditional on overcoming these three objections.

Thus empirical anti-politics is a topical, loose-fit title for a bundle of political woes, dysfunctionalities and public discontent. Jennings and Stoker (2014) have plotted survey evidence of this increasing and now entrenched popular disillusionment with politics. They note "anti-politics is reflected in two dimensions: negative attitudes towards politicians, institutions and broadly the political system and a withdrawal from formal politics" (ibid 2014). In diagnosing the factors in this they emphasise distrust of the "political class". A report from the British Academy, (Building a new politics?) identifies the problem of political disengagement in these empirical terms and explores two remedial perspectives (Stoker 2011). The political "engineers", situated in a protective or pluralist paradigm seek to restore faith in the existing representative system. A reform agenda would include; proportional representation (local this time), more power for parliament over the executive, devolved power to local governance and greater transparency. The engineers' focus on "a radical overhaul of the way representative politics works in response to anti-political sentiment" (ibid p38). This engineers' viewpoint has been updated, post-Brexit and re-focussed as addressing a populist anti-political angst. Substantial focus group and survey evidence suggests that a "sunshine" set of attitudes favours reform of representative democracy. Citizens want to make "representative democracy work in practice the way they think it should, such that their confidence in politics as a governing process might be restored" (Stoker G. and Hay C. 2016 p21). The "designers" who favour a developmental paradigm, argue for a more direct form of political engagement, "in which citizens are encouraged to become better informed and to debate, deliberate and judge what is in the common good" (ibid p40). A recent re-appraisal of deliberative democracy criticises current thinking which replaced the earlier "empirical turn" (Owen D. and Smith G. 2016). The case is made for an idealistic stance "that extends the conception of deliberative democracy to take into account the deliberative characteristics of the political system as a whole" (ibid p214). The discursive attributes of neighbourhood planning await the sort of detailed reviews and trials carried out in the empirical phase. The designers' deliberative democracy approach also emphasises the social justice argument about differential access to the system and advocates innovation enabling

all citizens to engage. Neighbourhood planning is undoubtedly creating new spaces for local engagement and community-led discourses. So far there is little evidence of change in traditional patterns of participation in terms of socio-economic groups, ethnicity etc. There is an expectation in the Localism Act, and certainly an appetite on the ground, for neighbourhood planning groups to be genuinely representative of their communities. There is scope for a major experiment in deliberative democracy here. At the same time neighbourhood planning offers an opportunity for a renewal of representative democracy. Apparently, from the London experience, councillors may perceive a threat, where community groups can by-pass ward councillors and the town hall, determining planning policy for themselves. An alternative legitimacy is later conferred by referendum. There are examples (but surprisingly this is not the norm) where local councillors have played a key role, contributing to and championing neighbourhood planning. This may enhance both their own status and also the efficacy of local representative democracy. There appears to be little research. As a potential next stage within localism policy, the opportunity exists for a neighbourhood planning group to petition their local council for a governance review, with a view to setting up a community council with identical tax precepting power to parish councils in non-urban areas. There is one in existence in London with 12 non-partisan councillors representing Queens Park ward in Westminster. The British Academy report strongly advocates reform employing ideas from both the participative and representative democracy paradigms. The innovation of neighbourhood planning in rural and urban England, and its unfolding political practices, offer an innovative and huge test bed, which already engages tens of thousands of people, for both the reformist "engineers" and the deliberative democracy "designers".

