Neoliberal Business as Usual or Paradigm Shift? Planning under Austerity Localism.

PhD Thesis

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Declaration of Original Authorship

Declaration: *I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all materials from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged*.

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Abstract

This thesis presents an empirical qualitative analysis of the planning policy reforms and austerity measures enacted under the Cameron-led Coalition and majority Conservative Governments 2010-2016. The conceptual framework is developed by drawing on a neoliberal structure-agency approach, with a specific focus on how externalised 'structural' planning neoliberalisations impact on local planning authority departments and planner's internalised 'agency' in England. The research is based on 40 semi-structured interviews with planning managers representing a diversity of rural-urban and regional contexts across England. The guiding rationale is that the particular scope, scale and temporal context of austerity, localism and planning reforms in England post-2010 represents more than a neoliberal 'business as usual' approach, but rather forms a more fundamental set of post-crisis changes to the professional roles of public planners and objectives of the planning system more generally, in line with wider attempts at state restructuring during this period. The argument is made that the reallocation of responsibility and risk through such reforms has been key to the unfolding state restructuring in England post-2010, with planning further becoming both a punch bag for, but also agent of, neoliberalisations in England. However, that despite being conscripted into a stronger practice context of deregulation and austerity, the institutional positioning and professionalism and ethics of planners means that planning agency 'is in many respects the last line of defence to space itself being neoliberalized' (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014, p. 357).

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Abbreviations

LG/LA – Local Government/Local Authority

LPA – Local Planning Authority

SP/PM - Senior Practitioner/Planning Manager

E&Rs – Experiences and Responses

DCLG – Department for Communities and Local Government*

NPPF – National Planning Policy Framework

NPPG – National Planning Policy Guidance

OSP – Open Source Planning

BS – Big Society

LEP – Local Enterprise Partnership

RDA – Regional Development Agency

RSS – Regional Spatial Strategy

LGA – Local Government Association

RTPI – Royal Town Planning Institute

TCPA – Town and Country Planning Association

NAO – National Audit Office

ONS – Office for National Statistics

*Note: The terms LG/LA and SP/PM are used for variation in reference throughout the main text rather than to represent any analytical distinction. *DCLG was renamed MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government) in January 2018.*

Chapter 1 - Introduction and Research Context

This research project is concerned with how local authority planners in England have been affected by national planning reforms and austerity measures since 2010. The research takes as its starting point the argument made by Taylor-Gooby (2012, p.62) that the Coalition Government's social policy '*objective is to set the UK on a trajectory of permanently lower spending, lower debt and market-led growth. Future pressures on the state will be contained through a shift of responsibility in many areas from state to private providers, citizens or the community. Market principles will permeate social life to a greater extent than at any time since the inception of the modern welfare state*'. This project examines this social policy approach specifically in relation to public sector local government planning practices.

The overall argument presented is that localism, a central plank of planning reforms in this period, and austerity, represent part of a broader neoliberal state restructuring strategy. One which aims to transfer state functions, but not necessarily powers or funding, to market, voluntary and community actors, and promote entrepreneurial, managerialist and individualist discourses and practices within public institutional services and delivery. This follows one dominant view in the planning literature that '*[n]eoliberal responsibilisation involves the offloading of responsibility from the formal institutions of the state to individuals, communities and localities in the name of self-reliance and resilience*' (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015, p. 95). It is further argued that these shifts in responsibility and risk from the national to the local scale, through policy agendas such as localism and public sector austerity, form the most significant characteristic of the Cameron-led Coalition and Conservative Governments 2010-2016.

This narrative presents the argument that the neoliberal reallocation of responsibility and risk through such reforms has been key to the unfolding state restructuring in England post-2010, with planning further becoming both a punch bag for, but also necessary agent of, neoliberalisations in England. That is planning is blamed as a bureaucratic barrier to neoliberal ideals of efficiency and growth, but that such neoliberalisations through policy and fiscal reforms are dependent on such planners to 'make the system work' despite the contradictions of free-market development processes (negative externalities) and political dissatisfaction through myriad competing agendas from spaces and places that need housing, employment, infrastructure, green spaces and leisure provision from their built environment. The institutional positing of public planners within local government and their relationship with elected-members and the corporate management of the council puts them in an important position to influence land-use planning decisions, whilst their professional and ethical training means that they are likely to place a strong value on concepts around community, amenity, public interest and sustainability. The assertion is therefore made that, despite planners being conscripted into a stronger practice context of

deregulation and austerity post-2010, their institutional positioning and professionalism mean planning agency is both facilitating neoliberal reforms to land-use planning but is also simultaneously '*in many respects the last line of defence to space itself being neoliberalized*' (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014, p. 357). It is this trade-off that provides the 'structure-agency' divide/conflict for planning practitioners.

This sets up the overarching *neoliberal structure-planning agency* theoretical framework utilised in this research. However, the emphasis on national policy and austerity reforms means that the focus here is more on these 'structures' and the impact of these 'external forces' on agency; rather than a specific study of planning agency per se. In other words, *agency is evaluated here only in relation to how it has been impacted by such structures*. A more focused evaluation of planning agency was beyond the scope of this study, given the emphasis on collecting data from a diversity of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) across England; however, research investigating these issues with an orientation towards 'agency' and an accompanying methodology would neatly complement the findings presented in this thesis.

Before moving on it is worth briefly outlining what is meant by the term 'neoliberalism' at the outset as it forms the main theoretical lens for this project. At its most basic level, neoliberalism can be defined as '*a modified form of liberalism tending to favour free-market capitalism*' (Oxford Dictionary.com). The history and traditions surrounding the development of the neoliberal philosophy are complex and have been the subject of entire books (See Harvey, 2007). However, for the purposes here, a simplification is sufficient to outline that the intellectual roots of neoliberalism are often seen to rest with Friedrich August von Hayek and Milton Friedman as part of the Mont Pelerin Society founded in 1947 that sought to defend and promote classic economic liberal theory; and the economic group of German Ordoliberals (closely associated with the University of Freiburg post-WW2) that similarly championed competitive free markets supported by a strong state institutional framework. These economic and academic groups both criticised the 'socialist' forms of state planning that dominated Western governments during the period at the height of the Keynesian Welfare State consensus - that lasted between approximately between 1945-79. The political application of neoliberal political economy, however, is associated with the election of Margret Thatcher as Prime Minister in the UK in 1979 and Ronald Reagan as the President in the United States in 1980. Since then neoliberal political economy has become commonplace across the world and forms a main plank of economic globalisation, particularly through the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Trade Organisation (WTO). In other words, neoliberalism has become a hegemonic mode of discourse that has '*pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world*' (Harvey, 2007, p.3).

More specifically, according to David Harvey, neoliberalism is in the first instance '*a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade*' (2007, p.2). From this perspective, the role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework that supports these practices. It also asserts that state intervention, beyond creating and supporting these market rights, must be kept to a bare minimum because '*the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit*' (ibid). The overall consequences have been an increase in deregulatory measures, privatisation, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision. As such, these processes of 'neoliberalisation' since the 1970s have entailed much 'creative destruction' of both prior institutional frameworks (such as the Keynesian 'welfare state') and broader societal '*divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart*' (Harvey, 2007, p.3).

Neoliberalism as a political philosophy or theory of political economic practices (political economy) is important for understanding how 'state-market-society' relations have been (re)structured under such processes since the 1970s. It is a widely used theory in the social sciences across a number of disciplines to assist with structural explanations of changes to the relationship between government, citizens and the market. Neoliberalism is also dominant in the academic planning theory and literature as a force shaping urban development, land rights, capital/resource exchanges, policy reforms amongst others. In sum, neoliberal thought and practices have had a significant influence on government policy and the English planning system since the 1970s. Most relevant here is that neoliberalism is understood as the ideological driver behind the reforms enacted post-2010 that form the empirical focus of this project.

The subsequent sections in this chapter will outline the necessary contextual information for the reader to make sense of the wider national economic and planning policy context 2010-2016 that 'frames' this research. Firstly, Section 1.1 presents the overall statement and purpose of the research project. Then Section 1.2 outlines the national economic and political context that resulted in the UK Government adopting austerity as an economic policy. Finally, Section 1.3 introduces the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) and Localism Act (2011). Together these set the stage for the proceeding chapters.

1.1 Statement and Purpose of the Research Project

From the outset, it is worth stating that the period 2010-2016 was a dynamic, chaotic and controversial time for planning in England, particularly in the first three years of the Coalition Government. The challenge is therefore to present a coherent and necessarily selective account of the key changes, but without oversimplifying the complex and contested reality. The context of *neoliberal planning policy reforms and austerity for local planning authorities (henceforth LPAs) in England 2010-2016* forms the theoretical, institutional, disciplinary, spatial and temporal 'boundaries' of the project respectively. The dual austerity and policy reform components of this research are not mutually exclusive; they were both pursued simultaneously by the Coalition during this period, and austerity is also a type of national economic fiscal reform comparable to the legislation/policy reforms enacted on the planning system. In practice the austerity measures and policy reforms enacted heavily overlapped across time/space.

Furthermore, whilst this was a period of *coalition* between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in government, the specific focus on planning was an agenda mainly driven by Conservative thinking and policy, primarily outlined in the Green Paper *Open Source Planning* (Conservative Party, 2010) developed before the 2010 General Election. As Allmendinger and Haughton (2014, p. 32) explain, '*[d]espite the need to accommodate the Liberal Democrat Party's political agenda, the Coalition Agreement explicitly endorsed Open Source Planning and the Big Society concept*'. The Lib-Dems focused greater attention on other core areas of their 2010 manifesto when negotiating the Coalition Agreement; centring on political reform (such as the 'alternative voting' electoral system referendum) and educational support (such as a 'pupil premium' to support further study). Therefore, the conjecture is made that the Conservatives dominated the thinking and policy on planning reform during this period.

These policy goals are therefore attributed here primarily to the (former) key Conservative cabinet members Prime Minister David Cameron, Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne and Communities Secretary of State Eric Pickles and Greg Clarke as the drivers behind planning system (and austerity) reforms. In respect to austerity reforms, however, the Conservatives and Lib-Dems were more broadly in agreement over the need for significant budget reductions across the Coalition Parliamentary period, and this was reasonably uncontested within their respective leadership in the Coalition Agreement and much of the Parliament. Without providing a more comprehensive political account (which is beyond the scope of this thesis), it is sufficient to contend that the Liberal Democrats challenged some of the 'hard edges' of Conservative policy within the Coalition but did not lead them.

It also needs to be stated that although this research focusses specifically on the Coalition and majority Conservative Governments under the leadership of Cameron 2010-2016, this period is porous at either end, and necessitates reference to the previous Blair/Brown New Labour administrations 1997-2010 and the incumbent post-EU referendum May-led Conservative Government (July 2016 -). The empirical focus is also specifically on England rather than the UK. This is to avoid confusion with the devolved national contexts of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and the (subtle) differences between their respective planning systems. This project draws the line before Brexit began to dominate domestic and foreign policy within the UK Government post-2016. In some cases, however, key planning changes that happened after the research context will be discussed, such as the 2017 Housing White Paper *Fixing the Broken Housing Market* and the revised 2018 NPPF, but these will only be discussed to the extent they are necessary for understanding and explaining the trajectory of the Cameron-led governing era.

Additionally, whilst this is primarily a research project drawing on the perspectives and theories from the disciplines of *planning and urban development*, it is also specifically interested in the broader economic, political and geographical dimensions that form the context for planning and development activities and touches on contemporary political issues of democracy and spatial justice in England.

The research *rationale* is that the particular scope, scale and temporal context of austerity, localism and planning reforms in England post-2010 represents more than a neoliberal 'business as usual' approach, but rather forms a more fundamental set of changes to the objectives of the planning system and role of public planners to align with wider governing attempts at public sector state restructuring. However, as an important caveat, the contention that the Cameron-led governing period 2010-16 amounts to more than a neoliberal business as usual approach is a deliberately critical position taken by this research; this position is not argued to be a claim to knowledge nor is it something that is being explicitly looked for in the empirical data, but rather forms a specific *critical interpretation* by the researcher. The research *aim* is more open and exploratory as it seeks to *evaluate the extent to which, and how, structural programmes of reform have affected planning practices within English LPAs post-2010*.

Based on these overall aims and objectives, this project has four guiding *research objectives* (herein labelled as ROs) and six main *research questions* (herein RQs) that are as follows:

RO1) *To present practitioner evaluations of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012), planning policy deregulations and performance targets 2010-2016*.

RO2) *To present practitioner evaluations of the Localism Act (2011) and governance shifts to 'economic' and 'community' localism* 2010-2016.

RO3) *To present practitioner evaluations of the effectiveness of the latest period of planning reforms in relation to their professionalism and ethics (planning structures and agency) 2010-2016*.

RO4) *To present practitioner evaluations of public planning under austerity in relation to the diversity of local contexts, structures and geography of LPA planning across regions in England 2010-2016*.

RQ1) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the planning system reforms and policy deregulations introduced by the central government since 2010?*

RQ2) *What has localism meant in practice for local planning authorities and their relationships with local communities?*

RQ3) *What have national planning policy reforms and localism post-2010 meant in practice for the economic and collaborative approaches of LPAs to strategic planning and housing policy and delivery?*

RQ4) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the demands of austerity (urbanism/governance/localism) as imposed by central government since 2010?*

RQ5) *What are the financial/budget and capacity/resilience pressures on planning services, and how do they relate to the impacts of austerity on local authorities (landscapes of antagonism) more generally?*

RQ6) *To what extent have austerity logics been internalised or resisted by local authority planning managers? How have these austerity measures shaped LPA practice cultures and structures?*

The remaining Sections 1.2 and 1.3 in this chapter present the contextual information needed to situate the research rationale, aim, objectives and questions that have been outlined at the start of this project. The beginning of the story for this project is the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, which sent global financial markets into crisis and necessitated state governments rescue the systemic 'toxic' debt accrued by their banking sectors. This shift from a private market debt crisis to a national public debt crisis paved the way for contemporary austerity policies in 2010, resulting in the subsequent expenditure reductions across national and local government and the public sector and particularly impacting planning services.

1.2 The Global Financial Crisis and UK 'Age of Austerity'

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis (henceforth GFC) started as a subprime mortgage crisis in the US housing market (Skidelsky and Fraccaroli, 2017). American banks were issuing mortgages so readily that even 'sub-prime borrowers' could access a loan. These loans were then put into the financial markets as 'securities'. These securities comprised financial instruments called Collateralized Debt Obligations (CDOs), which mixed low quality (subprime) housing mortgage debt and with high quality debt, such as US Treasury bills, that seemingly offered low risk and high reward. When the housing bubble burst, the CDO market imploded as sub-prime borrowers began to default on their repayments, and house prices began to plummet. The banks stopped lending to each other and customers for fear of insolvency, and this perpetuated a 'credit crunch'. This US crisis became a 'global' crisis because of the strong interconnections between national financial markets trading securities and lending to each other, particularly impacting the UK and rest of the EU. It is not the intention here to recount and analyse the events leading to the 2008 GFC (Mirowski, 2013), but rather to provide a summary context to austerity.

In response to the GFC, the HM Treasury, along with national finance ministries across the globe, made a series of financial interventions to maintain the stability of the UK banking sector. These interventions supported four broad aims; 1) to protect depositors in banks suffering insolvency or a severe decline in market confidence; 2) to maintain liquidity to allow banks to pay due claims and outstanding borrowings; 3) to ensure that banks whose failure would threaten the overall financial system would have sufficient capital to cushion them from losses caused by further deterioration in the financial markets; and 4) to encourage banks to lend to creditworthy borrowers (NAO, 2017). A 2009 NAO report '*Maintaining financial stability across the United Kingdom's banking system*' argued that "*if the support measures had not been put in place, the scale of the economic and social costs if one or more major UK banks had collapsed is difficult to envision. The support provided to the banks was therefore justified, but the final cost to the taxpayer of the support will not be known for a number of years*" (p. 8).

Table 1 – Summary of HM Treasury support provided to the UK Banking Sector Bailout 2007-2010:

The National Audit Office (2017) summarises the support the HM Treasury provided to the banking sector during the bailout predominantly throughout the period 2007-2010 following the GFC:

- *Recapitalisation of Lloyds Banking Group (Lloyds) and Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) through a series of transactions eventually acquiring 83 per cent of RBS (but 68 per cent of the voting rights) and 41 per cent of Lloyds (of both ordinary shares and voting rights).*
- *Lending money to the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) so it could guarantee customer deposits of up to £50,000. The limit has been increased since then, most recently in January 2017 it was increased to £85,000.*
- *Lending directly to insolvent banks so they could repay customer deposits of over £50,000, including to London Scottish Bank, Dunfermline Building Society and the Icelandic Banks – Heritable, Kaupthing Singer and Friedlander, and Landsbankinn.*
- *Nationalising Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley (B&B) to protect their depositors and facilitate the orderly unwinding of their obligations and HM Treasury's guarantees.*
- *The Special Liquidity Scheme, introduced in April 2008 and lasting until January 2012, to increase the liquidity of UK banks. It was a Bank of England (BoE) scheme, supported by a HM Treasury guarantee, under which banks swapped assets for more liquid Treasury Bills in return for a fee.*
- *The Credit Guarantee Scheme, introduced in October 2008, to help restore investor confidence in bank wholesale funding by guaranteeing certain unsecured debts in return for a fee. The scheme closed in 2012.*
- *The Asset Protection Scheme, announced in January 2009, to protect assets on banks' balance sheets. RBS and Lloyds initially agreed in principle to join, but in the end only RBS joined. The scheme closed in 2012.*

These 'bailout' support measures (see Table 1) exclude the wider interventions undertaken to support the economy during this period, such as the Bank of England's (BoE) Quantitative Easing Programme, which provided adjustments to economic monetary policy (NAO, 2017). Two main types of support were provided; the first was the *Provision of guarantees and other non-cash support*. These items were the Credit Guarantee Scheme, Special Liquidity Scheme and Asset Protection Scheme, as well as various other guarantees and indemnities provided to UK banks. The second type was the *Provision of cash* in the form of loans to the FSCS and insolvent banks to support deposits, and the purchase of share capital

in RBS and Lloyds. The peak support total of £1,029 billion *guarantees and non-cash support* has fallen significantly to £12 billion, and the £133 billion peak total *cash provided* has been reduced to £46 billion, by 31st March 2017 (NAO, 2017). The GFC and banking bailouts created the antecedent economic and political conditions for the UK Government and EU to embed the orthodoxy for austerity measures.

Important here is that post-2010 the global financial/banking crisis was being recast as a *Sovereign Debt Crisis*, one supposedly caused by profligate national government spending during the 'good times' that now had to be paid for through 'controlling' public spending. In this narrative, neoliberal 'austerian' political elites and economists argued the 'moral' dimension that austerity is the natural price to pay - akin to the hangover that results from a good party. For Blyth (2013), this strategic reframing of the *banking crisis* into a *public debt crisis* represents the '*Greatest Bait and Switch in Human History*'.

In a 2009 speech in Cheltenham, David Cameron, then leader of the opposition Conservative Party, outlined his economic position for a Conservative government should they achieve power following the 2010 General Election:

> "*We need a complete change of direction. I'm not just talking about changing one group of Ministers for another. Or one set of policies, plans and proposals for another. I'm talking about a whole new, never-been-done-before approach to the way this country is run. Why? Because the world has completely changed. In this new world comes the reckoning for Labour's economic incompetence.* ***The age of irresponsibility is giving way to the age of austerity.*** *Labour's Debt Crisis. The highest borrowing in peacetime history. The deepest recession since the war. Labour are spent. The money has run out. Now some people say: let's get through the recession, let's get through the election we can keep on spending more, keep on borrowing more, and deal with the debt crisis later. Wrong - seriously wrong. The alternative to dealing with the debt crisis now is mounting debt, higher interest rates and a weaker economy.* ***Unless we deal with this debt crisis, we risk becoming once again the sick man of Europe****. Our recovery will be held back, and our children will be weighed down, by a millstone of debt.* ***So this is no time for business as usual***" (Cameron, 2009, no page, emphasis added).

Cameron's speech potentially represents the discursive start of the contemporary austerity agenda in UK politics, and can be seen as a precursor to the creation of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) in 2010 by the Coalition to make independent fiscal judgements and assess its plans. The GFC provided the 'crisis' conditions that necessitated the UK Government enact economic policies measures for

significant public spending cuts as a means to stabilise the national budget deficit. Despite the pressing need for *some form of economic state intervention*, a political dimension to austerity can be seen through Cameron's attempt to attribute the blame for the debt crisis, and subsequent need for cutbacks, to the 'irresponsibly high' spending and borrowing of the New Labour Governments (1997-2010). Here some commentators focus attention on the 'political opportunism' of austerity (Jabko, 2013, Gamble, 2015), whilst others emphasise the role of political elites in reviving and 'doubling-down' on neoliberal political economy following questions over its legitimacy post-2008 GFC (Peck et al., 2012).

1.2.1 Austerity Measures and the UK National Debt and Deficit

In order to make sense of the academic literatures and debates around austerity, it is first necessary to provide the main definitions and concepts that are widely used by economic and social commentators, and which are often misunderstood, or deliberately obfuscated, within public discourse on the subject.

Austerity policy and reform is referred to throughout this project and forms a core focus for the theoretical and empirical analysis developed in the subsequent chapters. As such, it is necessary to have a precise definition. In economics, 'austerity measures' can be understood as:

> '*A set of economic policies aimed at controlling the budget deficit by reducing government spending. Such measures are usually implemented when the ratio of national debt to GDP has reached an unsustainable level and a country is on the verge of defaulting on bond obligations. Austerity measures can include spending cuts and tax increases*' (Oxford Dictionary of Economics, 2017, p. 25).

Whilst in the academic literature, Blyth (2013) defines austerity as '*a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices and public spending to restore competitiveness, which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts, and deficits. Doing so, its advocates believe, will inspire "business confidence" since the government will neither be "crowding-out" the market for investment by sucking up all the available capital through the issuance of debt, nor adding to the nation's already "too big" debt*' (p. 2).

One significant, but less obvious, issue for understanding political and economic debates on austerity is the distinction between the national *debt* and *deficit*. These terms have different meanings, although they are often misunderstood or used interchangeably in public discourse or for political expediency.

The difference between national debt and the government deficit is as follows:

'*[National debt is] the debt of a country's government. This may be owed to residents (internal debt) or foreign lenders (external debt). If national debt is held by foreigners, the whole of the interest and redemption payments are claims on national resources. Where the debt is held domestically, the real burden of debt is only the deadweight losses due to the taxes needed to service it. The government budget deficit is the difference between receipts and expenditure in a given year, and is equal to the increase in national debt*' (Oxford Dictionary of Economics, 2017, p. 349).

Put simply, the *budget deficit* is the excess of a government's total expenditure over its income measured annually; whilst the *national debt* is the total amount of debt owned by a country's government at any given time. The budget deficit has to be met by borrowing, which increases the government's national debt. As outlined, one way a government can reduce its budget deficit is to implement austerity measures, that is, introducing government spending cuts to reduce the governments' total expenditure in relation to its income. Expenditure cuts simply refer to reductions in government spending that are either already happening, or more commonly that have been announced in the Spring/Autumn Treasury Budget statements. As the former Chancellor of the Exchequer (2010-2016), George Osborne often claimed the need to restore a '*balanced budget*', which '*occurs when total government receipts and expenditure are equal. There is thus no need for additional government borrowing so government debt remains constant*' (Oxford Dictionary of Economics, 2017, p. 30).

The following tables 2-3 and figures 1-2 highlight the changes in the UK national debt and budget deficit over the time period of the Coalition/Conservative Governments. They show that the budget deficit as a percentage of GDP has decreased significantly from 10.1% in 2009/10 to 2.4% in 2016/17. However, they also show that the national debt has increased from 69.9% of GDP in 2009/10 to 86.7% in 2016/17. So it should be noted that *reducing the budget deficit does not straightforwardly mean reducing the national debt*, despite the terms being used interchangeably in public discourse or for political effect.

Table 2 – UK Government Debt (Financial and Calendar Years) 2009/10 -2015/16:

£ billion[3]

Financial Years	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17[1]
Debt[2]	1,076.6	1,214.5	1,349.7	1,425.6	1,522.5	1,604.0	1,652.0	1,720.0
as % GDP	69.9	75.9	82.3	83.8	85.8	86.7	86.8	86.7
Calendar Years	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**
Debt[2]	979.8	1,194.3	1,328.8	1,424.8	1,499.8	1,604.8	1,666.0	1,731.4
as % GDP	64.1	75.6	81.3	84.5	85.6	87.4	88.2	88.2

(ONS Statistical bulletin: UK government debt and deficit: September 2017).

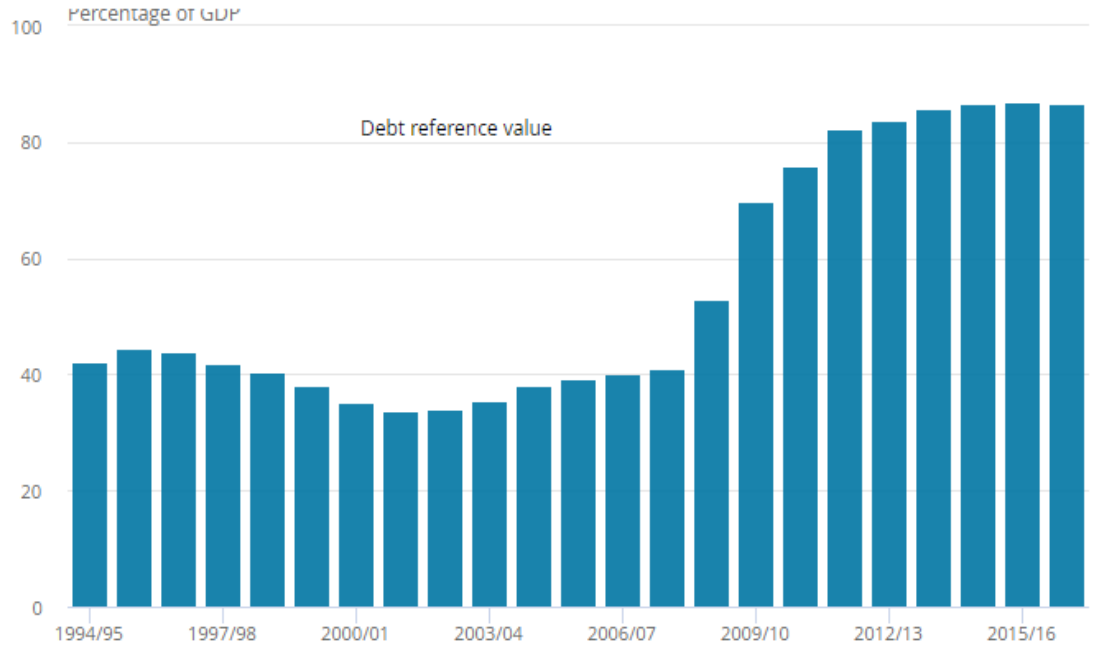
Table 3 – UK Government Spending Deficit (Financial and Calendar Years) 2009/10-2015/16:

£ billion[2]

Financial Years	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17[1]
Deficit	154.8	142.1	123.8	124.1	99.9	90.8	75.9	46.9
as % GDP	10.1	8.9	7.5	7.3	5.6	4.9	4.0	2.4
Calendar Years	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**
Deficit	154.8	148.8	122.2	137.4	94.6	100.0	80.5	58.0
as % GDP	10.1	9.4	7.5	8.2	5.4	5.4	4.3	3.0

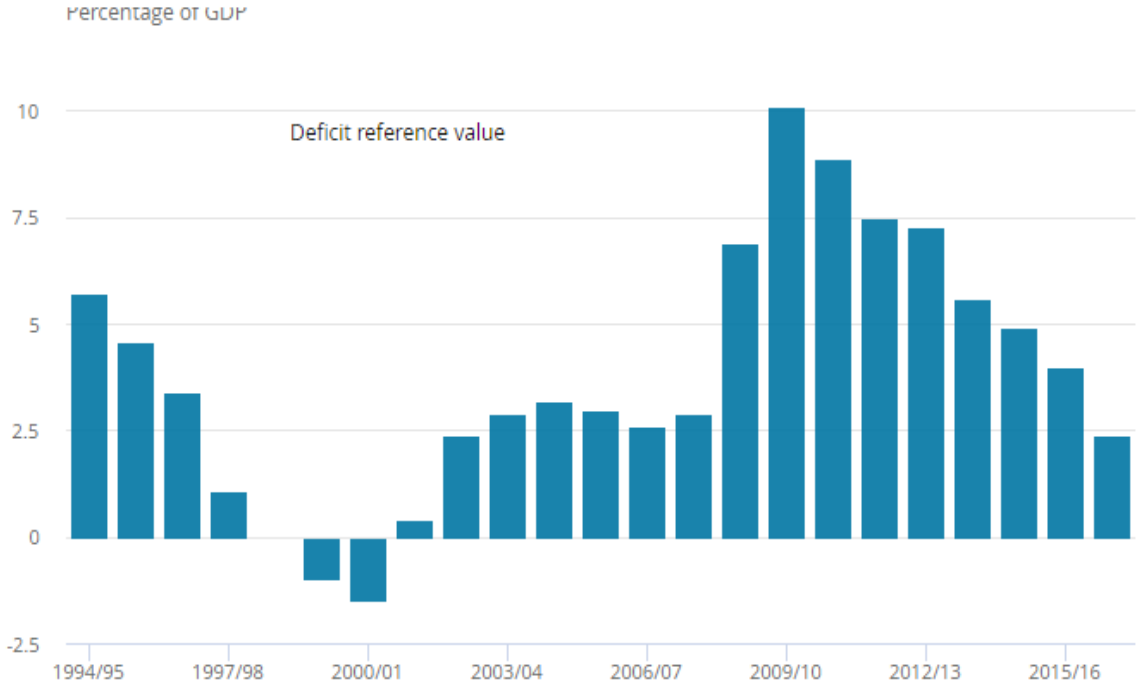
(ONS Statistical bulletin: UK government debt and deficit: September 2017).

Figure 1 – Government Gross Debt as a percentage of GDP (Financial Year) 1995-2017:



(ONS Statistical bulletin: UK government debt and deficit: September 2017).

Figure 2 – Government Net Borrowing as a percentage of GDP (Financial Year) 1995-2017:



(ONS Statistical bulletin: UK government debt and deficit: September 2017).

The relevance of these definitions and distinctions are outlined here as a reference point for the reader before the main debates are presented. So called 'Austerian' economists argue that the national deficit must be reduced to restore private sector 'confidence' and hence their investment, which acts as the driver of the economy. In contrast, 'Keynesian' economists argue that government spending should be increased during a recession. This approach means that the budget deficit is deliberately increased and run at a higher level in the medium term, because this is necessary to temporarily 'fill the gap' created by reduced private sector activity and investment, and to stimulate the markets and aggregate demand that will ultimately restore economic growth. It is from this time that the government can then reduce spending and focus on deficit reduction. This position is often summarised by Keynes' statement in 1937 that "*The boom, not the slump, is the right time for austerity at the Treasury*".

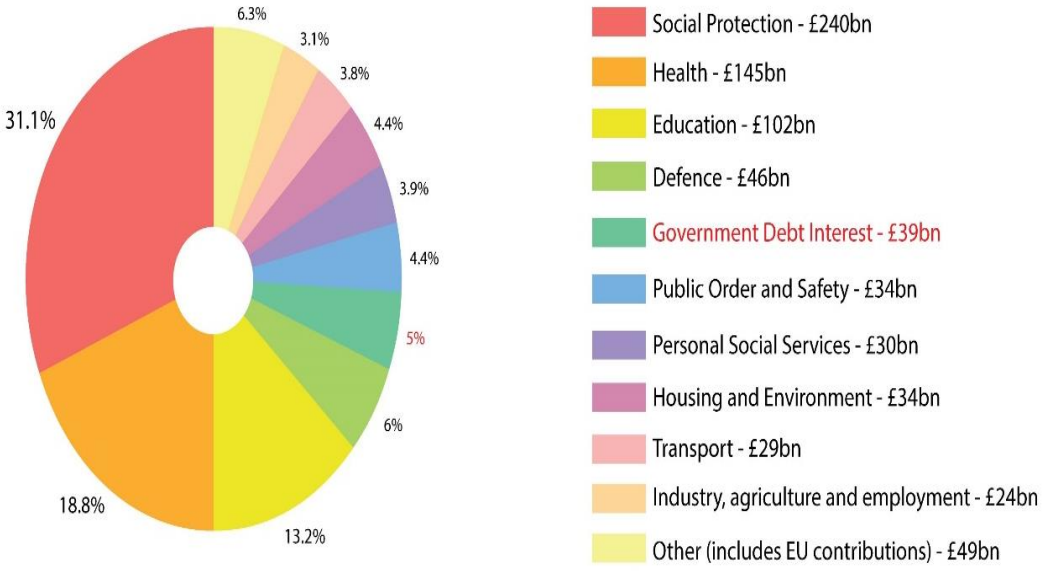
These (simplified) austerian and Keynesian economic positions essentially differ over the most effective timing of austerity measures within economic cycles, and thus the impact they will have on economic growth in terms of boosting or stagnating recovery. The economic cycle (also called the business cycle or trade cycle) is the rise and fall of economic growth that occurs over time, and is comprised of four phases; *expansion*, *peak*, *contraction* and *trough*. These four phases characterise the 'boom and bust' economies typically experienced under advanced capitalism and have a strong impact on countries.

One of the core arguments *against* austerity is that reductions in government spending and/or higher taxes during recessionary condition, associated with the *contraction* and *trough* phases in the business cycle, serve to exacerbate the reductions made by private investment and further slowdown and discourage economic activity. The counter argument to austerity is thus for *economic stimulus* during recessions; by temporarily increasing government spending to boost demand and investment as a means to compensate for the cyclical shortfall in private sector activity/investment within the business cycle. Stimulus policy can be defined as '*an increase in the public deficit, aimed at sustaining aggregate demand and hence aggregate output and employment*' (Skidelsky and Fraccaroli, 2017, p. xvii).

Suffice to say, austerity measures were chosen by Osborne and the UK Treasury, and public spending cuts were implemented across the government and public sector. As will be discussed, local authorities, and particularly the planning departments within them, were subjected to severe government spending cuts to their funding under the Coalition Parliament 2010-2015. The deepest spending reductions were frontloaded in the first couple of years but persisted to varying degrees throughout this period. The impacts of these austerity cuts on LPAs and planners forms three main research questions in this project.

At this stage we also need to understand what is meant by government 'expenditure'. Government expenditure '*consists of spending on real goods and services purchased from outside suppliers; spending on employment in state services such as administration, defence, and education; spending on transfer payments to pensioners, the unemployed, and the disabled; spending on subsidies and grants to industry; and payment of debt interest*' (Oxford Dictionary of Economics, 2017, p. 228). It also includes the net out payments from one level of government to another, such as central government grants to local authorities. However, these expenditures do not all have the same objectives and recipients, nor yield the same returns (See figure 3 for a breakdown of UK Government Expenditure by sector for 2016-17).

Figure 3 – United Kingdom Government Expenditure 2016-17 by Sector (Total £772 Billion):



(HM Government Treasury Budget 2016).

There are central distinctions between the three main types of government expenditure that are often not explicitly addressed in political discourses and public debates on austerity measures. These are *Current Expenditures*, *Capital Expenditures* and *Transfer Payments*. It is sufficient for the purposes here to note that current spending is expenditure on wages and services that are short term and have to be renewed each year to sustain the needs of the population. Capital spending is spending on physical assets like roads, bridges, hospital buildings and equipment, which is long term with regards to its repayment (Economics Online Fiscal Policy). Transfer payments include state pensions, unemployment and other social security benefits. These types of expenditure can be thought of as funding the different elements of a society, each having a different but important role, and each subject to different cutbacks.

Keynesian economists advocating stimulus economic policy, as opposed to austerity measures, contend that recessionary periods in the business cycle are the most suitable time to borrow to invest in capital spending projects, because they can take advantage of low interest rates, utilise resources that would otherwise remain idle and stimulate economic activity. Therefore, government revenue from taxation need only cover the current spending on an annual basis, and not borrowing for capital spending:

> '*Public finance theory makes a clear distinction between current and capital spending. A sound rule is that government should cover its current or recurring spending by taxation, but should borrow for capital spending, that is, investment. This is because current spending gives rise to no government-owned assets, whereas capital spending does. If these assets are productive, they pay for themselves by increasing government earnings, either through user charges or increased tax revenues*' (Skidelsky and Fraccaroli, 2017, p. 145).

Therefore, whilst it may be prudent to apply austerity measures to reduce government *current expenditure* during recessionary conditions as a means to reduce the budget deficit, it may be equally prudent to accept a certain level of budget deficit surplus to boost *capital expenditure* and stimulate economic growth. These nuances often get obfuscated in popular political and public austerity debates.

Finally, we need to clarify what is meant by the terms 'economic policy' and 'economic growth', given that both are repeatedly referred to in academic and policy debates and throughout this project. Economic policy is '*the set of controls used by the government to regulate economic activity…broadly classified into three areas: fiscal policy (issues related to taxation, government spending, and public deficit), monetary policy (interest rates and inflation), and trade policy (tariffs and trade agreements)*'. Economic growth is defined as the '*persistent increase in per capita aggregate output and in the aggregate physical capital per worker in an economy*' (Oxford Dictionary of Economics, 2017, p. 157-9).

Data on UK government debt and deficit is collected by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and is frequently published in statistical bulletins. The EU government deficit and debt statistical bulletin is published quarterly in January, April, July and October each year, to coincide with when the UK and other EU member states are required to report on their deficit (or net borrowing) and debt to the European Commission. These provide a comprehensive resource for monitoring and reporting the debt and deficit levels of the state governments that comprise the EU. Although austerity has been a significant economic policy issue across the EU, the focus is on the UK for the purposes of this study.

Some background information on EU fiscal policy is also necessary here to understand the broader context and restrictions on member states which influence the UK context. The member states of the EU are obliged to avoid 'excessive budgetary deficits' under Article 126 of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union*. The Protocol on the Excessive Deficit Procedure within the Maastricht Treaty sets out two criteria and reference values with which EU member state governments should comply. The first is ensuring *a deficit (net borrowing) to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio of 3%*. The second is ensuring *a debt to GDP ratio of 60%* (ONS Statistical bulletin: UK government debt and deficit: December 2017). These two criteria reference values are used by the European Commission when assessing the UK's debt and deficit performance against the Protocol on the Excessive Deficit Procedure. The main points from the ONS December 2017 Statistical Bulletin are as follows:

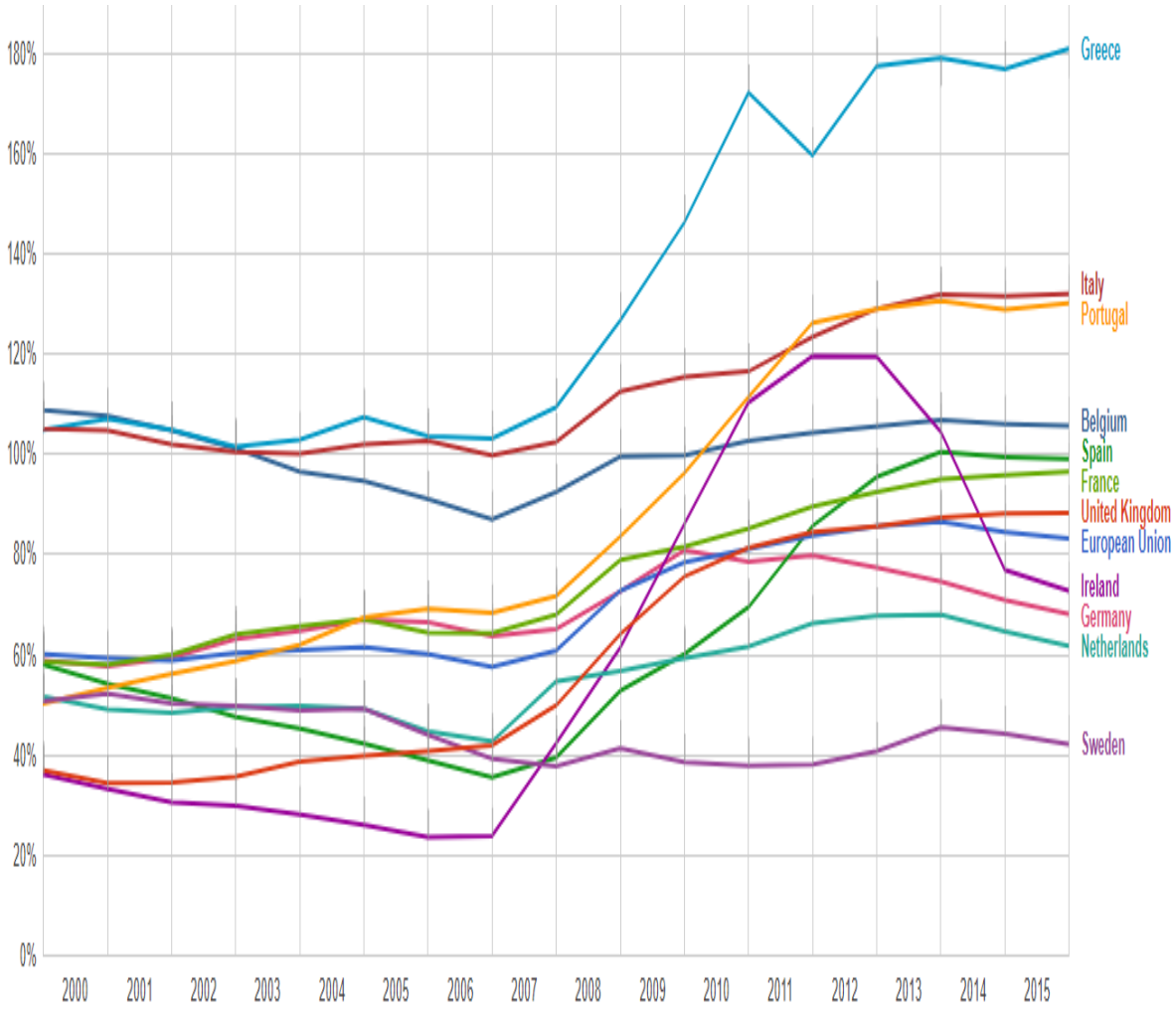
- General UK government gross debt was £1,786.3 billion at the end of December 2017, which is equivalent to 87.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) and 27.7 percentage points above the reference value of 60% set out in the Protocol on the Excessive Deficit Procedure;
- General government gross debt first exceeded the 60% Maastricht reference value at the end of 2009, when it was 64.1% of GDP;
- General government deficit (or net borrowing) was £39.4 billion in 2017, a decrease of £19.0 billion compared with 2016; this is equivalent to 1.9% of GDP, 1.1 percentage points below the reference value of 3.0% set out in the Protocol on the Excessive Deficit Procedure;
- 2017 is the first time the government deficit has been below the 3.0% Maastricht reference value since 2007, when it was 2.6% of GDP.

(ONS Statistical bulletin: UK government debt and deficit: December 2017).

Following the literature, the argument is developed that austerity is also a political project (Streeck and Schäfer, 2013) as well as a 'technical' expert economic project. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Commission (EC) and European Central Bank (ECB), the "troika", and Germany, all had high stakes in the proposed policy solution; the former to restore faith in neoclassical economics and neoliberalism that had been shaken by the GFC, and the latter to protect their export-based economy and position within the EU hierarchy. Similarly Osborne and other austerian economists (strategically) used the example of Greece as a warning of what happens when government debt nears default levels and as a justification for austerity measures in the UK and EU. The contention that austerity is as much political and ideological as economic in nature, particularly in the UK, is a recurring theme throughout this thesis. As a comparison to situate the UK context, figure 4 highlights the government national debt

to GDP ratio for a selection of European Union member states and the EU average over the period 2000-2015. This shows that the UK national debt occupies the middle ground close to the EU average, however, was at no point during this period in a comparable debt position to Greece, Italy and Portugal:

Figure 4 – European Member State Government Debt as a percentage of GDP 2000-2015



(Eurostat, 2017).