ANTI-POLITICS AS AN IDEOLOGICALLY-DRIVEN CONCEPT

Schedler's many research papers and books are frequently cited and have been influential, not least in literature concerning localism. It is argued here that his notion of an anti-politics which is essentially driven by a neoliberal ideology is itself, simply ideological. In Schedler's edited collection, The End of Politics? (1997), he sets the scene in his introductory chapter: "Antipolitics; Closing or Colonizing the Public Sphere" (also separately available online). Schedler proposes two sets of anti-political concepts or forces. He distinguishes between the concept of the denial or banishment of politics ("closing"), and the concept of conquering or replacing politics, ("colonising"). These concepts are partly described in terms of ideational phenomena and partly in terms of ideologically wilful acts. In his first set, four anti-political ideologies reject or banish the premises upon which his functional definition of democracy depends: "Instead of collective problems they see a self-regulating order; instead of plurality they perceive uniformity; instead of contingency they state necessity; and instead of political power they proclaim individual liberty" (ibid p3). Schedler's first "closing" ideology is described as **Public Action versus Self-regulation** where public action is necessarily political, but private action, such as exchange through markets, is non, or anti-political. This is a binary opposition, although the boundaries are not fixed and are the "objects of continual struggle" (ibid

p4). Schedler argues that neoliberal ideas to minimise the state and create self-regulating societies relying on market competition are the embodiment of this ideology. However, "public action", as coined by Schedler, is difficult to distinguish from "state" action, and in practice self-regulation is always bounded by regulation and law. In reality, this ideological contrast may be about the enduring issue of the balance between the public and private sectors. Politics or anti-politics is potentially operational in either sector, democracy permitting. In any case neighbourhood planning clearly comes under public action. Schedler secondly posits the idea of **Plurality versus Uniformity,** where there are attempts to create uniform societies with politics presented as redundant or actually divisive; "various ideologies have indeed bred anti-political fantasies of consensual, conflict-free reconciled communities" (ibid p6).   Schedler cites generic exemplars of uniformity; in populism, nationalism, Marxism and religious fundamentalism. However to take an actual example, North Korea would perhaps serve as a model of politics closed, but coercion may be the obvious proximate cause of such anti-political uniformity. Arguably, uniformity is utterly uncharacteristic of democratic states and localism is certainly plural, entertaining multiple situated political discourses. The third ideology of anti-politics is described as **Contingency versus Necessity,** where it is noted that politics operates with contingencies as they arise, generating options and determining courses of action. Tradition can constrain politics, but today it has "to impose itself, above all, against the nearly overwhelming dynamic of the market economy" (ibid p7). In particular, democratic politics "has hopelessly fallen behind the global expansion of capitalism, technology and culture" (ibid p7). This diagnosis of the loss of national sovereignty brought about by globalisation identifies a guilty party in the form of "neoliberal technocrats" (global corporations would be more plausible), who wilfully disempower politics and "celebrate its impending disappearance" (ibid p8). For Schedler to impute common (anti-political) motives to an all-powerful neoliberal group is merely a conspiracy theory. Globalisation, which is economically dynamic, creates new contingencies (in both the developing and developed worlds) as well as removing old ones. The fourth ideology acting to abolish or negate politics is probably the least potent one. **Authority versus Anything Goes** accepts that order and compliance must be imposed by the state as a legitimate and necessary political function. Schedler calls in aid a preference for Hannah Arendts notion of mutual obligation rather than top-down coercion. The forces of individualisation, anti-authoritarianism and anarchical impulse are posited as amounting to an anti-political ideology. However, politics is hardly banished merely by opting-out and localism enlists citizens opting in.

Schedler's second set of notion of an anti-political "colonising" of the public sphere concerns the two means by which politics can be subverted, either through social sub-systems or ideas "This colonial variety of anti-politics concedes the functional value of politics but denies that it ought to be conducted according to its own laws and logic" (ibid p 10). In contrast to the blunt "closing" ideologies presented as consciously intent on replacing politics, this colonialist conceptualisation of anti-politics is contemplative in style and democratically normative. This explanation draws in aid both Habermas and Arendt. In considering **Politics and Language,** Schedler declares that the borders of modern politics are