The political motivations for state restructuring as an objective of austerity policy were almost explicitly outlined by elite figures during this period (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011, Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012). In his speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet in November 2013, then Prime Minister David Cameron outlined the government plan to reduce the national deficit in the short term; however, the pretext was his administration's intention to build a 'leaner' and 'more efficient' state for the future:

"Let's be clear. The single biggest threat to the cost of living in this country is if our budget deficit and debts get out of control again. If interest rates and mortgage rates start to soar, the increase in cost of living will far outweigh the impact of any increase in government spending or indeed reduction in taxation. This government is not prepared to let that happen. We have a plan – and we are carefully implementing that plan. Already we have cut the deficit by a third. And we are sticking to the task. But that doesn't just mean making difficult decisions on public spending. It also means something more profound. It means building a leaner, more efficient state. We need to do more with less. Not just now, but permanently. It can be done. Consider these facts. There are 40 per cent fewer people working in the Department for Education - but over 3,000 more free schools and academies, with more children doing tougher subjects than ever before. There are 23,000 fewer administrative roles in the NHS - but 5,000 more doctors, with shorter waiting times. So you can have a leaner, more efficient, more affordable state that actually delivers better results for the taxpayer" (Cameron, 2013, emphasis added).

Strong government austerity discourses led many critical social commentators on the political left to argue that such measures in the UK are as much a political agenda by the government as a technical one based on economic theory and evidence. The Guardian (Friday 12th June 2015) published an open letter from Ha-Joon Chang, Thomas Piketty, Mariana Mazzucato, and other academic signatories, to the then Chancellor George Osborne warning of the dangers of playing politics with the UK economy:

"*The chancellor's plans, announced in his Mansion House speech, for "permanent budget surpluses" are nothing more than an attempt to outmanoeuvre his opponents. They have no basis in economics. Osborne's proposals are not fit for the complexity of a modern 21st-century economy and, as such, they risk a liquidity crisis that could also trigger banking problems, a fall in GDP, a crash, or all three…It is irresponsible for the chancellor to take such risky experiments with the economy to score political points*".

These wider economic and political debates renewed academic attention on 'post-crisis' neoliberalism, specifically deployed here to refer to the contemporary austerity measures enacted following the 2008 GFC and the 'rescaling' policies towards localism post-2010 discussed further in the next chapter. Attention can now move away from the European and UK macro-level context to consider the more specific impact of austerity measures on English LPAs in the next section.

1.2.2 UK Public Sector Austerity and Local Authority Planning

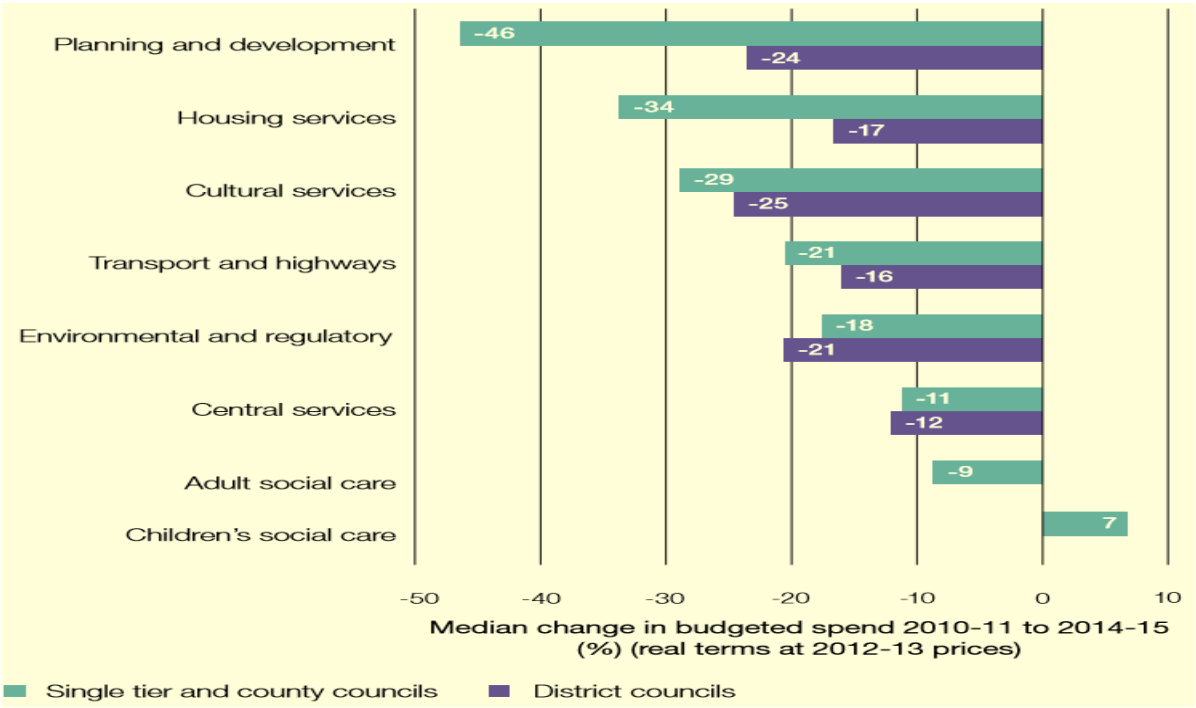
The Cameron-led governing era was marked by a public sector austerity agenda that ostensibly sought to reduce the national debt/deficit and restore confidence, investment and growth in the UK economy following the 2008 GFC. In the UK context, public sector funding (expenditure) cutbacks impacted upon a range of public sector services (health, education, policing, etc.) and central government departments in Whitehall that extended far beyond the tighter focus here on local councils and planning services.

Nonetheless, austerity in practice has meant almost a 40% reduction in LG budgets since 2010 (NAO, 2014). There has been a 37% fall in central government funding to local authorities (LA), and a 25% fall in LA's income, both in real terms, between 2010-11 and 2015-16 (NAO, 2015, p. 3). Moreover, it has been the LAs themselves that have had to make up for this shortfall in funding, primarily through efficiency savings, increased revenue generation and/or service retrenchment. These changes to the financial settlement of English LG have resulted in the general context of pressures to make fast and deep savings whilst also maintaining statutory and front-line public services. Furthermore, whilst LAs have been the target of the deepest government public spending cuts in relation to the relatively more protected national education and healthcare expenditure, within local councils it is the *planning and development services* that have received the largest real term reductions in budget spend (NAO, 2015).

Council '*Planning and Development Services*' are typically comprised of eight component areas; these are: 1) *Building control*; 2) *Development Management*; 3) *Planning Policy*; 4) *Environmental Initiatives*; 5) *Economic Development*; 6) *Community Development*; 7) *Economic Research*; 8) *Business Support*; with the specific combinations and departments for these functions varying across councils. Figures 5 and 6 highlight the funding pressures facing planning departments in relation to other LA service areas.

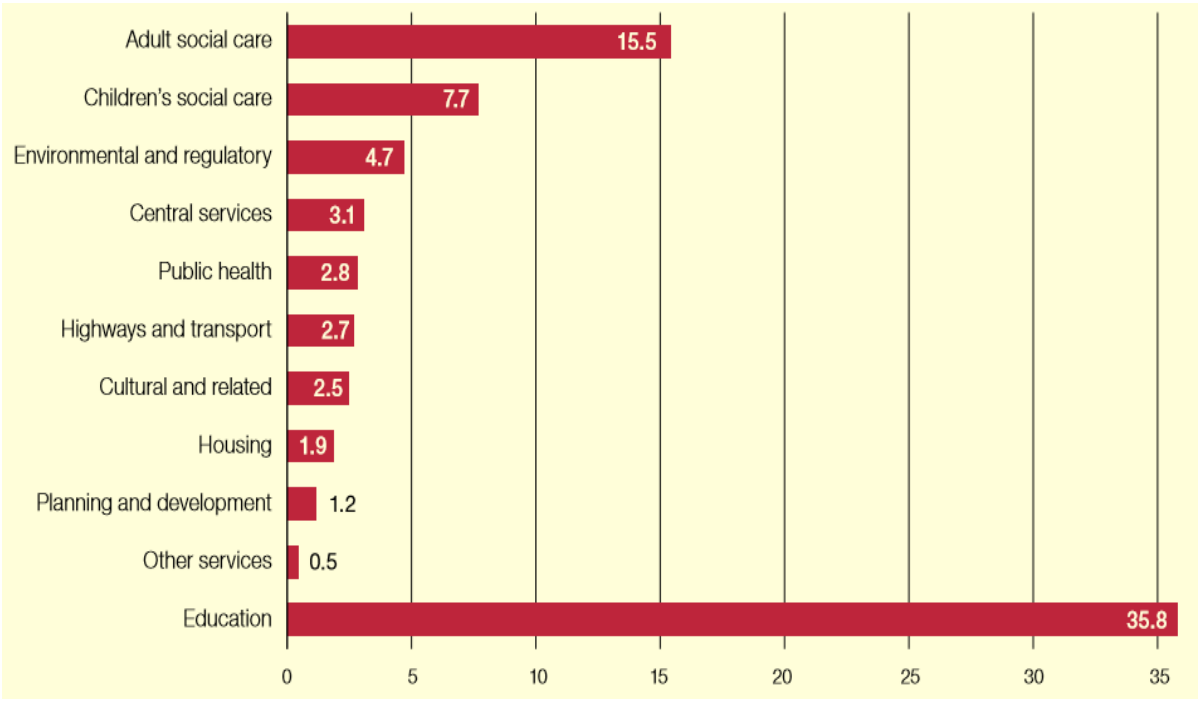
LAs in England receive funding from four main sources. The first and primary funding source is from central government called the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), which is a general funding pot calculated using various formulae to assess the needs and costs of service provision within a specific council locality. The second source of funding is from local business rates. The third is from special or specific government grants provided to fund ring-fenced programmes or functions. The fourth source of funding is through council taxation. Depending on their position, LAs can also generate smaller short term revenues from the sale of assets, through service fees and penalty charges, external trading accounts or transfers from accumulated reserves (Fitzgerald and Lupton, 2015).

Figure 5 – Change in English Local Authority Budget Spend by Service Area 2010/11 – 2014/15



Source: UK National Audit Office (2015): 'A Short Guide to the NAOs work on local authorities'.

Figure 6 – English Local Authorities' Budgets by Service Area in 2014-15 (£Billion)



Source: UK National Audit Office (2015): 'A Short Guide to the NAOs work on local authorities'.

Government austerity cuts have significantly reduced the provision of the RSG to LAs. This is to the extent that councils are expected to be financially 'self-sufficient' at the local level in time for the expressed total government removal of RSG funding in 2020. Austerity measures have also reduced both the number and amount of funding grants and streams provided by the government to local councils. In practice, this has resulted in LAs needing to develop and expand their local business rates and tax bases to meet the funding budget shortfall and achieve self-sufficiency in the short to medium term. It also means that far more emphasis is placed on generating increasing revenue from alternate and recurring sources, such as service fees and asset sales, than previously was the case pre-2010.

In this context, LAs will have to become more 'entrepreneurial' to raise revenues and be thrifty with their spending and resources. This practice change in LG approach is termed here as 'commercialisation' (a key concept discussed in Section 5.1 in the *Austerity Analysis Chapter*). This is partly based on the support offered by the Local Government Association (LGA) to councils to achieve more *efficiency* and *income generation* under the heading 'commercialisation' on their website and within the 2017 report '*Enterprising councils: Supporting councils' income generation activity*'; '*As funding shrinks exploring new ways to maximise incomes is essential. In order to protect valuable frontline services and ensure positive outcomes for local communities councils are increasingly thinking through a more commercial approach to their activities. These innovative councils are using their assets wisely, trading services with others across the public and private sectors, and selling commodities to generate income*' (LGA Online).

The term *commercialisation*, however, is not being applied as a concept to LPAs in its strict literal sense as '*the process of managing or running something principally for financial gain*' (Dictionary.com). Rather the point is to indicate that LPAs are having to act *more commercially* than they did before the pre-2010 austerity measures, not that they have become fully commercialised public services. This term is similar in definition to being *entrepreneurial* as '*characterized by the taking of financial risks in the hope of profit*' (ibid). *Entrepreneurialism* is a theoretically loaded term; however, it is increasingly being used in the planning literature (along with *marketisation* and *commercialisation*) to highlight the stronger emphasis placed on local government and planners to adopt more 'business-like' and 'riskier' practices to respond to austerity (See Raco and Moreira de Souza, 2018, Raco, 2018, Beswick and Penny, 2018).

This section has outlined the macro economic and political context of austerity following the 2008 GFC. It has introduced some of the key definitions, positions and concepts that are needed to understand the academic literature on austerity, as well as set up the context for research questions 4, 5 and 6 and the subsequent *Austerity Analysis Chapter 5*. However, austerity reform only represents half the story

in this project, the other half examines the parallel planning policy reforms enacted by the Cameron-led Governments 2010-16. The next section does the same for reforms to the English Planning System.

1.3 Reforming the English Planning System Post-2010

The overall purpose of this section is to introduce the political rationales, context and technical details behind some of the key planning reforms introduced under the Cameron-led Governments 2010-2016. Specifically it seeks to provide the context and details surrounding the introduction of the 2011 Localism Act and 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (herein NPPF). This is because they form the specific focus of research objectives and questions 1, 2 and 3 respectively. As such, this section sets up the (policy) context for the subsequent empirical data analysis in the *Planning Reform Analysis* (Chapter 4).

Even before the Conservative Party came to power in 2010 with the Liberal Democrats in a Coalition Government, one of their stated core policy objectives was to reform the planning system in England. Conservative Party discourse on planning at that time was outlined in the 2009 Conservative Green Paper 'Open Source Planning' (OSP), which stated that the planning system was '*broken*', '*inefficient*' and '*adversarial*'. OSP provided the intellectual foundations for the 2012 NPPF by making the case that:

"*The planning system is vital for a strong economy, for an attractive and sustainable environment, and for a successful democracy. At present, the planning system in England achieves none of these goals. It is broken…To establish a successful democracy, we need participation and social engagement. But our present planning system is almost wholly negative and adversarial. It creates bureaucratic barriers rather than enabling communities to formulate a positive vision of their future development. Many local politicians and council officers have tried to make the current system work, but as power over planning has been taken away by Labour from locally elected representatives and given to bureaucrats in Whitehall and in regional government, so the mistrust of the planning system has grown along with an increase in protest and in the use of judicial review…Given the scale of the problems we face, piecemeal reform of the planning system is simply not an adequate response. Only a radical reboot is going to deliver the planning system that we need to succeed in the years to come*" (2009, p.1, emphasis added).

For the Conservative Party, OSP successfully 'problematized' the existing centralised and regional planning approach developed under the New Labour Governments 1997-2010 and paved the way to present 'the solution' through their own reform agenda that took the form of the NPPF and localism. The government's view on the main problems was outlined in the 2012 *Planning Reform* policy paper:

'*Sometimes planning decisions can take too long. This can slow down or prevent people building new homes, creating new places and bringing disused or neglected land and buildings back into productive use. We need to ensure that the planning rules or poorly managed planning processes do not unnecessarily prevent or delay development. We want to simplify planning approval processes and make our policies and guidance simpler and easier to follow*' (DCLG, 2012, p.1).

This political motivation to 'speed-up' planning decisions to more effectively facilitate development took on the language of 'streamlining' and 'simplifying' the planning system. Based on the definitions of the words *streamline* to '*make (an organization or system) more efficient and effective by employing faster or simpler working methods*' and *simplify* as to '*make (something) simpler or easier to do or understand*'; the intended objectives of the NPPF was to make the planning system both faster and more accessible by reducing and consolidating the numerous existing 'thousands of pages' of national planning policy statements and guidance into a concise guiding framework comprised of 50 pages.

A more detailed account and insight into the Conservative Party political discourses behind the need for planning reform in the UK can be seen in a joint article published in September 2011 by then Chancellor George Osborne and Communities and Local Government Secretary of State Eric Pickles:

> "**Planning reform is key to our economic recovery**...*sticking with the old, failed planning system puts at risk young people's future prosperity and quality of life.* **No one should underestimate our determination to win this battle**...*Since the planning system was established in 1947, it has grown inexorably more complicated. Between 2005 and 2010, Whitehall issued some 3,250 pages of guidance.* **As central prescription has burgeoned, the process has become more and more wasteful**...*Today, planning delays cost the economy £3bn a year...In a global economy, where skills and capital are more mobile than ever,* **our planning system is a deterrent to international investment**, *and a barrier to the expansion of home-grown enterprise.* **When planning acts as a brake on growth, and on the much needed new jobs and new businesses, reform is imperative**. *Current policy runs to thousands of pages, much written in technical detail. There is nothing democratic about a system that makes it* **virtually impossible for communities to understand** *how important decisions are made...Reforming* **a slow and inefficient planning system** *will be good news for the small business looking to expand; for the young family hoping for more affordable house prices; and for the community wanting to decide on their own future. This is our opportunity to unlock the new investment and new jobs the country needs. We cannot afford to miss it*" (Pickles and Osborne, 2011, no page, emphasis added).

This article demonstrates the emerging government policy thinking behind the reforms that eventually translated into the NPPF (2012) and Localism Act (2011) during this period. However, the twin political and national policy aims to both *simply planning decision-making to support (economic) development* and *empower local communities to become more involved in planning processes* soon created evident practical tensions between different planning stakeholders. In practice the pro-development and housing policies in the NPPF sit uneasily with the political narrative of localism, leading to new critical debates over how, where and by whom *power* is mobilised within and through the planning system, themes that are returned to later. The next section focuses specifically on the NPPF as national policy.

1.3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (2012)

The purpose of this part is to familiarise the reader with some of the key policy provisions in the NPPF. There is less academic literature specific to the NPPF (compared to broader agendas such as localism) and so this part is necessarily closer to a brief 'policy review' than a critical discussion at this stage.

In the ministerial forward to the adopted 2012 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the then Minister for Planning Greg Clark subsequently confirmed the government's position that the '*purpose of planning is to help achieve sustainable development*' (p.i). This meant that the 'golden thread' running through all planning policy and decision-making activity should be a '*presumption in favour of sustainable development*'. Clark further explains the government's expectation that "*Development that is sustainable should go ahead, without delay – a presumption in favour of sustainable development that is the basis for every plan, and every decision*" (p.i). Paragraph 14 (p. 4) outlines the national policy requirements to meet this (henceforth) '*presumption*' as the *purpose* of planning in England.

NPPF paragraphs 13 and 15 respectively clarify what this presumption means for planning practice: '*The National Planning Policy Framework constitutes guidance for local planning authorities and decision-takers both in drawing up plans and as a material consideration in determining applications*'; and that '*Policies in Local Plans should follow the approach of the presumption in favour of sustainable development so that it is clear that development which is sustainable can be approved without delay. All plans should be based upon and reflect the presumption in favour of sustainable development, with clear policies that will guide how the presumption should be applied locally*' (DCLG, 2012, p.3-4).

The rationale behind the presumption is a desire to speed-up the planning system by ensuring that decisions are '*positive*' so that sustainable development can be '*approved without delay*'. However, a joint article by Pickles and Osborne (2011) explains the need to *balance growth and conservation* through the presumption, addressing one of the core ideological sticking points in Conservative politics:

"*The aim of a National Planning Policy Framework is simple. The draft brings together the policy and principles that guide decisions about how our country should grow. It reduces policy from more than 1,000 pages to under 100, and will pave the way for swifter, clearer decisions.* ***In recent years, planning has come to be seen as a tool to say 'no' to growth****; as a means to delay and block. This government will change that.* ***Instead of stopping development, we want to support the right development****. At the heart of the framework is a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. This means* ***the answers to proposals for responsible, careful growth should be 'yes', unless there are strong reasons to the contrary****…The idea that presumption in favour means that growth will be able to take place wherever, whenever and however is false. Protections for the green belt, for National Parks and Areas of Outstanding National Beauty continue. The framework insists on high environmental standards and good design. Poorly-designed and poorly-located development is in no-one's interest*" (emphasis added).

In terms of national policy reforms with regard to *housing*, the NPPF Section 6 outlines the national policy approach to 'delivery, choice and quality'. Most significant is paragraph 47, which explains the national requirements on LPAs to '*boost significantly the supply of housing*'. It outlines that LPAs should '*use their evidence base to ensure that their Local Plan*[1] *meets the full, objectively assessed needs for market and affordable housing in the housing market area*', as well as '*identifying key sites which are critical to the delivery of the housing strategy over the plan period*'. Further LPAs must '*identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide five years worth of housing against their housing requirements with an additional buffer of 5% (moved forward from later in the plan period) to ensure choice and competition in the market for land*' (DCLG, 2012, p. 12-14).

Furthermore, for market and affordable housing, LPAs need to '*illustrate the expected rate of housing delivery through a housing trajectory for the plan period and set out a housing implementation strategy for the full range of housing describing how they will maintain delivery of a five-year supply of housing land to meet their housing target*' (ibid). An additional footnote explains that to be considered

[1] **Local Plan** – '*A plan for the future development of a local area, drawn up by the local planning authority in consultation with the community. In law this is described as the development plan documents adopted under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A local plan can consist of either strategic or non-strategic policies, or a combination of the two*' (NPPF, 2012, p.68).

'deliverable', sites need to be available and offer a suitable location for development now, with a 'realistic prospect' that the housing will be delivered on the site within five years, and that the particular site is 'viable' for development. The sum of these national policy requirements outlined in paragraph 47 are referred to as '*five-year land supply*' (5YLS) and '*objectively assessed needs*' (OAN) for shorthand.

These policy details will be important context for the subsequent analysis of the empirical data; but suffice to say now that this effectively 'localised' responsibility for housing targets and delivery to LPAs. National policy reform to place emphasis on 'viability' presents one of the most significant changes because it effectively brought developer profits into the frame of planning policy, meaning that local policy-compliant planning obligation was now open to negotiation on a site-by-site basis. The elevation of the status of development viability considerations within national planning policy and associated responsibilisation of local councils to ensure 'viable' development marks the strengthening of the *economic* dimension of sustainable development and planning deregulation under the Cameron era.

In terms of the more general context, the NPPF seeks to direct growth and development into existing urban city and town centres, specifically maintaining 'sequential test' policy (Paragraph 24), with LPAs and local plans being required to '*recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality*' (Paragraph 23). This focus on promoting the vitality of core urban areas is balanced by requirements to protect Green Belt and high-grade natural environments, as well as conserving key heritage sites. On this point, paragraph 115 explains that '*Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty*'. Furthermore, to promote sustainable development in rural areas, '*housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities*' and LPAs '*should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances*' (Paragraph 55). However, other national policy deregulation such as permitted development often jarred against these objectives.

In this respect, the core principles of the NPPF effectively seek to promote and increase development where it is already happening, or has happened historically, and to protect natural areas where development has not happened and would cause harm to the existing landscape. Other developments that do not fall into these existing urban or environmental and heritage conservation areas effectively became 'negotiable' with regards to planning permission; so long as it can be demonstrably shown it is a 'sustainable development' that can meet material concerns for design, transport, flood risk, climate change and pollution outlined in the 'core planning principles' (Paragraph, 17) then it was acceptable.

Crucially, section 1 of the NPPF is concerned with building 'a strong, competitive economy'. It explains that '*[t]he Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system*" (Paragraph 19). As such, LPAs should plan 'positively' and 'proactively' to meet the development needs of businesses and support '*an economy fit for the 21st century*'. Essentially fostering a positive, responsive and flexible approach to development is the key political objective of the NPPF as national planning policy. These government rationales and policies for planning will subsequently be compared to SP *experiences and responses* (herein E&Rs) to the reforms.

The understanding of the planning system as an excessive regulatory barrier to development, outlined in Open Source Planning (2009), is addressed in the NPPF through the requirements that '*Investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations*'. To this end, '*Planning policies should recognise and seek to address potential barriers to investment, including a poor environment or any lack of infrastructure, services or housing*', and be '*flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances*' (Paragraph 21). These changes attempted to link planning more closely to the business cycle/markets than previous national policy, particularly through an emphasis on development *viability*.

In summary, the NPPF marked a return to a neoliberal 'roll-back' deregulatory approach to national planning policy than the previous 'roll-out' regional and spatial planning approach under New Labour 1997-2010. The NPPF simply aims to set out the more abstract core objectives of the planning system in the form of a simplified and flexible aspatial framework. The NPPF policy objectives for economic development and conservation had the potential to clash, however, with the parallel national localism agenda that claimed to make planning more participatory through 'empowering' local communities. The actual links between the NPPF and localism as simultaneously developed and implemented national policy agendas are somewhat complex and messy; however, both had the broad aims to simplify and rescale planning activity and to promote economic growth with an emphasis on housing. It should be noted that unlike the NPPF, the Coalition localism agenda was a policy applied more widely to the public and voluntary sectors than to just the planning system; however, the 2011 Localism Act was specifically couched in statutory planning. The next section moves on to examine the reforms towards 'localism'.

1.3.2 The Localism Act (2011)

On coming to power in May 2010, the Coalition Government began to craft and implement their 'Big Society' (herein BS) and 'localism' policy agendas that they claimed formed the heart of their governing philosophy. The history and development of these political concepts is long in the UK, and this section cannot do justice to the numerous contributions and nuanced interpretations that have led to the particular brand of Coalition BS and localism developed post-2010 (although see Ishkanian and Szreter, 2012, for an introduction to the 'Big Society Debate' as a new agenda for social welfare). It is enough to state that the development of the Coalition's BS agenda paved the foundations to craft their position on 'localism'; so whilst the research focus here is not on the BS *per se*, it does provide a significant antecedent context/position for examining the developing forms of state-market-citizen relations and state restructuring in the UK post 2010 under the auspices of localism (and later 'devolution' agenda).

A growing political undercurrent for 'decentralisation' as a means to address the historically centralised settlement of the UK governmental architecture had been developing on the political left and right for at least the last three decades in its contemporary guise and within political debates. This support for decentralisation from the political right is potentially explained by the close links between neoliberal ideology and forms of 'localism' (discussed in Chapter 2) that values the market, civil society and community groups as the building blocks of effective governance over state institutions; as well as drawing on the traditional Conservative philosophy of Edmund Burke and the "little platoons" of family, church, and local community that make up our individual experiences of 'society' and provide the foundations for their 'best life'. Whilst on the political left support for decentralisation potentially developed from concerns over equitable representation aligned with traditions of democratic socialism. Notwithstanding these different political traditions and philosophical positions behind appeals to 'localism', the main point here is that it had gained cross-party support as a governing agenda by 2010.

There were also other more pragmatic and specific reasons that the Cameron-led Conservative Party from 2005-2016 sought to adopt a related 'Big Society' narrative. Just after the Conservative Party had suffered their third consecutive General Election loss to the New Labour Party (1997, 2001 and 2005), MP Theresa May argued that the UK population had come to view them as the "nasty party" and that they would have to change this image to win the next election. At this time in 2005 David Cameron was elected as leader of the Conservative Party, and he sought to develop his form of more traditional '*compassionate conservative*' as a means to remove this negative image and reconnect with the UK electorate. This was a difficult task because, following the Conservative Governments 1979-1997,

'*[e]conomic liberalism has permeated the Conservative Party to such an extent that it has undermined the core values of Conservatism. Thatcherism was an essentially free-market creed which destroyed respect for the past and created a society in which no one could be sure of their place*' (Evans, 2008, p.291). The main point is that whilst Cameron considered himself a 'Thatcherite', he needed to pursue (at least the image of) a social reform agenda that could return to traditional Conservative values. Thus the development of the BS agenda satisfied both Cameron's need for a free-market neoliberal political economy (see Corbett and Walker, 2013) and reformed social image valuing Conservative traditions of 'family, church and community' (for more on this see Dorey, 2007, Buckler and Dolowitz, 2012).

Indeed, Jacobs (2015) argues that whilst the majority of critical scholarship on the Big Society that views it as a rationale to legitimize both a reconfiguration of the welfare state and an austerity programme to reduce government debt are helpful interpretations, these accounts only partly provide an explanation for the appeal of ideological agendas such as the BS to politicians and political parties. He argues that whilst BS is part of the rationale for austerity and welfare reform (as well as localism), it also provides '*a discursive setting for politicians to address societal anxieties by offering a navigable route for the future*'; one whereby '*[a]lthough the Big Society agenda has been roundly derided, its Manichean morality tale offers assurance at a time when politics is being reshaped by neoliberal ideology, changing media practices and globalization processes*' (p. 25). In this interpretation, BS is also a governing strategy that is '*conveying authority in an era of uncertainty*', and especially following the 2008 GFC.

Having very briefly touched upon the antecedent conditions that led to the specific adoption, development and implementation of the compassionate conservatism/BS agenda by Cameron from 2005 onwards, the remainder of this section focusses specifically on the actual practices of the post-2010 localism agenda and statutory 2011 Localism Act by the Coalition (for more on the Conservative Party and the Big Society see Ellison, 2011). Importantly, whilst the BS agenda was quickly discredited within UK political and public discourse, and largely fell out of use by the end of 2013, the related localism agenda remained a core policy throughout and beyond the Cameron Governments 2010-2016.

It is also worth noting that towards the second half of the Cameron-led Governments (circa 2014-16), the localism policy agenda began to expand from its initial focus on communities and neighbourhood governance in line with BS thinking, towards a broader one of English devolution to core city/regions and administrative economic areas in the form of newly developed combined authorities. These sub-regional core economic areas could negotiate bespoke agreements with the government for greater local funding and decision-making autonomy across a number of policy areas (including housing,

infrastructure, transport, health, education, etc.) in the form of 'devolution deals'. This 'devolution agenda' built on the groundwork of the immediate Coalition policy shift from a regional to a neoliberal localist economic strategy post 2010 that prioritised 'natural' market geographies, termed Functional Economic Areas (FEAs), through Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Similar to the BS, whilst the devolution agenda also does not form a core focus in this research per se, it still provides necessary context for understanding the changing policy landscape under the developing 'community/council' and 'economic/sub-national' localism agendas implemented during this period. This project therefore makes the distinction between the development of parallel and emerging '*community*' and '*economic*' localisms under the Cameron-led governments (which together form the focus of analysis Sections 4.2).

1.3.3 Coalition 'Community' Localism

Post-2010, the Coalition's 'localism' agenda, enshrined in policy through the 2011 Localism Act, was pursued simultaneously alongside the NPPF; but it had a number of subtly different political purposes and objectives. One of the long-standing challenges to the speed of the planning system in England, and therefore to development, is community resistance. As such, the promise of localism was intended to empower local communities to take greater ownership over development within their localities, as a potential means to stem some of the local political resistance around development (Bradley, 2015).

Despite the localism agenda being claimed as a 'radical reform' of local empowerment that broke with previous centralised approaches, pressures for wider community participation in planning have been steadily building in England since the 1969 Skeffington Report. This context of increasing calls for forms of community governance framed the background for both the previous New Labour's 'New Localism' (Stoker, 2004, Lodge and Muir, 2010) and the latest iteration of localism developed by the Coalition Government (Painter et al., 2011, Evans et al., 2013, Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). More critically, however, localism as a policy supported the Conservative politics of deregulation and a smaller 'smarter state' (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016) in favour of the private sector, third sector voluntary organisations and local communities. Localism had the additional advantage of distinguishing the Coalition politically from the top-down 'centralised' and 'bureaucratic' approach of New Labour that they 'problematised'.

Some of the main provisions in the Localism Act need to be briefly outlined here to set the context for the subsequent analysis of '*localism in practice*' (Section 4.2). The most important of these here is the flagship policy of the Localism Act 2011 that granted legal provision for *neighbourhood planning*:

"*Neighbourhood planning will allow communities, both residents, employees and business, to come together through a local parish council or neighbourhood forum and say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go – and what they should look like. These plans can be very simple and concise, or go into considerable detail where people want. Local communities will be able to use neighbourhood planning to grant full or outline planning permission in areas where they most want to see new homes and businesses, making it easier and quicker for development to go ahead. Provided a neighbourhood development plan or order is in line with national planning policy, with the strategic vision for the wider area set by the local authority, and with other legal requirements, local people will be able to vote on it in a referendum. If the plan is approved by a majority of those who vote, then the local authority will bring it into force*" (Plain English Guide to the Localism Act, 2011, p. 12).

The rationale for neighbourhood planning was expressed as "*Instead of local people being told what to do, the Government thinks that local communities should have genuine* ***opportunities to influence*** *the future of the places where they live…This will help people take advantage of the* ***opportunity to exercise influence*** *over decisions that make a big difference to their lives*" (ibid, p.12, emphasis). The subtle but important wording is 'opportunity' and 'influence', which contrasts with strong government rhetoric and neighbourhood planning group's beliefs in the power of their plans when developed in practice.

Neighbourhood planning created the potential for conflict, because the Localism Act represented the first time local communities had been provided with statutory rights in the planning process. Previously local communities could make 'parish' or 'community' plans to address local issues, although these could be largely ignored by councils and developers (Gallent and Robinson, 2012). Now LPAs had to manage the new dual opportunities and pressures to negotiate an ill-defined 'duty to support' and guide their communities through localism and adopt a pro-growth and housing position to comply with the NPPF (these issues are discussed in the analysis and formed key practice challenges for planners).

It is also important for this section to outline the provisions the Localism Act made for *local government* more generally (RQ2). In terms of 'empowering' councils, the 2010 Green Paper on Decentralisation '*Control Shift*' made provisions for LAs to enact a '*General Power of Competence*' for activities previously deemed *ultra vires* ('*beyond one's legal power or authority*'):

"*We will therefore introduce a new general power of competence which* ***gives local authorities an explicit freedom to act*** *in the best interests of their voters, unhindered by the absence of specific*

legislation supporting their actions. ***No action*** *– except raising taxes, which requires specific parliamentary approval –* ***will any longer be 'beyond the powers' of local government in England****, unless the local authority is prevented from taking that action by the common law, specific legislation or statutory guidance. We will give the general power of competence real meaning by allowing councils specifically to:* • ***carry out any lawful activity****;* • *undertake* ***any lawful works****;* • *operate* ***any lawful business****; and* • *enter into* ***any lawful transaction***" (Conservative party, 2010, p.14, emphasis added).

The *Plain English Guide to the Localism Act* (2011) further expresses the government rationale that the general power of competence is intended to promote cost savings and innovation in council services:

"*Local authorities' powers and responsibilities are defined by legislation. In simple terms, they can only do what the law says they can. Sometimes councils are wary of doing something new - even if they think it might be a good idea - because they are not sure whether they are allowed to in law, and are concerned about the possibility of being challenged in the courts. The Government has turned this assumption upside down. Instead of being able to act only where the law says they can, local authorities will be freed to do anything - provided they do not break other laws…The new, general power gives councils more freedom to work together with others in new ways to drive down costs. It gives them increased confidence to do creative, innovative things to meet local people's needs*" (p. 4).

It is worth noting that the Localism Act also legislated for three 'Community Rights' (See the *Community Right to Challenge*, *Community Right to Bid* and *Community Right to Build*); however, these have not been outlined here because they were not a research focus for the data collection or analysis in this study. The next section moves on to outline the interrelated and developing 'economic' localism agenda.

1.3.4 Coalition 'Economic' Localism

Localism also represented a new scalar approach to economic policy. The Coalition Government set out the basis for their economic strategy in the 2010 White Paper '*Local Growth: Realising Every Place's Potential*'. In the ministerial forward, then Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg explained the need for the geographical and sectoral rebalancing of the UK economy, and moving away from reliance on the state and public sector for employment towards more sustainable private sector investment, employment and growth. This 'new' kind of growth would allow the whole country to thrive through realising their

potential, which was apparently stifled by centralised government but will flourish under localism. In terms of planning practice, this approach effectively reemphasised its economic development function.

The key government message was that localism means local leaders need to take ownership over the future economic development in their localities through developing their own solutions in partnership with businesses, rather than relying on the government for support or to tell them what they need to do. This governing approach stands in stark contrast to the centralised hierarchical, interventionist and performance-based approach taken by New Labour 1997-2010, particularly for local government and planning (these issues will be further discussed in relation to the empirical data in *Analysis Chapter 4*):

> "*[P]aying down the deficit is only part of the story. We must also create the conditions that will help business and get the economy growing. As we do, there is an important question we must ask ourselves:* **what kind of growth is it we want?** *Governments of the past have contented themselves with growth concentrated heavily in some areas of the country but not others, and within a limited number of sectors…Our ambition is to foster prosperity in all parts of the country, harnessing the great potential across the range of industries in the UK…***we must rebalance our economy***, ensuring that growth is spread and prosperity shared…We are creating local enterprise partnerships to bring together business and civic leaders to set the strategy and take the decisions that will allow their area to prosper. These partnerships will be equipped to** **promote private sector growth** *and create jobs locally…we are also investing in a £1.4 billion Regional Growth Fund over the next three years,* **which will help areas which depend too heavily on the public sector for jobs, helping create more sustainable private sector employment***. This Fund…will help generate new opportunities in these parts of the country…Our aim is powerful local communities, working with government,* **allowing the whole country to thrive***. That begins with* **a new kind of growth: one that benefits us all**" (Clegg, 2010, p. 3, emphasis added).

In a speech to the Local Government Summit in January 2012, Eric Pickles further outlined what the government expect from local councils and businesses under localism, and how the new Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) fit into and can deliver this agenda for renewed and long-term growth:

> "*There is no greater responsibility, no higher priority for this Government than to get the nation back on track towards renewed, long-term, sustainable growth…***Now in the past, supporting growth might have been seen as a job for the Treasury and Business Department. But we simply don't have that luxury today…Not least because localism and growth are two sides of the same coin.**

You can't engineer, can't manufacture growth through nationally-dictated plans and blueprints. However well-meaning, however expertly devised, Regional Development Agencies simply didn't deliver…Instead of trying to impose growth from Whitehall, we want to encourage and celebrate local leadership, ingenuity, and enterprise. Instead of the public sector going solo, we want to get councils and entrepreneurs working together…Local Enterprise Partnerships put civic leaders and local entrepreneurs in the driving seat as never before…This means making tough decisions and putting the cash where it can make the biggest difference – not where it's most expedient, or will appease the most people…To a great extent, what happens in your area next is in your hands. We've binned the guidance, the strictures, the blueprints. As local leaders – whether in business or the Town Hall – for the first time in decades – you've got a clear run. Your communities are looking to you to lead. To shape the future of your local economies…Above all, there is no point clinging to the old levers and approaches. The world has changed. Nobody's going to try and force a solution on you. Nobody's going to stop you pursuing your own" (emphasis).

This section has presented a very brief and necessarily selective account of the rationales, contexts and policy details for the major planning reforms of the NPPF and Localism (Act) that have shaped planning practices post-2010. The purpose has been to both familiarise the reader and to set up the thesis.

Overall this thesis is comprised of six main chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the research project, context, overall argument and conceptual framework (neoliberal structure-agency). Chapter 2 presents a thematic literature review on neoliberalism, austerity and planning reform. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology and research design used to collect and analyse the empirical data that underpins the analysis (comprised of 40 semi-structured interviews with LG planning managers (henceforth PMs) from a range of rural-urban and regional contexts across England). Chapters 4 and 5 present an analysis of the empirical data on national planning reforms and austerity for council planning and planners respectively. Chapter 6 summarises the research findings, limitations and the future research agendas.

Chapter 2 - Framing Theory and Applied Literature Review

This *theory and literature review* chapter is divided into five thematic sections that individually and collectively develop the overall 'theoretical framework' and outline the analytical concepts used as the lens to interpret the empirical data presented in the subsequent analysis (Chapters 4 and 5). The first section discusses neoliberal structures and planning agency in relation to austerity localism to set up the overarching conceptual focus of the research. The second section draws on governmentality theory to discuss government programmes of reform as governing attempts to shape individual conduct and regimes of practice. The third section addresses theory on power and politics in relation to planning through depoliticisation and post-political theory. The fourth and fifth sections present the 'applied' literatures on neoliberalism and austerity governance and planning reform respectively, as well as some of the main arguments. Together each of the thematic section present the framework (see Table 4).

The purpose of this chapter is to draw on the relevant theories and literatures that can help 'frame' this research project and outline how they can be applied to provide insights to this study. Some of the theories discussed here are 'high-level' abstractions that seek to explain broad phenomenon in the social sciences and others can be considered more 'applied' literatures on specific planning issues and cases. The reviews on neoliberalism and structure-agency, governmentality and post-political theories respectively (Sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) are intended to provide a more complex theoretical basis for understanding the changes to planning practices post-2010. Whilst the later reviews on neoliberal austerity governance and neoliberal planning reforms respectively (Sections 2.4. and 2.5) present a more mid-level and applied theory more specific to planning and local government to understand these issues. It has obviously not been possible to provide a comprehensive account for each of these theories and related literatures here but rather a thematic review of each is presented to inform the analysis.

It is not argued that these theories *necessarily* fit well together (or with subsequent empirical data), nor that other explanatory frames could not have been equally applied to this type of study. Researchers from similar or different professional and disciplinary backgrounds may have likely chosen a different framework, but these resonated with the researcher's understanding and interpretations of the literature, empirical data and current practice landscape (the researcher's positionality/world view and the challenges in operationalising high-level theory are further discussed in the methodology chapter). And whilst each of these theories are not sufficient on their own to explain the numerous and complex changes to the planning system and planners under the Cameron Governments 2010-2016, collectively they can provide a framework and the various conceptual tools to develop analytical explanations here.

These explanatory theories and literatures can help to explain the different findings and complex influences that planning policy and austerity reforms are having on LPAs and planning managers. The rationale for this *hybrid approach*, which applies a selective rather than wholesale approach to theory, is based on the conviction that '*there is no one planning theory that we can assimilate and take into practice. Instead, there are a range of competing ideas and theories that will, to greater or lesser degrees, correspond to our values and views of the world*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 27). These theories provide insights for understanding reforms but are not sufficient on their own to explain the empirical data and changes to planning. They are useful here in so much as they can shine a different light on the rationales and outcomes of neoliberal programmes of reform that attempt to rearticulate the role of public planners in England post-2010. The next few paragraphs takes each of these *explanatory* theory in turn.

Neoliberalism is conceptualised here as a dominant '*thought collective*' (Dean, 2014) influencing advanced political economies across the globe as an art of government, but variegated, context-specific, emergent and experimental in its policies and practices (Peck, 2010). It is not argued to be a strategic and coherent hegemonic structure, seamlessly implemented by elites, but a structural theory that can explain the broader trajectories and rationales behind UK state-market restructuring processes. More specifically, it conceptualises neoliberal ideology as a technology for governing the population through the instillation of the economic logics of markets, competition, efficiency, managerialism, consumer choice, financial autonomy, individual responsibility and risk, entrepreneurialism, and the promotion of self-governing subjects to meet these ends. Whilst neoliberal theory on its own cannot explain the competing rationales and complex processes within national and local politics in specific concrete cases, it can provide the background to broader changes to planning that unfold within and across local spaces.

Governmentality theory is used to examine individual 'conduct of conduct' and the tensions between freedom of action and the manipulation of behaviour through powerful discourses that normalise the dominant logics of institutions and societies through the art of governing. It is useful for conceptualising a more fine-grained analysis of agency, and the governing forces that seek to shape what constitutes 'rational' action for certain individuals, social groups and institutions. The rational conduct expected of planners by the government can be evaluated through their policy reforms/agendas targeted at efficiency, performance, participation and growth that together form the wider 'regimes of practice'.

Post-political theories highlight how the political can be bypassed in contemporary planning practices, explaining the dissatisfaction that planning is ostensibly more open to participation, but also becoming more tightly controlled to support elite/neoliberal agendas. It can provide explanations for broad

strategies aimed at limiting, displacing, deferring or diffusing political debate and opposition ('*dissent*') in development processes and within decision-making structures, whilst also claiming democratic openness and public consensus. This has strong resonance within the contested nature of local planning and development processes and can help defend democracy through challenging '*consensus*' politics and depoliticization; which serves to concentrate decision-making power within powerful elite and technocratic stakeholder groups, but whilst claiming to be representative of the broader public interest.

In sum, neoliberal and governmentality theory can provide conceptualisations for *power structures* and their impacts on *individual agency*; whilst post-political and depoliticisation theorisations can highlight the underlying *political* dimensions behind the competing interests and agendas of stakeholders. That is to say, each explanatory theory develops a different analytical lens for evaluating the empirical data.

Table 4 presents the 'theoretical framework' developed in this chapter; however, an important caveat is that this has been developed primarily as an *organising heuristic* for the researcher to orientate the research approach and as a tool to present the reader with a visual codex for the literature review, rather than claiming any theoretical contribution which was not the intention of this template. This also applies to Section 2.6 and Figure 7 which are only intended to sketch out the relationship(s) between these national reforms and the local government experiences and responses investigated in this project.