the outcome of conflict where social sub-systems (markets, technology and family) try to impose their own values. Arendt's definition of liberal democracy, as embracing equality, freedom and deliberation, is enlisted. Having committed to such norms of liberal politics, Schedler volunteers "language" as the defining normative attribute. In particular: deliberation by free participants, rationality through discussion, and the force of argument rather than violent force, "The word stands against the sword, the logic of arguments against the logic of power and war" (ibid p 11). Here Schedler moves to advocacy, posing the deliberative version of democracy against conventional party-based representative democracy, "The consensual norm of deliberation may run counter to the majoritarian norm of electoral accountability" (ibid p 12). The preference for deliberative democracy is explicit, and neighbourhood planning would seem to conform. It is conceivable that technology or markets, and so on, might subvert or "colonise" the politics of localism. Schedler establishes the importance of discursive or deliberative politics in normative terms, and we are left with the assertion that the "language" in politics is imperative and that colonising social sub-systems might detract from this essential. The second feature of anti-political "colonisation" is that of **Partial Rationalities**. Schedler, borrowing from Habermas, elaborates on how communicative rationality may be subverted by alternative rationalities. Firstly, politics can be reshaped instrumentally when technocrats assert their expert knowledge so that political discussion by non-experts is discredited as ill-informed and unhelpful. Ironically this anticipates the anti-expert populism which has become prominent and controversial following the "Brexit" referendum. The pre-eminence of expert commentary (and how this is popularly received) is, according to Schedler potently anti-political. The chance of capture by experts is much reduced in neighbourhood planning however compared with conventional council-led consultations. Secondly, Schedler depicts rational-choice conceptions as flooding the political realm with private choices and motives. Potentially this utility-maximisation results in "political corruption" (ibid p 13). This is where the market economy supposedly removes publically determined choices. A new neighbourhood-based tier of town planning is surely an exercise in fine tuning the regulations, although this does not rule out individual or collective rational-choice decisions. A presumption or bias in favour of development, as such, is certainly built into the Localism Act and some researchers equate this to neoliberalism. Thirdly, a moral form of anti-politics is proposed which undermines political debate by asserting moral principles which are prescriptive. This fundamentalist anti-politics deplores dissent and "rejects consequentialist ways of ethical reasoning" (ibid p 13). There is no evidence of any form of moral absolutism in neighbourhood planning. Schedler's fourth and final anti-political "rationality" is an aesthetic one where the power of images subverts politics. Drama, music, sports, advertising and TV are specifically indicted as symbolic acts prevailing over substantive verbal communication. In particular there is an anti-politics of "comforting ritual over the disturbing experience of learning" (ibid p 13). This is an entirely plausible form of anti-politics, supposing as it does the ordering of the emotive and expressive above the rational. This idea is found in Wood's notion of politicisation below. This notion, pre-social media, with an emphasis on the emotive aspect of the aesthetic, may represent prototype "post-truth" politics. Again this is not an obvious feature of neighbourhood planning,

although a reinvigorated and newly inspired sense of local identity has an aesthetic dimension. To summarise, Schedler offers two forms or families of thought about anti-politics; that of an abolition or closing of politics; and that of an anti-political colonisation. These are global and summative notions from a Gramcian perspective. Schedler portrays a neoliberal hegemony ideologically attacking the social purposes of politics so as to replace contestation and deliberation with the imperatives of privatisation and the marketplace. It is difficult not to conclude that Schedler's specification of the anti-political is itself ideologically-driven. The "public sphere" is enabled in the liberal democracy to challenge any ideology discursively which is what Schedler does. No evidence is produced to demonstrate that the neoliberal ideologies identified do actually close or replace the essential political characteristics of the public sphere. It might be reasonable to conclude that Schedler's ideologies simply represent politics in action, but betray neoliberal characteristics of which Schedler disapproves. The functioning of the (local) state and its potential for anti-politics is unexplored. It is difficult to deploy these ideologies so as to define neighbourhood planning as anti-political. Nevertheless some of Schedler's ideas have been called in aid to help appraise localism.

ANTI-POLITICS AS OUTCOME OF A DEPOLITICISATION PROCESS

        Matthew Wood's (2015) paper on policy paradigm shifts supplies an up to date and elaborated explanation of "politicisation" and "depoliticisation", with distinct definitions of these polar opposites. The paper is placed in the context of policy analysis of how paradigms are changed. Wood juxtaposes three key ideas; social learning, as advanced by Hall P. (1993), paradigmatic change and deliberative democracy. These contributions reinforce comments elsewhere about deliberative democracy and supply the two additional dimensions of "social learning" and "paradigmatic change" for the purpose of reviewing localism policy. Wood argues that a policy paradigm can be reframed or alternatively reinforced by non-rationalistic rhetorical appeals which are emotive or normative. There is some correspondence here with Schedler's aesthetic rationality. Policy actors have agency. "We may hence define (de)politicisation as *the rhetorical recognition or denial by humans of their capacity to alter their collective practices, institutions and social conditions*" (italics in the original) (ibid p 10). Further; "Politicisation involves disputing the underlying assumptions that guide society and depoliticisation involves entrenching such assumptions" (ibid p 10). As an aside, the Brexit and Trump outcomes in the following year would thus be identified as politicisation. Wood is interested in aiding the analysis of change empirically and indicates the arenas in which discursive (de)politicisation practically takes place. The process occurs, in one direction or the other, in contexts where discourses are binary and partisan, and typically resources of expertise, time and money are short. Party conferences epitomise such venues where, "partisan rhetorical flourishes and simple narratives are used to elicit audience responses and to reinforce and mobilise political cleavages" (ibid p 15). Tabloid Newspapers indulge in binary narratives constrained as they are by tight deadlines and editorial policy. Wood quotes research indicating that online forums, blogs and social media host partisan communities with discourses within rather than

between themselves deploying narrow viewpoints and rhetorical tools. Such methods and conditions do not pertain in the local planning context where discourses are slow, complex and multifaceted and typically policy development is incremental. There may be rhetoric and emotion but not the advocacy of radical or partisan opposites. Crucially however planning policy is refined or developed, that is to say positively changed (otherwise why bother with neighbourhood planning) but there is no paradigmatic shift.

With respect to social learning and deliberative democracy, Wood's particular contribution is the production of a framework which enables the quality of deliberation and discourse to be discerned. Wood's depiction of (de)politicisation is posed and contrasted with "social learning" explanations of policy paradigm change as advanced by Hall P. (1993). Hall's essentially institutionalist framework is critiqued. The framework, with its three orders of change; instrumental, changed techniques and paradigmatic change, is criticised for an under-emphasis on the agency of policymakers. Wood complements Hall's causal process of social learning with his notion of change via (de)politicisation. There are many explanations of how change is effected, especially from organisational studies, but social learning is a well-established concept. Here it is posited as an explanation of change where goals or techniques are modified by rational consideration of externally supplied feedback. The process involves testing, learning and revision, although externalities are critical, such as public opinion. Citizen planners, supported by professionals, devise policy and engage in continuous consultation with the local community over several months. This social learning definition is as close as may be to describing the process of neighbourhood planning. Ultimately, an election creates authority for change or in the case of neighbourhood planning, a referendum. In stark contrast to the processes of paradigmatic shift through (de)politicisation, social learning implies expert knowledge and extensive resources, financial and professional, together with expertise from academics, practitioners and professional bodies. Wood locates such a capacity in places such as judicial reviews, parliamentary select committees and think tanks. Allegedly, such policy-making resists high-level philosophising and focusses on outcomes at the instrumental and technical level. This constitutes Hall's first and second order change, short of altering fundamental goals and norms. Wood's (de)politicisation process produces actors of a psychological and partisan disposition to prompt debate leading to the third level of paradigmatic change. There may be an exaggerated dichotomy here. The social learning model of policy change is rational and incremental and surely political. At the same time the contribution of rhetorical actors will not always be transformational and may support or empower instrumental and technical change through social learning. Wood's distinction is perhaps between high-politics, de-personalised, evidence-based and incremental, and low-politics, which is rhetorical, emotive and either radical or reaffirming. This definition of (de)politicisation is certainly distinctive, and Wood's definition neatly anticipated ideas of a "post-truth politics" which followed the Brexit/Trump upsets of 2016. The features of (de)politicisation involving rhetoric, normative appeals and antipathy to experts are claimed to be characteristic of the anti-establishment camps in these arguably paradigmatic shifts. Wood concludes by suggesting that his combined framework of social learning and (de)politicisation, with appropriate