Table 4 – Theoretical Framework

Level of Theory (abstract-practical):	**Theory / Literature / Discipline**	**Rationale and justification for inclusion in research theoretical framework:**
Framing / Meta theory	*Structure-Agency (emphasis on externalised structures of policy and austerity reforms on internal practices) and the Power relations between national and local government for shaping planning agendas.*	Overarching theme of planning structures that work to shape the experiences and responses of planners to reforms at the local scale. This leads to power relations between those that have the power to set the agenda and the autonomy of agents to promote, conform or resist their structural settings.

Intermediary / Explanatory theory	*Neoliberalism* *Governmentality* *Post-Politics & Depoliticisation*	Neoliberal theory provides the structuring politics / ideology behind planning reforms and broader state restructuring processes. Governmentality helps explain relationships between structures and agency through attempts to govern individual conduct. Post-politics highlights the circumventing of local democracy through political attempts to manufacture consensus / displace dissent.
Applied / Concept theory	*Austerity Localism* *Austerity Urbanism/Governance* *Austerity Realism* *Progressive Localism* *Empowerment* *Conduct of Conduct* *Regimes of Practice* *Landscapes of Antagonism* *New Public Management* *Sedimentation* *Ideational Power* *Responsibilisation/Risk* *Capacity/Resilience* *Consensus/Dissent* *Depoliticisation* *Growth-Dependent Planning* *Public Interest/Trust* *Statecraft*	Derived from the higher meta and mid-level explanatory theory, these practical applied theories and concepts are used as the 'tools' to evaluate and analyse the empirical data.

The theoretical framework has divided the literature review material into the meta 'framing' theory, the intermediate 'explanatory' theory and the 'applied' theory based on concepts. The proceeding sections move on to further develop the different insights offered by these theories/concepts to both frame the project and evaluate and analyse the empirical data. The next section begins this task by starting to develop the theoretical (power) relationships between the structures of neoliberalism manifest in national reforms and what these means for forms of local planning agency on the ground.

2.1 Neoliberal Structures and Planning Agency: Planning under Austerity Localism

The purpose of this section is to begin to develop the theoretical relationships between (neoliberal) *power structures* and *planning agency* (professionalism/autonomy) under the conditions of austerity localism post-2010 that forms the overarching theme of this thesis. It also develops the main argument in this chapter that public planning and planners have increasingly become captured as facilitators of neoliberalism in the UK; however, that planners are also part of the fight back against neoliberalisations.

The starting point for this section is the work of Healey and Barrett (1990) arguing for a relational structure-agency approach to understanding land and property development processes. In this seminal work, agency was broadly understood as the strategies, interests and actions of the various agents involved in the development process, including landowners, investors, developers, consultants, public planners, politicians and community groups. Whilst structure was understood as the organisation of political and economic institutions and activity, and the values around land, property, buildings and environments, which frames the decision-making of agents. This work demonstrated how combining both structural and agency accounts could uncover more holistic understandings of the development process, whereby the development industry is '*actively involved in its own reconstitution*' whilst at the same time '*being driven to restructure by external pressures*' (p. 90). A structure-agency approach will be applied to this research in order to evaluate how public planners negotiate and reconcile the post-2010 structures of austerity localism with their practices of professional autonomy to enact change(s).

The 'Strategic-Relational Approach' developed by Bob Jessop and Colin Hay builds on initial structure-agency approaches through an attempt to understand '*the recursive nature of this relationship; that particular structures, in a variety of ways, privilege some forms of agency, while agents reflect on the nature of the structures confronting them in selecting their courses of action. In addition, agents might also examine their own nature and capacities and alter their own identities in the light of their understanding of the structural context. In turn, agents can influence structures, but their capacities to do so are unequal, given the 'strategically selective' nature of structures which operate to reinforce some*

actions and discourage others' (Valler et al., 2013, p. 151-2). This acknowledges the crucial role of *power*; more specifically, the power relations explained through structure-agency have clear implications for theorising how externalised government reforms are internalised by LG institutions and planning actors.

Dowding (2008) discusses the essential element of the relationship between structure and agency as one of *role development* in system theory accounts as developed by Parsons (1952) in *The Social System*:

'*Individuals create understandings of their role in society by internalizing standards that they have learned by seeing other structured behaviour. The structure has a two-fold 'binding in': first, an internalizing of the standards of conformity that has instrumental or expressive value to the person and, second, through the structuring of the reactions of others to the agent's conformity with the standards expected of his role. Value patterns are thus created by the reactions of people; first, in how they see their own roles and, secondly, in how others view that role and how they view the agent's view of that role. The latter also reacts to the agent's playing of the role through negative and positive sanctions, which then modify the agent's future playing of the role*' (Dowding, 2008, p.27).

Such understandings assist conceptualisations of the role of PMs in internalizing and promulgating the 'standards of conformity' for their planning department and staff under the structural conditions of austerity governance. As a structure, austerity reform places new expectations on the roles and 'role development' of planners to respond to and operate effectively within a new environment; however, the agency of PMs and planners also shape how these structures are implemented and potentially reworked within specific contexts. In order to evaluate the autonomy of planning agents, however, we need to consider conceptualisations of *power* that mediate their specific 'acting spaces' (Grange, 2013). This links to the work of Erving Goffman on 'action spaces' in the sociology literature (Goffman, 1997).

Morriss (2002) poses the question '*why do we need concepts of power?*'. He conceptualises power in the general sense of '*the capacity to bring about effects*' and presents the threefold answer that we want to know the '*practical*', '*moral*' and '*evaluative*' contexts of power. The practical context is the capacity of ourselves and others to achieve desired outcomes; the moral context is whom to hold responsible for outcomes that affect the interest of others; and the evaluative context, when judging social systems, is to what extent they provide their citizens with freedom from the power of others and the power to meet their own wants and needs. These practical, moral and evaluative contexts of power are useful tools for explaining the different forms of power planners have influence over in practice(s).

For Lukes (2005 [1974]), there are three dimensions of power; the first dimension is the power to achieve desired goals by prevailing over the opposition of others, the second dimension is imposing a desired agenda on others, and the third dimension is '*influencing their desires, beliefs and judgements in ways that work against their interests*'. These conceptualisations relate to the '*subjects*' of power (those actors or agents that are subjected to it) and the '*sources*' of power (those actors or agents who have or who exercise power). It is argued here that public planners are both 'sources' and 'subjects' of power; they are not 'dominated' or 'powerless' in the traditional sense of 'subjects' of power, but their actions are constrained by powerful interests that exercise power over their policy objectives and financial settlement. These conceptualisations of power relate to theories of structure and agency, specifically where power is located and how it operates by mediating the relationships between actors.

Much academic work has been dedicated to overcoming the structure-agency divide in social theory, particularly the work of Anthony Giddens on 'duality' and 'structuration' (Giddens, 1979, Giddens, 1984). For Dowding (2008), however, '*the agency-structure divide is false*', and those disciplines and theorists that give more weight to structure over agency and vice versa primarily represent different uses of *language* and *emphasis* rather than any significant analytical distinction in their approaches. Similarly, the conceptual framework developed here does not perceive there to be an agency-structure divide in substantive analytical terms; it does not distinguish the structures of neoliberal policy reforms from the agency responses of LG PMs. Agents respond in relation to their structural and local contexts, but their actions also shape these contexts, as so they are largely symbiotic and mutually co-dependent.

Similarly in the political studies literature, Glynos and Howarth (2008) argue that the '*the radical contingency of social structures and human agency – their structural incompleteness – discloses new ways of understanding both their character and their mutual intertwining…an approach developed around different sorts of logics – social, political and fantasmatic – goes some way to steering a different course between a pure thick descriptivism that focuses principally on individual beliefs and desires on the one hand, and a concern with causal laws and mechanisms on the other*' (p.155). This intertwining relationship means austerity localism *logics* can be analysed as structural forces over agency in practice.

The complex relationships between national structures (reforms) and local agency (practices) can be viewed through neoliberal theory. Brenner and Theodore (2002) contest pure neoliberal ideology claims that market forces will consistently operate according to set laws regardless of where they are enacted geographically. Instead they highlight "*the contextual embeddedness of neoliberal restructuring projects*" that are "*produced within national, regional, and local contexts defined by the*

legacies of inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices, and political struggles". These factors assist in understanding the production of "*actually existing neoliberalism*" through evaluating "*the path–dependent, contextually specific interactions between inherited regulatory landscapes and emergent neoliberal, market–oriented restructuring projects at a broad range of geographical scales*". Each successive wave of neoliberal reform paves the way for the next level of restructuring, highlighting "*the path-dependent character of neoliberal reform projects*" (Brenner and Theodore, 2002, p. 349). These 'neoliberal' practices did not emerge in the post-2010 UK context, rather layers of preceding myriad neoliberal policies and initiatives created the foundations for the latest wave of reforms following a series of ideological continuations and breaks since the 1970s.

Brenner et al. (2010) argue that whilst examples of neoliberalism are found all over the world, the actual concrete practices and forms of neoliberalism are contingently produced through interaction with the specific antecedent political, economic and social conditions, the '*inherited landscape*'. Neoliberalism therefore can be understood to constitute a spatially variegated set of contested processes, rather than a single coherent project that is aspatial. In this context, Blanco et al. (2014) explain that it is "*important to guard against totalising explanations that reduce the local to a political strategy of neoliberalisation…which impose a false coherence onto emergent and uneven practices across distinct economic, political and social contexts*" (p. 3135). Therefore, attention must be given to both the structural and universal position of neoliberal ideas and practices within global discourses, and the context-specific agency found in the localities that neoliberal practices are being produced or contested.

In terms of viewing 'neoliberalism' as a structural context, Harvey (2007) outlines the neoliberalisation of societies is characterised by reduced restrictions on business operations, extended property rights, privatisation, deregulation, the erosion of state-supported economic safety nets, devolution of central government, uneven economic development and increasing social polarization and inequality. For Harvey (2007), the central contradiction of neoliberalism is that whilst its core objective is to produce a minimalist state with society directed by the market economy, this requires complex legal, judicial, financial and regulatory state frameworks. Planning is one of these necessary regulatory state frameworks. This contradictory reality means that neoliberalism ironically seeks to strip back planning systems whilst also relying on them to maintain a state-led neoliberal political economy. This highlights the uneasy relationship between state neoliberal ideology and forms of land-use planning regulation.

The context of contemporary neoliberalisation across the western-world has been shaped by the forces of economic globalisation and international capital mobility, which prioritises new scales and spaces of

competition as capital and business becomes increasingly 'footloose' and clustered in key urban nodes within the world economy (Harvey, 2007). The basic argument goes that cities that want to attract company headquarters, factories or infrastructure capital etc. have to make their bids more attractive than the other ambitious cities they are competing with nationally and globally. One way to win this contest is to convince private businesses that the local city governance and public managers will play a role in the goal of securing revenue and helping to get certain projects implemented as members of public-private partnerships, rather than traditional bureaucratic regulatory role in urban development.

According to Harvey (1989), these shifts towards urban entrepreneurial governance is a response to extending capitalist forces under globalisation. Sager (2013) builds on this understanding that '*[u]rban entrepreneurialism aims at creating conditions conducive to capital accumulation within a city's boundaries. This means adoption of pro-growth policies and new institutional structures of urban governance, expecting local officials to be enterprising, risk-taking, inventive, and profit motivated in their entrepreneurial role. The way cities operate is changed towards business-like strategies, alliances to achieve urban competitiveness, and public-private partnerships*' (p.132-3). These specific governance and policy responses to the pressures of economic globalisation are broadly interrelated with the emergence of neoliberal political economies across advanced liberal democracies since the 1970s.

In this context, a '*neo-liberal policy is one that is promoted by neo-liberal regimes and implies a shift from government to (partly) private strategies, or a conversion from publicly planned solutions to market-orientated ones, or at least the serving of private companies and their favoured customers*' (Sager, 2013, p.129). These policies aim to elevate administrative efficiency, entrepreneurialism, and individual economic freedoms over democratic political steering from the state and forms of public collectivism. More specifically, Sager (2013, p. 153) highlights the characteristics of neoliberal ideology and policies to reform urban planning that most concern critical planning theorists (and practitioners):

- '*One-dimensional concentration on efficiency and economy in neo-liberal policy recommendations.*
- *A predilection for private, competitive, and market-orientated solutions to urban problems, that is:*
    - *Search for development strategies that create profitable investment opportunities, and organizational frameworks that mimic markets and force actors to compete;*
    - *Scepticism to year-long participatory processes preparing for political compromises rather than economically sound decisions.*

- *Lack of a democratic agenda beyond consultation that elicits information from clients and consumers, and widespread privatization that reduces transparency and thus weakens the inhabitants in their capacity as well-informed citizens.*
- *Indifference to concerns for unequal treatment, exclusion, segregation, and distributional questions: Private goals of profitability are given higher priority than social goals of improving the living conditions of the economically deprived*'.

The key issue is that neoliberal policies therefore extend the privileged position of private business, investors and affluent communities whilst disadvantaging and polarising poorer sections of society. Furthermore, neoliberal policies will only support environmental protection and mitigation to the extent that people are willing to pay for policies with such outcomes. Finally, the increasing private sector management and funding of urban development leads to a contraction of the political sphere, with private actors less vulnerable to political criticism and citizen lobbying. In contrast to neoliberal conceptions of planning, '*the aim of public planning is to treat people as citizens with political roles, rights, and agendas – not only as entrepreneurs and recipients of service*' (Sager, 2013, p. 155).

Critical planning theory resists the capture of planning as only an enabler of development, because such a role detracts from the important social and environmental contributions that planners can make to their locality (Fainstein, 2010, Rydin, 2013). Fordham (1990) cautioned that the planning system is designed to regulate private developers, highlighting the problems with transferring planning functions to the private sector through privatisation and out-sourcing strategies as giving planning over to one sectoral interest concerned with profit-making. These potential challenges to planning professionalism / practices (agency) are more pronounced under the competitive economic structures of neoliberalism.

Despite the strong links between neoliberal political economies and the structuring contexts of planning (discussed later), there are still critical debates surrounding the useful of neoliberal theory to explain local contextualised policies and strategies. In the academic literature, theoretical and empirical accounts of neoliberalism have been increasingly subject to emerging critiques concerning the contested nature, analytical value and explanatory power of the concept (Le Galès, 2016, Storper, 2016).

Among these critiques are concerns with the tendency of neoliberal narratives to over-state the strategic coherence of neoliberal projects, whilst underplaying the explanatory capacity or existence of alternative political projects (Blanco et al., 2014). Policy attempts at local scale neoliberalisations will interact with competing political agendas, such as nationalism and conservatism, which can produce

significant local variations that cannot simply be explained through a neoliberal lens. The plurality of factors shaping local governance regimes can therefore be overlooked. Such neoliberal meta-narratives suffer from an 'analytical disconnection' as they move from the macro-level economic, social and political drivers of change, to the 'messiness' of local urban politics and practices that are crucial for explaining micro-level accounts (Blanco et al., 2014). This sets up the challenge of exploring structure and agency through local neoliberalisations given the complexity of competing local factors/contexts.

As a result, explanations of neoliberal regimes remain somewhat divorced from broader accounts of the local state and urban change. However, the role of the local state in fostering or resisting neoliberal strategies is crucial, facilitating or resisting the implementation of neoliberal policy and practices at the local scale through situated agency. Indeed, '*the radical restructuring of the local state and its redefinition as a sponsor and agent of enterprise and growth was integral to the success of neoliberal programmes from the 1980s onwards, alongside the reconfiguration of local state–society relations through the extension of economic ideas and practices into social and cultural relations*' (Blanco et al., 2014, p. 3131). Neoliberal 'roll-out' programmes of reform seek to make the local state an accomplice to such reforms, particularly through changing LG from 'facilitators' to 'enablers' of growth; however, by failing to fully engage with these micro-level processes, institutions and actors, structural neoliberal accounts remain somewhat detached from 'actually existing' neoliberal explanations 'on the ground'.

Thus the complex interplay between the structural forces of neoliberalisations on the planning system through national policy reforms and austerity and the situated agency of LG planners is critical for understanding how programmes of reform are implemented, constructed or reworked in space/place.

Similarly, Newman (2014) argues that theories that situate neoliberalism within a governmentality framework (discussed in the next section) can present ways to conceptualise LG not simply as the subject to dominant top-down forces, but rather themselves being implicated in strategies of 'governing at a distance' and the resignification and re-articulation of neoliberal discourses at the local scale. In such cases, the agency of LAs is acknowledged through their role as '*incubators of new possibilities*' that can blend and adapt, or establish alternatives to, neoliberal logics:

"*Local governments play an active role in strategies for governing populations by installing 'economic' logics of calculation (constituted through discourses of markets, efficiency, responsibility, consumer choice and individual autonomy) and strategies for promoting 'self-governing' subjects. The temptation is to see local authorities as the passive victims of global and national forces. Yet local authorities may,*

through their own policy agendas, be crucial actors in producing, reproducing, reworking and reconstituting neoliberalism" (Newman, 2014, p. 3294-5).

Newman (2014, p. 3297) also cautions that "*different enactments of neoliberalising projects take place in a contradictory field of political forces ('landscapes of antagonism') that cannot be reduced to systems of party political representation and party-specific ideologies*". Crucially, LAs can mirror the dynamics of the state by "*seeking to extend their own reach through new governmentalities and forms of expertise while seeking to displace the contradictions they face—including those of austerity politics—onto their 'partners' as well as onto local citizens. It is in this sense that local governments can be seen as 'mediating' processes of neoliberalisation*" (Newman, 2014, p. 3303). Therefore LAs are not necessarily passive or resistant to neoliberalism in any particular circumstance; they can experience and respond to reforms in a number of ways based around their own specific '*landscapes of antagonism*' formed by their local politics, economy, partnerships, goals, communities and other local 'contextual' factors.

Having discussed some of the relevant high and mid-level theorisations on neoliberal structure-agency, it is now worth reviewing some of the more applied empirical studies in the literature that relates most closely with this research and demonstrates how local institutions and agents respond to reforms in practice; before lastly unpacking what and whom is meant by 'planning' activity and 'planners' as agents.

Austerity is conceptualised here as a neoliberal government policy structure intended to reformulate LG institutions and planning agency. One of the key theoretical positions in the contemporary academic literature on austerity post-2008 GFC is the 'austerity urbanism' developed by Jamie Peck (2012) in the US context. According to Peck, the emergent features of austerity urbanism are *leaner local states*, *rollback redux*, *fire-sale privatisation*, *placebo dependency*, *risk-shifting rationalities*, *tournament financing*, and *austerity governance* (2012, p.648-9). Each of these features are interrelated in practice as responses to urban governance restructuring; however, the key focus here is '*austerity governance*':

'*Extended forms of management by audit and 'rule by accountancy' will be consolidated, both between scales of government and within individual municipalities. Beyond the immediate effects, not to be under-estimated, of continuing budgetary shortfalls and intramural struggles over the apportionment of cuts, protracted subjection to fiscal stringency will likely become an indirect driver of ongoing organizational transformation. This strengthens the hands, internally, of the cadre of fiscal disciplinarians, restructuring advocates, change-managers, consulting auditors and local state entrepreneurs, whose license to act (decisively) is reinforced by austerity-budgeting Realpolitik. The*

opponents of this ascendant class of fiscal change-makers, on the other hand, can be maligned and marginalized as advocates for special interests, defenders of turf or apologists for the status quo'.

The concepts of 'austerity urbanism' and 'austerity governance' (Peck, 2012) have formed a strong research agenda in the academic literature (Tonkiss, 2013, Mayer, 2013, Davidson and Ward, 2014, Tabb, 2014, Di Feliciantonio, 2016, Stanley, 2016) and for evaluating the empirical data in this thesis.

In their study, Davies and Blanco (2017) explored the processes of variegated local neoliberalisation through the framework of urban regime theory and austerity urbanism, using a comparative case study of six cities in Spain and the UK. They found that in the two UK cases of Cardiff and Leicester, the governance strategies operated within the doctrine of '*austerity realism*', '*where cuts are implemented in a spirit of realpolitik due to statutory constraints and for lack of any perceived political alternative*' (p. 1524). In contrast, they found many examples of contentious politics and 'new urban activism' in Spain, which could provide a platform for resistance to austerity and regime formation within local governance structures. These remained muted in the UK, explained by the link to the legacies of industrial collapse and trade union defeats in the 1980s. According to Davies and Blanco (2017), '*Cardiff and Leicester had stable 'austerian realist' regimes, political cultures in which national government sets the rules, no mainstream social actor refuses austerity and resistance has little direct impact*' (p. 1529). As such, 'austerity realism' provides another core 'concept' theory to evaluate the empirical findings in this study and underscore the political context for LAs and planners operating in the UK post-2010.

The city cases in Spain demonstrated that the devolved regional structures and local traditions around church-influenced social care and insurgent cooperatives worked to mediate the politics and temporality of austerity. Such differences were subtler in the UK context, based on the tempo of cuts and the durability of collaborative institutions established previously by New Labour. In the UK cases, it was argued that '*Austerity has been largely interiorised into the logics, assumptions and everyday practices of state and non-state actors through the combination of strong central direction, weak regionalism, weak contentious politics and the dependency culture of municipality on centre*' (p. 1530). These 'austerity regimes' were considerably more robust in UK urban governance than in the more diverse contexts of Spanish cities. Leading Davies and Blanco (2017) to argue that '*cities and regions are 'institutional forcefields' producing convergence, differentiation and hybridisation in patterns of austerity urbanism and mediating top-down neoliberalisation in significant ways*' (p. 1530). Such studies highlight the importance of contextual factors for shaping local responses and outcomes despite being targeted by similar structural neoliberalisation policies through variegated local structures and agency.

Similarly, Fuller (2017) adopts a 'Pragmatist Sociology' framework to explore the construction and deployment of 'discursive institutions' under austerity using the case study of an English city council. He found that these discursive institutions seek to control the behaviour of actors and reduce internal contestation, with the intention of legitimising austerity programmes. From this perspective, austerity has been implemented in a cumulative manner reflecting the ongoing deliberation, justification and agreement required to generate consensus around the responses necessary to manage cutbacks, which become characterised through contestation. Such discursive institutions represent an attempt to shape consensus and agency at the local level. In this context, the '*critical task for senior politicians and managers has been to justify austerity measures to the broader council and local population*'; whereby the '*main strategic priorities are geared towards economic development and supporting vulnerable communities, with service retrenchment judged on their relevance to these priorities*' (2017, p. 753).

This discursive construction of austerity by national government as a necessary task to be undertaken across the public sector by management actors was translated into a local narrative that presented market values as both as a solution to cuts and more importantly a way forward for the organisation in the contemporary age of austerity. In these national and subsequent local reform narratives, change is framed as inevitable and couched in positive terms of doing 'more with less' by developing strategies to make services more 'commercially viable' and supporting a 'business approach' for the council.

In Fuller's case study, the council's corporate plan worked to naturalise austerity in 'positive terms' by relating the creation of a more efficient organisation to the delivery of beneficial social outcomes. In practice, however, the consolidation of corporate strategy production at the very senior council level represents '*congruence to state restructuring through (disparate and uneven) new public management practices since the late 1970s, characterised by organisational centralisation and hierarchies through the primacy of a managerial culture*' (Fuller, 2017, 756). In achieving these ends, senior management have been able to lose their more 'negative' staff through cutbacks, and subsequently seek to select or employ new managers and officers that have the 'right values' to perform under austerity governance.

Fuller argues that this concern for '*more entrepreneurial officers*' is an important organisational change mechanism designed to '*reorient the long-term culture of the organisation*' (p. 758). Crucially, Fuller (2017) highlights the role of '*senior management to constantly reconfirm austerity institutions*' (p. 759) in response to everyday critiques; and concludes that the devolved risk for implementing austerity to city governments has led to senior managers and councillors formulating discursive institutions, based

on market and bureaucratic values, which seek to '*guide the daily practices of officers*' (p. 761). In this way, local agents are doing the 'work' of neoliberalism by reproducing austerity within local institutions.

Finally, to further develop this neoliberal-structure-planning-agency conceptualisation, the definition and scope of what and whom counts as 'planning' and 'planners', along with the conceptual/normative and practical objectives that these activities/agents seek to achieve needs to be briefly discussed.

On the first point, as Campbell et al. (2014) explain, the work of planning and the job title of 'planner' is not limited to those that hold a professional qualification or membership of the professional body in the UK; and that in the academic and professional literature the actual activities of planning can be broadly defined as '*spatial governance*' (Healey, 1997a) and '*critical thinking about space and place as the basis for action or intervention*' (RTPI Education Institute, 2003, para. 4.17) respectively (p.56). This means that '*At its most narrow, planning may be viewed as those statutory tasks undertaken by professional planners, at its widest, planning concerns any intervention or action associated with space and place and is not restricted to the activities of "planners" but includes policy makers, politicians, as well as civil society. Even those engaged in planning disagree as to its scope*' (Campbell et al., 2014, p.47). So whilst the specific unit of analysis in this study is LPA *planning managers*, overall the researcher understands 'planning' and 'planners' in this broader sense as the activities and agents (inter)connected to wider processes operating within and between national and local political and civil society spheres.

On the second point, these definitions concerning the scope of planning are more than just academic semantics but relate more fundamentally to the professional autonomy and wider role/position of planners in development processes and society; because '*[a] narrow perspective results in much being ruled as beyond the remit of planning (and planners), while a broader perspective suggests that little differentiates planning from public policy and politics. Linked to this is a continuum of aspiration, moving from a limited concern with the maintenance of existing procedures and practices, through to an ambition that planning can contribute to wider social transformation*' (Campbell et al., 2014, p.47). The autonomy/capacity/ability of planners to enact wider agendas based on their professional training and skills, and crucially ethical values, rather than the diktat of structural policy and financial reforms gets to the heart of contemporary debates concerning the crisis of 'trust' and perceived decision-making 'legitimacy' of planners and the wider planning system (Swain and Tait, 2007, Tait, 2011, Tait, 2012).

These debates on the role of planning/planners and trust in the system are mediated by normative and practical concerns over what the objectives of planning should be when there is critical debate over the

actual existence and continued relevance of broad notions for planners serving the 'public interest' (Campbell and Marshall, 2002, Tait, 2016), and particularly what is meant by the term 'public':

'*[M]uch of the debate in planning literature on the public interest revolves around the concept of interests and particularly the mechanisms by which we might reconcile individual and collective interests…[but] it has also tended to downplay the significance of the 'public' dimension of the concept. What and who is 'the public' to which the concept is attached, and to what extent is 'the public' a universal or delimited group? To what extent can we define a 'public sphere' that enables us to conceive of a public interest? What does it mean to participate in the public sphere, and how does it shape our identity and actions? These are questions that are not asked as frequently with respect to the public interest and its legitimating function within planning, yet are clearly crucial*' (Tait, 2016, p.339).

These important theoretical and normative debates aside, the conjecture is made here that planners still rationalise their professional role in relation to a broad notion of 'public interest' that is a signifier of their ethical commitment to society and the environment and made concrete through their local practice setting and personalised understanding of what this means for the future of places and people.

This is the planning 'agency' that is conceptualised as part of the 'fightback' against structural neoliberal reforms and ideological politics (Shepherd, 2017) that positions planners as 'barriers to growth' and serves to 'deprofessionalise' their practices through policy deregulations and financial and performance controls. On this last point, academics and professional bodies also have an important role to play, along with practicing public planners, to demonstrate the wider 'value' of planning as an important and worthwhile activity that can and does support other sectors in the economy (Adams et al., 2016).

This section has introduced the main argument in this chapter (and theme of the thesis) that planning and planners have increasingly become captured as facilitators of neoliberalism in the UK post-1980, and that the post-2010 structural context of 'austerity' and 'localism' has furthered served to make the planning system and planners more complicit in achieving neoliberal objectives through these agendas. However, it has also shown that neoliberalisations are highly mediated by the local contexts they are implemented within, and this is where various attempts at reform can be challenged through the professional autonomy of public planners to form part of the fightback against neoliberalisations. The next section continues this argument by outlining the potential insights of governmentality theory for evaluating 'programmes of reform' that seek to change individual 'conduct' and 'regimes of practice'.

2.2 Government Programmes of Reform and Individual Conduct: Governmentality Theory

One way to comprehend the relationship between neoliberal structures and planning agency is through the lens of Foucauldian 'governmentality' theory. Such theories can explain the governing programmes and tools used to shape individual conduct, and the potential for free individuals to exercise autonomy.

The purpose of this section is to outline how neoliberal-informed governmentality conceptualisations of governing the '*conduct of conduct*' and '*regimes of practice*' can be applied to explain the role of *planning agency* in relation to power and structural neoliberal governing '*programmes of reform*', such as localism and austerity. In overview and relevant to this research, a governmentality perspective can inform evaluations of how one of the intended recipients of austerity reform, LG PMs, have *internalised* and implemented the *externalised* neoliberal logics associated with '*entrepreneurial governance*' (Harvey, 1989), '*New Public Management*' (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994) and '*austerity urbanism*' (Peck, 2012) into their agency (conduct of conduct) and departmental practice cultures (regimes of practice).

Foucault's 1978-9 lectures on '*the birth of biopolitics*' (Foucault et al., 2008) investigated the (then developing) subject of neoliberalism. They presented neoliberalism as not just a doctrine for the government of states or economies, but as intimately tied to the governing of the individual towards a particular manner of living (Read, 2009). Foucault understands the two forms of 'classical' and 'neo' liberalism as sharing the understanding of man as an 'economic subject' as the basis of politics, that of 'homo economicus'. In contrast to classical liberalism, Foucault argues that neoliberalism '*extends the process of making economic activity a general matrix of social and political relations, but it takes as its focus not exchange but competition*' (Read, 2009, p.27). The shift from exchange that underpins classical liberalism to the pre-eminence of competition under neoliberalism marks one key distinction. Neoliberal ideology seeks to transform individuals into homo economicus subjects governed by their individual interest, investment and competition over the minimal strictures of the collective or legal principles of society or the state. Therefore, for Foucault, the term 'governmentality' refers to the '*ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power*' (Rose et al., 2006, p. 86).

Foucauldian governmentality theory explores the specific and complex attempts to exercise *power* through governing strategies and programmes of reform that seek to shape human conduct(s). From this perspective, the activity of 'government' is conceptualised in broad terms; '*Government is any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape conduct by working*

through the desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs of various actors, for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes' (Dean, 2010, p. 18).

A governmentality perspective recognises that '*a whole variety of authorities govern in different sites*' and in '*relation to different objectives*' rather than seeing any single body, such as the state, responsible for managing the conduct of citizens; a perspective that then raises the questions, '*Who governs what? According to what logics? With what techniques? Towards what ends?*' (Rose et al., 2006, p.85). It also highlights that understanding how people and society are governed individually and collectively in the present requires turning away from grand theories, such as the neoliberal state or globalisation, to examine the seemingly normal concrete practices shaping rationalities within advanced liberal societies:

'*[W]e need to investigate the role of the gray sciences, the minor professions, the accountants and insurers, the managers and psychologists, in the mundane business of governing everyday economic and social life, in the shaping of governable domains and governable persons, in the new forms of power, authority, and subjectivity being formed within these mundane practices*' (Rose et al., 2006, p. 101).

A central concept in governmentality theory is the understanding and framing of government activity as the 'conduct of conduct' (henceforth *conduct* for shorthand). In essence, governing through means of conduct involves various attempts to deliberate on and to direct human conduct through specified governing 'programmes of reform'. It is the attempt to modify how certain actors think, behave and act in relation to a given situation or context so that they become 'self-governing' agents that are working towards desired government objectives. Indeed for Larner (2000, p.6), '*Neo-liberalism is both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance*'. Governmentality theory thus seeks to connect questions of government, politics and administration to the human spaces of individual actors, a scale which neoliberal research has been criticised for paying insufficient attention; neoliberal governmentality can bridge structure and agency.

Specifically, governmentality theory demonstrates that just as '*practices of the self*' can be used as governing instruments in the pursuit of political, social and economic goals, they also can express the autonomy of the 'ethical self' which can provide resistance to imposed forms of government. In this sense, practices of the self can also take the form of 'counter-conducts', whereby agents reject the ways in which their conduct is trying to be governed towards enacting a specific rationality. This is why attempts at governing conduct will result in relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes. The self is not a passive actor and will have his or her own ethical rationalities and discourses.

For example, LG planners may exercise their 'counter-conduct' through professional and ethical concerns for public interest and sustainable development, which potentially sit uneasily with the forms of governmentality attempting to reshape their conduct, such as neoliberal growth agendas. In this context, planning for the '*social is increasingly colonised by the economic criteria of efficiency, competition and productivity, and measured by cost-benefit analyses. These criteria have come to define the rules of the game and shape the conduct of all conducts*' (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015, p. 87).

The individual attempting to be governed, however, has agency as a '*locus of freedom*'. As free actors it is possible for them to think and act in a variety of ways, sometimes in ways unforeseen by those trying to govern them. In this sense, the government can only structure the '*field of possible action*' available to free actors as a means to alter their own conduct through 'self-governing' practices. Therefore, the ability for individuals to exercise freedom and their capacity to think and act is a danger to attempts to govern, and hence to powerful actors implementing programmes of reform. In advanced liberal democracies, governments have to achieve their ends through democratic process, meaning that free actors can decide to think and act in a number of different ways either supporting or rejecting dominant governing rationality. The statecraft of governmentality is to convince free actors that their interests are aligned or served by the ones elite actors are attempting to implement through reforms.

In the UK, advanced liberal governments must seek to govern their populations through utilising their individual freedoms to (re)shape their conduct towards specific rationalities or ends. For LG planners, state austerity policy was an attempt to shape their conduct towards self-practices of efficiencies, retrenchment and revenue generation to support neoliberal rationalities of self-sufficiency and growth. As free actors, planners could still decide to think and act in different ways as a 'counter conduct' to austerity; however, their 'field of possible action' had been tightly structured and circumscribed by the government to leave few alternative opportunities to act in other ways. As such, they were only 'free' to change their conduct accordingly to respond to austerity, they still made the (Hobsons) 'choice' but their conduct had been governed to those ends. Thus, 'conduct' provides a strong framework for attempts to evaluate the internalised planning cultures and practice changes in response to austerity.

Governmentality programmes of reform attempt to promote forms of '*self-government*' through which individual agents question and '*problematize*' their own conduct in relation to a dominant rationality. The objective is for individuals to govern themselves through these rationalities, and therefore become '*responsibilized*' (Hastings et al., 2015, Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015) for continuing the '*programmes*

of reform' articulated by powerful actors to achieve their desired governing objectives. Planning theory highlights that governmentality perspectives can assist explanations of how neoliberal objectives are achieved through local practices; '*Foucauldian governmentality helps focus analytical attention on the mechanisms through which neoliberalism guides and shapes the conduct of organisations and individuals, such as planners, and the selectivities involved in how they create or draw on a range of formal and informal techniques of government*' (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2014, p. 36).

A further key concept in governmentality theory relevant to this research are '*regimes of practice*' and their related '*mentalities of government*'. Regimes of practice (herein RoP) refer to the organised practices through which we are governed and through which we govern ourselves. They involve practices for the production of truth and knowledge comprised of multiple forms of practical, technical and calculative rationality, and are subject to programmes that attempt to reform the existing RoP. RoP can be understood as institutional practices in the form of the routinized and ritualised way actors do things in certain places and at certain times; as such they can be considered the organisational or practice cultures, discourses, rationalities and norms that govern the actions of individuals within them.

Dean (2010) explains that within any given society there are a large but finite number of intermeshing 'regimes of practice' that involve and link up particular institutions, such as the 'criminal justice system', 'health system', 'social welfare system' and so on. In this project, the broader RoP investigated is the 'planning system' in England post 2010 as (re)shaped by policy and austerity programmes of reforms. Powerful agents acting as 'government' seek to 'problematize' existing RoP as a means to implement programmes for their reform, this has been a common feature of governing the planning system in England over the last three decades (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014, Allmendinger and Haughton, 2013).

As the main objects and agents of the planning system, 'planners' are the targets of programmes of conduct and regime reform. In this way, planning and planners are invested with '*multiple programmes that employ certain types of knowledge to reform or radically challenge their operation, to reorient them to new goals and objectives, and to act upon the desires, aspirations, needs and attributes of the agents within them. Regimes of practices, while having a material and institutional locale, exist in the milieu of thought, one feature of which is these programmes of the reform of conduct*' (Dean, 2010, p. 32).

The related 'mentalities of government' asserts that thinking is a collective activity and emphasises the ways in which the thinking involved in practices of government is implicit and embedded in language and technical instruments. Such thinking is not readily examined and is relatively taken for granted, that

is to say, it is not usually open to question by its practitioners. Here the '*analysis of government is concerned with thought as it becomes linked to and is embedded in technical means for the shaping and reshaping of conduct and in practices and institutions. Thus to analyse mentalities of government is to analyse thought made practical and technical*' (Dean, 2010, p. 27). In this context, a governmentality lens demonstrates how the austerity 'mentality', expressed through language ('Crisis', 'Deficit Deniers', 'Living within our Means', etc.) and financial policy, is made practical and technical by reshaping how thought operates within organised ways of doing things, through planners conduct and LPA regimes.

Whilst RoP exist within the milieu formed by the mentalities of government, they are not reducible only to this milieu; that is, whilst LPA RoP exist within neoliberal mentalities of government, such regimes cannot be reduced to the thought and practices of neoliberalism. RoP have their own logics or '*strategy*' that are irreducible to the explicit intentions of any one actor, but nonetheless have an orientation towards specific ends and purposes. The distinction should be made between the *strategy* of RoP and the *programmes* that attempt their reform, they challenge them but do not become their raison d'être.

For Foster et al. (2014), such neoliberal programmes of reform seek to govern conduct by offering new opportunities for local agency (such as through the localism agenda), however, within a constrained field of possible action (NPPF) that emphasises personal risk and responsibility for the consequences (the 'neoliberal citizen' can be replaced with the 'neoliberal local authority planner' for our purposes):

'*[T]he neoliberal citizen is imbued with a seemingly enhanced capacity and responsibility for managing choices and decisions around a number of issues formerly managed directly by the state. Yet, the same citizen is at the same time disciplined through formal and informal systems of government which function to imbue the individual with an equally enhanced capacity to incur the risk of making the 'wrong' choices, given that the consequences of their actions are to be borne by the subject alone*' (p. 232).

In the context of austerity, LG planners had no choice but to respond through efficiency, retrenchment, and revenue growth strategies, because the risk of inaction was local state failure (Bailey et al., 2015). This context was both the financial and growth 'responsibilisation' (Hastings et al., 2015) and 'discipline' driving organisational culture change for LPAs and SPs; a precarious context that has termed been 'austerity localism' (Featherstone et al., 2012). It is here that planners are effectively 'captured' and forced to do the 'work' of neoliberalism by extending its logics through their self-governing practices.

Neoliberal governing reforms attempt to create a '*new regime of truth*' for individual conduct. Here as Foucault explains '*Homo economicus is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself*' (Read, 2009, p. 28). Neoliberalism as a form of governmentality is a '*technology of the self*' and particular subjectification of the individual, which normalises the ideas of entrepreneurship, investment and risk not just within the economic spheres of the market but across *the whole of society*; so that '*[s]tates, corporations, individuals are all governed by the same logic, that of interest and competition*' (ibid, p. 35). Therefore the scope for collective political solutions around 'public interest' and 'common good' associated with democracy are replaced by individualised market solutions under neoliberal regimes (Brown, 2006).

In this respect, neoliberal 'actors' are indifferent towards prescriptive ideas, and so it is not necessarily the dominant rationales that limit the individual but rather the privileging of self-interest that curtails efforts for collective transformation. In other words, '*[i]t is not that such actions are not prohibited, restricted by the dictates of a sovereign or the structures of disciplinary power, they are not seen as possible, closed off by a society made up of self-interested individuals*' (Read, 2009, p. 36). Neoliberal discourses, such as '*there is no alternative*', position agents within an individualised competitive market system of governing, limiting the possibility for other forms of subjectivity, conduct and freedom.

In this context, Read (2009, p. 35) argues that '*any criticism of neoliberalism as governmentality must not focus on its errors, on its myopic conception of social existence, but on its particular production of truth…the manner in which the fundamental understanding of individuals as governed by interest and competition is not just an ideology that can be refused and debunked, but is an intimate part of how our lives and subjectivity are structured*'. This highlights the structural power of neoliberalism over agency.

This section has highlighted the insights of governmentality theory in relation to this study. It has argued that neoliberal programmes of reform aim to shape the 'conduct of conduct' and 'regimes of practice' of planners and LPAs respectively towards 'self-governing' mentalities that (re)produce austerity and growth logics. It is in this respect that planners are doing the 'work' of neoliberalism as its agents of reform, but that can also challenge these structures through 'counter-conduct' thought and practice. This theory helps to further develop the overall neoliberal structure-agency framework in this research. The next section moves on to discuss the role of political power in planning through post-political theory.

2.3 Politics and Power: Depoliticisation and Post-Political Theory

The purpose of this section is to draw on depoliticisation and post-political theory to set the scene for subsequent evaluations of the extent to which externalised and internalised neoliberal planning logics

are transforming the structures and agency of planners towards a narrower focus on the management of growth and away from 'traditional' political objectives around the roles of ethics, democracy and distribution in planning. This specifically follows the contention of Allmendinger (2016, p. 8-9) that:

'*Planning and planners have become 'part of the problem' in the sense of withdrawing into a managerialist worldview: planning has become about the management of growth and is no longer concerned with the distributional, ethical or political questions that underpin debates about the objectives and future of planning. In this sense planning is part of the new consensus politics, in that it has become depoliticized and deploys empty phrases such as 'urban renaissance', 'spatial planning' and 'sustainable growth' in order to appeal to a wide range of interest*'.

One normative argument in this section (and throughout the wider thesis) is that we need to '*criticize particular relations of power and to identify and evaluate alternatives…driven by a commitment to human freedom and political equality: to the idea that people should have a hand, and that they should have a roughly equal hand, in helping shape the terms that govern their existence*' (Hayward and Lukes, 2008, p.9). Planning should be one way that different stakeholders each have a roughly equal hand in shaping the development of their homes, communities and public spaces. Following Foster et al. (2014), politics should not only be conceived as debate and resistance to power, but as the (re)production of political reason that 'rationalises' how states govern their own affairs and those of their population. From this perspective, we need to critically deconstruct elite political discourses/rationalities in order to develop the production of alternative political reasoning. This is why planners have a potentially important role to play in promoting political equality and developing alternatives through their professional capacities and skills. This is why these theories of power and politics are included in the theoretical framework, that is because such theories help explain the uses and abuses of political power.

One important way that power and politics interact in practice is through depoliticisation strategies. The literature on depoliticisation can be divided into three related strands (Fawcett and Marsh, 2014). The first strand concerns the relationship between a politicised political class that seek to further their own interests and a depoliticised, neutral bureaucracy (civil service). The second strand argues that regulatory governance structures and institutions can protect policy areas from political interference in which decisions are made for partisan or short-term electoral reasons. The third strand concerns the way that a depoliticisation strategy is pursued by politicians and the government to strengthen their position by shifting responsibility onto other actors and thus reducing their own accountability. It is this third strand that is the most relevant to this project in relation to the UK localism and austerity agendas.

From this perspective, Foster et al. (2014) conceptualise "*depoliticisation as central to the rolling out of new forms of power and regulation associated with neo-liberal governmentality*" which is "*at all times an inherently political act, involving an extension rather than a retraction of political space*" (p. 226-7).

In this literature, depoliticisation creates the façade of 'rolling back' the state, but whilst neoliberal governmentality allows the state to 'roll out' its agenda paradoxically increasing central control. The 'removal' of both politics and the state through depoliticisation strategies represents an illusion, but the shift in responsibility and risk onto technocratic and local actors is real. Depoliticisation is a strategy for powerful actors to protect themselves from criticism for decision-making whilst also retaining and exercising some control over the intended outcomes. Indeed, Burnham (2001) explains characteristics of depoliticisation governing strategies as '*the process of placing at one remove the political character of decision-making. State managers retain arm's-length control over crucial economic and social processes whilst simultaneously benefiting from the distancing effects of depoliticisation. As a form of politics it seeks to change market expectations regarding the effectiveness and credibility of policy-making in addition to shielding the government from the consequences of unpopular policies*' (p. 127).