balance between the two, has merit and resonance with discourses about deliberative democracy. The interpretation of anti-politics as a phenomenon resulting from, or caused by, depoliticisation supplies a template. The process of "politicisation" tends to promote political action, whereas the process of "depoliticisation" tends to replace or detract from political action, resulting in anti-politics.   For the purposes of analysing the situated practices of localism, it can be supposed that the citizen actors, by their agency, contribute to a process of politicisation. This may in some degree be characteristic of deliberative democracy.

THE POLITICS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

Neighbourhood planning can be described as the current leading-edge of localism, where "local" is at the subsidiary or parish level, close to the people. There are numerous localism precedents restrained by limited delegation of powers and strict controls and targets. In reality the town hall holds the budget and remains accountable for any service delivery. What is astute about the devolution at the neighbourhood level of planning is that the problems of political and financial accountability for service delivery, simply do not exist. Authority (not resource) is transferred from the town hall to the designated local group. A new tier of town planning has been created and offered to the citizens. The eventual "made" neighbourhood plan has statutory force and even a plan in the process of drafting is a "material consideration" in any local planning application. It is difficult to argue that this form of devolution is insubstantial, or politically insincere, or anti-political. Research by Clarke and Cochrane (2013) reviewed the explicit intentions of the Localism Act in the form of official documents and announcements. Their case study of this legislation is a critique of the government's notion of "localism" and juxtaposes this with concepts of "anti-politics". Clarke and Cochrane conclude that, "this localism seeks to replace New Labour's technocratic government, but it appears to be doing so with just another form of anti-politics; naïve, populist liberalism" (ibid p28). Reviewing alternative definitions of localism, the authors take the view that "contemporary localism makes for a complicated picture and is best conceptualised as spatial liberalism" (ibid p16). They argue that the legislation replaces the content of politics with assumed unities of local populations and with technologies such as markets, and define an "instrumental anti-politics" where "technocratic experts colonise the space of politics" (ibid p23). Thus Clarke and Cochrane at the time of enactment infer and anticipate anti-political consequences to the Localism Act. Later, Williams, Goodwin and Cloke (2014) argue that localism is profoundly neoliberal, promoting individualism and market-based technologies which are inimical to local democracy. Nevertheless Williams et al actually endorse the subversive value of transfers of power to the neighbourhood, suggesting that protest groups can acquire the agenda. Thus; "the changing architecture of governance brought about through the drive towards localism has opened up opportunities for the direct appropriation of governmental structures by local groups seeking progressive outcomes" (ibid p2809). Schedler's ideological definitions of anti-politics are directly employed in Clarke's "Geographies of politics and anti-politics", where anti-politics is the replacement of politics by self-regulating orders (especially market

forces), uniformity and necessity (populism), and also by alternative rationalities such as information technology (Clarke 2015).   Clarke notes the arguments that a political elite has, for essentially careerist reasons, adopted a strategy of "depoliticisation" which creates the consequent public disengagement; a logical relationship of; "cause (elite strategies of depoliticisation) and effect (citizen negativity towards formal politics)" (ibid p191). The Schedler-inspired ideological definition of anti-politics has been enlisted by a number of authors, but Clarke also adopts Wood's process notion of anti-politics. This paper contends however that neighbourhood planning operates in the opposite direction, as a process of politicisation, which is pro-political.