One contemporary example is the depoliticisation of housing through expert techno-managerial politics of control. The quantitative measures of objectively assessed need and five-year land supply outlined in the NPPF since 2012 are examples of such 'techniques' that attempt to remove the politics from local housing debates, through technical demographic and econometric calculations that provide an 'answer' in the form of a specified number or supply of housing. The process of removing the politics from highly charged and complex policy areas such as housing can be seen as a form of depoliticisation, as politicians seek to shift the need for housing development into technical arenas based on scientific quantified calculations that are more difficult to argue against through a subjective/qualitative value-based rationality. Essentially the argument is that transferring decision-making to experts outside of the political sphere will lead to better policy free from short term politics and complexity (Crouch, 2016).

Post-political theory on planning focusses on the series of techniques that defer and displace debate into other managerial or technical (post-political) arenas. Post-political strategies ostensibly project the appearance of public openness and 'consensus', whilst *limiting*, *displacing*, *deferring* or *diffusing* opposition to development and growth (Allmendinger, 2017). Post-political theorists draw a crucial distinction between the '*political*' as the public space of decision-making for society, and '*politics*' as the practiced power dynamics between political actors and institutions involved in policy-making (Swyngedouw, 2011, Swyngedouw, 2014b). The main argument here is that planning has shifted from

attempting to uphold the political through balancing stakeholder positions in the public interest, to supporting techno-managerial politics and delivering national policy. For more detailed overviews of different post-political traditions and their application to planning, see the following volumes (Rancière, 1999, Žižek, 2000, Mouffe, 2005, Swyngedouw, 2014a, Metzger et al., 2014, Allmendinger, 2017).

Applied to planning, post-political theories help explain the contradiction between the increasing levels and opportunities for public involvement but growing dissatisfaction with the outcomes of the system. Public dissatisfaction with these ostensibly open and inclusive techniques for decision-making, which in practice often amount to the management of planning and the political, has resulted in the search for alternative arenas to become involved and have their views heard. For Allmendinger (2017, p. 193), the '*outcome of this situation is a growth in political activity outside of planning as those who wish to engage with planning are forced into other arenas, most notably the courts and national-level political lobbying*'. In this broader sense, neighbourhood planning can be viewed through a post-political lens because of its claims to give local people more control over housing within their area, but within a strict pro-development framework, which is given legitimacy and consensus through a local referendum. The local politics of dissent is displaced into a tightly circumscribed and technical plan-making exercise that often requires the assistance of experts to ensure communities conform to the wider goals of national policy to achieve a made neighbourhood plan (Parker and Salter, 2016b, Wargent and Parker, 2018).

Post-political theory also assists in explaining the specific techniques and tools of planning that have been used to displace political questions into technical and managerial arenas controlled by experts: '*Techniques such as environmental impact assessment suggest a scientific tool or method that can guide decisions and provide 'an answer' separate from the subjective, complex, sub-optimal and messy world of politics. The reality is that such apparently apolitical approaches are, in fact, deeply political in the choices around the scope and methodology and the emphases and assumptions necessary*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 193). Some contemporary examples (that are discussed later) are the shift in emphasis from democratic considerations of planning obligations to techno-financial development 'viability' and political questions around public needs/types with calculations for 'how much' housing.

Indeed, Allmendinger and Haughton (2012) go even further by arguing that the spatial planning system in England should be analysed as a form of '*neoliberal spatial governance*'. They argue that spatial planning is underpinned by a post-political context, in which conflict and dissent in the planning system is strategically choreographed into '*consensus*', in order to speed-up development as part of a pro-growth agenda. In this way, the important development decisions have already been made and

participation is used to gain support for the decision (build consensus) or (re)framed around smaller issues to deflect attention away from what has already been decided. As such, the potential spaces for democratic debate and dissent, the '*political*', are closed down making the decision '*post-political*':

'*Rather than accept the mainstream view that presents spatial planning as a progressive change…there is a danger that the resulting planning system is not so much an empowering arena for debating wide-ranging societal options for future development, as a system focused on carefully stage-managed processes with subtly but clearly defined parameters of what is open for debate. This system gives the superficial appearance of engagement and legitimacy, whilst focusing on delivering growth expedited through some carefully choreographed processes for participation which minimise the potential for those with conflicting views to be given a meaningful hearing*' (ibid, p. 90).

Putting these political theories into a planning context, whilst planning theory has long questioned the extent to which planners can operate as neutral actors working for the 'public interest' (Campbell and Marshall, 2002), there remained an understanding that planners could counter certain systemic biases in capitalist regimes through their professional practices and by forging collaboration. In contrast to this view, '*[p]ost-political analyses point to a conscious and deliberate role for planners in not just supporting but also rolling out and helping constitute strategies of depoliticization…the changing role of planners from a progressive function, underpinned by agreed values and an apolitical self-perception, to a narrower, partisan, pro-growth and development sensibility*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 192).

Closely aligned to these post-political theories is the power and capacity of planners in relation to other development and built environment stakeholders. The goes back to the framing role of theory on power, particularly as a long-standing and highly debated concept in planning theory (Forester, 1988, Flyvbjerg, 1998). Fainstein and Campbell (2012, p. 9) explain the role of power in planning theory, and how the increasing recourse to a plurality of competing vested interests serves to bound the agency of planners:

'*Unlike some other professionals, planners do not have a monopoly on power or expertise over their object of work. They operate within the constraints of the capitalist political economy, and their urban visions compete with those of developers, consumers, politicians, and other more powerful groups. When they call for a type of development to occur, they do not command the resources to make it happen. Instead, they must rely on either private investment or a commitment from political leaders. They also work within the constraints of democracy and bureaucratic procedures. Moreover, their*

concerns may have low priority within the overall political agenda. Thus, despite the planning ideal of a holistic, proactive vision, planners are often restricted to playing frustratingly reactive, regulatory roles'.

In this context, planning theory has acknowledged the limits to planning power in the past few decades, and has sought to redefine the role of planners as 'facilitators' or 'mediators' through collaborative planning theory (Innes and Booher, 1999, Healey, 2003), or as 'critical pragmatists' (Forester, 2013), rather than technical experts or professionalised autonomous agents of change. In practice, planning is often a 'tug of war' between capitalist and community interests' dependent on conflict, bargaining, and the mobilisation of political resources, the results of which are indeterminate in advance (Stone, 1993).

Post-political theory forms one critical response to the dominance of collaborative planning approaches in planning theory over the past two decades; based on the interpretation that 'collaborative' planning '*now seeks to supress dissent through the vain and managed search for consensus*', but also broadly to presents '*a critique of contemporary planning policy and practice in general*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 193-4). This is because the government reform of planning, in line with other elite stakeholder interests, have attempted '*the colonization of the political*' through the '*politics of the singular*' by choreographing discourses of homogeneity through terms such as '*community*' and inclusive rhetoric of *partnership* and *consensus* to justify the way planning issues are managed and developments approved. This context increasingly forces planners to deal with fundamental *political* issues of '*difference*' and alternative priorities as technical issues of management through *politics* (such as the five-year supply).

Overall, depoliticisation strategies seeks to limit and control democratic involvement and opposition, but through transferring decision-making power for complex and contested policy away from political accountability to technical experts and scientific rationality; thus making decisions 'depoliticised' but importantly not *apolitical*. This is in contrast to the more disguised means of displacing dissent or manufacturing 'consensus' highlighted by post-political theory. Despite their different theoretical traditions, theorists of both depoliticisation and post-politics argue that the *decline of politics* has been too easily accepted and that these strategies are often strategically used to support powerful interests, such as a neoliberal growth agenda. As a result, those people who wish to engage in debates on deeper fundamental political issues, and that question the achievement of consensus, effectively become alienated from politics. However, their antagonism has not be removed from planning, it has just been displaced. In this respect, stakeholders must find expression elsewhere outside of the formal system(s).

Arguably, the most contemporary state depoliticisation strategies are the austerity and localism policy agendas under the Cameron-led governments; that is, a governing strategy to shift the responsibility and risk for economic growth and public service provision to the local scale away from the government, whilst still retaining political control 'at one remove' through national policy and funding settlements.

This section has presented a concise review of the depoliticisation and post-political (planning) theory most relevant to this research. It has argued that powerful elite depoliticisation and post-political strategies have further served to make planners complicit in the neoliberalisation of planning in England, through transferring responsibility for political decisions into the technocratic sphere and attempting to achieve 'consensus' that masks the plurality of stakeholder positions and broader dissent; however, that planners have an important role in resisting such agendas that work against the 'public interest'.

Having briefly outlined the contributions of the framing and explanatory theories used in the theoretical framework, the next two sections 2.4 and 2.5 seek to further develop the relationships between *neoliberalism* and *austerity governance* and *planning reform* respectively as the key focus of the thesis.

2.4 Theorising Neoliberal Austerity Governance

This review section on neoliberal austerity governance makes two core and related arguments. Firstly, that austerity has managed to revive and renew the international legitimacy of neoliberalism following the 2008 GFC. Here the case is made that although the Cameron-led Governments implemented significant fiscal policy public expenditure cuts, this has not been accompanied by any meaningful departure from the pre-crisis UK growth model based on a neoliberal political economy approach that helped to cause the GFC. The combination of bolstered post-crisis UK growth model and withdrawal of public redistributive mechanisms demonstrates how austerity has paradoxically assisted to 'rescue' neoliberalism (Peck et al., 2012). Secondly, that austerity is creating a more unequal and responsibilized society in England. The socio-spatial implementation and consequences have been multifaceted and uneven across the UK, with much critical research focussing on the uneven redistributional impacts for (already) relatively disadvantaged people and places (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013, Hastings et al., 2017).

Firstly, following Peck (2012, p.651), '*[a]usterity has become a strategic space for the contradictory reproduction of market rule, calling attention to the ways in which neoliberal rationalities have been resuscitated, reanimated, and to some extent rehabilitated in the wake of the Wall Street crash of 2008-2009*'. Similarly in the UK context, Taylor-Gooby (2012) and Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) quickly identified the political relationship between austerity and 'state restructuring' under the Coalition

Government. The academic literature highlights the strong relationship between neoliberalism and contemporary forms of austerity politics (notwithstanding that austerity has a long history that pre-dates neoliberalism). Indeed, for Peck (2012), '*the most recent rounds of austerity programming are wired into the central nervous system of the neoliberal project*' (p.639), however, these reforms are exacerbated because they are building on an '*already neoliberalized institutional landscape*' (p.631).

Furthermore, Whiteside (2016) argues that '*the history and hegemony of neoliberalism is intrinsically intertwined with that of austerity*', and that post-2008 '*the politics of austerity are entrenching, reasserting, and unrolling processes of neoliberalization at global, national, and urban scale*' (p. 361). Farnsworth and Irving (2018) come to a similar conclusion that as a result of austerity, neoliberalism '*has been pursued with renewed strength and vigour since 2010*', and that whilst '*the limits to neo-austerity's legitimacy may be more exposed [since the 2008 GFC], there is less indication that neoliberal solutions to economic problems are on the wane*' (p. 17). Arguably, the ideological/political logics driving neoliberal and austerity policies have proved increasingly mutually beneficial since the 1970s and GFC.

In this post-crisis context of austerity in the UK, Berry (2016, p. 110) argues that '*the growth model supported by policy elites in the post-crisis period sustains patterns of wealth distribution similar to those which pertained in the pre-crisis period, albeit with inequality arguably more pronounced as financial and property wealth remains largely intact while earnings are held down and redistributive mechanisms are withdrawn*". This forms one of the key normative and democratic arguments in this research, that austerity has punished the most disadvantaged and further entrenched the uneven social and spatial geography of England, but whilst remaining committed to a neoliberal growth-model that caused the crisis and primarily serves the interests of a select few privileged people and places across the country.

The moral and power dimensions of austerity are starkly outlined by (Streeck, 2011) that the '*average citizen will pay – for the consolidation of public finances, the bankruptcy of foreign states, the rising rates of interest on public debt and, if eventually necessary and still possible, for another rescue of national and international banks – with his or her private savings, with cuts in public entitlements, with reduced public services and, one way or another, with higher taxes*'. The impacts of austerity on geographical patterns of planning and development will further exacerbate the pressures on local citizens to pay (through taxes) or make do without a range of public services or infrastructure projects.

One of the most relevant theoretical contributions to this research is the work on 'austerity urbanism' by Peck (2012). It provides an important foundation for conceptualising the interplay between parallel 'austerity' and 'localism' reforms as variegated neoliberalisations that shape LPAs E&Rs across England:

'*The neoliberal proclivity for downloading, by way of responsibility dumping and devolved discipline, assumes an increasingly radical and regressive form in an environment of austerity, as both budget cuts and responsibility for their management is handed down to local authorities, actors and agencies—where the capacity to respond is uneven at best…many will suffer twice, first from the localization of economic decline and then from the devolution of budget cuts*' (Peck, 2012, p.631-2).

'*Neoliberal austerity measures operate downwards in both social and scalar terms: they offload social and environmental externalities on cities and communities, while at the same time enforcing unflinching fiscal restraint by way of extra local disciplines; they further incapacitate the state and the public sphere through the outsourcing, marketization and privatization of governmental services and social supports; and they concentrate both costs and burdens on those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, compounding economic marginalization with state abandonment. Traditionally, 'localism' has been regarded as normatively benign, even implicitly progressive in some instances; today, it has become a pressure point for some of the most pernicious consequences of late neoliberalization*' (ibid, p. 650-1).

Local council responses to austerity have been similar across the UK, European and US contexts. In the context of LG in the Netherlands but with general application, Overmans and Noordegraaf (2014) find that '*[f]our responses can be identified for managing austerity: decline, cutbacks, retrenchment, and downsizing*' (p.99). They also found whilst '[r]*hetorically, [local] governments are innovative. In reality, however, fiscal measures that tend towards stability are most often used*' (ibid); underscoring practical challenges for developing transformative rather than reactionary LG approaches to austerity localism.

With these theoretical positions in mind, attention now turns to theory on the specific impacts of austerity on LPAs in England post-2010. Gardner and Lowndes (2016) raise the '*austerity puzzle*' that between 2010-2015 English LGs have lost more than a third of their funding, yet they have continued to provide and commission a wide range of statutory and discretionary services. This puzzle is prominent in the debates between critical perspectives that view austerity as a policy fundamentally restructuring the welfare state (Taylor-Gooby, 2012) and new institutionalism accounts of 'resilience' (John, 2014). For Gardner (2017) such contrasting narratives '*begs a question about the nature and extent of austerity-related change to our public service institutions*' (p. 150). Based on these literatures,

the concepts of LG 'capacity' and 'resilience' are developed as a main research theme (RQ5). The academic journal *Local Government Studies* symposium on '*Local Responses to 'Austerity*'' (2015, Volume 41, Issue 4) provides one of the key sources of literature most relevant to this research project. The remainder of this section will deal with the key debates developed in this symposium as a way to set up some key theories and concepts applied to examine the empirical data and analyse the findings.

Bailey et al (2015) explain that LG across the UK are experiencing a period of crisis created by the austerity measures introduced by the Coalition since 2010, with the level of cuts being more severe in speed and depth than under the Conservatives in the late 1970s/early 1980s. They contend the harsh treatment of LG under austerity could simply be the consequence of government according higher priority to other services areas, such as healthcare; although that the more credible view is that the high level of cuts for LG were intentional because they fitted neatly with wider policy objectives, such as localism and state restructuring. In this sense, the political aim was to reduce dependence on central government, whilst simultaneously increasing LG fiscal autonomy and responsibility for promoting growth and social protection. The latter being particularly salient because recessions typically have a worse impact on the poor, unemployed and sick, as well as more deprived regions (Bailey et al., 2015).

The political aspiration to reconfigure the role of (local) government is evident in a multitude of central government initiatives since 2010. Although this is most clearly expressed in the Localism Act 2011, the 2010 Spending Review was not only about cuts but also the deregulation of LG, both as an end in itself but also with consideration to encouraging innovation (Bailey et al, 2015). The themes of devolution and state restructuring have been evident within all areas of Coalition policy outputs since 2010; including free schools/academies in education, privatising the NHS in healthcare, and new freedoms and responsibilities for LG. One of the key goals of austerity localism has been to provide more space for the private and voluntary sectors and communities in service provision. These changes have created both a multitude of challenges but also new opportunities and possible ways of working for LG. In order for local councils to manage such large funding cuts, however, controversial political decisions "*have to be made about how to allocate the cuts between functions or services*" in which there "*is clearly potential for strategic choices to have quite different distributive impacts*" (Bailey et al, 2015, p. 576).

Bailey et al. (2015) present two conclusions about LG responses to austerity. The first conclusion is that strategies to respond to fiscal crisis are still evolving; with many of the responses implemented in the early period of austerity that proved initially successful, such as efficiency and back-office savings, becoming increasingly unsustainable and insufficient over time. As a result, *"Front-line services will face*

more significant cuts in the coming years. These cuts will be more visible to the public and are likely to impact most adversely on those on lower incomes as they rely most heavily on these services. In that sense, we have yet to really see the distributive impacts" (p.579). The second conclusion is that LG is operating in "*an increasingly risky and uncertain environment*" through which councils will struggle to support their communities as the central government reduces its funding and welfare obligations and future local income sources become more uncertain. In this context, such "*risks imply greater variation between authorities and inequality of outcomes in future*" (p. 579).

Overall, the challenges facing LG in England is the combination of significant cuts to council finances coupled with the increasing demand for services, which has resulted in "*unprecedented 'budget gaps' in council budgets*" (Hastings et al, 2015, p. 601). This practice-based context has created polarised views about the resilience and future role of LG. As such, two competing narratives on the future of LG have emerged in the literature; one a positive story of 'adaptation and survival' and the other a negative one of 'residualisation and marginalisation' (Hastings et al, 2015).

The 'adaptation' narrative emphasises the historic and contemporary capacity of LGs to survive periods of austerity through adaptations that do not fundamentally challenge the core aspects of its nature and purpose. This narrative asserts that "*austerity presents some opportunities for creative, entrepreneurial activity which will allow the sector to remain a strong and significant part of the local state*" (Hastings et al, 2015, p. 603). This is particularly the case as councils are forced to become more innovative in hard times. This narrative is closely linked to the ecological conceptualisations of 'resilience' whereby biological life must adapt to changes in their environment or risk extinction (Shaw, 2012). This position also posits that the new powers and responsibilities accorded to councils by the localism agenda has created new opportunities for them to develop bespoke strategies for managing austerity.

In contrast, the 'marginalisation' narrative makes the case that LG capacity will become weakened to such an extent that it can only provide the most basic levels of service provision to an increasingly restricted segment of the most vulnerable in the community. From the marginalisation perspective, Hastings et al (2015) explains, "*the adaptations made by local government amount to substantial, fundamental changes which will lead to a retrenchment in the significance and centrality of local government to the citizenry, as well as in its capacity to deliver social and economic programmes which are not simply ameliorative*" (p. 603-4). This position is more critical and emphasises the "*accelerating trend towards the privatisation, marketisation and commodification of service provision*"; one that understands localism as "*an instrument for implementing budget cuts…as part of the larger process of*

state retrenchment associated with neo-liberal development" (ibid p. 603). These further shifts in responsibility for economic development to local councils are also understood as an additional burden.

The common theme in both the adaptation and marginalisation narratives is that there is much worse to come from austerity in the immediate future (Hastings, et al, 2015). Most commentators agree that the responses to austerity and strategic decisions of LAs in the next five-year period 2015-2020 will be critical in shaping the future of LG in the UK (a core theme in this research in relation to planning). Beyond meta-debates over LG resilience and futures, the literature identifies three main strategies that LAs have used to respond to austerity; these are a mix of 'Efficiency', 'Retrenchment' and 'Investment'.

The first strategy, efficiency savings, are actions that seek to reduce the cost of council services without changing the service level for the community, so that the level and quality of front-line services are not obviously compromised as a result of cutbacks. These measures predominantly involve restructuring and reductions in 'back-office' support functions, such as human resources, management 'delayering' and staff reductions and implementing more effective debtor management (Hastings et al, 2015). The efficiency measures approach was the most common in the early stages of austerity; however, over time the avenues for efficiency savings have become exhausted as all the 'easy' savings are made, meaning that there is "*a substantial shift from efficiency to retrenchment in later austerity*" (p. 608).

The second strategy, retrenchment, is the action of reducing the role, or completely withdrawing the responsibility, of the council for the range and level of its service provision; transferring them onto either the entire community or specific population groups. Examples include reducing or withdrawing funding and grants for local youth organisations, arts and culture, public libraries and park maintenance. This is because as LG budgets become increasingly stretched and strained, resources and services have to be rationed according to more selective criteria of 'need-based assessment' within the community. Such retrenchment strategies often rely on a greater contribution from outside agencies and the local community to make up the shortfall in reduced council services. This is not entirely a new trend as the diminishing role of local councils has been ongoing since the 1980s emphasising the 'enabling' LG that commissions rather deliver services and enters into partnership with other sectors and agencies. However, the extent of retrenchment in the face of severe cuts presents a real danger of local councils becoming a marginalised player even at the local scale. The limits to efficiency strategies and implications of retrenchment raises questions over the capacity for 'adaptation' (Hastings et al, 2015).

The third strategy, investment (or prevention), aims to reduce the demand for or cost of council services in the future, through "*the realignment of some capital and revenue resources towards 'prevention' or 'invest to save' activities*" (p. 615). Examples include investing in assisted living technology, designed to assist with independence and thus reduce expensive forms of social care for the council in the future (Hasting et al, 2015). The investment strategy has been the least utilised response to austerity, because investment is a long-term approach that will have little impact on the necessity for immediate savings. These shifts from early efficiency savings to service retrenchment during the later phases of austerity underscores the challenges for LG to continue to '*weather the storm*' (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013).

This research follows the literature in regard to the need to understand the context of LG post-2010 as "*the intersection between the austerity and localism agendas*" (Hastings et al, 2015, p. 617). This is why 'austerity localism' (Featherstone et al, 2012) forms a key analytical concept in this research as a lens into the intersection between the austerity and localism agendas for local planning practices. Moreover, Hasting et al (2015) explain that the decisions taken by central government to manage national fiscal pressures, such as austerity and localism, can be seen as part of "*a project to 'shape the conduct' of local government by requiring it to behave more entrepreneurially; to take on more responsibility for economic growth and the distribution of benefits; and to take on new risks in relation both to the demands placed on services such as social care and for balancing budgets*" (p. 618). In this context, they add a third '*Responsibilisation*' narrative to the academic debates; one that can be characterised as a neoliberal 'technology of government' that more accurately captures the trajectory of LG in England. In this narrative, the purpose of the state is the governance of conduct in which responsibility for tackling economic and social problems is transferred from state institutions to local institutions and citizens. Therefore neoliberal 'responsibilisation' forms another key analytical category in this research.

In their analysis of expenditure data by services area for councils in London, Fitzgerald and Lupton (2015) found that the largest percentage cuts have come in the 'discretionary services' that councils are not obligated to provide by law. In this context, the local resources that councils can draw on is critical, such as a strong community and voluntary sector, to deliver more than the statutory services and provision. They further argue that the concept of 'sustainability' should also be considered as well as 'resilience' when evaluating whether council adaptations are positive based on their potential long-term impacts:

"*Organisational elasticity and nimbleness in its various forms may arguably not be sufficient, in these times, to ensure that the needs of local citizens are met, nor even that local authorities can survive in the long term. Could 'resilience as transformation' even provide a cloak of optimism behind which*

damaging, undemocratic and unsustainable reforms to the role of local government can be made in the belief that 'all will be well' if only organisational resilience can be maximised?" (ibid, p. 583).

Here Fitzgerald and Lupton (2015) found LG responses to austerity in London broadly demonstrated organisational strength and adaptation consistent with the resilience narrative (Shaw, 2012). However, that this framing may obscure the weakness that "*capacity has been reduced, another shock of the same nature could not be absorbed again and, therefore, the ability of local government to fulfil its purpose of serving local need in the long term has already been diminished*" (p. 598). They therefore argue that it is crucial to assess the resilience of communities, based on how they can meet their needs with reduced or withdrawn support from council services, and not just the resilience of LAs; because families with children under five, young people aged 16-24 and older people with care needs are the three foremost group users of LG services that carry the greatest social risk from service retrenchment.

For Kennett et al. (2015), '*[t]he depth, breadth and nature of the 'great risk shift', as well as the impact of the crisis and austerity and responses to them, are localised and translated unevenly between and within cities, and across different household types depending on the congruence of specific historical, political and policy legacies, socio-economic profiles and risk factors*' (p. 624). Therefore the literature suggests that the antecedent contexts of councils in England will play a significant role in determining the localities that 'sink or swim' in the new system of 'austerity localism' (Featherstone et al., 2012).

In the socially and spatially uneven context of post-crisis austerity localism, where responsibility and risk are devolved to the local and household scale, "*the role of individual and household resources, and assets (established owner occupation, savings, private pensions), as well as social capital and informal networks, becomes increasingly important*" (Kennett et al, 2015, p. 640). This means that the future is likely to become increasingly precarious for the most vulnerable as individual and public resources are eroded and governments absolves itself of responsibility. In this respect, "*it is increasingly cities, local administrations and partnerships that will have a crucial role in shaping, generating and innovating local economic and social policies*" (ibid p. 640) to mitigate the most harmful impacts of the 'risk shift'. These debates set the foundations and concepts for the empirical data and analysis presented in Chapter 5.

Overall this section has argued that austerity has managed to 'revive' the international legitimacy of neoliberalism following the 2008 GFC; with the Cameron-led Governments implementing significant fiscal policy public expenditure cuts as part of a need to reform according to a crisis discourse; however, without any meaningful departure from the pre-crisis UK growth model based on a neoliberal political

economy approach that helped to cause the GFC. It has also argued that austerity is serving to further entrench the existing unequal geography of the UK, because austerity localism has served to devolve responsibility and risk for public service provision to the local scale, further embedding pre-existing patterns of socio-spatial inequality. These issues are further explored in the empirical analysis chapters. The next section continues in the same manner by theorising neoliberalism and UK planning reforms.

2.5 Theorising Neoliberal Planning Reform

This review section on neoliberal planning reform makes two core and related arguments. Firstly, that planning systems and planners have been subjected to consistent reforms under neoliberal regimes; continuously being targeted by powerful elite discourses that problematize planning as a constraint on growth which needs to 'reformed' in order to become an enabler of economic development. Secondly, that these ideological critiques driving neoliberal planning reforms are flawed because they underplay or ignore the existing and entrenched underlying challenges of elite interests and land politics that lie at the heart of planning and development processes and that goes beyond the formal planning system.

Firstly, Lord and Tewdwr-Jones (2014) highlight the overall challenge that across '*a 15-year period (1997–2012) England has witnessed a remarkable five waves of legislative planning reform. On each occasion, the discourse used by politicians has been one of a necessity to "fix" the system on the grounds that it is a chronic obstacle to growth*' (p.348). Similarly, Allmendinger and Haughton (2014, p. 29) question the prevailing state of planning reforms associated with neoliberalism in recent decades:

'*Planning in England is subject to periodic upheavals. Perhaps there never was a period of stable planning regulation – but what seems undeniable is that planning reform is now with us on a near permanent basis, as incoming political administrations seek to modernise, reform or 'deregulate' planning. Partly this seems to be a feature of our neoliberal times*'.

This trend towards continuous planning reforms as a means to promote economic development has also been prevalent in other advanced liberal economies that operate a neoliberal political economy. In the Australian context, Ruming and Goodman (2016) detail how a broad coalition of core business groups, the development industry and neoliberal ideologues have developed a national narrative that positions urban planning as a barrier to economic growth. The result has been that '*a public and policy discourse has emerged that sees planning policy as restricting and constraining economic performance*', creating a context where the '*need for greater efficiencies has become so widely accepted that state governments are now engaged in a seemingly endless round of system reviews and reform*' (p. 72).

National planning systems are the target of neoliberal governments and private sector interests because planning forms one of the strongest regulatory tools to manage property, development and land rights in the interest of national legislation and the public. In the UK, the right to development (permission) remains nationalised under the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and separated from the rights of private ownership of land and property. This means that planning is a strong national state regulatory tool for shaping land and property development beyond the role of the capitalist free-market economy. However, the central belief underpinning the neoliberal project is that the governing of society is most effectively achieved through the free-market and a distrust of the state (Hall, 2011).

Since neoliberalism achieved political hegemony in the 1980s, UK states to various degrees have been on the trajectory of attempting to govern society more aligned with market principles and through community/voluntary actors, particularly moving away from the modernist, rationalist, hierarchical, bureaucratic and administrative approaches characteristic of the post-war welfare state (Healey, 1997b). In sum, planning as a form of state regulation is antithetical to neoliberal elites because it 'distorts' markets and imposes on the liberty of individuals to develop their land and property according to their own interests. Whilst this is a simplification of positions, it sets the general tone of the debates.

One position in the literature that seeks to explain the shift towards consistent planning reforms is Allmendinger and Haughton (2013). They argue that the persistent attempts for planning reform by UK Governments represents the continuous but unsuccessfully search for the "*perfect market supportive scalar and institutional fix*" (p. 10) for delivering state strategies underpinned by neoliberalism. This assumption that an ideal scale of governance exists can potentially explain the frequency of changes made to planning. Post-2010 localism is only the latest iteration of a political attempt to find the scale most supportive to the current government objectives of deregulation, responsibilisation and growth.

In the context of this research, the 'rescaling' of the planning system post-2010 has taken the form of abolishing regional governance and creating 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships in an attempt to find the 'natural' scale for economic functions and to empower market actors. Similarly neighbourhood governance has been prioritised as the site of local democracy through the 2011 Localism Act, whilst cities and city-regions have been recast as the most appropriate scale for urban economic governance through combined authorities and devolution. However, Allmendinger and Haughton (2013, p.20) criticise the '*unrealistic expectations over the ability of any newly empowered scale of governance, such as regions, city-regions, or neighbourhoods, to provide a 'silver bullet' solution to longstanding planning*

problems'. It is argued here that under neoliberal political economies, state strategies for rescaling and deregulating planning are the only options available to elites without accepting and addressing the more fundamental underlying problems created by operating a neoliberal and financialised land and property market as issues that lie at the very heart of planning and development processes in the UK.

Having outlined the main position taken/arguments adopted by the researcher based on the literature, the remainder of this section is divided into two parts outlining the relevant theory on *Neoliberalism and Post-2010 Localism* in 2.5.1 and *Neoliberalism and Planning Reforms* in 2.5.2 respectively.

2.5.1 Neoliberalism and Post-2010 Localism

Post-2010 localism is conceptualised here as a neoliberal political state strategy with the broad objectives of rescaling and deregulating the UK planning system as part of a wider state restructuring agenda associated with austerity. This part therefore reviews some of the critical academic literature on 'localism' most relevant to this project and highlights its close relationship with neoliberal ideology.

Firstly, Evans, Marsh and Stoker understand localism as '*an umbrella term which refers to the devolution of power and/or functions and/or resources away from central control and towards front-line managers, local democratic structures, local institutions and local communities, within an agreed framework of minimum standards*' (2013, p.405). However, localism as a concept and policy is ambiguous, and is often used to refer to the virtues of undertaking any activity at the local scale. Indeed the management of people at the local scale; local interests and views being used to inform local policy; local groups formed around their experiences under the spatial division of labour; and the variable implementation of public policy are all forms of 'localism' (Clarke, 2013). Furthermore, one core belief underpinning localism is that the local scale is inherently more 'democratic', 'efficient' or 'environmental' than other spatial scales; however, the literature highlights that it is problematic to make any assumptions about how governance is likely to operate at different spatial scales (Purcell, 2006), because scales and spaces are not static entities but fluid, relational and 'socially produced' (Massey, 2005, Herod, 2010).

The close relationship between localism and neoliberalism is highlighted by Rogers (2015). He explains that the 'local' is preferred in neoclassical (neoliberal) economics because of the assumed efficiency created though competition based on valuable local knowledge of people, places and circumstances (market information). According to Hayek, the actors that have the best local information will be in the best position to make decisions about how to use resources most efficiently. This economic rationale

for the virtues of the local is implicitly drawn on in the argument that local people understand their locality and public services best (in economic terms they have the best information), and hence they are the most appropriate actors to make decisions about how to use resources efficiently. In contrast, the state cannot comprehend the complexity of such diverse information. Post-2010, the Coalition embraced the benefits of localism in terms of efficiency, previously evident in their Green Paper Control Shift (2009) that contrasted the '*inefficient state*' with '*vibrant localities*' that were being restrained. In this context, '*the [Localism] Act's rationale resonates with the neoliberal conception of the local through this emphasis on the relative efficiency of the local in comparison to centralised systems of management*' (Rogers, 2015, p.6). However, the Coalition also framed this position in terms of local 'empowerment'.

Similarly, Layard (2012) argues that the Coalition presented localism in terms of local decision-making being prioritised over other scales of governance; however, despite this rhetoric, the provisions within the Localism Act (2011) "*retain considerable national hegemony over local decision-making, both in what the Act requires and in the provisions and policies that it leaves untouched*" (p. 134). The politically undefined use of the terms 'local' and 'community' (deliberately) allows localism to be presented as universally empowering when in practice initiatives are fragmented. Furthermore, the Coalition has not justified why the local should be the preferred site for decision-making, and therefore "*Localism is a normative claim that requires justification*" (p. 134). For Layard (2012), the core principle set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that development should be approved unless it is 'demonstrably unsustainable', "*clearly ousts local decision making*" (p. 138, original emphasis) and, as LPAs are materially bound to the NPPF, "*Localism in planning terms is highly limited*" (p. 139). In this context, the Localism Act and NPPF are more than '*soft spaces*' of neoliberalism, but rather are "*hard policy*" (Layard, 2012) which formalises in legal and material terms the national government rationale of pro-development localism into a concrete legal understanding of what localism is to mean in practice.

Furthermore, Hildreth and Bailey (2013) argue the Coalition emphasis on 'rebalancing the economy' as part of a 'localised' growth strategy aims to reduce the 'overdependence' of parts of England on the public sector and subsequently facilitate the conditions necessary for them to enable private sector growth. Thus the Coalition introduced neoliberal economic supply-side reforms to the planning system as a means to incentivise business and housing growth and promote efficient markets. These planning reforms were couched in terms of community empowerment, however, critical commentators argue that localism was primarily a cloak for policy deregulation and market-led growth (Allmendinger, 2016).

In the context of development geography, but with significant resonance to UK planning reforms post-2010, Mohan and Stokke (2000) explain that decentralisation should be understood as part of a broader market strategy; one which divorces the 'technical' questions of economics from the ideological concerns of 'politics', so that "*the logic of the market is presented as natural*". From this perspective, "*Decentralisation in its neoliberal guise treats the local as a functional, economic space with policies designed to increase the efficiency of service delivery. In this sense the market is seen as a universal principle without any 'geography'…Decentralisation simply facilitates the efficiency of these nested local economies*" (p. 251). However, decentralisation on its own will not necessarily bolster local economies and services across England, rather localism may further entrench the unequal economic geography.

In a similar vein, Ercan and Hendriks (2013, p.423) present three main critiques of localism. Firstly, the localist goals of decentralisation and devolution cannot always equate with improved democratisation, and even when services and responsibilities are devolved to the local level, this does not automatically mean that it is accompanied by greater power or resources. Secondly, localism often fails to empower, and can further entrench, the position of the marginalised within local communities by exacerbating the existing inequalities and unequal power relations in favour of those with high social capital and influence at the local level. Thirdly, localism is inward-looking and parochial, which reduces policy debates to the confines of the local and thus removes scope for discussion and public debate on wider policy issues such as climate change and social justice. These remain important policy challenges for any national government attempting to develop a more progressive localist governance framework.

Moreover, localism as a policy concept is an 'empty signifier' without being placed within a specific socio-economic context. Once it is situated it can take on many forms. For example, Taylor explains two types of '*politics of turf*' that represent forms of localism (Clarke, 2013, p. 494). The first type, the '*class politics of location*', is when local homeowners with children in the local schools become politically active in their neighbourhood. This happens to protect the existing use-value against (economic) development that may impact upon their vested interest in the neighbourhood, such as on house prices, local infrastructure and service capacity. The second type, the '*territorial politics of location*', happens when locally dependent households and businesses form growth coalitions to defend the locality from disinvestment caused by shifting market forces in the economy. The *class politics* can be considered a conservative form of localism through which the 'local' is being defended against development, more typically associated with nimbyism and reactive community and neighbourhood planning groups. The *territorial politics* is an economic localism where the local is promoted as site of investment and opportunity in response to internal social pressures and external national and global economic factors.

These can be seen through the marketing attempts by Local Enterprise Partnerships and devolved city-regions to attract private sector investment, as well as by some LAs and towns struggling to attract inward investment/development. In sum, there are different types of 'localisms' (and for development).

In the academic literature, critical commentators argue that beyond the claims of local 'empowerment', the reality of the Coalition Government's localism agenda is an extreme restructuring of social welfare, local government and public sector finances (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011, Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012, Jacobs and Manzi, 2013); increasing responsibility for service delivery being directed away from the state towards the private sector, third sector and local communities (Ishkanian and Szreter, 2012); and the continuation of neo-liberal governance (Corbett and Walker, 2013, Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013). In such critical accounts, the positive and inclusive government rhetoric of 'empowerment' and 'rebalancing the economy' through localism are expressed through the responsibilisation for risk and reward at the local scale at best; and at worse a politics of 'abandonment' that promotes the 'self-help ideology' more aligned with welfare in the US (Davies and Pill, 2012). This research takes this position.

For Featherstone et al. (2012), Coalition Government "*localism is being mobilised as part of an 'anti-state', 'anti-public' discourse to build support for an aggressive round of 'roll-back' neoliberalism*" and "*a direct challenge to state intervention, regulation and the public sector to create a right-wing restructuring of Britain*"; which forms "*part of a broader repertoire of practices through which the government has constructed the local as antagonistic to the state and invoked it to restructure the public sector. We term this project austerity localism*" (p. 177-8). This demonstrates the Coalition construction of an austerity localism agenda to support a broader neoliberal right-wing restructuring of the state.

Similarly, Williams et al. (2014) argue that the Coalition Big Society and localism agendas have been consistent with neoliberalism and have discursively manoeuvred the traditional responsibilities of government into the shadows, and transferred them onto local councils, communities and businesses. For them, the problematic assumption "*that decentralisation will somehow empower communities to get the services they deserve masks not only a neglect for structural inequalities between and within communities, but also a political strategy that delegates risk, responsibility, and accountability from central government onto new subjects – local government, and private sector and local community organisations*" (p. 2802). Likewise, Wilks-Heeg (2011) argues that "*the financial settlement imposed on English local authorities is best seen as the core of a radical and highly risky attempt to engineer a particular form of localism from the centre*", whereby the Coalition political agenda was to convince the general public that the "*responsibility for high-profile local service cuts rests with local authorities*

themselves" (p. 649). Whilst Bradley (2015) also contends that the Coalition "*state strategy of localism seeks to harness the benefits of collective participation while limiting its impact on the current political settlement*" (p. 97). Therefore post-2010 localism is conceptualised here through a neoliberal lens.

For Tait and Inch (2015, p. 4), '*the Big Society and 'localism' represent an attempt to articulate a vision capable of sustaining the neoliberal settlement in an era of austerity, one that is replete with contradictions that reveal wider lessons about the political potential and limitations of the local in the current conjuncture*'. Similarly, Kisby (2010) argues the Coalition vision of a 'Big Society' based on empowering communities, redistributing power from the state to citizens and promoting a culture of volunteering is badly flawed because it '*overlooks the crucial role that needs to be played by the state in promoting social justice, which is vital to the development of active citizenship and vibrant communities…the Big Society is largely about ordinary citizens doing their bit to keep the free market going in an era of austerity*' (p.484-6). This also links localism with austerity as related neoliberal policies. In these ways, localism is consistent with the broader neoliberal political agenda of the Coalition Government to reduce the role of the state and promote economic growth under state restructuring.

However, despite critical accounts of Coalition localism and austerity being developed within the framing of neoliberalism, the potential for counter-hegemonic forms of 'progressive localism' are also highlighted in the literature. Featherstone et al. (2012) contrast the reality of Coalition localism with the potential for forms of '*progressive localism*', comprised of community strategies that are outward-looking and create positive relationships between places and social groups negotiating global processes. Such progressive localisms are not merely defensive but expansive in their geographical reach and build on a '*politics of place*' (Massey, 2007), which work to "*reconfigure existing communities around emergent agendas for social justice, participation and tolerance*" (p. 179). For Featherstone et al. (2012), the terrain of localism should not be ceded to the neoliberal political right. Instead, progressives need to intervene and contest how localism is being politically constructed and practised, and how existing forms of localism can be reworked and extended to determine "alternative political projects" as part of left-wing political agendas (p. 179-180). This means that "*it is imperative that geographers engage critically and creatively with the way localism is being articulated in different geographical and political contexts*" (ibid, p.181). As such 'progressive localism' also form a key concept in the research framework.

In the same progressive spirit, Williams et al. (2014) argue that austerity localism has inadvertently opened various ethical and political spaces of interstitial resistance and experimentation against roll-back neoliberalism. In their words, "*there is a matrix of possibilities for 'progressive' social and political*

actors to enact new worlds within the confines of neoliberal governmentality, in some cases reappropriating technologies and exploiting political openings created by austerity localism" (p. 2810). So whilst Coalition localism clearly has alternative political and economic motives beyond empowering local councils and communities, it has also (inadvertently) created new spaces to cultivate forms of progressive localism that have the potential to disrupt and challenge existing neoliberalisations. However, as Clarke and Cochrane (2013) warn, the '*geographies of localism are never straightforwardly local*'; and attempts for counter-hegemonic progressive politics must not become fixated or confined within a single spatial scale such as the 'local' (Mohan and Stokke, 2000, Purcell, 2006, Rootes, 2013).

The literature shows that the barriers to progressive localism are more than just 'excessive' state power. Raco (2013) argues that Coalition rhetoric that empowerment is a zero-sum game, with power either residing with communities or state bureaucracies, underestimates the complex entanglements that have been created by privatisation and the shift from government to governance. During the 1990s and 2000s, state-led privatization expanded aggressively to the extent that private companies not only took control over a diverse range of contracted-out services, but also began to build much of the physical infrastructure on which public services are dependent and rent them back to the government. As such, a large amount of *power* now lies outside and beyond state bureaucracies, which hinders the extent to which *government can actually empower citizens*. The Coalition Government deliberately ignores these barriers to empowerment, because to do so would be to acknowledge that the planning system and state bureaucracies are not the main barriers to democratic engagement as depicted in their rhetoric.

In this context, Raco (2013, p.60) makes the point that ironically "*Far from crushing localism, stronger state institutions could in fact enable citizen and community activity to flourish*", particularly when mobilised to challenge powerful vested interests. Thus for localism to mean anything, it must directly engage with power embedded in private sector 'contractualism' and the barriers imposed on localities and communities by neoliberal privatisation. In this way, '*the politics of localism is, of course, a politics of geography…under the Coalition's localism agenda there has been a systematic attempt to institutionalise inequalities and reduce the extent to which wealthier areas directly support the less wealthy through financial transfers…By withdrawing state support and re-defining the planning system as a whole, the Coalition government has exposed people and places to market changes that are way beyond their control and over which there is little they can actually do…Place-formation is to be left to the vagaries of the market…with its focus on sink or swim politics of place and individualism*' (Raco, 2013, p.9-12). This geography of 'sink or swim' localism post-2010 forms a key focus of the empirical research.

Finally, getting to the heart of these critical theories of Coalition localism, and forming one of the core themes investigated throughout this study, is that '*the capacity for local autonomy is asymmetric*'. As Madanipour and Davoudi (2015) explain, '*[a] peaceful, prosperous, confident and well-connected locality is well-placed to benefit from a process that favours the local. Localism in this context may lead to the reconfirmation of the status quo and furthering of existing privileges. In such circumstances, active networks and civic enterprises are more likely to be able to fill the gaps left by the withdrawal of the state institutions and support. However, if a locality is riddled with conflict, unable to mobilise resources, exposed to the dominance of larger players and located unfavourably in the broader political and economic processes, localism is likely to find a different meaning. It may well become a trapdoor leading to the abandoning of people and places in the face of potentially unsurmountable challenges*' (p. 277).

In sum, the relationship between neoliberal ideology and the Coalition Governments' particular policy articulation of localism post-2010 is strong in the critical academic literature despite the political claims for 'empowerment'. The next part continues this critical review for neoliberalism and planning reforms.