The issue of ideology has been illuminated by Davoudi and Madanipour (2015) who adopt Foucault's notion of "governmentality", or the art and technology of government, as the frame of reference. The attraction of localism is acknowledged as the populist appeal of "romantic images of small groups bound together through cultural and geographical ties and collaborate reciprocally and locally to find local solutions for local problems" (ibid, p78).   But localism is simply a mentality of government and in particular of liberal government. They trace an evolution from classical liberalism through welfare liberalism to a post-1970s neoliberalism. The criticisms of Hayek and Friedman of the big state are explored, "welfarist liberals consider the state as the necessary regulator and keeper of the social order" (ibid, p86). For the neoliberal mentality, "it is the market that governs the state and not vice versa" (ibid, p87). A retreat from concerns with social justice is regretted and it is suggested that localities, "as the new imagined collectivity, are expected to be responsible for their own conduct and their own fates" (ibid, p94). This is a hostile view (reflecting Schedler's) and supposes that cracks are appearing in neighbourhood planning "localism's flagship policy". One such crucial flaw is, "the anti-political tendencies of localism that invade and colonise politics by technocratic and calculative practices" (ibid, p98). Schedler's 1997 view of anti-politics is extant and influential. As an ideological perspective this analysis is obviously contestable and would have to be sustained by the evidence. There are recent contributions which adopt a similar perspective but reject the anti-political accusation. While expressing concern about neoliberal agendas, "the ideal is to cut down the size of the state…to leave the field for market processes and civil society initiative" (Healey P. 2015, p114) advocates a "more progressive place-based governance" (ibid, p120). A grounded and pragmatic case is made for building civic capacity through, "collective experiences of 'doing', 'deliberating', 'learning; and 'reflecting'." (ibid, p115). This corresponds closely to Wood's social learning as a means of politicisation. Healey does not abandon representative government but argues for "place governance….informed by many forms of knowledge including that of planners" (ibid, p119). Suitable community values for planning activity and the components of capacity are defined and set out. This is a menu for a politicising form of localism which has clear deliberative features.

The most recent research is better grounded in the emerging practice of neighbourhood planning, while retaining an ideological edge. Bradley Q. (2017) suggests that neighbourhood planning may be an extension of a radical tradition of

grassroots challenge and protest against the system. It is logical to interpret neighbourhood planning as "a political practice founded on the inevitability of antagonism and conflict" (ibid, p39). Although concerned about spatial inequalities and the danger of affluent areas exerting privileged influence, Bradley concedes "the binary dichotomies between civic interest and narrow self-interest breaks down even in studies of affluent place-based groups…A more complex struggle between alternative visions of the common good emerges" (ibid, p43). He argues that place and identity are crucial and that a form of participative democracy is emerging from neighbourhood planning. The nearest we have to an official review of neighbourhood planning is the User Experience Study by Locality for the Department of Communities & Local Government which evaluated its support for planning groups (Parker G. et al 2014). A national pattern emerged very quickly of an uneven take up with wide differences in community capability. Some communities can draw upon skills, expertise and networks to access with confidence their right to plan locally. The heavy burden on time and goodwill over a long period, together with the crucial importance of a supportive local authority, was highlighted. Locality currently funds groups up to £15,000, which is more a pump primer. Based upon London figures the typical costs of a neighbourhood planning project run to about £100,000 in cash or kind. The most recent data (Parker 2016) indicates a preponderance of designated groups in the South East (22% of the national total) and South West (22%). London is lagging far behind with only 4% of the national total of groups (ibid, p82). A mapping exercise, using Indices of Multiple Deprivation Data ranked by quartiles does suggest a clear link between groups reaching a referendum and affluence (ibid, p84). It is hardly surprising that London is well behind. Apart from the complexities of agreeing boundaries and the absence of parish council resources, there is the notable absence of council support from many boroughs. All of which compounds the difficulties faced by the less affluent London areas. "Intermediary input" from the borough council and consultants has been critical to success nationally (ibid, p88).