2.5.2 Neoliberalism and Planning Reforms

Moving onto planning system reforms, despite the strong links between neoliberalism and Coalition localism in the academic literature, the exact links between neoliberalism and planning more generally remain more contested. Arguably the UK state has been underpinned by a neoliberal political economy to different extents since the collapse of the post-war settlement throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, however it is unclear what exactly this has meant in overall terms for the UK planning system:

'*Various changes and outcomes are seen as part of the neoliberalization of planning, a process that started in the late 1970s and early 1980s and has continued ever since. Yet during the decades since this neoliberalization of planning allegedly began there have been distinct and rather different emphases. While the 1980s witnessed attempts to roll back and deregulate planning, the early 1990s were characterised by a strengthening and centralization of planning. Then, the period from 1997-2002 was marked by more deregulation rhetoric while the era 2002-2008 witnessed a 'renaissance of planning'. If planning has been neoliberalized then it is not entirely clear what that means or what has been achieved*' (Allmendinger, 2016, p. 10, emphasis added).

In this sense, the literature demonstrates that the overall direction, significance and total cumulative impacts of neoliberalisations on planning and planners are less than straightforward. Despite varied

and persistent neoliberal programmes of reform to the planning system, there has been '*no recipe for planning but neoliberalism provided the broad parameters and ingredients for its reform. There was and can never be a clear neoliberal end game for planning*' (Allmendinger, 2016, p. 205). However, the broad parameters for neoliberal reforms involve '*greater marketization of planning, a more prominent role for the private sector in determining policy, the replacement of local discretion in favour of an agenda created by a central government–business nexus and the deregulation of state planning with the removal of higher strategic levels of planning*' (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014, p.346). In this respect, neoliberal ideology is more a guiding framework outlining the desired overall objectives for planning rather than a coherent strategy or 'end game'. These key issues will be returned to later in the thesis.

The neoliberal explanatory framework developed in this study aligns with the critical commentators that argue the planning system created through the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, as part of the broader post-Second World War development of a collectivist welfare state, has been replaced by variegated forms of '*neoliberal spatial governance'* developing since the 1980s (Allmendinger, 2016, Sager, 2013). This literature is closely aligned to post-political theory that neoliberal planning has the broadly defined objective to promote growth and a market state, but whilst also maintaining legitimacy through the removal of conflict and alternative political discourses (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012).

In terms of neoliberal strategies more generally, Allmendinger (2017) categorises three processes of 'roll-back', 'roll-out' and 'roll-around' neoliberalisations. The neoliberal approach enacted under the Thatcher Conservative Governments 1979-1990 was broadly 'rolling back' the state and emphasising the market (Thornley, 1991). For the Blair and Brown New Labour Governments, the approach was one of making the state more efficient, particularly through centralised regulatory and performance/target management regimes to 'roll-out' new forms of neoliberal urban governance (Fuller and Geddes, 2008). Under the Cameron-led Coalition and majority Conservative Governments 2010-2016, both roll-back deregulation and roll-out neoliberal governance have been pursued in a 'hybrid' form of 'roll around' or 'roll-with-it' neoliberalisation (Keil, 2009). It is argued these hybrid approaches to neoliberalisations have proved to be a successful governing strategy by blending policy deregulations and central financial management with spatial rescaling to achieve different state objectives for restructuring post-2010.

Extending the focus on neoliberalism to evaluating capitalist systems more generally, Prior (2005) provides a 'regulationist' interpretation of the structural causes of planning system reform in the UK. Broadly, the capitalist obsession with endless accumulation generates contradictions that threaten the system through perpetuating economic crises. Regulationist (Marxist) and critical (neoliberal) theorists

have sought to understand how such systems are successfully 'reproduced' despite their inherent 'creative destructive' tendencies, most recently evident in the 2008 GFC. The capitalist systems in which crisis tendencies are mitigated are said to be 'regulated'; the regime of capitalist accumulation survives because it is being regulated by social institutions to compensate for market failures. This can explain the capitalist/neoliberal contradictory need for planning to mitigate against negative externalities and crisis and simultaneous attempts to undermine its regulatory functions as a barrier in the search for increased capital accumulation. In this way, planners are also part of the fightback against excessive accumulation at the expense of competing social/environmental objectives under neoliberal regimes.

Similarly, Foglesong (1996) identifies two contradictions in capitalism that need to be addressed by the state using planning. The first is the '*property contradiction*' between the private ownership and control of land as a 'commodity' in a system of property rights, against the 'socialization' of land as a collective social resource for providing amenities and coordinating essential infrastructure for the reproduction of labour. In this way capitalism necessitates a land-use planning system, but at the same time such a system threatens the liberty of private property rights. The second is the '*capitalist-democracy contradiction*' in which the market alone cannot create a built environment that can maintain capitalist production and therefore needs state intervention through planning. However, such intervention creates democratic opportunities for input in planning decisions that goes beyond land and property owners. These tensions within the planning system mirror the wider tensions that manifest within the prevailing capitalist system. These understandings assist in explaining the constant problematizations and reforms aiming to better align state planning within the dominant political economy, but whilst also needing to maintain enough planning powers to 'regulate' the system. These tensions between the role of the state and market under capitalist regimes significantly pre-date neoliberal ideology; although under neoliberalism tensions between regulation and development have been exacerbated.

Beyond these 'structuring' planning system contexts under capitalist and neoliberal political-economies, the literature underscores another key point for this research; that *government reforms often deviate from their intended objectives* as they are translated into local practices as they are mediated by both their target actors (LG and planners) and external (quangos/consultants/statutory bodies/communities) bodies. Structure-agency theory demonstrates how government legislative and material policy reforms can be (re)implemented by agents in specific ways that produce unintended consequences in practice.

For example, previous research on planning reform in England 2001-2010 under the New Labour government (Gunn and Vigar, 2012, Gunn and Hillier, 2012, Gunn and Hillier, 2014) highlights the

challenges faced by national government when implementing planning reforms. The complexity and mediation of reforms through different institutions and actors means that the ways in which they are translated into local practices often deviate from the intended objectives. This leads to the recognition that policies are '*complex and evolving social constructions rather than...concretely fixed objects*' (Peck and Theodore cited in Gunn and Hillier, 2012, p. 376). The literature and policy changes suggests this has been the case for localism reforms and neighbourhood planning (DCLG, 2016, Parker et al., 2017b).

Specifically, Gunn and Hillier (2012) explored how new policy agendas travel and are adopted through the planning system. The ambition for reform started within central government, however, to be successful they need to develop '*the capacity to travel to LPA processes and be recognised and accepted by key actors, the new system needed to progress through various networks or assemblages, becoming institutionalised into local strategic planning discourses and practices*' (p. 375-6). Thus the aims of central government planning reforms needed to be translated through key textual and organisational intermediaries and mediators, a process through which some key ideas became lost, others mutated, whilst others gained in importance through this translation process (such as viability post-NPPF).

Building on these findings, Gunn and Hillier (2014) found New Labour's planning reforms in the UK 2001-2010 intended to create a more proactive, creative and flexible planning culture; however, that they increasingly became interpreted by public-sector planners through practice 'uncertainty' and 'risk'. The tensions within the narratives and objectives of the reforms, the continually changing practice context, and contradictory advice from multiple intermediaries and agencies led to a lack of practitioner proactivity and confidence in their role and confusion over the goals of the broader planning system.

In this context, the intended proactive and flexible goals of the planning reforms were lost and instead became interpreted through performance targets by planners. The reform emphasis on performance targets, indicators and timescales, along with '*the focus on a well-identified danger—of not achieving a sound plan in the time frame expected, missing identified key evidence requirements or of not meeting agreed development management decisions/targets on time and so on— generated anxiety and fear*'. The culmination of these factors effectively '*imbued changes to the planning system with a strong sense of risk*' (p. 67). For Gunn and Hillier (2014), this reduced the scope for forms of practitioner reflection, flexibility and creativity, leading planners to adopt a 'risk mentality'. Planners therefore acted in precautionary ways, such as seeking greater guidance and delaying strategies for examination in favour of more evidence gathering, which countered the government ambition for a more efficient planning system and underscored the *unintended consequences* of the New Labour planning reforms 2001-2010.

Beyond these specific practice challenges of reform 'implementation', Lord and Tewdwr-Jones (2014) argue that if the economists at the British Treasury genuinely wanted to fundamentally reform planning, they would need to address '*the real issues that affect how land is priced and allocated*', the '*largely fixed relationship between landownership and development rights*' and the '*extremely limited evidence of a genuine appetite amongst the public at large for greater democratic involvement in land-use change*' (p.355). Instead the conservative nature of the governing elites on both sides of the political spectrum results in '*an almost constant process of piecemeal tinkering rather than wholesale reform*' that typically takes the form of shifting the territorial scales of planning (ibid). This literature highlights the crucial point that despite strong government rhetoric that the planning system needs to be 'fundamentally reformed', *elites do not necessarily want to reform planning in respect to these more fundamental issues*.

Instead, successive governments have focused almost exclusively on 'piecemeal' planning reform, without explicitly acknowledging that *planning is only one part of the problem* amongst broader political/economic/social/cultural challenges in the UK. The overall picture from the literature is that the UK planning system has become a '*political football*', a sector that every incoming administration uses as a means to both explain the previous government failings and highlight their own radical agenda, resulting in a '*bruised sector, used to multiple reforms intended to 'cure' a problem that has been ill-diagnosed*' (Haughton, 2012, p.122). These key issues 'frame' the analysis chapter on planning reform.

Overall this section has argued that planning systems and planners have been subjected to continuous reforms under neoliberal political economies in response to powerful elite discourses that planning acts as a constraint on growth and needs to be reformed to become an enabler of economic development. It has also made the case that the ideological critiques driving consistent planning reforms are flawed because they underplay or ignore the existing and entrenched underlying challenges of elite interests and land politics that lie at the heart of planning and development processes. It has also highlighted the potential for 'unintended consequences' as structural government reforms are implemented by specific actors and places. These issues will be further explored in relation to the subsequent analysis chapters.

Overall this *Theory and Literature Review* Chapter has introduced some of the key literatures that have informed this study and outlined the main 'theoretical framework' and concepts that will be used to examine contemporary practice changes in LG planning post-2010. The next chapter outlines the methodology and research design used to collect and analyse the primary empirical data for the analysis.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Research Design

This purpose of this chapter is to present a summarised overview of the central methodological and research design decisions taken throughout this project. It is divided into four main sections. The first section develops a reflection on the overarching methodological/theoretical/epistemological approach to the research and how these influenced the practicalities of the overall research design. The second section outlines the local planning authority (LPA) case selection process. The third section explains the rationale behind which planning actors have been targeted for participation in the study. The final section discusses the research methods used to conduct the fieldwork and collect the empirical data, as well as the outlining coding strategy for sorting and analysing the data. It should be stated at the outset that the empirical component of this thesis is underpinned by 40 semi-structured research interviews with (senior) management level planners working within LAs across England. Having outlined the objectives and structure of this chapter, the next section begins by setting up the overarching methodological, theoretical and epistemological approaches underpinning the research design.

3.1 Research Methodology and Epistemology

This section reflects on a number of key methodological issues that have shaped the overall approach to the research and that are necessary to address before moving on to discuss how they influenced the more practical decisions that informed the research design. These methodological, theoretical and epistemological reflections concern; 1) the researcher's *positionality and world view*; 2) the challenges of *connecting (abstract) theory and (empirical) practice*; and 3) the trade-off between presenting either the nuances around *the contextualised cases or broader decontextualized comparisons* of the sample. It is not claimed, however, that these are the only core methodological challenges facing this study, but that together they each represent a key consideration or limitation of the approach to the development of this research. The following methodological discussion is necessary to 'clear the decks' and explain the broader frames of reference that have shaped the overall approach to the research. This is necessary at the outset to set up how these broader framings have influenced the more 'practical' research method issues of how the study was designed and implemented in the proceeding sections.

3.1.1 Positionality and 'World View'

The first point to make is that the researcher has a clear positionality as a young, white, male academic on the political left; and a specific 'world view' that (sub)consciously informs the approach and (critical) interpretations of the research. In terms of the researchers' 'world view', one foundational conviction

is that *neoliberalism* is more than a set of market-supportive technical policies, but rather should be understood as a fundamental ideological/political attempt to change the very nature of the relationship between the state, citizens and market. This world view immediately boxes in the scope of the research. Next is the researcher's conjecture that 'grounded' and 'real world' practice-based data is significant for understanding the world as 'socially constructed' by competing actors and interests. Whilst an inductive 'grounded theory' approach was not specifically operationalised in a pure methodological sense; it shaped the overall approach based on the value attached to professional and lived experiences of the theoretical and policy concepts being investigated. Finally, the researcher has the belief that public planning and development can and should play a key role in socio-spatial justice. Together these form the epistemological foundations for a neoliberal structure-agency approach to planning practice.

This world view meant that qualitative research was selected as most appropriate to gain insights into 'practice-based' and 'lived' experiences and responses (E&Rs) to the research 'objects' of austerity and planning policy/localism reforms. It is sufficient to note here that during the early stages of the study, a number of potential qualitative methodological approaches were reviewed based on the research methods literature (e.g. Corbin and Strauss, 1990, Holloway and Todres, 2003, Flyvbjerg, 2006, Starks and Brown Trinidad, 2007, Silva et al., 2014, Farthing, 2015). As such it was decided that a variation of 'grounded theory' would be most the suitable based on the research questions and objectives in this study over a phenomenology, discourse analysis or single case study/ethnography approach.

The research design does not rigidly adhere to grounded theory (GT) (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in a pure sense; but instead is *informed* by this approach to emphasise that concepts about the world (theory) should always have their roots (be 'grounded') in the ideas voiced by the people whose lives and activities are being studied (Cloke et al., 2004). Starks and Trinidad (2007) explain that GT explores the 'six C's' of social processes that are *causes*, *contexts*, *contingencies*, *consequences*, *covariances* and *conditions* to '*inquire about how social structures and processes influence how things are accomplished through a given set of social interactions*' (p. 1374). A variation of GT was selected over phenomenology because the objective is to develop explanatory theory about LG planning that is grounded in specific contexts; because '*[g]rounded theorists inquire about how social structures and processes influence how things are accomplished through a given set of social interactions*' (ibid). Similarly, Holloway and Todres understand the goal of GT to '*[d]evelop a theory of how individuals and groups make meaning together and interact with each other; of how particular concepts and activities fit together and can explain what happens*' (2003, p. 348). This is why the researcher selected methods that engages (talks) with people.

Furthermore, the researcher was sympathetic to the position of the participants in having to respond to national austerity and policy reforms, and this influenced how they positively responded to the interview process. Responses such as "*it has been very cathartic talking to you*" (SP17) suggest an atmosphere akin to a therapy session for the participants to express their professional concerns that now formed the day-to-day challenges in their jobs. The benefit for the participants was that they were given the opportunity to discuss their practice challenges in a sympathetic way that they might not get to with others, whilst the payoff for the researcher was gaining access to insider knowledge about these actual practices of planning. The researcher attempted to minimise their influence over the research interviews and participants by adopting a measured and non-judgmental tone (akin to a quasi-therapist) that acknowledged the challenges for planners in relation to different stakeholders and encouraged them to openly discuss their E&Rs. However, it is not claimed that the researcher was a neutral party simply collecting objective data, rather the data should be considered as 'co-produced' between the questions and rationale/position of the researcher and specific understandings and points raised by the participants. Overall, this approach was largely successful in building rapport/trust during the interviews.

Moreover, the references made throughout this thesis to LG planning practices 'post-2010' under the premiership of the Cameron-led Governments is based on the conjecture that this is a '*transformative moment*' for the planning system and public planners in England. It is argued that the national policy reforms (NPPF, localism, viability, duty to cooperate, etc.) and financial reforms driven by austerity (removal of the Revenue Support Grant, New Homes Bonus, Business Rate Retention, council tax restrictions, sale of high value public assets, etc.) in this period signal a continuity and strengthening of neoliberal thought and practice over the planning system in England. This does not necessarily mean there has been a clear break from previous models of planning (albeit the differences to New Labour's strategic spatial planning are evident), but a significant step change in the expected practice culture of planners (Grange, 2014, Inch, 2017) and objectives of the planning system (Ellis and Henderson, 2016, Allmendinger, 2016). So already 'post-2010' is used here as a loaded term to denote this transformation.

Overall, the methodology and research design forms a qualitative, grounded, inductive and 'imbricated' approach (Homan, 1991), based on the high value the researcher places on practice-based 'actually existing' or 'real world' accounts of experiences and responses to existing national policy agendas, and working within abstract academic and elite normative and theoretical discourses/ideologies. This is also based on the researcher's position as a 'social constructivist'; that the social world is created by the actions of individuals/institutions but shaped by forces that led to adoption of structure-agency theory.

3.1.2 Connecting Theory and Practice

Beyond considerations of the researcher's role and position within the study, there are also more generalised questions surrounding the difficulties in applying 'high-level' (framing/meta) theory to contextualised empirical data. One of the main challenges is the attempt to connect abstract high and mid-level explanatory theorisations (whether that be neoliberalism, governmentality, post politics, etc.) with inductive 'grounded' empirical data on planning practices concerning specific E&Rs within local councils. There are important concerns about stretching these theorisations too far to try to explain specific events in heavily contextualised local settings, as well as misapplying them to specific findings or overstating their fit and explanatory power for planning changes. However, without such higher level theory, the empirical data would lack any explanatory frameworks and concepts to situate the findings and make sense of 'real world' understandings and practices. These concerns form part of wider debates around a planning 'theory-practice gap' (Alexander, 1997, Watson, 2002, Watson, 2008).

Critically, whilst neoliberal theory provides a useful framework for explaining the meta-narratives and trends relating to changes within the UK political economy and the planning system, the actual application to the LA cases and empirical interview data can be considered more limited. It is difficult to reconcile high-level theory with highly contextualised and specific empirical data, and caution has to be taken not to force the data to conform to the theory. This forms a significant tension within contemporary research on neoliberalism, and is why many commentators question its analytical value to explain context specific actions and events (Birch, 2017). Indeed, Venugopal (2015) goes further in arguing that as a concept, '*neoliberalism has become a deeply problematic and incoherent term that has multiple and contradictory meanings, and thus has diminished analytical value*'; and questions '*the one-sided, morally laden usage of the term by non-economists to describe economic phenomena…[that] serves to signify and reproduce the divide between economics and the rest of the social sciences*' (p.165). This was a particular frustration for this researcher, finding that neoliberal theory is valuable 'generally' for explaining changes to *planning* but elusive 'specifically' for explaining contextual cases and actions.

In presenting a counter-argument, such high-level theories are important because planning, and politics and society more broadly, are structured by *power* relations; and so we need high-level abstract theory such as neoliberalism, governmentality and post-politics to assist broader explanations for how power *operates* (e.g. through individual conduct or manufactured consensus) and to what *ends* (e.g. a market-led low-regulation state). The fact that there are competing theoretical and critical interpretations that provide different explanations for the changes being enacted within the planning system in England is

not a considered a weakness but rather a strength of planning theory (Allmendinger, 2017) and other (academic) disciplines to explain the 'real' world. The fact that this project has adopted an extended neoliberal structure-agency approach does not deny, for example, the insights of an alternative post-structuralist account of the complex changes unfolding in planning/politics/economics in the UK post-2010. In defending the approach selected, however, it is argued that governing programmes of reform are as much ideological/political as objective/technical in necessity and nature; and therefore are driven explicitly or implicitly by powerful interests. As such, the blend of theories contributing to the theoretical framework heuristic developed here attempt to deal with issues of *power* in their own way to greater or lesser extents; but with the contention that neoliberal ideology shaped the Cameron era.

This research primarily draws on a neoliberal structure-agency informed approach, but also insights from governmentality and post-political theory. Again, this is based on the conviction that '*there is no one planning theory that we can assimilate and take into practice. Instead, there are a range of competing ideas and theories that will, to greater or lesser degrees, correspond to our values and views of the world*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 27). Rydin (2010) also makes the case that there is '*no one planning theory*' and that planning researchers should draw on a number of explanatory frames/concepts to make sense of the 'real world' system. From this perspective, each of these disciplinary theories can highlight different traditions and insights for understanding contemporary planning changes, but they are not necessarily sufficient on their own (or in different combinations) to explain the range of observed empirical data and complexity of social reality (nor should they be fully expected to do this).

3.1.3 Contextualised Cases or Decontextualised Comparisons?

The last challenge discussed here is that given the extensive scope of background information and empirical data for each of the 40 cases, it was not possible to present any of the cases with significant local details. As such, much of the empirical data presented is essentially 'decontextualized' to present broader E&Rs, rather than to explain the local 'contextualised' specificities for each case. This is one methodological trade-off in the research design that prioritised some degree of geographical representativeness, and therefore generalisability and comparability, over a more fine-grained analysis.

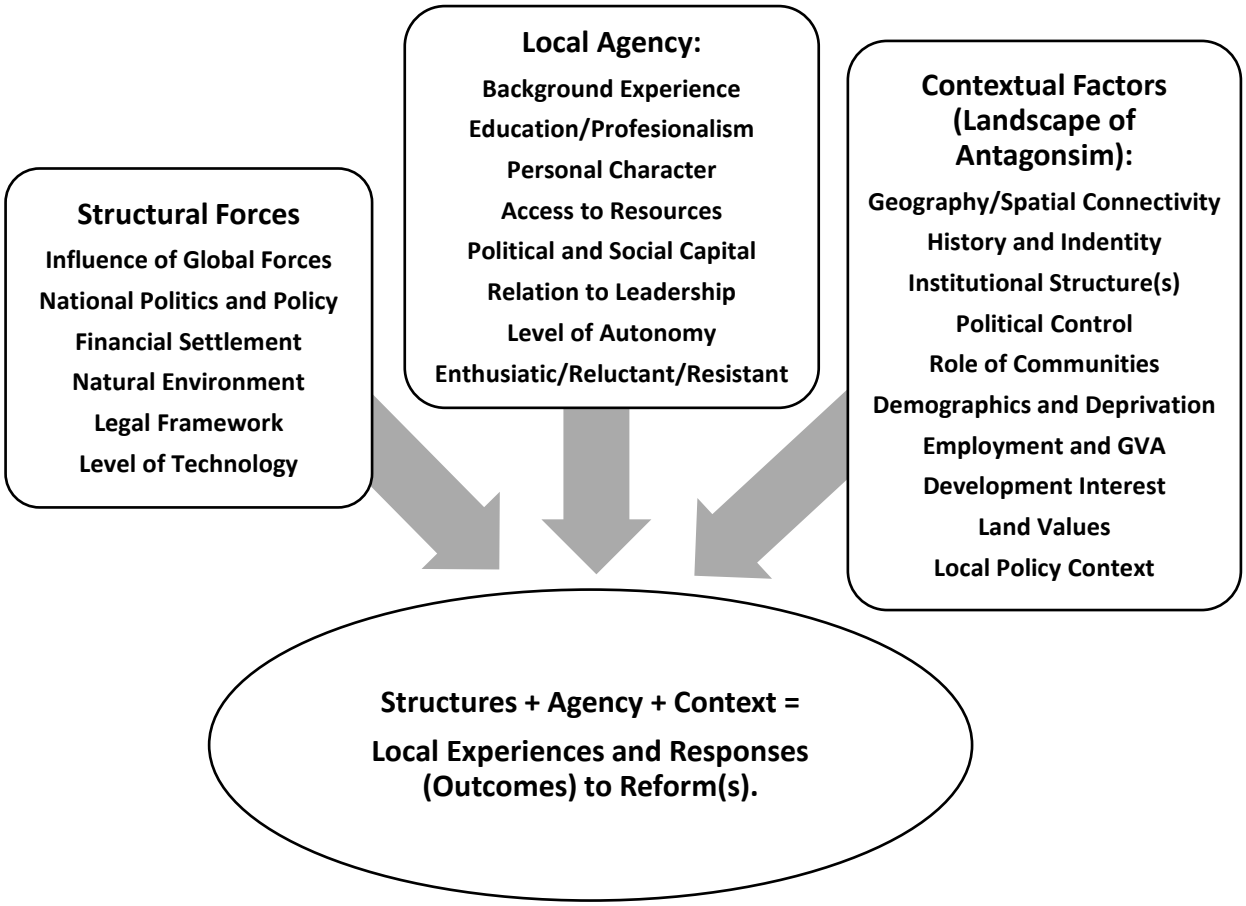
The subsequent *Analysis Chapters* draw on the empirical case data to construct a number of general propositions and claims about the experiences and responses of planning/planners to austerity and policy reform post-2010. This is based on a *decontextualization/recontextualisation* coding approach. The 'coding framework' (discussed more in section 3.4) consisted of first phase 'open-coding' on the

contextualised 40 'place-based' interview transcripts; and second phase 'focussed-coding' for the decontextualized seven 'thematic transcripts' (e.g. a thematic transcript on 'localism' rather than for a single LPA/PM 'case'). Once decontextualized 'themes' had emerged (such as the shift towards LPA 'commercialisation' under austerity) the data would be re-contextualised by situating the practitioner's E&Rs with their specific rural-urban, political and regional context. As such the approach was based on decontextualisation and re-contextualisation rather than a contextualised analysis of each LPA case.

In this respect it was not possible to chronicle the rich details that form the 40 LG cases and sample participants in this study in the same way as would be possible for a traditional case study approach examining a single or handful of cases. Therefore this research adopted a broader geographical focus, necessarily sacrificing depth in exchange for a greater level of representativeness. The rationale behind this approach is that both broad and specific studies have strengths and weakness, and each need to be developed to complete our understanding of research issues at different scales and grains of analysis. Had the study been based upon a single or small number of 'case studies', then another approach, such as actor-network theory (Rydin and Tate, 2016), would have been more suitable for explaining the complexity of local actors involved in implementing, mediating or challenging the objectives of reforms. There are a number of excellent case studies on local government austerity (Ahrens and Ferry, 2015, Davies and Thompson, 2016, Gardner, 2017, Fuller, 2017), and some emerging broader geographical studies (Ferry et al., 2017), in the academic literature. This study seeks to add to these literatures.

The *theory and literature review* highlighted the challenges involved in trying to explain the relationship between neoliberal structures (such as national policy and financial reforms) and the diverse forms of agency at the local level (such as council planning practices). There are a number of different structural forces, forms of local agency and contextual factors that can produce complex interplays to determine the specific experiences and responses (outcomes) of attempts at reforms within space. Figure 7 sketches out the different inputs that interact to shape the relationships between national level reforms and the local government planning experiences and responses investigated in this project. It should be noted that this figure is intended to be indicative of the complex interplay between different forces, agencies and contexts rather than providing a comprehensive list of factors or attempting to develop a 'model' of responses to reform (See Herrington and Parker [2012, p.482-487, Journal of the Town and Country Planning Association, Vol.81, No.11] for a similar attempt to map these dynamics for councils).

Figure 7 – Outline factors that shape local experiences and responses to national reform:



It seems intuitive here (although not a claim to knowledge) that nothing can be read off about the likely E&Rs of an LPA to reform *a priori*; such as a more reductionist typology based on their rural-urban classification, regional context, political control or local economy alone. Instead a more complex set of relationships between (competing) factors needs to be considered to do justice to the specific local contingency of the case being investigated. Put crudely, every local (planning) authority has diverse and unique *structuring forces*, *assemblages of agency* (for more on assemblage theory see DeLanda, 2006, DeLanda, 2016) and *embedded contexts* that mean that *every place and case is different*. Such differences can be subtle and nuanced or can be a complete contrast relative to the combination of factors that shape other LPAs. The question then becomes, following Blanco et al (2014), can we say anything more about the structures of neoliberalism and its impacts on the diversity of local agency?

'*Recognising the significance of context for the logic of the local and the urban poses challenges for how we traverse the universal and the particular in studies of neoliberalism. Are we left concluding that everywhere is different or can we begin to offer anything else? The challenge here is to develop a*

comparative critical local governance that can engage with both 'global discourses' and contextually specific experiences, and which avoids either subsuming all regimes of local governance within an over-riding logic of neoliberalism or privileging the diversity of local regimes to the extent that we negate the hegemonic potential of discourses of neoliberalism' (Blanco et al., 2014, p.3141).

Whilst this research has not specifically addressed this need for a '*comparative critical local governance*', the research methodology and empirical findings presented here have been sensitive to the problems of privileging either structural neoliberal or situated agency accounts for determining wholesale the local E&Rs of reforms. Instead it has attempted to present some of the *complexity* between cases as well as the more 'generalised' LPA E&Rs and evaluations of structural reform pressures. For example, pressures for LPAs to become more commercial and financially self-sufficient in response to austerity was broadly shared and evident across all 40 cases, but the details behind the ability of individual LPA cases to respond to these pressures was heavily dependent on the different combination of factors that allow them to (re)act in different ways, which shaped their overall approach and 'resilience' to reform. So whilst the focus here emphasises structures, it should be clear that these cannot be separated from some consideration of individual agency when examining local experiences and responses to reforms.

Therefore the 40 LPA cases have not been explicitly placed into a *typology* here because each has a different combination of factors whereby structures are filtered and mediated in situated local contexts by different agents to produce specific outcomes. Even the descriptive containers used for the LPA cases as 'urban' or 'rural', 'south east' or 'north east' or 'Conservative' or 'Labour' masks the messy variations and physical and social histories that weave together to shape 'space' and 'place' (Massey, 2005). The urban-rural classification, regional geography and local politics applied to LAs here, whilst necessary to provide some background to orientate the reader, can at best only provide the reader with a limited understanding of the context. Suffice to say a typology based only on such characteristics would very likely mask the unique variables that produce specific outcomes within and between cases.

The above methodological discussion was necessary to 'clear the decks' and explain the broader frames of reference that have shaped the overall approach to this research. This is necessary at the outset to set up how these methodological/theoretical/epistemological framings have influenced the more 'practical' research methods issues of how the research was designed and implemented. Having developed this groundwork, the proceeding sections in this chapter can move on to discuss the practical research design decisions. The next section begins this by outlining the research case selection process.

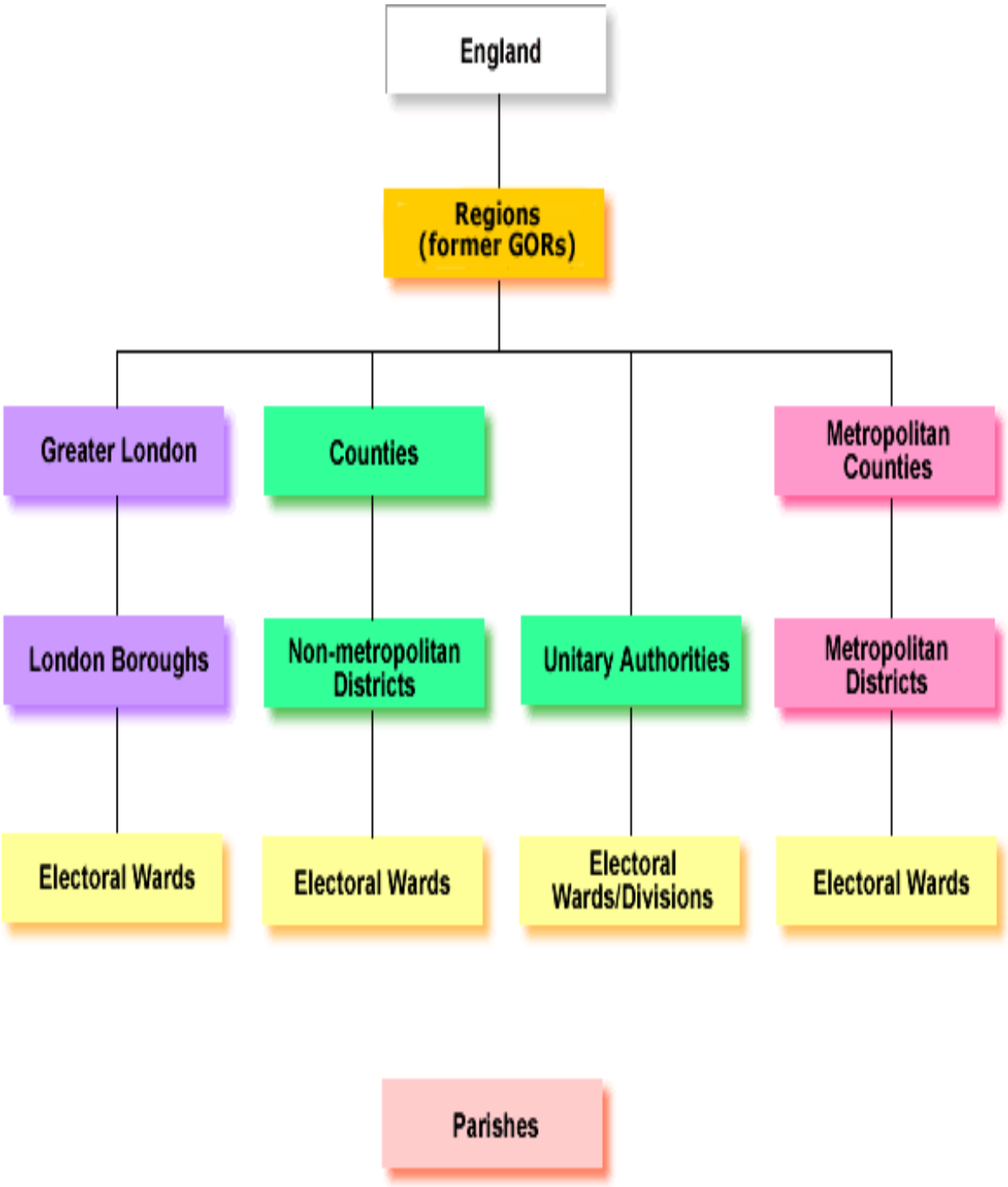
3.2 The Research Cases - Local Authority Selection Process

The objective of this section is to explain the selection process for the LPA research 'cases'. The first central decision in the process was to focus on the case study of the *English planning system* for the practical reason that this study does not seek to present a comparative account of planning systems and practices across the UK; which would need to evaluate the similarities and differences between the (increasingly) devolved political, legal and (planning) policy contexts of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Morphet and Clifford, 2014, Clifford and Morphet, 2015, MacKinnon, 2015, McKee et al., 2017).

This research project had the advantage that all LAs in England have been subject to national policy reforms and austerity measures, albeit to differing extents and with strong geographical variations. Therefore, the potential pool of cases was extensive. There are 353 LAs in England. These are comprised of 27 county councils, 201 district councils, and 125 single-tier authorities (House of Commons Briefing Paper, 2017, No.07104). However, not all of these LAs have responsibility for *planning and development* functions, and so a number would not be suitable for this study. For example, county councils have responsibility for health and social care, education and waste planning, but not planning services. Instead, planning departments sit within the remit of second-tier district council functions or single-tier unitary authorities that encompass all LG functions. The next decision was to exclude London because of its unique economic, political and governance status compared to the other eight regions of England. This meant that, after excluding the 27 county councils and 32 London Boroughs, the study could potentially include the remaining 294 district and single-tier LAs that carry out planning services from across the eight regions in England. These decisions set the initial parameters for the LPA case selection.

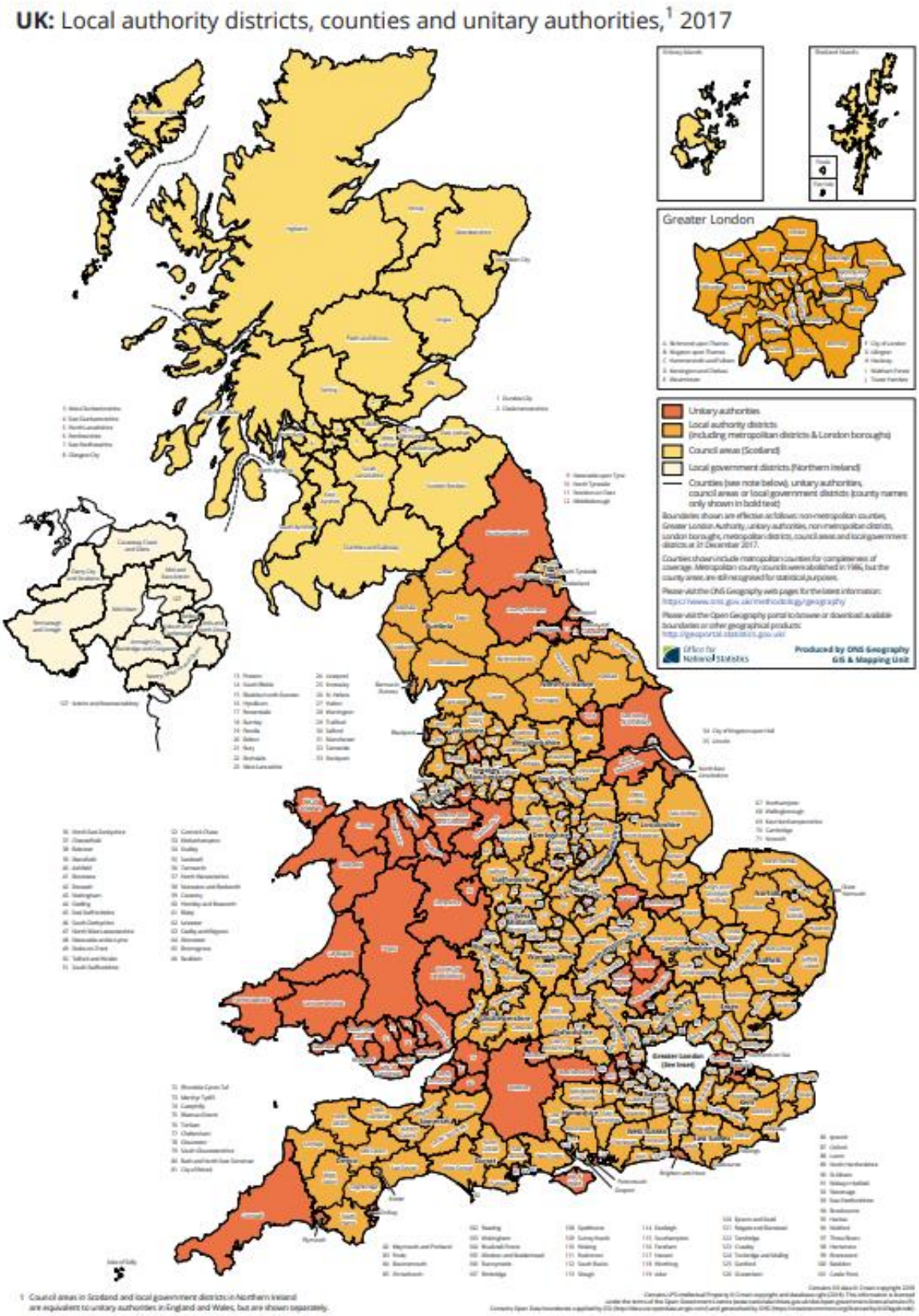
Figures 7-8 below outline the administrative structure and geography of local government in England. From these figures it is worth noting three points: firstly that the Coalition Government abolished the former regional government structures covering England in 2010; secondly that the electoral wards relate to the boundaries for voting activity for local and national elections which are not relevant to this study; and thirdly parish councils, often referred to as 'community' or 'town' councils, sit below the 'primary' county, unitary and district councils because they do not have the same statutory powers or functions. Parish councils are also only found in certain parts of the country and so are not part of the study. It is sufficient for the purposes here to note that the objects of the study are district councils and unitary authorities because they control planning services within their bounded administrative territory:

Figure 8 – Administrative Structure of Local Government in England:



(ONS Online – UK Administrative Geography).

Figure 9 – United Kingdom Local Authority Districts, Counties and Unitary Authorities (2017)



(ONS, 2018).

The case selection method was based on a blend of *judgement*/*purposive* and *quota* sampling (Farthing, 2015) that sought to ensure a relatively balanced mix of characteristics between regional distribution, rural-urban classification, relatively higher and lower 'values' in terms of local economic conditions (GVA), demographic and social pressures, administrative structures and size, etc. which together are termed here as LPA 'contextuality' as a shorthand for their specific mix and combination of these factors. In practice this activity relied on LG website desktop research and circling areas on a hard copy map to filter through the potential case candidates on a region-by-region basis (e.g. starting in the south-east).

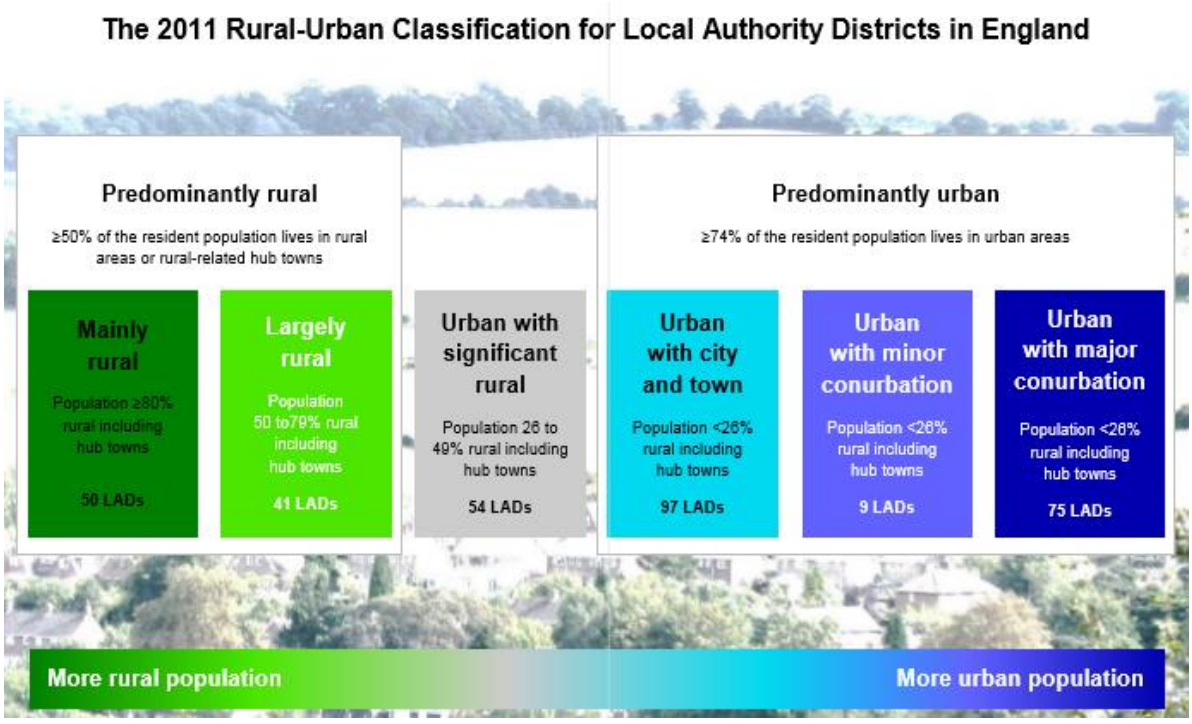
Where one targeted council was unresponsive to a request to participate in the study, the next LPA considered most suitable based on achieving a mix of contexts were contacted, and so on (and so also influenced by the characteristics of the LPAs that had already agreed to participate within a region). This sampling method also extended to the specific individuals that were contacted to participate in the study (discussed in section 3.3). Despite these criteria defined by the researcher leading to which cases were invited to participate in the study, this was balanced in practice by pragmatic issues of gaining 'access' to LPAs and key informants. Overall, the majority of councils were responsive to the study, with approximately 90 requests for participation translating into 40 research interviews. At this point, the researcher ceased inviting local councils to participate in the study in order to avoid collecting 'too much data' than could be reasonably managed within the resource/time constraints of the project.

In deciding on which cases to contact, the researcher utilised three main sources to review the 'practice landscapes' of local (planning) authorities. The first source was official reports and briefing papers from professional bodies such as the Local Government Association (LGA), Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), New Local Government Network (NLGN), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and Town and the Country Planning Association (TCPA). The second source was information from the national government Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and individual LG websites. The third source was through the practice-based industry magazines '*Planning*' and '*Local Government Chronicle*'. Together these sources provided unfolding 'real time' practice-based insights that assisted the research design, case selection process, preparation for the interviews and served to supplement the academic literature and theoretical framework (Chapter 2). The sampling method and sources also addressed the concern to avoid the potential biases of only presenting '*novel*' cases of responding to policy and austerity reforms on the one hand, and on the other presenting a '*purely random'* selection.

The ONS Rural-Urban Classification (RUC) of Local Authority Districts in England, based on data from the 2011 National Census, was used to classify councils for selection and into groupings for analysis

(See figure 10). Six are categorised as 'Mainly Rural' (*West Oxfordshire and Cotswolds, Uttlesford, Derbyshire Dales, Huntingdonshire, Ryedale, Ribble Valley*). Three as 'Largely Rural' (*Aylesbury Vale, County Durham, Suffolk County*). Five are categorised as 'Urban with Significant Rural' (*Taunton Deane, Stafford, Wyre Forest, Cherwell and South Northants, Cheshire East*). Sixteen are categorised as 'Urban with City and Town' (*Arun, Bracknell, Leicester, Exeter, Guildford, Lincoln, Rugby, Oxford, Warwick, Middlesbrough, Wakefield, Hull, Blackburn with Darwen, Preston, Norwich, Bristol*). One was categorised as 'Urban with Minor Conurbation' (*Sheffield*), and nine as 'Urban with Major Conurbation' (*Birmingham, South Tyneside, Gateshead, Salford, Trafford, Newcastle, Wirral, Wigan, Rochdale*).

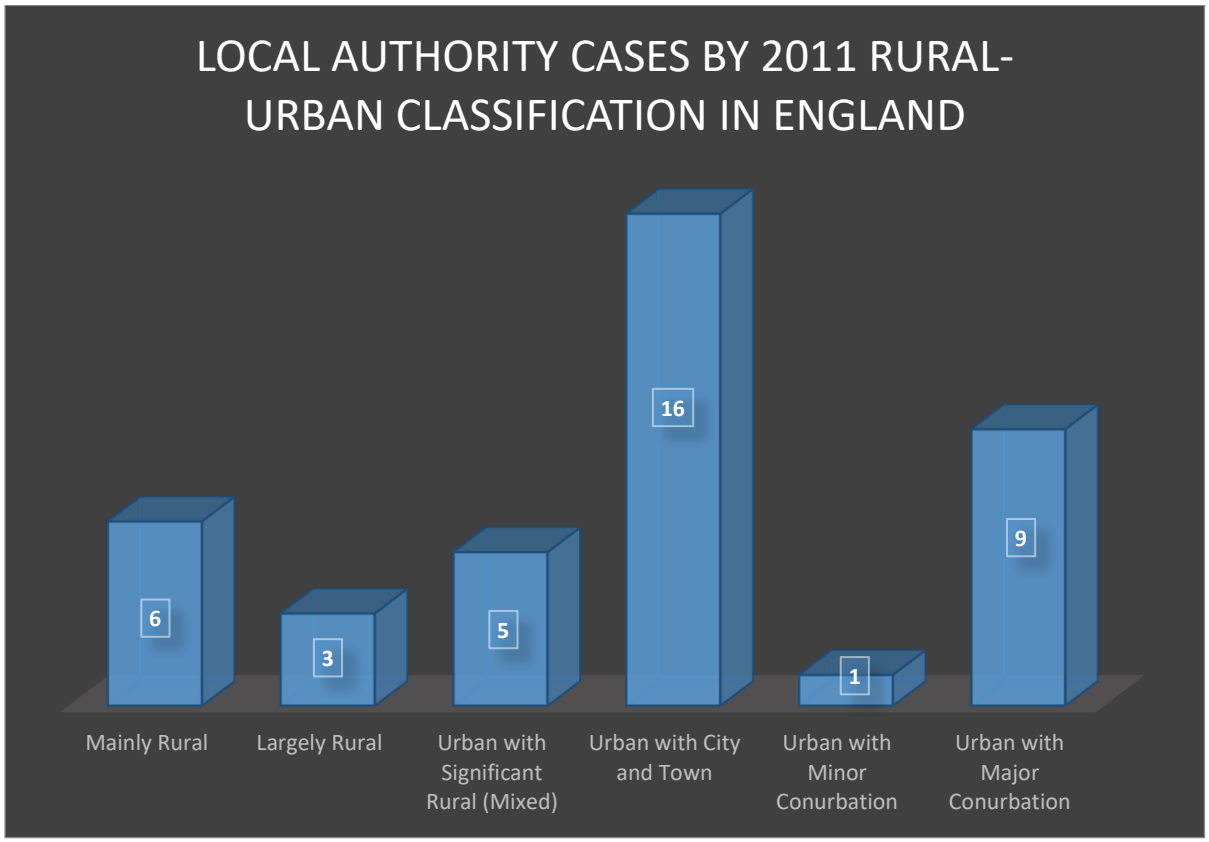
Figure 10 – Local Authority 2011 Rural-Urban Classification in England (ONS, 2011)

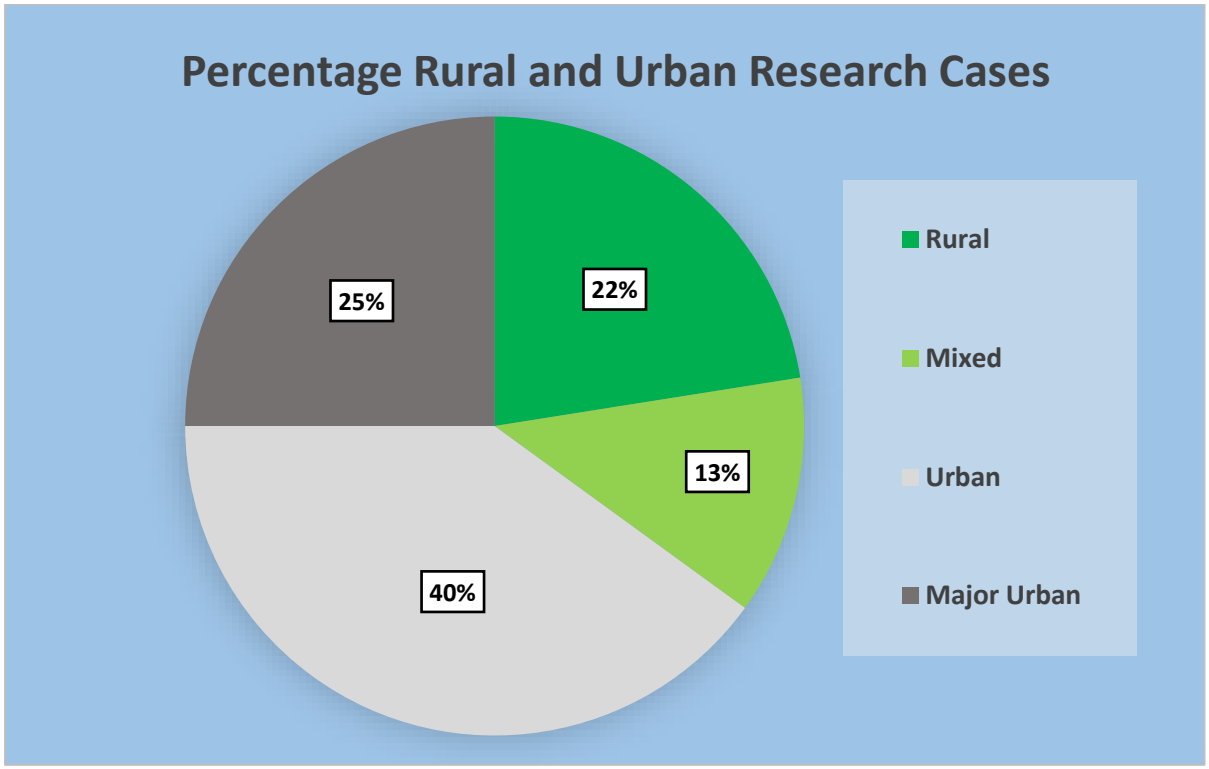


(source: ONS, 2017).

The RUC for each LPA case has been slightly simplified here to assist categorisation and comparison throughout the analysis. The nine LAs that fall under the classifications 'Mainly Rural' and 'Largely Rural' have been classified as '**Rural**'. The five LAs that come under 'Urban with Significant Rural' have been classified here as '**Mixed**'. The sixteen LAs designated 'Urban with City and Town' have been classified as '**Urban**'. The final ten LAs designated as 'Urban with Minor Conurbation' and 'Urban with Major Conurbation' respectively are classified here as '**Major Urban**'. Across the total 40 LPAs, 65% represent Urban and Major Urban places and 35% represent Mixed and Rural places across England. It can therefore be argued that the data set represents a fairly diverse and mixed set of urban and rural LG cases, albeit with a slightly stronger urban bias (See figure 11).

Figure 11 – Research Cases Numbers and Percentage by Rural-Urban Classification (ONS, 2011)

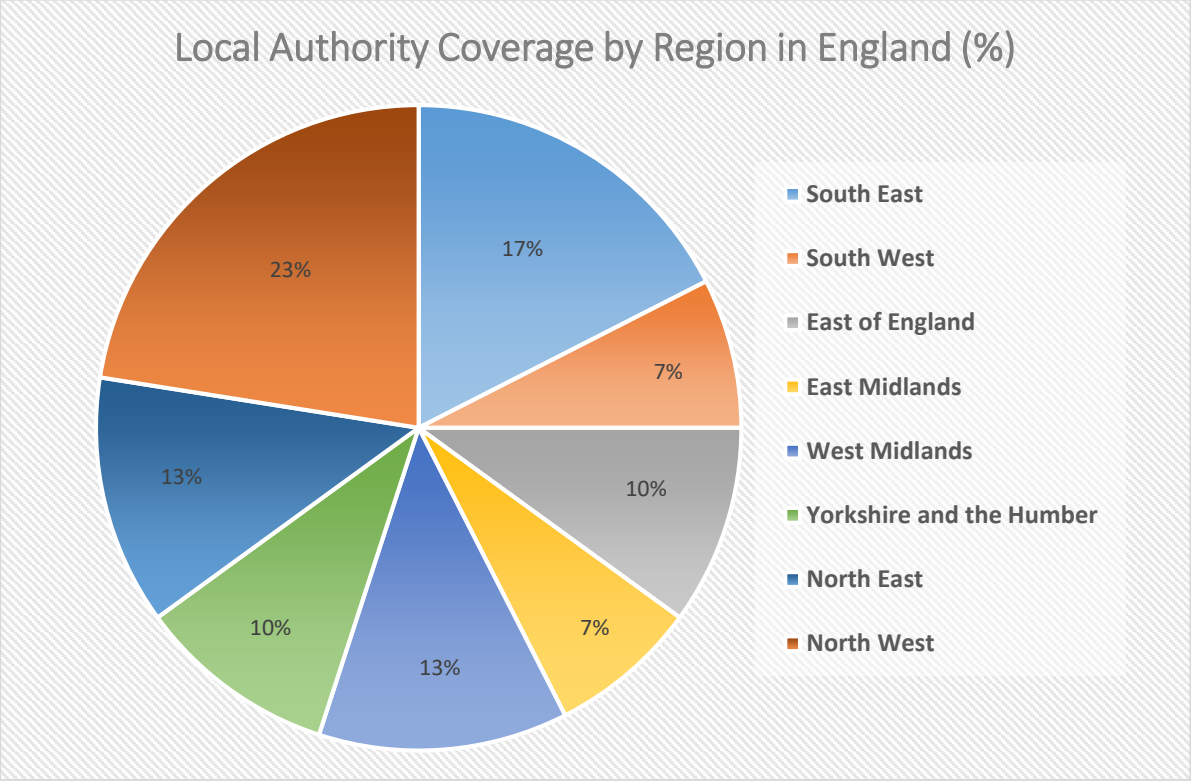




Source: Authors own data.

In terms of the regional coverage of the total 40 LG cases that participated in the research, there is a slight over-representation of the North West and South East, and underrepresentation of the South West and East Midlands regions respectively. The original intention was for an exact distribution of 40 LAs comprising five cases from across each of the eight regions in England. However, as a result of LG response rates and access, the lowest representation is three cases each in the South West and East Midlands, and the highest of nine cases in the North West. Figure 12 demonstrates the percentage regional distribution of the LA cases. The data set comprises 7 located in the South East (17.5%); 3 in the South West (7.5%); 4 in the East of England (10%); 3 in the East Midlands (7.5%); 5 in the West Midlands (12.5%); 4 within Yorkshire and the Humber (10%); 5 in the North East (12.5%); and 9 in the North West (22.5%) respectively. Overall it was felt this still provided LA regional 'representativeness'.

Figure 12 – Regional Distribution (Coverage) of Research Cases across England (%)



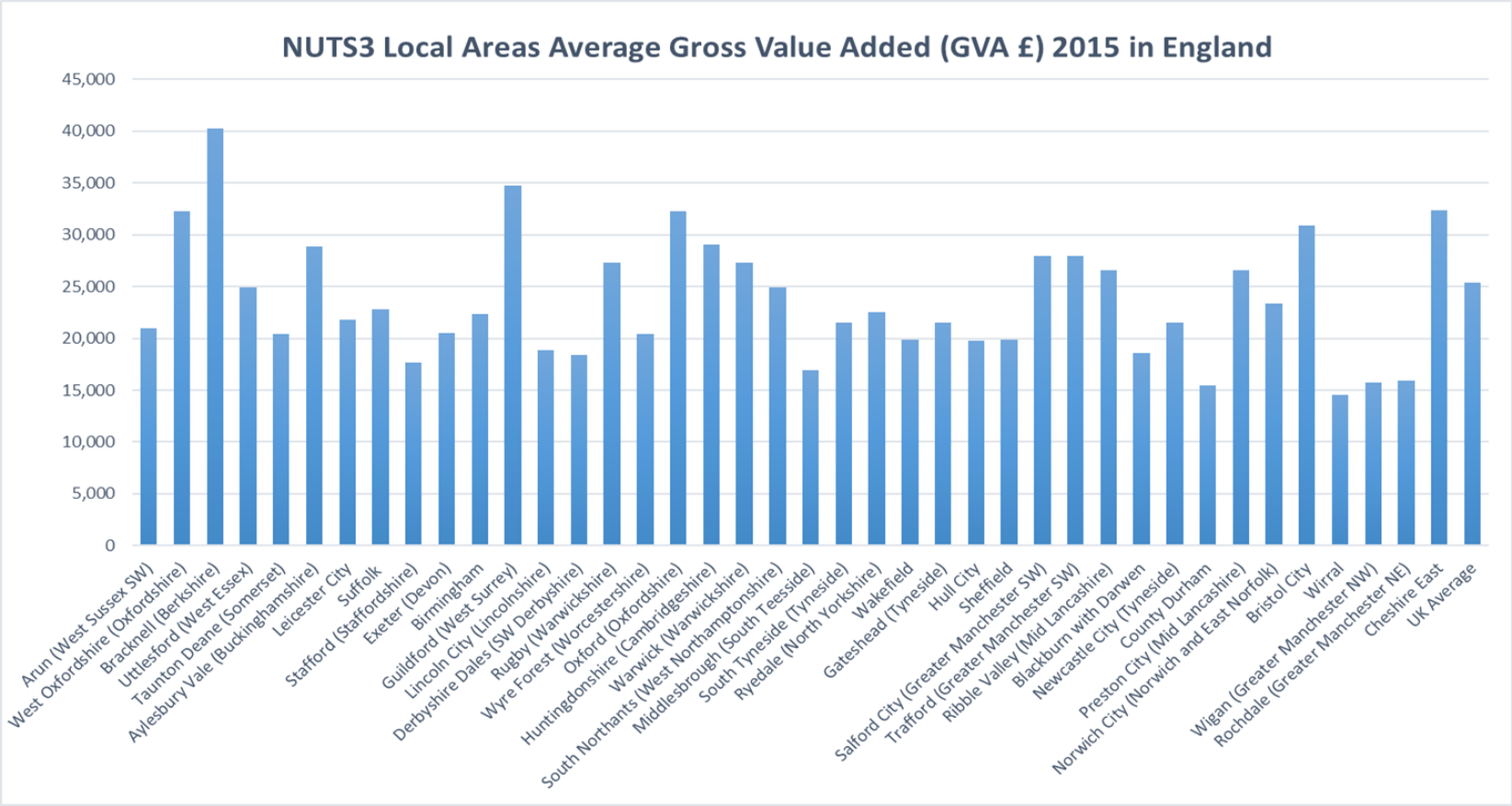
Source: Authors own data.

Despite the slight imbalances between regional coverage, there is still a good degree of representation from all eight regions across England (excluding London). This is important because the claim is not that these cases are representative of all LAs across England, but rather to demonstrate that a diverse range of geographically located places have been considered when drawing tentative interpretations and conclusions from the qualitative empirical data collected. The 40 LG 'senior practitioners' (herein SPs)

interviewed can therefore provide a diverse picture of the responses to planning under austerity and policy reforms since 2010 from a number of rural-urban and geographical regions across England.

In addition, the state of the local economy across each of the research cases provides an important antecedent condition when examining incentivised/pro-growth policy reforms and responses to budget pressures. The average Gross Value Added (GVA) produced by local economies (NUTS3 areas) in 2015 provided a rough initial benchmark to assess the economic context for each case in relation to the UK average (See figure 13). These NUTS3 areas did not necessarily fit neatly with the cases and often represented their wider local economies that masks the economic variations at the scale of local councils. However, the researcher was not attempting to determine an exact or scientific definition of 'high' and 'low' value councils. Rather the intention was to provide a cursory overview, with the specific LG positions clarified through the research interviews. Therefore, the high or low economic 'value' status attributed to the LG cases was simplistically inferred from the performance of the broader local economy to provide context for the research case selection process and preparation for interviews.

Figure 13 - Average Gross Value Added (GVA) 2015 for NUTS3 Local Areas in England



Source: Authors own graph (data sourced from ONS.GOV.UK).

3.3 The Research Participants - Local Authority Planning Managers

Following from the LPA case selection process, the purpose of this section is to discuss the decisions made around which planning actors (sample) to approach for interviews and why it is necessary to seek their specific knowledge. In practice the case and sample selection process were conducted at the same time in order to ensure that the researcher could access both an informative LPA case and SP position.

The key informants for this study are senior management level planning practitioners. These positions are, however termed, the *Head of Planning and Development Management* or the *Strategic Director* that is responsibility for planning and other service areas. These actors have been selected because they are closely related to both the highest corporate level chief executive and directors running the local authority, and hence the overall strategies and principles of the council, as well as the front-line delivery of planning services through the management of their department, planning officers and resources. The rationale is that this position represents a key intermediary level between the overall council strategy and the specific functioning of the planning department. Furthermore, that the role of 'planning manager' (PMs) would also encompass wider relationships with elected members/councillors, community groups and partnership organisations. In short, that they would have specific and collective knowledge as a professional body or policy group of actors working within the public planning sector.

One underlying assumption is that senior and management level planners would better understand the broader corporate and leadership agenda of the council, and as such would have to manage their planning services accordingly to respond to austerity and policy reforms. That is to say that PMs are understood to represent well-informed decision-making actors, which are responsible for the everyday management of their staff and services and delivering wider changes as part of the overall corporate agenda. It was anticipated that such actors are the best placed to provide the most planning relevant and higher-level council insights into the internal culture changes and external relationships that had taken place in response to austerity and reforms 2010-2016. This was based on the reasoning that these issues have constituted their main practice concerns on a consistent basis over the previous six years.

So the term 'senior practitioner' (SP) is used here as a broad shorthand to refer to an experienced, management-level planning practitioner working within LG. These SPs typically had extensive previous experience working for a number of LAs and planning services positions, as well as regional government agencies, development corporations, or private sector planning services in a number of specific cases. Seniority is used here as a proxy for the duration spent working within the planning system, and the

understanding of how it has functioned in the past as an important prerequisite for the ability to evaluate how it has been changing under the Cameron-led Governments post-2010. As such, the selection process for contacting the SP/PMs extended beyond the initial criteria for the cases to provide geographical 'coverage', to also incorporate their personal planning histories, management status and time working in their current role and other LAs, following the *judgement/purposive* sampling method.

Importantly, the length of time spent as a PM and within the specified LG cases was a key factor when sampling for participants. The actors needed to have been acting 'planning managers' for at least most of this period 2010-2016; with preference given to those actors in the position for a longer duration (ideally pre-2010) and within the same LG during this time to make sense of the context and changes. These criteria were largely met by the participants, although some exceptions were made for distinguished PMs that had worked in a number of LAs under austerity/localism conditions. It was held that such actors could provide multiple views of responses within different LG contexts, with the trade-off that these were still useful given the stated concerns around case and sample representativeness.

The initial search for senior management planners was conducted through locating the '*organisational structure charts*' (or equivalent) found on LG websites. These allowed the researcher to identify all the 'key' actors within the management levels of the organisation and by each service/departmental area. Once the most relevant contacts were identified for a number of LG cases within a region, the professional networking site *LinkedIn* was utilised for acquiring background information on previous employment histories, roles and councils for contacting potential participants. This allowed each email (Appendix A) to be specifically tailored to the named individual being invited to take part in the study. These emails explained that because of *their personal experiences and current position at council x*, they would be ideally placed to take part in the research. Although this individual-by-individual approach was more time consuming, it proved very effective for gaining specific responses rather than contacting a council more generally. In many cases, these emails were followed up and interviews arranged with personal assistants as the 'gatekeepers', providing clear contacts for 'chasing up' potential respondents.

The main research participant criterion was achieved, with all 40 participants in the study holding posts at a senior management level within the planning services area of the council. These roles ranged from the traditional '*Head of Planning*' to '*(Assistant) Strategic Directors of Place Services*' with the remit for planning and development services under their portfolio. It is important to note that the (assistant) strategic directors held a higher position and played a larger role within the council than the PMs that

acted as head of their department. In practice, the researcher was often referred either upwards or downwards between these two seniority/management levels by the actors contacted for an interview.

In practice, this trade-off had the upshot of providing a neat balance between the views of more strategic level planning actors and those more orientated towards the front-line service delivery. However, it also raised the issue over whether or not to treat these actors with analytical distinction. The judgement call was made not to explicitly distinguish between these actors on the basis that for the purpose of this study each provided important insights for 'managing' austerity (Section 5.3) and policy reforms, albeit from a range of slightly different corporate and departmental management-level perspectives (although see table 5 for a summarised distinction of participant seniority and positions).

In order to protect the identity of the research participants, the quoted extracts used to support the analysis only refer to the LG rural-urban classification and regional context as the minimum necessary for geographical context and comparison. This will be accompanied by the prefix 'SP' as shorthand for 'senior practitioner' and a number from 1-40 which corresponds to the sequential order in which the research interviews were conducted. As an example, a quoted extract from the first interview conducted would be referenced as follows: (SP1, Urban, South East). The relatively close timing of each of the research interviews, conducted over a five-month period between February and July 2016, means that the date has not been included with each quotation. After the event, it became evident that these interviews were conducted during the final months of the Cameron-led Governments, which (inadvertently) provided a neater temporal boundary of planning practice 2010-2016 for the research.

In terms of the overall sample representativeness, the total sample 'population' could have extended to all senior management planners working within English LAs (excluding counties and London). Assuming that each LG has one individual employed as the 'head of planning services' for each of the relevant 294 councils, then the 40 PMs interviewed that make up the sample in this research potentially represent around 13% of this population. It should be noted then that any empirical generalisations made about the responses of PMs to austerity and policy reforms is based on the representativeness of this *specific sample* of 40 practitioners in relation to this total population of council PMs in England. Again, the research design attempted to mitigate these methodological concerns by ensuring that the cases and samples represented a diverse range of contexts. One implicit assumption here, however, is that the PMs in specific regions are 'speaking for' the specific planning and development contexts within their region and the wider population of cases in that part of the country (or rural/urban issues, etc.).

Whilst it is acknowledged that LG contexts are extremely variable even within small geographic areas (e.g. mix of historical, economic, political, institutional/governance and population conditions) meaning that any claims to regional representativeness based on a handful of sample cases is overly reductionist; few studies have the *resources and access* to study the entire population, and as a result a number of relatively imperfect empirical generalisations have to be made from the samples and cases and extended to the whole. Nonetheless this is a key caveat for the (empirical) claims made in this research.

Indeed, following Guba and Lincoln (1982), the need to generalise findings from samples/cases is questionable because '*it is virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs. One can easily conclude that generalizations that are intended to be context free will have little that is useful to say about human behaviour*' (cited in Farthing, 2015, p. 84). Therefore the E&Rs of PMs to austerity and policy reforms within each LG will necessarily be specific to the factors determined by their overall context as these processes are simultaneously 'socially constructed' by the actors within each contextual case setting across the country. So although there have been common challenges and themes for LPAs and planners, the researcher is cautious to claim any empirical generalisations to a single reality independent of the context.

The challenges around sample 'validity' concern the extent to which the research is measuring what it claims to be measuring. In the context of this research, to what extent is the researcher really measuring the experiences and responses of LG planning managers to austerity and reform? For example, how are these separated from their personal sentiments on these subjects (and do these distinctions matter)?

'*If planners are talking about their own actions, for example, do they rationalise their behaviour after the event and give a positive version of what went on? Or do they describe what they would ideally have liked to do in those situations?*' (Farthing, 2015, p. 82).

Further methodological questions concern the claims to knowledge made based on the empirical data set; such as *how legitimate is one specific practitioner's E&Rs compared to the broader sample and case population, and how much weight should be given to singular accounts of these reform events?* The position here is that singular personal/situated experiences of key actors within place have the potential to be equally as insightful for the research themes/concepts as the shared experiences that form the basis for empirical generalisations, and thus each practice-account is legitimate to their own local E&Rs.

The reliability of the interview data also needs to be considered. One potential issue is the *uniformity* of how planners were questioned about their experiences of austerity and policy reforms, because the differences in the order, emphasis and specific probes when questioning could potentially influence the responses provided by the participant. However, in light of the need to be sensitive to different contexts and follow the inductive approach that allowed room for the participants to decide the key themes in the first instances of questioning, it is contended that *some variation* in interview uniformity was necessary (discussed more in the next section for the semi-structured interviews and 'interview guide').

Moreover, the participants were asked to reflect over the period 2010-2016 so that the data presented more than a 'snapshot' of what was happening at a particular place and time when the interviews were being conducted. The rationale was to try to overcome the snapshot that a single interview provides by focusing on changes over this time period. This problem was partially addressed by ensuring that all of the research participants had been PMs since at least 2010 (albeit often for different LPAs), and so had experienced and responded to austerity and reforms at this level (between the council leadership and case officer level) on a routine basis over the target reform period. It is obviously problematic, however, to suggest that participants could 'bracket' and speak directly to this 2010-2016 period in a one-hour interview. This issue was somewhat addressed by the focus on key themes of the NPPF, localism and austerity that simultaneously pervaded this period to present the 'general picture' in specific cases, rather than seeking a comprehensive step-by-step account of events over time. This does, however, present another caveat when making claims to the *temporal scope* of the research findings.

Finally, whilst the research design and analysis does not explicitly divide the 40 participants according to their seniority of position, they were informally categorised by the researcher as Level 1 (L1) for 'Directors' responsible for planning services, Level 2 (L2) for 'Assistant Directors' and Level 3 (L3) for 'Heads' or 'Managers' of planning and development (or equivalent role/title within each of the cases). This means that L1 practitioners make up 30% (n12) of the sample, L2 practitioners 20% (n8) and L3 practitioners 50% (n20) respectively. This distinction may not be accurate, however, given the various organisational and hierarchical council management structures and positions, and so should be treated with caution when attempting to make formal comparisons between planning management; although this potentially presents a future research agenda. Table 5 shows the practitioner codes, employment position and local authority context for each of the forty interview participants involved in the study.

Table 5 – Interview Participant Code, Employment Position and Local Authority Context:

Interview Participant Code (1-40)	**Employment Position (at the time of interview)**	**Local Authority Context (RUC and Region)**
SP1 (L1)	Director of Planning and Economic Regeneration	Urban, South East.
SP2 (L1)	Shared Strategic Director (responsible for Planning services and other functions)	Rural, South East.
SP3 (L1)	Leader of the Council	Urban, South East.
SP4 (L2)	Assistant Director Planning and Building Control	Rural, East of England.
SP5 (L2)	Assistant Director Planning and the Environment	Mixed, South West.
SP6 (L1)	Director (responsible for Planning services and other functions)	Rural, South East.
SP7 (L3)	Head of Planning Management and Delivery	Urban, East Midlands.
SP8 (L3)	Head of Planning and Resource Management	Rural, East England. County
SP9 (L3)	Head of Planning and Regeneration	Mixed, West Midlands.
SP10 (L2)	Assistant Director for City Development	Urban, South West.
SP11 (L2)	Assistant Director for Planning and Regeneration	Urban, West Midlands.
SP12 (L3)	Head of Planning and Major projects Manager	Urban, South East.
SP13 (L3)	Planning Manager	Urban, East Midlands.
SP14 (L3)	Head of Regeneration and Policy	Rural, East Midlands.
SP15 (L3)	Head of Planning and Recreation	Urban, West Midlands.
SP16 (L1)	Director for Economic Prosperity and Place	Mixed, West Midlands.
SP17 (L3)	Head of Planning and Regulatory Services	Urban, South East.
SP18 (L3)	Head of Development	Rural, East England.
SP19 (L3)	Head of Planning and Development Services	Urban, West Midlands.
SP20 (L3)	Head of Strategic Planning and Economy	Mixed, South East.
SP21 (L1)	Executive Director for Economic Development and Communities	Urban, North East.
SP22 (L3)	Head of Development Services	Urban, North East.
SP23 (L3)	Head of Planning and Housing	Rural, Yorkshire and Humber.
SP24 (L1)	Service Director for Planning, Transport and Highways	Urban, Yorkshire and Humber.

SP25 (L3)	Spatial Planning and Environment Manager	Urban, North East.
SP26 (L3)	City Planning Manager	Urban, Yorkshire and Humber.
SP27 (L1)	Director of Regeneration and Development Services	Urban, Yorkshire and Humber.
SP28 (L2)	Assistant Director Planning and Transport	Urban, North West.
SP29 (L1)	Director of Growth and Regulatory Services	Urban, North West.
SP30 (L3)	Head of Regeneration and Housing	Rural, North West.
SP31 (L1)	Director of Regeneration, Growth and Prosperity	Urban, North West.
SP32 (L2)	Assistant Director for Planning	Urban, North East.
SP33 (L3)	Planning Development and Performance and Planning Managers (joint interview)	Rural, North East.
SP34 (L1)	Director of Development	Urban, North West.
SP35 (L3)	Head of Planning services	Urban, East England.
SP36 (L1)	Service Director for Planning	Urban, South West.
SP37 (L3)	Head of Regeneration and Planning	Urban, North West.
SP38 (L2)	Assistant Director for Planning and Transport	Urban, North West.
SP39 (L2)	Assistant Director Planning and Development	Urban, North West.
SP40 (L3)	Head of Planning Strategy	Mixed, North West.

Further research looking in more detail at the role and work of individual planners within the changing local government environment of policy and austerity-based reforms could compliment this study. Having briefly explained the selection process and rationale for the research cases and participants, the next section discusses decisions concerning the empirical data collection and how it was then analysed.

3.4 Research Methods and Data Analysis

Once the target LPA cases and SPs had been identified, contacted and participation had been agreed, the next task was conducting the fieldwork and collecting the empirical data. This section outlines how the fieldwork was undertaken, and the rationales behind the decisions made during the process, before moving on to explain how the empirical data was coded and analysed to present the research findings.

3.4.1 Fieldwork and Data Collection

The first research design decision was that qualitative data would be most suitable for answering the research questions. The decision was made that the most appropriate tool for uncovering and probing participant experiences and responses was semi-structured interviews conducted in person. As a result, all 40 of the research interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participant and within their respective local authority building where they are employed. Logistically, this meant that the researcher would have to plan train travel and accommodation across England to conduct the interviews. The upshot was that the researcher could explore the local area and get a 'feel' for the socio-spatial context before each interview, which added to the understanding of planning issues in place. This observational element neatly complemented the desk-based review of local planning policy documents, projects and related material that provided the groundwork contextual information before the formal interviews (in the form of a well-worn fieldwork notebook which has not been possible to include in the appendix).

The main research method was based on semi-structured interviews delivered using an 'interview guide' outlining the initial core themes/topics and using 'open-ended' questions to explore them. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to ensure that each interview amounted to more than a rigid question set with no room for deviation, nor merely an informal conversation that had no guiding structure or themes. The flexibility of this research tool allowed the participant scope to outline their own understandings around what has been important to practice, whilst also providing an overall coherence and structure to data collection. More importantly for the actual interview process, the approach was to treat the interviews as a more relaxed and friendly conversational approach rather than a formal process, especially when talking about potentially controversial subjects such as austerity and housing growth. This approach was taken to build rapport and show respect to the interviewees and their professional lives rather than feeling like they were being used instrumentally to collect data.

There are also some important methodological and practical limits of using semi-structured interviews with senior planners to understand changes in local authority practices. Firstly, research interviews can be problematic because the informant may have incomplete knowledge or memory. Moreover the interviewee '*will always have subjective perceptions that will be related to their own past experiences and current conditions. At best, interviewees will only give what they are prepared to reveal about their subjective perceptions of events and opinions. These perceptions and opinions will change over time, and according to circumstance. They may be at some considerable distance from 'reality' as others might see it*' (Walford cited in Roulston, 2010, p. 203). In this respect the informant is not an objective "*vessel of information*" (Cloke et al, 2006) that will provide the 'truth' for any given event or subject.

Secondly, as Kitchin and Tate (2000) explain, the informant might try to predict what the researcher wants to hear rather than articulating their own views. They might therefore provide a response that does not truly reflect their understanding or position on an issue which means we '*cannot always rely on interviewees giving truthful and rational statements concerning their intentions or meanings*' (p. 234). Furthermore, the interviewee might respond to the questions in any number of problematic ways; including '*misinformation*', '*evasions*', '*lies*' and '*fronts*' (Roulston, 2010, Roulston, 2011, Roulston, 2014). Especially questions related to the informant's personal life, work or politics, which means they may get defensive or simply repeat the 'party line' providing an uncritical 'official' account. This is pertinent here because austerity and community engagement under localism can be sensitive political issues for practitioners. Thirdly there are related issues around power dynamics when interviewing elite actors that need to be considered (Cochrane, 1998, Odendahl and Shaw, 2002, Mikecz, 2012). Taken together these challenges mean that the interview data must be treated with some degree of caution.

Furthermore, interview methods have been criticised for a number of more practical issues; including that the data they produce is too subjective with the researcher too heavily involved in creating the data; that the research is difficult to replicate and there is a lack of transparency; that the researcher needs to be clear about the contexts in which the research takes place and question the generalisation of the findings; that there is only a limited time for interviewees to get views across to the researcher; the criticism that interview data is 'soft' evidence and extent to which words always convey meaning; and perhaps most crucially the challenges around gaining 'access' to the right cases and participants.

Despite these methodological and practical challenges of research interviews, they also have a number of strengths, including; eliciting the views, perceptions and opinions of respondents; understanding actor motivations, expectations and justifications for their actions and how they made certain decisions; describing the circumstances and contexts people operate within and extracting their professional and personal stories; the ability to build rapport and deal with sensitive issues and topics; being flexible and responsive to emerging ideas; explaining processes, complexity and diversity of experiences, viewpoints, emotions, social relations, behaviours, etc.; and presenting in-depth explanations of the 'social world' from the perspective of people studied. The strength of interviews here is they provided practice-based appraisals to assess the claims and effectiveness of government policy *as it was implemented*.

The next main decision concerned how to conduct the interview process. The research design was deliberately set up to be inductive, open-ended and co-constructed; so that general questions could provide space for a range of practitioner-led responses on the research themes, before posing more

specific probing questions (based on the academic literature and/or responses to questioning). As such, an 'interview guide' was the main tool used to keep the conversation flowing and relevant (Appendix C). An interview guide has three core elements (Silva et al., 2014); 1) an *Informed Consent Statement* (discussed below); 2) *Grand-tour and Probe questions*; and 3) a *Closing Statement*. The initial 'grand-tour' questions ask the respondent to provide an overview of a major theme being investigated, with 'probes' being used as specific follow-up questions to flesh out details and issues within the major themes/concepts. The interviews started with general 'icebreaker' questions to ease the participants into the discussion before moving on to more detailed, complex, or controversial questions and issues; with the sequence adjusted if necessary to suit local context and the flow of the interview. The closing statement asked if there were any further issues they would like to discuss or elaborate on, which might have been missed or they feel are important for understanding the phenomenon, and then provided a final 'debriefing' where the participant was thanked for their time and any final details were exchanged.

The research project was designed in accordance with the University of Reading's Code of Ethics and was approved by the Real Estate and Planning departmental ethics board before any fieldwork was conducted. An integrated *research information and informed consent sheet* was verbally administered (or read by the interviewee) and then signed for each participant at the start of every interview undertaken in the project (Appendix B). This informed the participant of the purpose of the research and assured them of data protection compliance and confidentiality in the research output. This meant that the decision was made to anonymise the LA cases and SP/PM actors when quoting their interpretations as part of these ethical considerations. It was acknowledged that austerity and pro-growth reforms are often treated as sensitive political subjects within localities, and some actors would not necessarily want their personal understandings to be attributed back to them publicly. The rationale was that confidentiality would allow these actors to speak more openly and freely about these issues, and without the reader losing too much from a more general characterisation of their context.

In practice, research ethics means not pressuring or harming the participant in any way; such as interrogating or exploiting them for information; sharing sensitive or embarrassing information about them; forcing them to discuss traumatic events; leading them to compare themselves to idealised standards/normative theories that they fail to meet; etc. As well as showing respect and honouring promises to participants; such as not deceiving or pretending to share beliefs or falsely claiming experience to gain confidence; not misrepresenting the topic or purpose of the study to allay suspicion and gain access; not promising confidentiality or benefits if you might not be able to keep them; not wasting their time by showing up late or asking for background information that is available from other

sources; allowing participants to finish their points rather than cutting them off or starting a new question as soon as the discussion begins to deviate; and offering to provide the results; etc. These were all important ethical considerations when conducting the research interviews for this project.

Next the decision was made to record the interviews using an electronic recording device and to keep note taking to a minimum during the process. This was both to fully concentrate on interacting with the participants and engage with their views and develop a conversational rather than formal atmosphere. All of the participants agreed to be recorded following the explanation of the informed consent sheet.

At this stage, a number of core decisions concerning the nature, scope and style of which questions to ask the participants were made through the creation and subsequent revisions of the interview guide. In essence, the questions on national planning reforms post-2010 sought to uncover practice-based evaluations of the NPPF, policy deregulations and the localism agenda. These initially took the form of asking PMs grand-tour questions on how the NPPF or localism has impacted local planning practices in their locality, followed by more specific 'probing' questions on core policy changes (e.g. on duty to cooperate or neighbourhood planning) or other issues raised in relation to their practices. Similarly, the questions on austerity started generally and then progressed to specific issues (e.g. resilience/capacity issues, shared services and alternative service delivery models, revenue generating strategies to cover the costs of planning, etc.). In both cases, the interview guide questions were based on the national policy/rhetoric and academic literature/theory outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 respectively.

The interview guide served as a prompt to navigate the researcher during the process, although it was not shown to the participant to ensure it did not influence or (re)direct their responses. It was divided into the two main headings on '*Planning Reform*' and '*Planning Resources and Budget*' condensed onto one-side of A4 paper for ease of use with each containing bullet-points on the key themes/concepts (Appendix C). One main concern was not to presuming a priori how LPA cases and SP/PMs from across a wide range of geographical and institutional contexts had understood, experienced and responded to reforms. Rather than being prescriptive, the questions were designed to be open-ended so that the participants could initially decide what was most important about the key themes. Therefore, the early questions for each theme were very broad (e.g. "*Can you tell me about your experiences of austerity and what it has meant for planning practices here?*") so that the researcher was then not directing (pigeon-holing) the possible responses of the participant in the first instances of questioning. In this respect, the interview guide was deliberately flexible and incrementally adapted during the fieldwork process to reflect issues raised by practitioners consistent with the inductive and grounded approach.

The combination of a 'thematised' interview guide and detailed place-specific notes developed in a field notebook allowed for a deeper conversation around general issues that could draw on local examples. This approach was effective for demonstrating to the participant that the researcher had 'done their homework' concerning the particular local planning policy and development context within their LG, which more importantly meant that precious time could be focussed on the main issues over context.

The fieldwork generated 40 audio recordings. Whilst a few of the interviews were shorter than an hour because of time pressures on the day, a similar number exceeded the requested 1-hour time slot; with the shortest interview being 30 minutes and the longest lasting two and a half hours. As the amount of primary data collected increased, the decision was made to use a professional transcription agency to assist with transcription. The researcher transcribed 15 audio files and the remaining 25 were done by the company *Transcription Agency*; however, the transcriptions not undertaken by the researcher personally were rigorously reviewed to ensure that important details had not been missed. In practice, some interviews were transcribed in the days immediately after the interviews whilst others had to wait during busy periods of fieldwork activity. The empirical data now formed 40 text-based documents.

The research design formed a relatively traditional methodological approach to qualitative research; as the objective was to generate primary data on the experiences and responses of PMs across the cases, based on examples of local practices, strategies and challenges within and between specific LPAs, as a means to develop an overall picture of planning practices under austerity and policy reforms 2010-2016.

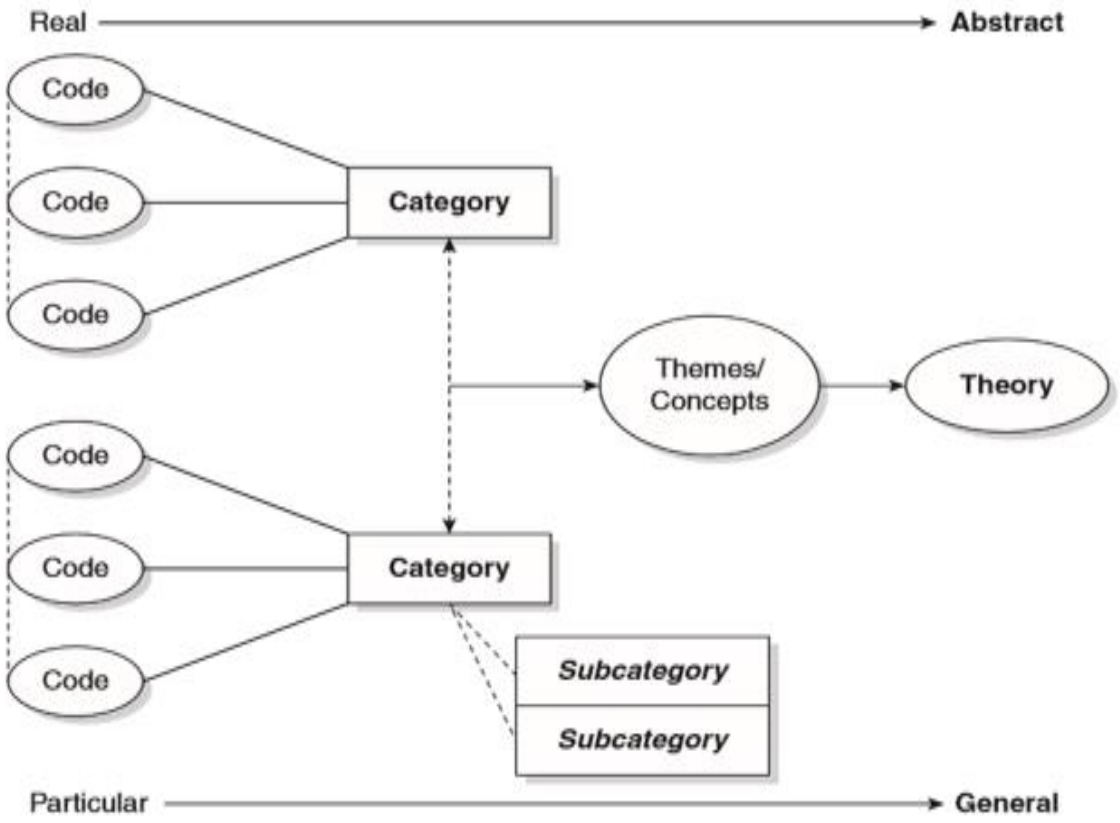
3.4.2 Data Coding and Analysis

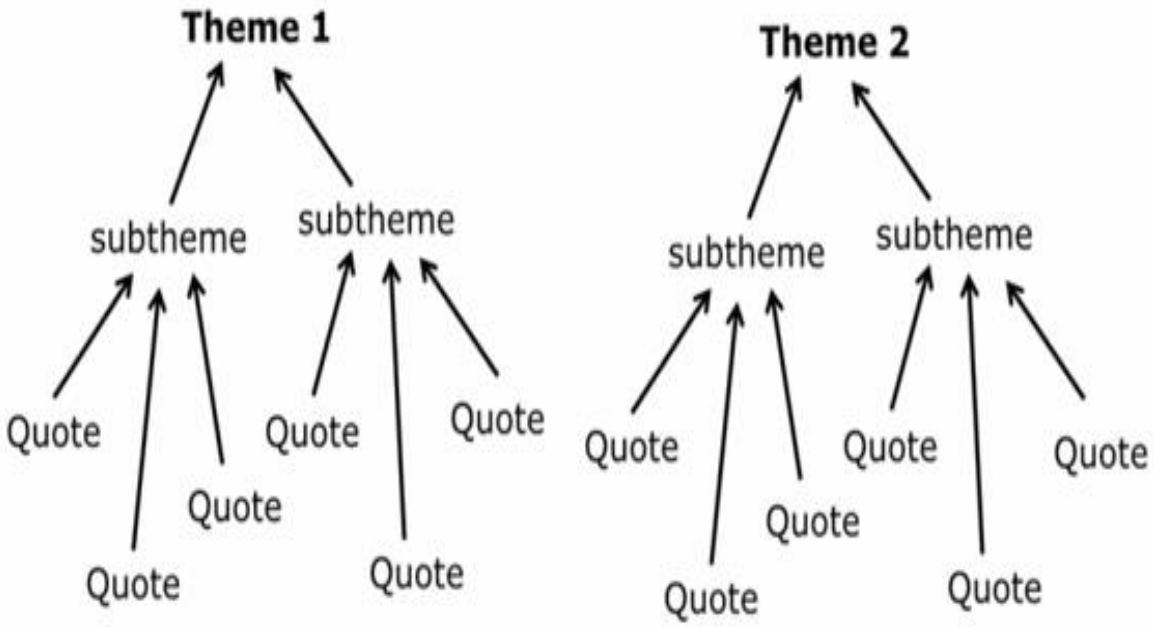
Now that the primary empirical data had been collected the formal stages of the analysis could begin. The first phase of coding comprised 'open-coding', which was necessary to sift and sort through the mass of empirical transcript data into 'organising' or 'container' meta-themes. This was conducted using the qualitative coding software *NVivo* in order to manage the large amount of textual data. In their original state, the interview transcripts presented the unorganised multiple themes within each case that made abstraction and comparison challenging. As such, the first phase of open-coding sorted the data from the 40 'case' transcripts into 7 'thematic' transcripts. In essence this meant that instead of scanning through each of the 40 case transcripts individually for all references to 'localism', a decontextualized thematic transcript collated all of the empirical data on localism into one document. These thematic transcripts then provided the material for the second phase analytical 'focussed-coding'.