Two case studies of early groups, Upper Eden, Cumbria and North Shields, demonstrated the practical problems of capacity and of community tensions and technical complexity (McGuinness D. and Ludwig C. 2017). In one case, a local planning officer wrote the plan, in the other, a consultant. This professional "turned away from the notion of community-led planning and instead compromised by emphasising the community 'taking ownership' of the final plan" (ibid, p110). This reality check of the necessity of technical expertise (or a division of labour) does not detract from the shift from conventional top-down planning to local ownership. In the default model local knowledge is first harvested (the public working for the planners) and plans are drawn up in the town hall. Subsequent consultation appears more like promotion and elicits little public response. The discredited reality of this conventional model is conveyed in some verbatim accounts of neighbourhood planning actors from Linton near Leeds. Voice two says, "We began to feel that the new plan was being imposed upon us. We started our plan in direct confrontation with them" (Bradley Q. and Brownhill S. (2016, p116). In this case study Leeds City Council decided to promote neighbourhood planning and, allowing for different capacities, supplied differentiated support, where even high capacity parish councils obtained "a pretty high level of planning support" (ibid, p121). The issue of

domination by a self-selected and affluent group is recurrent. A related question is how far planning groups can actually represent the diversity of the neighbourhood? This has major salience in London. A rare case study from London examined the wayward and exceptional conduct of two rival groups in Hackney (Colomb C. 2017). The author is concerned that there is weak guidance in the Localism Act and from local authorities as to how urban diversity can be ensured and demonstrated when groups apply for designation. In Hackney two rival groups, comprised of differing coalitions of ethnic, religious, party political and civic interests, applied for an overlapping area. Hackney Council eventually asserted local government authority and imposed a council-led resolution. This odd case perhaps highlights the inability of representative democracy to supply civic leadership in the first place and a lack of the necessary trust essential for unified community endeavour. A reportedly acrimonious clash of rivalries over neighbourhood planning acted as a catalyst for the council and eventually a geographically smaller and more consensual group was designated. An apparently anti-political status quo was challenged by competitive factions seeking to exploit the Localism Act. Whether a politicisation process successfully resolves conflict to produce a neighbourhood plan commanding wide respect will be revealed by the eventual referendum result. Colomb (2017) poses the question as to whether neighbourhood planning has the potential for division and exclusion. Her tentative conclusion implicitly endorses the politicisation thesis since groups may, "genuinely seek to reach out to a wider section of the local population, out of political belief, pragmatic necessity or the search for consensus around the future of a 'place' that they care about" (ibid p140). This unusually problematic Hackney case may recommend itself as demonstrating that localism can deliver deliberative democracy so as to achieve improved community cohesion, but also the prospect of a reinvigorated representative democracy. In any case Colomb stresses the need for more research.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper is the prominent issue of anti-politics and a shared concern about public disengagement from politics. Theorisation about anti-politics has been applied to an area of policy, namely localism, and in particular to the exercise of neighbourhood planning rights under the 2011 Localism Act, in the London boroughs. The Act was intended to increase public engagement. There appear to be three schools of thought or conceptualisations about anti-politics and each is examined in the context of research into how neighbourhood planning is working out in London, where there are known difficulties. In reviewing the uneven London experience, evidence is found of a resistance by some councils. The practicalities of a contra-localism are verifiable, with examples given of council policy and practice in promoting pre-existing top-down alternatives to neighbourhood planning. Since active local authority support is usually required (especially so in London) to enable citizen groups to embark upon and develop neighbourhood planning, the simple withholding of support, in effect, denies the right to plan under the Localism Act. It is asserted that this contra-localism may be symptomatic.   A more profound constitutional problem and democratic deficit in London borough governance (where there is surprisingly little research) may exist, amounting to a

distinct form of institutional anti-politics. There is prima facie, but unverified, evidence ("informal" cabinets, popular misinterpretation of "political", few opposition councillors, weak scrutiny, etc) of a depoliticisation process, exploiting and reinforcing disengagement. The hypothesis of an institutional anti-politics is easy to suggest, but testing it presents a large scale anti-establishment project. Further enquiry is however justified by the reality of London's contra-localism, although two other direct explanations suggest themselves.