This first phase open-coding was essentially a data management exercise. It allowed the researcher to make sense of 'chunks' of textual data within the interview transcripts by assigning them to a simplified category that succinctly sums up the content of the extract (e.g. 'housing'). It encompassed all the data collected to ensure that nothing was excluded during the early stages of analysis and to avoid attaching meaning *a priori*. Initially the 'organising' meta-codes needed to be sufficiently broad and flexible enough to represent the largest unit concepts for breaking down and categorising the data. Seven organising meta-codes (nodes) were created for this purpose; 1) *Austerity and Local Government Financial Settlement*; 2) *Change in English Local Government Planning*; 3) *Growth, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning*; 4) *Housing*; 5) *Localism*; 6) *National Policy Reform*; 7) *Local Plan-Making, Strategy and Uncertainty*. These organising themes were broad enough to categorise the interview data effectively by theme but required a further level of analytical focussed-coding. These seven organising meta-codes were divided into roughly three to four 'sub-codes' each that focus more clearly on a specific area for analysis (except for 'Local Plan-Making' which did not require further subdivision). In total, twenty-two sub-codes were created covering the seven main organising codes (Appendix D).

In contrast, the second phase focussed-coding was more selective and theoretically-informed, based on the research questions and theoretical framework and the emergent practice-based concepts (e.g. 'commercialisation'). This higher level of coding was completed by hand through highlighting and annotating the (more manageable) thematic transcripts. This activity was repeated a number of times. The first read through was 'exploratory' to find the interlinkages and outliers within the organising themes and sub-codes. Then subsequent 'readings' sought to further develop the key and emerging themes within and across the empirical data set. Decisions had to be made here about where to focus attention. The researcher had to make a number of judgments at these points to decide which information had the most analytical value and what needed to be presented to the reader. However, this was a highly subjective task, influenced by the researcher's positionality/world view. In deciding on how to present the key findings, a significant amount of collected data has been omitted. In practice, these higher second level coding stages were not linear but a messy back and forth between exploring the data and trying to critically interpret meaning within the frames of the research (Chapters 1 and 2).

Figure 14 – Approach to Qualitative Analysis using Interview Data:





Source: https://www.transcriptioncentre.co.uk/blog/2014/6/10/analysing-your-interviews.

The approach taken here broadly followed Rubin and Rubin's (2012) structure of the 'general stages' involved in qualitative analysis based on interview data (with stages 6-7 dependent on the project):

1) *Transcribe and summarise each interview.*
2) *Define, find, and mark in the text (code) excerpts that have relevant concepts, themes, events, examples, names, places or dates.*
3) *Find the excerpts marked with the same code(s) from across your interview transcripts and sort them into a single data file – then summarise the contents for each collated coding data file.*
4) *Sort and resort the material within each coded data file, comparing the excerpts between different sub-groups (sub-codes) – then summarise the results of each (re)sorting.*
5) *Weigh up different versions of coded data and then integrate the descriptions from different interviewees to create a complete picture.*
6) *Combine concepts and themes to generate theory that can explain the descriptions presented - constantly testing these ideas by examining them in light of the interviews.*
7) *See how far these results generalize beyond the individuals and cases studied in your project.*

Within the interview transcripts, 'concepts' are ideas often expressed as a single noun or noun phrase (e.g. affordable housing) or abstract nouns (e.g. empowerment), which often convey goals, values, perceptions, attitudes or represent strategies that frame action for the participants. Similarly the 'themes' are summary statements, causal explanations, or conclusions that offer explanations of why something happened, what something means, or how the interviewee feels about a matter. Themes normally show the relationship between two or more concepts, where a statement contains words like 'because', 'therefore', 'so that is why', etc. (or you can translate them into that format) this is likely to be a theme connecting concepts (see figure 14 for a visual representation of the approach to analysis).

Now that the core theoretical, methodological and practical approaches to the research have been outlined, the next two chapters present the empirical data and analysis. Chapter 4 examines *National Policy Reform and Local Authority Planning Post-2010* and Chapter 5 does the same for *Local Authority Planning under Austerity Post-2010*. The final Chapter 6 presents the overall *Conclusions* to the study.

Chapter 4 - National Policy Reform and Local Authority Planning Post-2010

"*Let me be clear - planning is the single biggest drag anchor on growth and we must deliver reform*".

(Eric Pickles, 2011).

'*[T]he link between power, agency, and responsibility is important. It enables us to keep in focus the very question of the difference that agents can make to outcomes and to cast a critical eye on attempts by powerful agents to escape their own responsibilities by 'blaming the system*'.

(Hayward and Lukes, 2008, p. 12).

This chapter is data-driven focusing on the empirical findings from the 40 research cases. It is divided into two main parts on *Practicing National Policy Reforms and Planning Deregulation* (Section 4.1) and *Practicing Community Localism and Economic Localism* (Section 4.2). These two main thematic areas have been selected because they are considered to be the most significant (policy) reforms to the planning system and practices under the Coalition and majority Conservative Governments 2010-2016. This is notwithstanding austerity which, despite being heavily interrelated in practice, represents a major national reform in its own right and is therefore discussed and analysed separately (Chapter 5). This chapter is informed by the overarching theoretical framework heuristic and takes a clear critical position on national policy and governance *structures* that seek to reform the planning system (termed here *externalised neoliberalisations*) that shape forms of planning *agency* and relations to stakeholders.

These two main sections on national policy reform and localism that comprise the body of this *Chapter 4 Planning Reform Analysis* specifically relate to *research questions* one, two and three respectively:

RQ1) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the planning system reforms and policy deregulations introduced by the central government since 2010?*

RQ2) *What has localism meant in practice for local planning authorities and their relationships with local communities?*

RQ3) *What have national planning policy reforms and localism post-2010 meant in practice for the economic and collaborative approaches of LPAs to strategic planning and housing policy and delivery?*

Additionally, each section also seeks to address *research objectives* one, two and three more generally:

RO1) *To present practitioner evaluations of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2012), planning policy deregulations and performance targets 2010-2016*.

RO2) *To present practitioner evaluations of the Localism Act (2011) and governance shifts to 'economic' and 'community' localism* 2010-2016.

RO3) *To present practitioner evaluations of the effectiveness of the latest period of planning reforms in relation to their professionalism and ethics (planning structures and agency) 2010-2016*.

The next section begins by evaluating practitioner experiences and responses to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other national policy deregulations in relation to local planning post-2010.

4.1 Practicing National Policy Reforms and Planning Deregulation Post-2010

RQ1) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the planning system reforms and policy deregulations introduced by the central government since 2010?*

This section is divided into three main parts on *Interpreting 'Simplified' National Planning Policy and Local Plan-Making* (4.1.1), *Planning Policy Deregulations and Professional Practices* (4.1.2) and *Boosting Planning 'Performance': Delivering Speed or Outcomes?* (4.1.3) respectively. The overall argument in this section follows Ellis that '*deregulation means that planning is simply less powerful in relation to the market and therefore offers fewer opportunities for progressive interventions*' (2015, p.438).

4.1.1 Interpreting 'Simplified' National Planning Policy and Local Plan-Making

The Coalition Government's (CG) core aim to 'simplify' the planning system by 'streamlining' the (perceived) significant amount of national planning policy and guidance, which they argued had been developing since the formal inception of town and country planning in 1947 and proliferated under the New Labour governments 1997-2010, was one broadly shared by the planning senior practitioners (SPs). The findings suggest that they also felt that the planning system had become increasingly complex, and so their criticisms of the NPPF was not its stated aims for simplification and streamlining, but ironically rather that these policy reforms had actually made things more complicated and uncertain in practice.

One example of the 'unintended consequences' of increased practice uncertainty following attempted simplification was the subsequent need for further government policy clarification on the NPPF through the development of associated National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG), particularly as it became evident that the policy 'framework' needed to be fleshed-out in particular key areas to better support practitioners. This context of uncertainty was exacerbated by the need for planners to operate and deliver the new policy reforms whilst simultaneously adapting to a 'localist' governance structure far removed from the previous regional 'spatial planning' approach that had been developing 2001-2010.

The NPPG steadily built-up from 2014 to cover over 50 core 'guidance' areas intended to supplement the NPPF. However, despite government recognition that they needed to further develop and explain their position on national policy, some SPs interpreted NPPG as '*policy through the back-door*'. They expressed practical concerns over its weight in decision-making given its less clearly defined material status in relation to the NPPF, which was already intended to be flexible and negotiable in practice. One main concern was that different planning inspectors had given different weight between 'core' national framework policy and practice 'guidance'. This led to the irony that certain parts of the planning system had actual become more uncertain and complicated as a result of policy consolidation and deregulation:

> *"I think my reflection on what happened in 2010, and I think it is probably fair to say that this in my view happens every-time there is a reform of planning, is that the government says that they are going to make it more straightforward, but what they actually do is make it more complicated…I think the National Planning Policy Framework was a good idea, I think it was a really good idea to streamline all the numerous planning guidance, regulations and all the rest of it at the national level…and of course that's fine, but then the one document proves not enough to be sufficient, so you then start to get lots of additional pieces of Planning Policy Guidance" (SP2, Rural, South East).*

> *"[W]hen the Coalition government said that they were going to look at planning and simplify it we thought thank goodness for that, but it hasn't happened has it [laughter]. Simplifying it in terms of permitted development, it may have made certain categories of development more permitted, but in terms of simplifying the process, it hasn't. And we have got a multitude of different notification processes, and some require prior notification and some don't, and some are time limited and some are not, so planning is ever more complicated" (SP5, Mixed, South West).*

> *"The NPPG, I don't know why they brought that in, because they had been simplifying all the planning guidance since the NPPF, and then to bring in the NPPG, which a lot of inspectors interpret as national policy as well, so it is just policy through the backdoor. So they had made a good step forward, and I think the NPPF is a good document and a good idea and worked well; but then they brought the NPPG which was another whole raft of requirements, which I don't think they really meant it to work that way, but that's what happened" (SP11, Major Urban, West Midlands).*

It was commonly acknowledged by the SPs that the evolution of the planning system in England since the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act had been quite settled for long periods of time, with big gaps between key pieces of legislation and amendments to the 1947 Act in 1947, 1971 and 1990. However, that this context of planning 'stability' had been changing since 2004, following which the temporal gaps between key policy reforms and legislative acts were becoming gradually and progressively shorter demonstrated by changes in 2004, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015 and 2016 respectively. This supports the planning literature that highlights the relationship between neoliberalism and increased attempts at planning reforms in the UK (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2013, Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014).

Indeed, for SP1, the planning system had changed from one characterised by '*relative stability*' to one permanently being subjected to '*a raft of changes*'; a practice context that made it difficult for planners to carefully plan for the development of their locality against the background of '*initiative overload*'. SPs understood the increasing reforms since 2004 as a symptom of a series of 'experimental' policy initiatives being implemented to try to tackle individual issues, without there being any real coherent government '*game plan*' for the overall objectives planning system beyond political '*blunt messages*' around the need to increase housing numbers and supporting growth. A situation that was exacerbated through the overarching aspatial and permissive NPPF that further perpetuated a context of uncertainty:

> *"There are all these series of different initiatives, but they are not a series of initiatives that fit into a blueprint of 'this is how we want all of these bits to work together'…[I]t goes back to there being this lack of a sense of what we are doing as a country, and as a country what we want from our planning system. And the fact that governments of whatever colour it is [political ideology] have to keep on coming back and changing it tends to suggest that they don't really know, and they are just in initiative overdrive" (SP1, Urban, South East).*

What made this context worse, to the frustration of SPs, was concerns that their professional views were being superficially requested by the government through consultations on reform; however, that their inputs were not being given due consideration because policy objectives had been predetermined:

> *"It feels again that things are happening too quickly. The consultations that we have had recently, no sooner has one consultation finished, then the technical consultation is out on things that were in the previous consultation. Well, you can't tell me that you [government] are going to give due consideration to things when you have already made you mind up and coming out with a technical consultation" (SP16, Mixed, West Midlands).*

This supports the literature that the Coalition Government (CG) had already decided the broad policy direction they wanted planning reforms to take to 'fix' the system; roughly the deregulation of planning, but whilst maintaining some core mechanisms to support growth, heritage and greenbelt preservation

and community engagement. However, they needed to give the impression that their approach to reform was based on professional consultation as an 'evidence-base', regardless of how such evidence was actually used in national policy formation. One way this can be explained is through post-political theory (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012) as an attempt by elite actors to manufacture 'consensus' and control the discourse on planning.

Furthermore, government claims that the NPPF would 'free' planners from thousands of pages of onerous policy regulation and allow them to adopt approaches more suited to their local development context is misleading; drawing on depoliticisation theory (Burnham, 2001, Foster et al., 2014), these reforms did not necessarily mean or translate into *less* national government control over local planning:

> *"[T]he whole tenure of the changes then, through the National Planning Policy Framework, were supposed to be about simplification of the planning system, and initially it did seem to do very much that. But unsurprisingly, again where something is not quite well articulated you have to interpret that through the National Planning Practice Guidance that came out, and then of course inevitably in case law as well. So I don't think really it has changed the whole tenure of planning at all, in that we are still subject to government controls over planning in one guise or another, but now in large part with things being decided through case law. And that includes things like judicial reviews, and I would say appeals as well; because we have had a lot of planning by appeal to test out elements of the National Planning Policy Framework and the Guidance" (SP9, Mixed, West Midlands).*

Here SP9 keenly notes how planning is still subjected to government control, but that the nature of this control is less direct/explicit and being conducted/managed/enforced by other actors; such as in the development industry (further empowered through a favourable pro-development policy environment) and legal system tasked with interpreting and upholding national policy for plan-making and appeals. So whilst the deregulated and localist approach to governing ostensibly appeared to stand in contrast to New Labour's more direct forms of control through strict national audit and performance target systems, under the CG state power was enacted more subtly 'at a distance'. The overall 'rules of the game' were still being controlled by central government post-2010, but planners and stakeholders now had slightly improved scope to work within and through the more flexible planning framework. In other words, drawing on governmentality theory (Foucault et al., 2008), planner's 'conduct of conduct' was still being 'governed' (towards acting 'responsibly' according to neoliberal ideology), but now within a policy context that rhetorical espoused 'empowerment' through greater individual and local freedom and autonomy. In this way, the NPPF and localism agenda formed a structural context that paradoxically both heavily constrained planning agency whilst also opening up new spaces for autonomous action.

This marked the complexity and double-edged sword of the NPPF and localism agenda for planners, they ostensibly had more room for manoeuvre but were still limited within the confines of national policy. Indeed, for Allmendinger and Haughton (2014, p. 48), the CG approach to national planning policy was '*presented rhetorically as a mechanism that empowers local actors, yet it also creates an obscured policy space within which different interpretations of the Big Society can be projected: the NPPF is both a product of and a process through which post-political planning operates*'. In this sense, whilst the NPPF arguably achieved its aims of simplifying policy, placing greater emphasis on pro-development and preservation objectives and increasing the scope for community decision-making in planning, its (perhaps deliberate) ambiguity meant that planning and development practices became subject to a 'free-for-all' where everything is potentially negotiable within the flexible and interpretive framework of national policy. This meant that the NPPF could be interpreted differently by stakeholders to support divergent planning positions at the local scale and in relation to the same local policy/project.

For SPs, the development of Local Plans, and managing their implementation, is an extremely resource and time intensive activity; however, such planning activity is justified on the basis that planning in England is still regulated according to a 'plan-led' system (Parker and Doak, 2012). Paragraph 12 of the NPPF reaffirmed the government commitment to this approach by stating that '*[t]his National Planning Policy Framework does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Proposed development that accords with an up-to-date Local Plan should be approved, and proposed development that conflicts should be refused unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. It is highly desirable that local planning authorities should have an up-to-date plan in place*'. However, despite the claimed primary role of Local Plans in national policy, SPs argued that challenges based on the presumption, five-year supply, objectively assessed need, viability and neighbourhood plans could routinely clash, appeal, modulate or override their LPA development plans and polices. This has challenged the professional status of planning/planners as the flexible, interpretive, and negotiable nature of the NPPF provides greater scope for a variety of different interpretations and understandings of the *meanings* and *weight* behind national and local policies:

> *"You know, we have gone from the mountains of guidance and specific details to a much slimmer version of that, which again leads people to different interpretations of things. So again it is much more of a mine field than it [planning system] was historically…So it is much more complex scene, I think, in that period [2010-15]. And I suppose expectations have gone up, in terms of a lot more people are expecting to have very detailed explanations of the decision-making process, the technicalities behind it, everybody is almost an 'armchair planner'. You know, 'Actually my interpretation of the NPPF is different to yours, so my view is just as valid as anyone else's'. So I think it has sort of opened up the conversation about planning, which has been quite challenging" (SP6, Rural, South East).*

This has opened up space for greater contestation and debate between different actors, primarily LPAs, developers, environmentalists and local communities. This new policy landscape may be welcomed by a range of planning theorist for different reasons; for collaborative planning theorist the opening-up of (networked) stakeholders to negotiate an agreed position would be a positive intervention (Healey, 2003, Booher and Innes, 2002), whilst agonistic planning theorist value the contestation and conflict as a necessary prerequisite to protect democratic decision-making (Hillier, 2003, McClymont, 2011). In this respect, whilst the CG post-2010 reforms have meant that the professional status and role of (the traditional 'rational') planners is now more susceptible to competing expectations, interpretations and stakeholder interests as a result of the system being 'opened-up' under the NPPF and localism, the jury is still out on whether this represents a positive or negative intervention in the context of neoliberalism.

Such practice changes are important because the 'plan-led' system approach is based on the normative understanding that 'good planning' involves professional planners having a certain degree of influence over the types and locations of developments, as a means to regulate their local impacts and manage broader concerns for sustainability and interests; however, rather than being empowered, LG planners expressed that these national policy reforms had served to undermine their local policy and practices:

> *"I think the other thing the NPPF has done is actually take a lot of flexibility away from local planning authorities; because one of the things that is really evident to me is that in many, many circumstances the NPPF trumps local policy. We had a situation in [local authority] recently where we had an application that was recommended for refusal by officers, refused by members, then went to appeal. And when the inspector's decision came through it read as though it was going to be appeal dismissed, because the inspector agreed with many of our judgements about the planning merits of our case. But almost at the end of the decision letter he said, "However, I believe this is a sustainable site, and therefore in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework I am going to allow the appeal". So I know that the councillors, both here and at [neighbouring local authority], are of the view that, you know, in many instances it does not actually matter what decision they make, because an inspector is going to come along and give the NPPF far more weight than they give local policies and grant planning permission" (SP2, Rural, South East).*

In this context, the strength of their Local Plan and/or policy-base was a source of anxiety for planners, particularly given the potential to succumb to 'planning by appeal'. It was acknowledged that local policy now needed to be 'robust' enough to withstand both high levels of technical scrutiny and legal challenges from developers as well as political opposition and resistance from their local communities, particularly over housing land supply calculations and allocated figures. These tensions gained greatest expression as the 'chasm' between government national policy and local planning on the ground:

"As soon as somebody says, "We have got this idea to streamline and speed up the planning system", I can guarantee you now the two things it will not do is streamline and speed up the planning system; because planning is really complicated. And if somebody says, "I'm going to streamline something", it means they are trying to cut a corner somewhere, and planning is something that has got legal challenges at every corner…whatever system we operate, it has got to be bomb proof, it has got to be capable of being beserked to the point of High Court of Appeal type of challenges that you are going to get from the Gladmans of this world. If the system isn't robust enough, or we end up producing a Local Plan that is based on some sort of Memorandum of Understanding from a Combined Authority, but actually that isn't worth anything, it's like standing on sand isn't it. So I think that is the big thing that is missing for me, there is this huge gap between government setting law and the NPPF, all the guidance, and the rest of it, and what they do in [neighbouring council], for example, is a massive, massive jump" (SP23, Rural, Yorkshire and the Humber).

"[T]he other big issue I think is that there is this wish, or instruction should we say, that councils will produce Local Plans in a timely manner, and the whole process has just gotten more and more complicated. And when I see the lists of evidence that we as a local planning authority have to produce to back up our Local Plans it really is no wonder that it takes such a long time for a Local Plan to be produced. Because again if you don't have solid evidence you are going to get torn to pieces at an examination by the development industry or by those that oppose your plan" (SP2, Rural, South East).

"The importance of the certainty of the Local Plan is something…we really prided ourselves on, because we have seen neighbouring authorities who have for whatever reason found it difficult to get a Local Plan in place. They have had five-year land supply issues and had to deal with unwanted applications in unwanted locations and choose very carefully their battles with Section 78 appeals. We have certainly seen them approve applications on or near the boundary with us and we know they have done it because they know they won't stand a chance at appeal; and they haven't got the resources to put into arguing an appeal. So that lack of certainty is really key, and the more destabilising of the Local Plan process then the more that uncertainty starts to rule, then you get 'planning by appeal'" (SP16, Mixed, West Midlands).

A number of SPs also raised a counter-argument to the government and developer claims of increased costs, risk and uncertainty for development projects where an LPA lacks a Local Plan, stating that the development industry could often use that as an opportunity to exploit the planning permission system:

"So the fact that we have not got a Local Plan in place has meant that for the development industry there is a window of opportunity to exploit to get the planning permissions but not necessarily deliver them…we have still got 8,000 planning permissions with permission but they [developers] haven't started yet, because there will be a finite resource to how much they want to flood the market because they are protecting their own interests. So, you know, we could be churning out planning permissions but they will still only deliver onto the market what they think the market will bear without their price share plummeting because there is too much choice. So it is supply and demand" (SP6, Rural, South East).

The next part moves on to further examine the impacts of wider national planning policy deregulations on the (perceived) capacities of planners to shape development through their professional practices.

4.1.2 Planning Policy Deregulations and Professional Practices

This section further examines planning policy deregulations in the form of *development viability* and *permitted development rights* and argues that these policy structures serve to curtail planning agency.

The formal introduction of development viability into national planning policy through the NPPF as a 'material consideration' was originally claimed as a policy tool to stimulate national economic growth following the 2008 GFC; primarily through easing the planning obligations and policy commitments placed on a fragile and recovering development industry, so that marginal development projects could still be considered 'viable'. Crudely summarised, viability formed a specific temporal and contextual policy reaction to the need for economic recovery through reanimating the development sector in the UK; however, despite this specific 'crisis' policy justification and the subsequent economic recovery in the UK and development sector, viability has since become a permanent feature of the planning system.

It is argued here that viability has become 'normalised' because it is consistent with neoliberal ideology that seeks to remove state and social claims on market actors. Thus neoliberal elites in the UK, including the Cameron administrations, would have wanted to introduce this type of favourable policy context for the development sector on a permanent basis anyway regardless of the economic context because it fits closely with their governing ideology for state restructuring; however, political appeals to 'crisis' conditions allowed a form of statecraft that could justify such reforms as a legitimate intervention. Just as austerity policy has become embedded into the public sector (McBride, 2016), what started out as a 'crisis' strategy to restart a 'dead' development sector post-recession has become a mainstream practice hardwired into the planning system. This has further undermined local (plan) policy obligations.

The case is therefore made that the way viability has been practiced in this period has significantly curtailed planning agency, because one of the core roles of LA planning is to negotiate a financial or physical contribution from specified developments as a means to compensate for the impact(s) of granting permission for new development on the existing community. Such contributions typically take the form of affordable housing, infrastructure, or amenity space. The primary policy mechanisms for negotiating planning gain is through Section 106 Agreements (S106) and more recently the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). However, the elevation of viability concerns in national policy since 2010 have

effectively undermined the negotiating position of planners to secure public benefits from local developments. A central issue of contention is whether a 'policy compliant' level of planning obligations can be supported by a site-specific development whilst also ensuring 'acceptable' return on the project.

The NPPF Paragraph 173 sets out the LPA requirements for ensuring viability: '*Pursuing sustainable development requires careful attention to viability and costs in plan-making and decision-taking. Plans should be deliverable. Therefore, the sites and the scale of development identified in the plan should not be subject to such a scale of obligations and policy burdens that their ability to be developed viably is threatened. To ensure viability, the costs of any requirements likely to be applied to development, such as requirements for affordable housing, standards, infrastructure contributions or other requirements should, when taking account of the normal cost of development and mitigation, provide competitive returns to a willing land owner and willing developer to enable the development to be deliverable*' (p.41).

The academic literature on development viability assessments has raised concerns that developers have strategically used (or abused) viability policy to water-down planning conditions and obligations, or retrospectively renegotiate or renegade on previous permission agreements. Such 'strategies' have exploited the expertise asymmetries between well-resourced developers and austere LAs; through mobilising complex financial calculations, that are ostensibly legitimised by concealed commercially sensitive data, to manage and exploit negotiations with LPAs (Crosby et al., 2013, McAllister et al., 2016).

Additionally, the literature highlights that LPAs have little clear national guidance on how to conduct or scrutinise viability; there are no agreed metrics or hard-and-fast rules about what constitutes viability, particularly in relation to 'reasonable returns' to developers and land-owners and why projects without contribution are considered 'otherwise viable'. Furthermore, even the most accepted professional body definition by the Royal Institute of Charted Surveyors (RICS) present much room for subjectivity:

'*Development is viable when its value upon completion exceeds its cost by an amount sufficient to compensate the developer for the risk that is borne and the effort that is expended on the project*' (Crook et al., 2015, p.2).

'*An objective financial viability test of the ability of a development project to meet its costs including the cost of planning obligations, while ensuring an appropriate Site Value for the landowner and a market risk adjusted return to the developer in delivering that project…The fundamental issue in considering*

viability assessments in a town planning context is whether an otherwise viable development is made unviable by the extent of planning obligations or other requirements' (RICS, 2012, p.4 -10).

In this uncertain context, calculating and negotiating viability formed a key practice tension for the SPs; however, they also showed sympathy with the risks faced by developers. The general sentiment was summed up by SP7 as the challenges between not wanting to be a '*tax collector*' through planning contributions for (local) infrastructure that '*effectively the government should be paying for*', especially where the development industry and land values can't carry the cost of social provision; and being able to determine and secure the most appropriate form of contribution given the lack of standardisation:

> *"[W]e have been through a massive period of austerity, been through a massive stagnation in terms of development delivery, and I don't want to frustrate development by being a tax collector for infrastructure that effectively the government should be paying for…but what I don't want to be doing is actually maybe accepting a viability appraisal which allows a developer to get away without paying S106, and then he goes away and buys a better Bentley. So the nature of how you negotiate I guess is a complex one…it's a bit of a dark art to viability appraisals in terms of the assumptions that you put into them you can probably argue a lot of things; and I think that is another area of work that the government could help with by really standardising the nature of how we assess viability. I mean the answer to the question is every site is different, every developer is different, every client is different…and you are in a position where it is actually very difficult to say what is more important, a bit of public open space or an education contribution or an affordable housing contribution? Actually what is more important to me is a decent standard of development that is going to stand the test of time, that is well designed and decent quality. And then there needs to be other ways of providing that social infrastructure, the development industry can't carry it, the values can't carry it" (SP7, Urban, East Midlands).*

Viability particularly strengthened the hands of developers given the wider context of austerity and pro-development policy reforms. In the context of austerity, LPAs desperate for development as a means to generate 'growth-based' revenues and financial self-sufficiency were in a very weak position to hold out and negotiate policy-complaint levels of planning obligation, with a number being forced to waive contributions in many cases '*simply to get things built*'. As SP39 explains, "*we don't have affordable housing anyway, because essentially it is negotiated away through viability*" (Major Urban, North West).

Overall, viability presented a key practice challenge for all of the PMs to varying degrees, however, they were most acutely felt in LPAs with weak market conditions and high social needs. These cases struggled with the balancing act between waiving planning contributions as a means to stimulate much needed development and future revenues in the form of New Homes Bonus and council taxes, whilst trying to secure any community benefits from otherwise economically marginal development projects. This key

issue resulted in some 'low value' LPAs training staff in development economics to strengthen their negotiating position, despite the wider practice narrative of needing to also have realistic expectations:

> *"[I]n the depth of the recession…for the first couple of years we didn't get any, or we got very little, affordable housing as part of S106 agreements. But because viability is such a critical issue for us, we took a decision four years ago to train-up two or three officers on development economics….[we] take a firmer line on viability but not being unreasonable. We just challenge the developers' profits and challenge the landowner's expectations…the North-East market context just being a little bit different because of viability and because of the need for the public sector to work with development…that means that you have to think slightly different around potentially market-led approaches and thinking around viability and how can you get benefits from development really…a real message for us that we have to remember that viability is more challenging in [council] and that impacts upon what you can actually deliver as part of development (SP33, Rural, North East).*

Critically, the argument here is not that the development industry could bear the costs and deliver the necessary infrastructure requirements of localities; the enormous cost of infrastructure improvements and new provision is altogether of national concern, and all built environment actors are facing a tough position to fund even their own projects. Rather the evidence suggests that *LPAs are in a weaker position to negotiate planning contributions on behalf of their communities' post-2010 because of viability considerations,* and this has changed the practice culture of planners to adopting a more 'pragmatic' approach to development. This is particularly the case given the reductions in funding from central government and the need to demonstrate five-year land supply and objectively assessed need as material considerations (that are open to legal challenge by developers). The combination of these factors that together undermine obligations created widespread concerns for the SPs about how large infrastructure projects and public amenities will be funded in the future. Following neoliberal theory, national government have downloaded responsibility and risk for infrastructure and amenity provision to the local scale private developers and public planners (and onto communities through localism).

Ironically, the shift towards planners having to accept more development and grant more permissions, but whilst not necessarily being able to deliver any greater infrastructure or affordable housing directly, means that securing more development consents becomes less important to planners for 'public interest' reasons although more important for financial and material reasons. It is not the case that Section 106 (or CIL) is less important to planners, but rather that these obligations are routinely being overridden or ignored based on viability claims and national policy pressures to deliver development. Arguably, the absence of strong national and regional government support post-2010 has left a number of localities to fend for themselves in negotiating provision more akin to the US (Davies and Pill, 2012).

Overall, the argument is made that viability transfers power from the public planner to the private developer within the development process; therefore, it can be conceptualised as a form of external neoliberalisation that is imposed on planners by the state to accept (yield to) market conditions as a key factor in planning decision-making. This is crucial because the planning system and planners are disempowered when facilitating developments with an absence of public infrastructure or affordable housing is considered a 'sustainable' approach to development in national policy (Rydin, 2013).

This period also witnessed more general planning policy deregulation through changes to the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO), shaping what Use Classes Order (UCO) changes legally constitute 'development' and therefore require planning permission. The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) puts uses of land and buildings into various categories known as 'Use Classes' (Planning Portal). The Use Classes Order specifies groups of uses within which a change of use does not constitute development and is therefore permissible without planning permission. For example, different categories can change within A1 without the need for planning permission, but they cannot change to any of the other Use Classes B, C, D or *Sui Generis* (see table 6 for an overview).

The Secretary of State has the provision to make a GPDO for advance 'permitted development rights' for use class changes, which constitute development but do not require permission because it is already granted by the GPDO. Relevant to this research, the 2013 GPDO 'office-to-residential' permitted development rights focussed on providing easier use class conversion from office blocks to housing units to tackle undersupply. Again, such national policy attempts to increase efficiency and speed through deregulation of the planning process raised a number of potential practical issues for planners.

SP responses to the changes to 'Permitted Development Rights' (herein PDRs) were generally mixed; typically depending on the existing office stock supply and demand, as well as overall housing supply and values within their LA. Councils with high land and development values particularly expressed concerns that PD was making it harder to defend employment land from conversion to residential units. There was also evidence of rural-urban variation, with rural areas concerned about becoming 'dormitory' if they lost too much employment to housing, and urban areas similarly concerned about the balance between the number of job opportunities and residential offering within their boundaries.

Table 6 – Guide to the Use Classes Order in England

USE CLASS	DESCRIPTION	PERMITTED CHANGE
A1 SHOPS	Shops, post offices, travel agencies & ticket agencies, hairdressers, funeral directors & undertakers, domestic hire shops, dry cleaners, internet cafés, sandwich bars (where sandwiches or other cold food are to be consumed off the premises)	No permitted change*
A2 FINANCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES	Financial services: banks, building societies & bureau de change Professional services (other than health or medical services): estate agents & employment agencies Other services which it is appropriate to provide in a shopping area: betting shops (where the services are provided principally to visiting members of the public)	Permitted change to A1 (where there is a ground floor display window*
A3 RESTAURANTS AND CAFES	Restaurants & cafés (i.e. places where the primary purpose is the sale and consumption of food and light refreshment on the premises) - this excludes internet cafés which are now A1	Permitted change to A1 or A2*
A4 PUBS AND BARS	Public houses, wine bars or other drinking establishments (i.e. premises where the primary purpose is the sale and consumption of alcoholic drinks on the premises)	Permitted change to A1, A2 or A3*
A5 HOT FOOD TAKEAWAY	Hot food take-aways (i.e. premises where the primary purpose is the sale of hot food to take-away)	Permitted change to A1, A2 or A3*

USE CLASS	DESCRIPTION	PERMITTED CHANGE
B1 BUSINESS	a) Offices, other than a use within Class A2 (Financial and Professional Services) b) Research and development of products or processes c) Light industry	B1(a) change to C3 residential** Up to 500 sqm permitted change to B8 Over 500 sqm no permitted change*
B2 GENERAL INDUSTRY	General industry: use for the carrying out of an industrial process other than one falling in class B1	Up to 500 sqm permitted change to B1 or B8 Over 500 sqm permitted change to B1 only
B8 STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION	Use for storage or distribution centre including outdoor storage	Up to 500 sqm permitted change to B1 Over 500 sqm no permitted change
C1 HOTELS	Use as a hotel, boarding house or guesthouse, where no significant element of care is provided	No permitted change
C2 RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS	Hospital, nursing home or residential school, college or training centre where they provide residential accommodation and care to people in need of care (other than those within C3 dwellings)	No permitted change
C2a SECURE RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS	Use for a provision of secure residential accommodation, including use as a prison, young offenders institution, detention centre, secure training centre, custody centre, short term holding centre, secure hospital, secure local authority accommodation or use as a military barracks	No permitted change

USE CLASS	DESCRIPTION	PERMITTED CHANGE
C3 DWELLINGS	Use as a dwelling (whether or not as a sole or a main residence and whether or not building contains one or multiple dwellings) by: a) a single person or people living together as a family, or b) up to six people living together as a single household and receiving care c) up to six people living together as a single household	Permitted change to C4
C4 HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION	Shared dwelling houses occupied by between 3 - 6 unrelated individuals, as their only or main residence, who share basic amenities such as kitchen or bathroom	Permitted change to C3
D1 NON-RESIDENTIAL INSTITUTIONS	Clinics & health centres, crèches, day nurseries & day centres, museums, public libraries, art galleries & exhibition halls, law courts, non-residential education & training centres, places of worship, religious instruction & church halls	No permitted change*
D2 ASSEMBLY & LEISURE	Cinema, concert hall, bingo hall, dance hall, swimming bath, skating rink, gymnasium, or area for indoor or outdoor sports or recreation (not involving motor vehicles or firearms)	No permitted change
SUI GENERIS	Uses which do not fall within any use class, including (not exhaustive): theatres, nightclubs, casinos, retail warehouse clubs, amusement arcades, launderettes, larger HMOs than C4, petrol filling stations and motor car showrooms	Casinos permitted change to D2 Otherwise no permitted change

* Two year flexible change to A1, A2, A3 or B1 available up to 150 sqm

** Subject to prior notice process, some excluded areas, change must occur before 30 May 2016

(Source: Pure Town Planning Online, 2018).

PMs generally expressed two overall concerns in relation to the need for some regulatory 'control'. Firstly, the potential loss of control over employment. In rural LPAs, planners expressed fears that places that lose too much employment land to residential will become dormitory, placing greater strain on local infrastructure and congestion as people commute outside the area for work. As well as the issues around creating isolated developments within the settlement hierarchy and poor landscape impacts:

"[W]e have a fair amount of pressure for employment land, and yet we also have permitted development rights coming in that will allow that employment land to be used for residential without us really having any control over it" (SP2, Rural, South East).

"The biggest impact of permitted development is, given our patch is largely rural, all the changes of use particularly farm buildings and others to dwellings; actually, that has had quite an impact on our rural areas and our landscape. It has helped deliver because we have had tens of them, but they are generally remote locations" (SP18, Rural, East England).

The need to protect industry and employment was also clear for urban authorities, although for slightly different reasons. It was argued that change of land-use applications are rarely refused unless there are strong planning justification for doing so, such as the need to separate industrial and residential uses:

"It's a nonsense really of an idea [Permitted Development], and it is sort of based on this myth they [government] have that we refuse change of use applications, when we have permitted probably over 270 hectares of industrial land for housing. You know, again we hardly ever refuse stuff unless it's bang next to a major employment area, when obviously you are trying to safeguard some of the big businesses in [city]…these are big companies, like Jaguar for God sakes. So if somebody pitched up and put houses next to them under permitted development and they start complaining, we will be the first ones to get a load of grief…they [government] are taking away control, and I don't think that the ideas are bad, but they just don't hit the right spot" (SP11, Major Urban, West Midlands).

Secondly, PMs were concerned with the loss of control over the size, quality and affordable provision of the new residential units converted from offices. Indeed, SP36 explained that even though they were already keen to promote office-to-residential conversions in the city, the '*process of sustainability*' for affordable housing and space standards was enough to deter developers from taking on such projects. The outcome was that PD deregulation improved housing delivery in the city, but at a social cost that undermined the commitment to 'sustainable development' concerns in local policy and developments:

"In some ways, the office to residential was something that did click, so before that came in I remember thinking, 'Well that's not going to make much difference in [city] because we're very pro that anyway'. We were very pro office to residential from a policy point of view. But what I hadn't appreciated is by our insistence on affordable housing, space standards and having to go through the process of sustainability, that process was enough for developers to think 'not sure'. As soon as the government took that [regulation] off, actually there was a lot of interest to do it. So that was an interesting one for me, that one did make a difference in [city], but only at the cost of the quality of the housing being built and the affordability. But in terms of numbers, yeah, it did contribute about 1,000 extra [residential] units…The issue for us was the fact that we had no control over the size of it, the quality of it, or the affordable housing. That was the issue. It was nothing about the loss of the commercial per se" (SP36, Urban, South West).

Concerns over the quality of the new residential units converted from former office blocks, and the ability to control the terms of conversion, highlights the nature of local policy deregulation in practice:

> *"We never really had a problem with losing that office stock [to residential], but what we tried to do is ensure that as it was lost, we provided smaller but higher quality accommodation, because that is what would meet the needs…we have seen flats built next to night clubs, which are just a recipe for disaster in terms of noise disturbance, because you weren't able to get any sleep. We have had certain ones where we have had to serve prohibition notices on them. We have certain flats that have been built with no natural light. So some flats have been built, not far from here actually, in the basement of a former office development, and their only outside light is through a skylight that links up three stories above. So if you don't want any sunlight and very, very little natural light, there's flat that are being built to service that need. We also have ones with no provision for refuse, or bike storage, or anything like that. I'm all for increasing housing supply, it's chronic, we are not building enough houses; I don't think anybody is going to argue with that, but is building shit housing really part of the solution?" (SP35, Urban, East England).*

For these planning professionals, whilst the moderate increase in housing units facilitated by PDRs were generally welcomed in the context of needing to demonstrate supply, the broad sentiment was that the overall contribution of such policies to addressing housing undersupply were viewed as negligible in relation to the potential costs to the quality of urban environments and additional process complexity:

> *"In my view, these things [office-to-residential PD] cause far more harm than good; because they make no meaningful indent in terms of the overall numbers, but what actually they can do on the ground, on a case-by-case basis, is they can really start to mess up your townscape. And the creation of a place, or keeping a place as a place, when you can get huge imbalances and inappropriate uses in inappropriate locations…It's making certain individuals a lot of money. It is not really tackling the housing crisis in any meaningful way, but it is having a real impact in terms of the impact of the environment and the place" (SP13, Urban, East Midlands).*

> *"I have some sympathy in terms of doing whatever we can to up the delivery of housing, but I'm not convinced…the PD stuff, which sounds good in principle, but actually in terms of scale the problem we have got is absolutely huge for the delivery of housing. So allowing farmers to convert the odd barn or permitted development offices to residential is a tiny solution to a huge problem, and actually all the added complexity and wasted hours debating it are such that it doesn't justify" (SP5, Mixed, South West).*

Notwithstanding the practice understanding that there was *some form of housing crisis in England*, such piecemeal deregulatory housing policies to boost supply were understood as tinkering around edges of the wider problems in the system rather than tackling housing issues head on in any meaningful way.

In sum, the professional agency of planners to shape places is curtailed under viability conditions and PDRs enacted as external government policy neoliberalisations. Thus the Cameron-led approach in this period can be crudely summarised as '*less planning, more development*' (Gurran and Ruming, 2016).

4.1.3 Boosting Planning 'Performance': Delivering Speed or Outcomes?

This section continues the arguments developed in the previous two sections on national policy reform and deregulation by arguing that the 'speed' of the planning application process is a poor measure of planning 'performance' when compared with the quality and sustainability of the new developments being produced; countering the neoliberal logic that efficiency is the key objective of planning reform.

Overall, SPs expressed the view that, despite the government fixation, planning application decision-making speed was often an '*artificial measure*' of performance. The main arguments made by the PMs for this position were that; 1) decision-making speed does not automatically provide any guarantee of quality of outcome; 2) that a council's permission/application refusal ratings would provide a more appropriate measure of performance; and 3) that decision speed/target systems often led to 'perverse' consequences and 'cheating' that distorted the actually quality of the service that was being provided:

> *"[Decision-making speed] that is a very artificial measure, in my view…I can remember the old days of Planning Delivery Grant where decision was king; refusal, grant, split-decision or whatever, but decision was king on that day. So our refusal percentage was significantly higher then than it is now, but we got it out on time. You talk to an applicant, a developer, an agent, "Were you happy with your service?". Well you got your refusal within seven weeks and six days, so that's great, isn't it? We are ticking our box. "Well, no, because I got a refusal". Or authorities that were issuing letters which were basically saying withdraw it or we will refuse it, which is Hobson's choice. Again, a) that is not a service, and b) that is not what people want and that isn't what development is about. So the speed thing, all the developers that I have spoken to, on major applications if you say, "Would you rather have a decision within 13 weeks that could be either way, or we can just carry on working with you to get an approval which might take 16 weeks", they will all take that one without fail. It is just such an artificial measure" (SP13, Urban, East Midlands).*

> *"[T]he government's approach to measurements by performance is absolutely time based, and is a very poor measure of performance in my view…The objective of the customer is to get to the point where they can build something, and that isn't always the most efficiently achieved by just the fastest bit of paper i.e. permission. Many of our applications are built within 22 days, because that is the minimum that it can be done in, so well inside any government target; but many of our applications are considerably over the government target because that is the right thing to do with that particular application, and it's foolish to try and do it quicker than is in anyone's interest" (SP15, Urban, West Midlands).*

There was a clear tension for SPs between meeting the imposed national targets for processing an application and making a decision (speed) and achieving the best quality of decision and a positive outcome for the applicant, mediated by a professional concern with '*getting it right*'. As such, PMs embraced the importance of speed as part of providing an efficient 'customer service' so that development could happen, but strongly rejected that it was the most important factor in the process.