The ideological version of anti-politics, which ascribes an anti-political intention to neoliberal policies, supplies some apparently operational mechanisms of neoliberal ideology such as "public action versus self-regulation" (Schedler A. 1997). These generic ideas, or ideologies, do not hold up when applied to the actuality of neighbourhood planning. Although earlier reviews of localism policy endorsed Schedler's anti-political mechanisms, recent research strongly indicates that neighbourhood planning is positively engaging the public in political discourses and activities. There is however a continuity of concern about neoliberal influence or intentions in localism. A common theme exists of finding uneven take-up of planning rights, of unequal capacities to engage, and of a failure to achieve a broad representation across the diversity of groups. A "progressive" form of neighbourhood planning has many proponents. A clear definition of what progressive localism might look like is supplied by Healey p. (2015). Although all political parties support localism, some differentiation in policy might be expected, but is not yet evident. The contra-localism apparent in London might be based upon an ideological discernment and positioning, but the councils' "duty to support" neighbourhood planning and the attraction of "power to the people" may be inhibiting any explicit dissent. The policy community in London, such as the boroughs' representative body, London Councils, has little to say about localism.

The empirical theorisation of anti-politics supplies an alternative explanation of contra-localism. Undoubtedly, neighbourhood planning does challenge the positional power and democratic authority of councillors and officers and this might help account for the very wide variation in responses from very pro, to very anti, despite the councils' statutory duty to support neighbourhood planning. The pragmatic perspective (and also process perspective) raises the key issue of deliberative democracy. In the research on localism in London, the characterisation of neighbourhood planning which is most consistent and persuasive is, that here is deliberative democracy in action. See for example Bradley Q. (2017). Deliberative democracy conceptualisation is an outrider of empirical anti-politics theory. The solution-oriented review of anti-politics by the British Academy (Stoker G. 2011) compares and contrasts the two remedies of reinvigorated representative democracy or the tonic of deliberative democracy. The remedies are not mutually exclusive although Gerry Stoker inclines to the representative rather than deliberative option, "It should not be assumed that where there is evidence of anti-politics, what it means is that what people want is more opportunity to do more politics themselves" (Stoker G. 2017 p186). But neighbourhood planning may be exactly that. The territorial and conservative instincts of borough councils may resent any loss of control, to the extent of displaying wilful non-cooperation. Aside from the issue of council

resistance, an obvious question arises as to why deliberative democracy has taken its theoretical turn (Owen D. and Smith G. 2016). Neighbourhood planning is a step change in participation and, allegedly, "deliberation", with over 2,500 groups engaged throughout England. In the recent past there have been funded exercises in deliberative democracy while today the real thing goes unresearched. The process perspective on anti-politics (Wood M. 2015) focusses on paradigm shift and thus introduces the topical question of "post-truth politics". Arguably the evidence suggests that neighbourhood planning is relatively popular, but not populist. Investing town planning with a degree of popular appeal might be considered a political achievement, even radical, but the paradigm is unchanged. Wood's mainstream ideas of social learning and deliberative democracy appear to be entirely characteristic of neighbourhood planning and this represents politicisation. The value of neighbourhood planning as the field in which deliberative democracy can be researched is, in effect, endorsed, but social learning and neighbourhood planning groups as communities of practice are also worthy of research.

In the UK's centralised state, Westminster is the magnet of attention for politicians, the media and political scientists alike. Local government and local governance is generally neglected by researchers and ironically, London borough governance in particular. Place-based and citizen-led as it is, the politics of localism is worthy of study with implications for anti-politics theory. There are some fundamental questions such as, how far anti-politics might originate at the local level, in the conduct of local political parties and in town hall politics. Conversely, how far might the "local polity" contribute to remedying anti-politics through neighbourhood planning and other forms of localism? This paper attempts to identify issues and questions arising when citizens are offered and acquire formative and legitimate power over planning policy. The politics of neighbourhood planning is not confined to the neighbourhood.

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