The general sentiment was summed by SP2 that, "*I have never disagreed with the idea that we should deal with planning applications as quickly as we possibly can, but I will always argue that speed does not always necessarily lead to quality*" (Rural, South East). For them, planning performance agreements (PPAs) were an important tool to mitigate these speed/outcome practice tensions because they put "*a sensible timescale to major developments that are so important to get right*" and counter-act the "*lack of reality in central government around the complexity of dealing with major planning applications*". SP2 highlighted this point through the example of a strategic housing site for 2,350 homes that had to be processed according to a nine-month PPA; "*we are talking about a major, major site on the edge of the biggest town in the Cotswold district, and it's really important that we get that right and don't just end up with another faceless housing estate on the side of a historic market town*" (Rural, South East).

Professional understandings of 'place-making' (RTPI), and value of maintaining the historical and design character of existing areas through new developments, are the most significant factors for planners rather than speed of determination. These tensions over speed and outcomes highlight the competing priorities and interests of built environment stakeholders that together need to mobilise their different resources, knowledge and skills in the development process (Healey, 1992, Adams and Tiesdell, 2012).

The PMs strongly argued that the speed of the planning application process was not the main or only problem, making the case that rather than obsessing over speed, the government should focus more on "*the percentage of applications approved as the measure of success*" (SP 13, Urban, East Midlands). In this respect it is more important for the government to try and understand the issues behind and reasons why a particular LPA has a prevalent high permission refusal rates; "*[t]here are many other things that should be focused on, for example there are still many authorities who are absolutely awful at actually accepting that the growth is happening and properly planning for it, I would much prefer to see planning authorities judged on their ability to do that*" (SP15, Urban, West Midlands). For these SPs, the government was looking for solutions in the 'wrong places', with levels of (eventual) positive determination being a more suitable measure of performance. However, the PMs acknowledged that speed was consistently given prominence over quality as a metric by government because speed can

be quantitatively measured to form statistical performance indicators and used to compare LPAs; whereas a 'qualitative' measure of planning decision-making performance would be far more complex:

> *"I can see why government are doing it [focussing on application speed as the best planning performance indicator], if you are measuring something nationally, it is very difficult to do it on a more qualitative basis" (SP15, Urban, West Midlands).*

> *"[T]his has been a bugbear for years now, I don't know who is telling the government that speed is all important. Every time we talk to applicants, whether they be your local agents, your individuals, your majors, the one thing they all want is a favourable outcome. Why wouldn't you? If you have invested a lot of money in an application the last thing you want is a quick decision for refusal. So we have always sought to work with applicants to get the right decision for them. Not just get a quick decision. But it is the easy thing to measure; that is the trouble, speed is the easy thing to measure. It is very difficult to measure the quality of the decision. But here we are again, you know, with government changes based around speed, I'm not seeing the evidence that that is the important thing. It is perceived to be, but I'm not sure it is…we want to be one of the best performing authorities, but also we want to get it right…not just doing things quickly" (SP16, Mixed, West Midlands).*

These practice-based accounts underscore the long-standing tension between '*process*' and '*outcomes*' in planning theory (Fainstein and Campbell, 2012). They question the government's desire to measure planning 'quantitatively' through statistics and an '*instrumental rationality*' model, as opposed to more political/technical qualitative '*value-based*' judgements that are more difficult to objectively measure. The main arguments presented here is the pragmatic need to give both process (speed) and outcomes (quality) due decision-making weight, regardless of the prevailing national policy and target framework. In practice, however, this is difficult for planners working under neoliberal reforms that distrusts the local state and seeks to either control them through targets or bypass them through policy deregulation.

Furthermore, SPs also argued that basing planning performance only on speed often led to '*cheating*', '*odd behaviour*' and '*perverse*' decision-making in practice. In this context, the case was made that '*creative practices*' were often used to stall the process until the application deadlines, which resulted in higher refusals levels and reduced negotiations/extensions as a means to simply meet the targets:

> *"[I]t was very clear that, you know, the whole thing about targets was that targets make you cheat; and actually what was happening was most of our determinations were happening on day 56, so in terms of the planning officers dealing with their caseloads they were leaving them all until the eighth week [deadline]. Now whether they could have determined them much sooner than that, but it was all on day 56, so there was a huge peak of decision-making activity" (SP6, Rural, South East).*

> *"[T]hose authorities that tend to get to the top of the government's performance table…they work in a specific sort of way and it works for them. It means they perform very well statistically, but they also get a lot of very odd behaviours and a lot of waste in their systems, or a huge amount of inefficiency at the same time; because they have a much higher level of refusals, they have a much higher level of withdrawn applications, and they have overall much less customer satisfaction. And that demand in the system just gets re-looped and re-fed back into the system elsewhere" (SP15, Urban, West Midlands).*

> *"There used to be all manner of creative practices which we had go on to get things done in eight weeks; everything from stopping the clock when you were negotiating something, through to not starting it at the beginning of the process, through to effectively not signing the decision notice on the day the decisions were actually made. It was all perverse outcomes of chasing a target that was eight weeks, but none of the outcomes, I don't think anybody would have signed up to any of the outcomes being a preferable outcome…It feels like a bit of a throwback to the 'bad old days' of the [New Labour] 'best value' indicators and, you know, the old eight week targets that just produced perverse decision making. Yes, you have a quick decision and get refused, but you get a quick decision. Well, how does that serve anybody?" (SP16, Mixed, West Midlands).*

Overall, these practice accounts highlight the problems with excessive government focus on 'process' through decision-making speed and efficiency as the measures of effective planning performance, that need to be achieved through continuous reforms, against planning outcomes based on *professionalism*:

'*Any tightening of the time taken to determine planning applications seems to reduce the capacity for local authority planners to negotiate, consult, mediate and conduct the activities which allow them to add value to the DM process through notions of professional expertise. Indeed, the exercise of such discretionary judgement (apparently in pursuit of wider public goals) is seen as intrinsically linked to the notions of planning's professionalism in the UK*' (Clifford, 2016, p. 385-6).

Despite acknowledgment across the board that speed and efficiency are important factors for providing a planning 'service', the desire for good quality planning outcomes linked to planners professional skills, such as high quality design standards, as well as reaching an acceptable positive determination for the client, was viewed as far more important to PMs than the time taken to make a decision on an application. Therefore the abolition of the performance-based audit and target systems for LG/LPAs by the Coalition can be viewed as a positive reform to planning under localism; however, the overarching central government demand for 'speed' and 'efficiency' has not changed post-2010. Instead different carrot-and-stick incentives have replaced the previous formalised targets, such as the threat of an LPA being placed into 'special measures' for consistently missing speed targets over a two year period. Thus successive UK governments have given 'process' prominence in the form of LPAs processing a planning application in 8 weeks for a 'minor' and 13 weeks for a 'major' application; despite the local evidence

that suggests this measure of performance does not necessarily lead to the best 'outcomes', both for the developers that want a positive decision and the LPAs to 'shape places' (Adams and Tiesdell, 2012).

Overall, the findings from the three main parts in this section (4.1.1, 4.1.2 and 4.1.3) have demonstrated that; 1) SPs viewed the principle of the NPPF as a positive attempt to simplify the planning system; however, that in practice this simplification led to increased policy uncertainty and greater challenges to planning professionalism from stakeholders as the planning system had become more flexible, interpretative and negotiable; 2) LPAs and planners are in a weaker position to negotiate planning gains with developers on behalf of their communities' post-2010 because of viability considerations; 3) the small potential pay-offs of piecemeal planning deregulations were viewed as far outweighed by the harm such policies could cause to localities; and 4) the speed of the planning application process is a poor measures of planning performance when compared with the quality and sustainability of the new developments being produced. These practice-based criticisms revolved around professional, technical and public interest planning concerns, such as for sustainability, design and communities. The main argument here, returning to Ellis (2015), is that national policy deregulations/targets means planning is less powerful in relation to the market and so offers fewer opportunities for planners to make progressive interventions and counter neoliberal reforms that seek to water-down their professional autonomy, skills and objectives. Together these structures clearly delineate the boundaries of agency.

In practice, this structural context of pro-development national planning policy reform, deregulation and performance had the potential to clash with the parallel and wider public sector governing strategy of 'localism'. The next section therefore moves on to examine the experiences and responses of PMs to developing forms of 'community' and 'economic' localism in relation to planning practices post-2010.

4.2 Practicing Community and Economic Localism Post-2010

RQ2) *What has localism meant in practice for local planning authorities and their relationships with local communities?*

RQ3) *What have national planning policy reforms and localism post-2010 meant in practice for the economic and collaborative approaches of LPAs to strategic planning and housing policy and delivery?*

This section is subdivided into four main parts on *localism* and *Local Planning Authorities* (4.2.1), *Local Communities* (4.2.2), *Strategic Planning* (4.2.3) and *Housing Delivery* (4.2.4) respectively. The rationale

for this focus is that together these represent and encompass the key change areas for planning practices under the latest forms of community and economic scalar governance and localism post-2010.

4.2.1 Localism and Local Planning Authorities

This section examines how the PMs have experienced governance under localism in relation to their LPA. Overall, the main criticisms of localism by the practitioners follows the literature that the rhetoric and claims of local 'empowerment' did not match the reality of how the Coalition Government actually implemented localism as a policy post-2010. This research does not discuss the previous New Labour brand of 'New Localism' but acknowledges that the principle of 'localism' as a governing approach had been gathering momentum within Westminster over the past few decades, and increasingly received cross party and sectoral support as a necessary counterbalance to the legacy of centralism in UK politics.

Firstly, the planning literature warns that such abstract and malleable concepts as 'localism' can support political agendas as 'empty signifiers'; similar to 'spatial planning', 'urban renaissance', 'sustainable development', 'smart growth' etc., which can be suitably stretched and adjusted to give various meanings and legitimacy to a wide range of specific policy programmes as needed. In practice, coalition localism can be explained as the continued use of post-political terminology by government to achieve broad appeal and capture a breadth/diversity of policy; that is it can be conceptualised as a "cloak" to wrap around a package of reform measures that support specific agendas within these broad principles.

In other words, '*the very fuzziness of the word 'localism' and all the baggage that surrounds it renders it a quintessentially post-political term. Localism is a feel good term that is hard to argue against and it therefore becomes difficult to refute policies that are said to be founded upon it, rendering opposition difficult to mobilise*' (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2014, p. 49). When evaluating localism in this context it is worth drawing on DeFilippis et al. (2006, p.675) that various forms of neoliberal reform are not necessarily about '*the weakening of the state per se*' but rather the '*re-articulation of the roles and goals of the state*' within which community '*play an active role*', in this case for restructuring planning.

Moreover, the Big Society and localism agendas provided a similar political appeal associated with *populism*, which positions the rights of mass society as in opposition to the interests of a small group of elites. Such broad appeals to democratic populism can be observed through the justifications for localism by then Communities Secretary (2010-15) Eric Pickles in 2010 at the Queen's Speech Forum:

"*So when people ask me about my priorities in government, I have 3 very clear priorities: localism, and we'll weave that into everything we do from parks to finance to policy. My second priority is localism, and my third is…localism…Because we like the folks. We don't think we know better than they do. And we trust them to know what's best for them. So we are determined to wrest control from the bureaucrats, the quangos, and central government departments. Taking power pushing it as far away from Whitehall as possible*" (no page).

Despite claims that the NPPF formed '*a key part of the government's reforms to make the planning system less complex and more accessible*' (DCLG, 2012) and that the Localism Act would '*shift power from the central state back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils*' (Pickles, 2010); the SPs countered that the system was more complex and rigid for local decision-making than before 2010:

> *"So I think in a nutshell, I think planning reform in 2010 took away some of the local decision-making powers if you like in terms of where we can go, and made the whole system more complicated than it was before…there is a view to some extent that the idea of localism is a good one, but the extent to which it has actually been successful is limited; because there is this wish from central government to do all sorts of things that don't necessarily fit with the local agenda…I think Planning Permission in Principle, extension of Permitted Development Rights, etc., we are almost back to where we started. Which takes away from the whole localism argument really; because it takes more and more out of the hands of local government and puts more and more control into the hands of central government and the development industry" (SP2, Rural, South East).*

PMs expressed the central tension between the government's ostensible commitment to localism and their related set of planning reform goals around efficiency, deregulation and growth, which effectively served to cancel each other out in practice ("*we are almost back to where we started*"). For the SPs, the view that *more control was being taken away from LG* and passed on to central government and the development industry served to discredit the policy claims and motivation for local 'empowerment'.

Pickles ended his Queens Forum speech making the case that "*[localism] will free up local government from the shackles of central government control. And it will continue the overhaul of the planning system: to put the community back in charge of how their area develops…this means there has never been a better time to be involved in local government. No one working in local government signed up to be told what to do for the rest of their lives by Whitehall. So there is a real opportunity for councillors today:*

- *to have much more fulfilling, rewarding careers*
- *to exercise genuine choice and power*
- *to change the face of their neighbourhoods*
- *to actually make a difference to people's lives*

Local government will no longer be the poodle of central government. And together, we are going to be part of the most radical shake up of power there has been for generations" (2010, no page, emphasis).

In contrast to strong government rhetoric that localism would '*free the shackles on local government*', it was clear from the SP accounts that in practice 'actually existing' localism had not heralded a radical shift in power from the central to the local scale for LPAs. Indeed, six years after Pickles speech, rather than exercising '*genuine choice and power*', planners and their councillors felt that they had less control over local development and decision-making as localism was de facto secondary to the NPPF in practice:

> *"Well, the national agenda sort of overrides everything really, there is not a situation where the national agenda might set the scene but then therefore you are allowed through the local situation to put a flavour on it. The national picture very much sort of almost dictates what goes on" (SP1, Urban, South East).*

> *"So in terms of the localism agenda it hasn't really, the reality has been very different from the rhetoric at that time, in that actually there is more restrictions now, and pressure in terms of delivery and potential control from central government than there was previously" (SP5, Mixed, South West).*

> *"I think localism is just nonsense really. The Localism Act raised what was believed to be a realistic spectre of local communities being able to make their own decisions, when the reality is no it isn't. And I think Eric Pickles described it as 'muscular localism' when he overruled another local decision or called it in and allowed it anyway. So you can make your local decisions as long as they are within a framework the government is happy with, which isn't truly localism but was raising this spectre" (SP23, Rural, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

The linguistic phrasing of localism as a "*spectre*" by SP23 is telling; taking this spectre metaphor, localism appeared genuinely real for a short time early on and from a distance at the national level, but soon disappeared under closer inspection when decisions had to be made about specific local developments.

These findings suggest that PMs perceive LAs as remaining '*the poodle of central government*' under localism, following the planning literature that localism represents a form of neoliberal governmentality whereby LPAs are being managed at a distance through 'technologies of government' post-2010 (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2013). Indeed, local autonomy and funding was 'incentivised' only as far as such plans and actions worked within the rational confines of the national agenda (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). In this context, the general feeling among SPs was that the NPPF, and particularly the five-year land supply and objectively assessed need, had neutered the localism agenda for LPAs, despite

acknowledging some government commitment to localism in the form of neighbourhood planning (discussed in the next section).

Additionally, practice concerns were raised that the actual task of implementing and reconciling the national policy reforms and vaguely defined commitment to localism fell onto LPAs and planners; which was exacerbated by the conspicuous government refusal to openly acknowledge (even ignore) that their pro-development policy reforms and localism agenda had the strong potential to clash when pursued simultaneously by local councils. This was a key concern for SPs:

> *"[T]he fudge between localism and neighbourhood planning and growth and all, you know, whilst then saying everybody must meet their needs through the NPPF is, well, it is slightly dishonest really; promising communities greater influence over planning, but then in that time making councils meet their needs and looking for more [housing], but not really being open about it" (SP17, Urban, South East).*

However, despite the widespread understanding among PMs that localism had been a secondary concern in relation to national policy and growth, SP14 argued that these issues are not simply tensions between national and local policy. Rather they highlighted a more complex set of relationships and politics of planning, with the real tensions being between '*preservation versus growth*' manifesting at the local/community scale, but not necessarily between national and local government policy agendas:

> *"Well, yeah it [parallel growth and localism agenda] is a real tension, but I think again it is over simplistic to say it is a tension between national policy and local policy. It isn't. The tension is between the needs of the country and the needs of a locality, which the local authority and the government are both as one on, versus the wishes of some local people, who are very loud, and vocal, and vote…I think that 'preservation versus growth' is the tension, whether it is expressed as national versus local, or politicians versus residents, or whatever, it is always going to be the tension. That is what creates the delays, and it's what creates the compromise, and it's what creates the difficulties, it's not the planning system, it's just life and the world around us" (SP14, Rural, East Midlands).*

Indeed, this tension between 'preservation' and 'growth' sits right at the heart of Conservative politics. This ideological party division is most sharply exemplified in southern England, where it is '*particularly problematic for Conservative Governments committed to a neoliberal growth model premised on the competitive success of the south-east but whose core electoral support is often located in areas marked by strong development pressure and high levels of opposition*' (Tait and Inch, 2015, p.11). In this way, localism as a policy agenda represented a fine balancing act for the government between objectives.

As a result of the strong undercurrents of preservation vs growth within English planning and localities, the localism agenda exacerbated the challenges of getting an up-to-date Local Plan in place in a number of cases. Even where planners and members appreciated the need to promote growth to regain 'control' over development through planning policy, they had to negotiate community politics and resistance:

> *"If we had our way we would have had a Local Plan two years ago; but it was local people who didn't want it, it wasn't the local council. It was local people who didn't want a Local Plan that had that scale of development…our big issue here is we need to get a Local Plan in place because it gives us back control over development. We want, we know we need some growth, we have got a draft Local Plan which has got 6,000 homes in it. The one which we tried to put forward two years, that the local people wanted us to put forward two years ago, had 4,000 homes in it. So we have come a long way, and we have taken our members with us, just can we take the local people with us as well? That is going to be the difficult part. We have worked really, really hard on our councillors, and they know we need to get this plan through, but they are going to face a lot of opposition from local people; and it is the local people whose own children can't afford to live locally, and can't get jobs locally, that are the ones who are saying, "Well we don't want any change"…Everyone is happy to see development, as long as it's somewhere else" (SP14, Rural, East Midlands).*

Such practice-based accounts underscore the challenge that even where central and local government objectives are aligned to deliver growth through planning policy, local community politics introduces antagonism into local planning processes. This also highlights that national policy structures and local agency are not always necessarily in conflict with one another; national and local government politics can also be complementary depending on their goals and 'landscapes of antagonism' (Newman, 2013).

The role of the planner in this context is to inform/support the members and work with the community to develop a local plan with sufficient growth but that is also politically acceptable at the local scale. This was not a national vs local planning policy tension as the council understood the need for growth; rather it was the national state growth strategy vs the specific local community politics played out within the local state territory. This politics of localism characterises local planning and development across England post-2010 and suggests a stronger role for collaborative planning theory (Healey, 1997a).

Thus the main role for planners in this policy context was to both deliver growth through adherence to the NPPF and national housing agenda, as well as simultaneously trying to understand and build upon what was meant by or required of councils within the wider localism agenda. As one planner explains:

> *"Other key things that have changed is really that relationship between the localities in which we [councils] are planning and communities becoming quite strong local activists, and we are almost the piggy in the middle. So the government have a very clear agenda*

here, which is they want more housing, but they also talk about localism, and we are trying to weave the path through it which is quite challenging" (SP6, Rural, South East).

Such practice accounts highlight LG planners' understandings of being 'stuck in the middle' of the potentially conflictual positions between national growth and local preservation, played out at the local scale, whilst having to careful weave a path to find the appropriate balance between the two agendas. This supports the role of the planner as 'mediator' between various stakeholders in order to reach a 'consensual' position, in this case between local preservation and growth. Again, this suggests that the logics of collaborative planning theory developed over the last two decades have been gradually internalised into planning practice, with planners understanding their role as finding a suitable local position for stakeholders whilst not necessarily seeking to impose their own position (Healey, 1997a).

Importantly, as Allmendinger (2016) contends, the Coalition was initially less certain about its policy approach and confident about extending the traditional Conservative neoliberal policy agenda in the early stages 2010-2012. During these formative stages, the government attempted to build the image of 'compassionate Conservatism' through communitarian/populist appeals to Big Society and localism, particularly following 13 years in political opposition and fallout from the 2008 GFC. However, from circa 2013-2016, the Cameron-led governments strongly returned to their traditional policy approach based on state deregulation and private sector-led economic growth and away from Big Society localism.

The PMs keenly understood the developing policy trajectory of the government for planning; noting the transition from a broader communitarian 'empowerment' approach in the early stages, towards a more confident assertion of planning deregulation, growth and 'responsibilisation' during later stages:

"I think the new [2016 Housing and] Planning Bill going through Parliament at the moment has taken a slightly different shift in the sense of it's now broadening out into lots of other areas and more what I call deregulation type of stuff. So there wasn't really, because you can't really argue that introducing neighbourhood plans is deregulation; that is more around localism. So we have moved from perhaps a so called localism agenda to much more of a deregulation agenda…It's all about taking the control away from local authorities and giving people who want to do development greater freedom to do it without the yay or nay of their local council" (SP1, Urban, South East).

*"We are not hearing 'Big Society' mentioned anymore, and even 'localism' really, and you look at what is coming down the track and it is ever more centralisation…it will be, "You [councils] make the difficult decisions, here is the resource, the limited resource to do it but you wanted localism; you wanted to command authority, you have got it, you need to make the decision now. It is yours, not ours". I think there is a heavy dose of that going on. The more that difficult decision-making could be fronted by local government the easier it is for central government to withstand it [criticism]" (*SP16, Mixed, West Midlands*).*

These understandings of unfolding and developing government policy agendas, and their implications for practice, suggests the SP/PMs role as 'reflective practitioners' (Schön, 1987) aware of their position within wider governing approaches, and alluding to externalised changes being ushered by successive waves of neoliberalisations and reforms that seek to devolve responsibility and risk onto the local scale.

Beyond the claims made for LG, the Localism Act was primarily aimed at empowering local communities through making the planning system more inclusive and accessible, along with the NPPF, and elevating the neighbourhood scale as the site for community governance. This forms the focus of the next section.

4.2.2 Localism and Communities

This section moves on to examine the understandings and experiences of PMs to 'community localism' within their LPA context, particularly through a focus on neighbourhood planning (henceforth NP) as the flagship policy of the Localism Act. It should be noted therefore that these accounts only represent one stakeholder perspective on NP and not the views of the communities actually involved in the process. Nonetheless, as LPAs have a 'duty to support' NP groups, they are a key agent within the local networks of community planning and so their views and roles merit attention (Parker and Salter, 2016a).

One core rationality behind NP as a policy agenda was that if communities were more involved and empowered within the planning process, and crucially received a share of the benefits of development, they would be more likely to accept growth within their locality (Open Source Planning, Conservative Party, 2010). This 'incentivised' policy was applied to NP groups through receiving a larger 25% share of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as opposed to 15% for those without NPs, and to LAs more generally through the New Homes Bonus (NHB; jokingly termed the 'Boles Bung' after the Minister for Planning at the time) that provided additional funding for new housing construction over a set period. This approach to govern local actions indirectly can be explained through governmentality theory, with localism as a specific form of '*spatial liberalism*' seeking to influence empowered actors to adjust their own conduct towards the governing end of facilitating development (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013).

Indeed, the Government's summary document '*A Plain English Guide to the Localism Act*' (DCLG, 2011) is strongly framed in pro-development terms for community engagement to influence the *location* and *design* of new housing and business development, but not to question the *necessity* for development:

'*Neighbourhood planning will allow communities, both residents, employees and business, to come together through a local parish council or neighbourhood forum and say where they think new houses, businesses and shops should go – and what they should look like…Local communities will be able to use neighbourhood planning to grant full or outline planning permission in areas where they most want to see new homes and businesses, making it easier and quicker for development to go ahead*' (p. 12).

These government discourses and policy agendas gradually developed out of the growing concerns that one of the key factors in the decline of new housing supply over the past couple of decades in England has been community opposition to house-building and development more generally. In this context, NP was introduced as a policy tool to '*overcome this opposition by devolving limited powers to communities to influence development*' based on the rationale that '*giving communities the right to draw up neighbourhood development plans would secure their compliance with a pro-growth agenda and increase the number of sites allocated for housing*' (Bradley and Sparling, 2017, p. 106).

Ludwig and Ludwig (2014, p. 245) present a practitioner perspective of localism that argues '*behind the rhetoric of the neighbourhood planning discourse is a covert political objective of enabling local economic development by facilitating private sector-led growth (through ensuring fewer local objections to development proposals and more planning approvals)*'. They are therefore concerned with the '*dangerously misplaced emphasis on empowering localities*' through NP and argue instead for a policy approach that '*facilitates genuine community engagement*' within local development processes. Similarly, Bradley (2015, p. 97) argues that the '*state strategy of localism seeks to harness the benefits of collective participation while limiting its impact on the current political settlement*'. These literatures highlight the tensions between government policy claims to 'empowerment' and their localism agenda.

Here insights from governmentality and post-political theory can help explain the Coalition approach to localism and NP. For the former, NP potentially involves bypassing the local state towards governing through the actions of responsibilized communities; that is, as a governmentality strategy to achieve state objectives (increased housing delivery) through advanced liberal democracies (Rose and Miller, 1992, Rose, 1993, Rose, 1999). Indeed going back to SP1, "*we have moved from perhaps a so called localism agenda to much more of a deregulation agenda…It's all about taking the control away from local authorities and giving people who want to do development greater freedom to do it without the yay or nay of their local council*" (Urban, South East); and in the words of Pickles, "*It [Localism Act] will empower local people giving them more power over local government*" (2010, no page). Whilst for the

latter, such policy can be explained as attempts towards *limiting*, *displacing*, *deferring* or *diffusing* the politics of housing development, or depoliticising it, within the planning system (Allmendinger, 2017).

In this context, however, only SP9 explicitly identified with the government logic that local communities would respond more positively to development when they had more control over the process. They explained that although a number of their local parishes had complained bitterly and fought hard against planning applications for housing pre-Local Plan adoption, when they came to produce their own neighbourhood plans they allocated housing sites in addition to their settlement requirements:

> *"[T]hat sort of rationalises that it is all about control…they [local community group] wanted to demonstrate through their neighbourhood plan that they were in control, and hence why they have allocated more than they necessarily needed to do to satisfy the numbers we have in our Local Plan and the settlement hierarchy. It is a real case of human nature there, and so the government got it right in saying that people want to be in charge of their destiny"* (SP9, Mixed, West Midlands*).*

More generally, PMs identified three key challenges around NP. Firstly, the need to explain to their communities that NP was not a tool for resisting development but for helping to shape their locality. Secondly, the need to align community group neighbourhood plans with the LA Local Plan (process) and national policy requirements (basic conditions). Thirdly, the lack of internal technical expertise and resources within some communities that wanted to undertake NP, and the capacity of LPAs to support such groups and maintain responsibility as the qualifying body particularly under austerity conditions. SP19 highlighted a typical problem for the SPs in relation to the first two challenges:

> *"[W]e have got quite a lot of neighbourhood plans at various different stages here. And inevitably neighbourhood planning was seen as the way of stopping development probably, I think many are seeing it as a way of focussing and controlling development within their villages. Again, that sort is sort of tricky when we are in a position where we have said, "Well to meet our local housing numbers, this is the quantum of development your village needs to take". And they are saying, "OK, that's quite painful but we'll take it there [site]", and they are then developing the neighbourhood plan. And we are now coming back and saying, "Well we have got to find more housing sites so we need another 1,000 across the villages, so you are going to have to take some more". And they are saying, "Well, we have got a neighbourhood plan that says that it is that site, not that site". So there is some politics, with a small p, around how we work with villages to get them to understand that it isn't about stopping growth"* (Urban, West Midlands).

In contrast to practitioner concerns that NPs cannot be considered a 'pro-growth' policy tool that will deliver more housing, the government has claimed (without much supporting evidence beyond a few hand selected cases) that localities with NPs are delivering 10% more housing than the figure required

by their Local Plans (DCLG, 2016). However, the government has been criticised for their quantifiable fixation with numbers based on NP uptake and completion status over more qualitative assessments of what NP policies are *attempting* and *actually* delivering for different places and people across England, which is crucial to the future of 'community' planning (Parker et al., 2017b, Wargent and Parker, 2018).

The general sentiment among the SPs was that NP represented a positive addition to the planning system; however, a number of PMs were sceptical of the value of statutory NPs over other 'community planning tools', particularly given the uneven power relations between community actors and the specific technical and constrained nature of NP. SP36 made the case that alternative participation mechanism could be more effective for meeting community objectives; especially where communities simply wanted to become involved with a particular development project or based on a specific issue, which could involve working with the council or the Local Plan process, rather than unnecessarily being directed towards the costly and challenging production of a statutory land-use planning document:

> *"[W]hen new groups come to [the council] we do a whole thing with them about, "Are you sure you want to do a plan? If there is a big development happening, let's get you more involved in the pre-app". We have other things in [the city], we have got something very good called the Neighbourhood Planning Network, every area has got planning groups…So we say to people, "That is what you really want to influence, and then by the time you have done a plan through the planning process the development could have been built. So if you are actually interested in the slightly softer things like housing policy there may be other community plans or other tools". So before people start off now, we try to be much more explicit about, "What are you trying to achieve, what do you think you are trying to achieve, because let's make sure a statutory land use plan is the right tool"…because our Site Allocations document allocates loads of sites for housing and everything else. Actually if you are interested in that particular site, how it can be designed, how it will be laid out, the mix of housing, then you don't need a whole land use plan" (SP36, Urban, South West).*

Whilst this case potentially represents a more 'pragmatic' approach to community engagement, the academic literature highlights the potential for instrumentalism and the colonisation of NP processes; whereby community objectives are captured by dominant interests, or 'rescripted' by LAs, expert consultants or independent examiners, which do the work of the state at a distance by course-correcting and re-rationalising neighbourhood plans (Parker et al., 2015). More research is therefore needed on the role of different LPAs in supporting or limiting NP groups (See Parker and Salter, 2016a).

In response to this context, Parker et al. (2017a) highlight the importance of the '*institutional framing*' of the NP process. Specifically that the existing terms of engagement imposes a series of procedural rules, stage-points, and coproduction limits; framed by requirements that neighbourhood plans must meet or exceed the level of growth set out in the council's Local Plan and other NPPF 'basic conditions'.

This institutional framing means '*localist empowerment is definitively subordinate to the Government's growth agenda*', with NP then forming '*an example of participatory design which attempts to control from a distance and represents a linked effort to de-politicise planning*' (Parker et al., 2017a, p. 455).

Similarly, Vigar et al. (2017, 423) found that NP in practice was not meeting its potential to '*create spaces for agonistic debate about very-local place futures*'; not least because of the emotional associations and affective politics involved in planning work within localities and communities. Instead, their research shows that rather than seeking to present different views, opinions and knowledge about place futures, which form the prerequisites to democratic participation and debate; process managers, intermediaries and citizens shied away or silenced such debates in favour of 'cosmetic consensus' to preserve community capital around the neighbourhood plan. In order to overcome these challenges, the institutional design of NP needs to address the shortages of knowledge, capacities and resources at the local level, along with more robust and innovative methods for community involvement that can facilitate agonistic debate (Vigar et al., 2017). In the context of austerity, LPAs may not have enough capacity or resources to support their communities without greater external government provisions.

These studies also highlight the nature of the third challenge identified by the SPs in this research:

> "*I think this is part of the tension that the government is saying they want communities to do something, but they do not have the same expertise that the local authority have if they were doing the plan, and we have to look at it differently beyond the light-touch…again in terms of the resourcing issues, it's bad enough trying to resource a Local Plan, never-mind trying to resource the many neighbourhood plans we have; because if we are going to have to be more forensic about it, we may as well do them ourselves*" (SP6, Rural, South East).

Despite these important concerns about the motivations, resourcing and institutional framing of NP, Bradley and Sparling (2017, p. 106) found that '*neighbourhood planning is emerging as the proponent of sustainability and social purpose in the English housing market, in conflict with the corporate interests of a liberalized housing development market*'. Such findings highlight the potential for 'citizen-planners' (Parker et al, 2018) to achieve counter-hegemonic outcomes through progressive engagements within the tightly constrained participatory spaces that work within the grains of neoliberalism to use localism and NP in ways unintended by government objectives (Williams et al., 2014, Featherstone et al., 2012).

Overall, the SPs understood community localism through neighbourhood planning as 'good principles' for participation in planning, but in their current form suffering from a number of practical and political challenges; not least the potential to clash with the 'strategic' national housing and growth agendas

pursued in other planning reforms. Having evaluated the community credentials of localist governance from the perspective of PMs, the next section moves on to evaluate their experiences and responses to key functions for strategic planning under national policy reforms for 'economic' localism post-2010.

4.2.3 Localism and Strategic Planning

The purpose of this section is to present practitioner evaluations of the practice changes for *strategic planning* and *cross-boundary collaboration* under the shifts towards 'economic' localism post-2010. The removal of the Regional Government (herein RG) architecture in 2010 by the Coalition in favour of a localist governing approach marked a significant change for approaches to strategic planning in England. As part of their localised economic development approach, the nine regions were replaced by 39 Local Enterprise Partnerships (henceforth LEPs), which were claimed to be more closely aligned with 'natural' local economic geographies known as 'Functional Economic Areas' (FEAs) rather than 'administrative' areas. This policy approach matured over the period 2010-2016 as the emphasis gradually shifted from LEPs towards city-regions, combined authorities and city/devolution deals (termed 'economic' localism).

Shortly after the Coalition was formed, then Secretary of State Eric Pickles made a speech in July 2010 outlining the government's rationales for the abolishment of the regional tier of government in England:

> "*In our first two months in government we have demonstrated our commitment to localism, decentralisation and rolling back regional government in England.* ***We have announced the abolition of Regional Development Agencies****, abolished the Regional Strategies, ended funding for the Regional Leaders' Boards (the successors to the Regional Assemblies) and are closing the Government Office for London. We have taken these steps because they are right in principle and as* ***part of a fundamental transfer of power from central Government down to local councils and down further to local communities****. We have done so to reduce spending on bureaucracy and protect front-line services against the backdrop of an unsustainable budget deficit and national debt.* ***We do not believe the arbitrary government regions to be a tier of administration that is efficient, effective or popular.*** *Citizens across England identify with their county, their city, their town, their borough and their neighbourhood. The case for elected regional government was overwhelmingly rejected by the people in the 2004 North East Referendum.* ***Unelected regional government equally lacks democratic legitimacy, and its continuing existence has created a democratic deficit****…We are making good progress with our programme of* ***radical reform to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on local authorities and businesses****, including removing the inflated local*

government performance regime and doing away with the unnecessary regional tier…I believe that the original intentions behind the establishment of the Government Offices for the Regions (to join up different Departmental teams outside London into a 'one stop shop') have been lost. Such functions are no longer necessary in an internet age and given the Coalition Government's commitment to genuine decentralisation and devolution of power…We should be clear: ***The Government Offices are not voices of the region in Whitehall. They have become agents of Whitehall to intervene and interfere in localities****, and are a fundamental part of the 'command and control' apparatus of England's over-centralised state*" (Pickles, 2010, emphasis added).

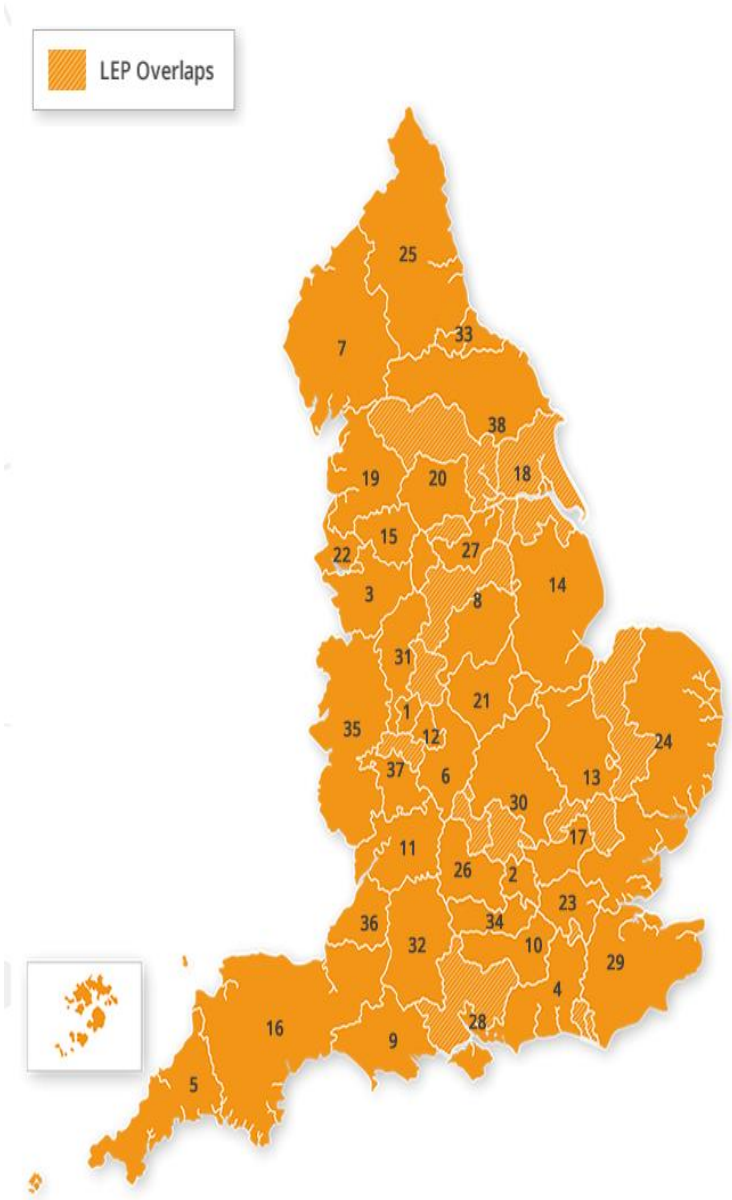
The main government justifications for removing regional government centred around three claims; they lacked democratic legitimacy and popularity, they were inefficient and overly bureaucratic, and they were part of the problem to resolving 'England's over-centralised state', as opposed to the solution of localism. The additional contention was made that regions did not hold the same emotional affective dimension for citizens as their local towns and neighbourhoods, and so these scales should be further empowered. Figure 15 shows the previous regional government structure in England (1997-2010) and figure 16 illustrates how the governance of strategic planning was reorganised into the (now) 38 LEPs.

The purpose here is not to provide an appraisal of the previous regional government in England (for this see Baker and Wong, 2013, Swain et al., 2013) nor to present an evaluation of LEPs since 2010 (see Pugalis and Bentley, 2013, Pike et al., 2015). Rather it is to present practitioner reflections on the changes to strategic planning impacting their practices post-2010, particularly in relation to Coalition claims that scalar reform from regionalism to localism would improve democracy, efficiency and growth. It is not possible to present the full scope of the empirical data here, suffice to say the findings suggest that PMs have mixed views about the removal of regional government and the effectiveness of their replacement by LEPs and city-regions, tending to highlight different strengths and weaknesses of each approach in terms of economic governance, (spatial) politics and democracy within their LA contexts.

Figure 15 – Regional Government in England (1997-2010)

Source: House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee Fourth Report, 2007.

Figure 16 – Local Enterprise Partnerships in England (2010 -)



01. Black Country
02. Buckinghamshire Thames Valley
03. Cheshire & Warrington
04. Coast to Capital
05. Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly
06. Coventry & Warwickshire
07. Cumbria
08. Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham & Nottinghamshire
09. Dorset
10. Enterprise M3
11. Gloucestershire
12. Greater Birmingham & Solihull
13. Greater Cambridge & Peterborough
14. Greater Lincolnshire
15. Greater Manchester
16. Heart of the South West
17. Hertfordshire
18. Humber
19. Lancashire
20. Leeds City Region
21. Leicester & Leicestershire
22. Liverpool City Region
23. London
24. New Anglia
25. North East
26. Oxfordshire
27. Sheffield City Region
28. Solent
29. South East
30. South East Midlands
31. Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire
32. Swindon & Wiltshire
33. Tees Valley
34. Thames Valley Berkshire
35. The Marches
36. West of England
37. Worcestershire
38. York, N.Yorkshire & East Riding

Source: LEP Network Website

Taking these government claims and criticisms of strategic planning before localism as a starting point, SP7 presented a counter to one of the arguments for the removal of RG put forward by Pickles (2010), that "*the original intentions behind the establishment of the Government Offices for the Regions (to join up different Departmental teams outside London into a 'one stop shop') have been lost*". Instead, SP7's account suggests the almost self-fulfilling prophesy that the 'one stop shop' for ministers outside of London was indeed lost, but only *after* the removal of the RG Offices. There was no evidence to suggest that the internet had replaced such intermediary relationships at the regional level, but rather the assumption that decentralisation means less *contact* with as well as less control from the central state:

> *"In the previous government, where you would have a network of Regional Government Offices…what used to happen was that before any national consultation or national legislation change was issued, the Government Offices would speak to their local contacts and, you know, say 'Look the government ministers are thinking about this, what do you reckon?'. And there would be a little sense-checking…the civil servants in the Government Offices would get that, because it's not all about London, the situation in the Midlands and the North East and North West is very different. So the civil servants in the Regional Offices would feed that back to the ministers and the mandarins at Whitehall, and say 'Well actually, have you thought about this?'…So what came out in the consultation was the more refined version, but that doesn't happen anymore"* (SP7, Urban, East Midlands).

> *"[T]he Government [Regional] Offices in the North East closing down was a big one for us, everything goes through Whitehall now, it would never come up [to the North East]" (*SP25, Major Urban, North East).

Despite the strong criticisms by the Coalition that RG was overly bureaucratic and undemocratic, the evidence suggests that regional-level civil servants provided a useful *linking role* between Whitehall and localities to informally discuss policy changes and provide early feedback on consultation and legislation. Under localism, the capacity for the central government to informally ascertain regional and local level views on policy from across the country, particularly concerning strategic and spatial governance, was undermined. In the new devolved system, only core city-regions with elected metro-mayors could have potentially similar intermediary access to Whitehall, a situation that could ironically be less democratic for localities as a whole to gain interaction and support from government. Arguably, the government have fallen into the 'local trap' in which the 'local' is uncritically conflated or used interchangeable with 'democracy' (Purcell, 2006), and confusing local 'empowerment' and 'abandonment' through localism.

The 'ineffectiveness' and 'high cost' criticisms of regions may be valid, as one of the main 'practical' outcomes of a very time consuming and resource intensive process was effectively to determine local housing figures. In this sense, having housing figures decided at the local scale may have saved the costs

of having regional institutions; however, this has caused a significant amount of political tension and conflict that regional governance could have managed as a strategic-level arbiter and decision-maker:

> *"My experience on Regional Spatial Strategies and the Regional Development Agency was that sometimes authorities would struggle to get what they wanted because there had to be a position that was suitable for the whole region. And I felt that some authorities that I was in, I was aware were struggling to get their messages across, and struggling to get what they wanted in Regional Spatial Strategy. And it seemed like the only thing that people were concerned about was the housing numbers…So you had a document that has taken quite a lot of research, a lot of time and consultation to prepare, but actually really the nub of it was 'what is the figure for your authority?'"* (SP38, Major Urban, North West).

> *"Well with the regional planning of course that required cooperation between all the organisations involved, and I think that was so well embedded that it worked well; and it certainly helped to overcome some of the conflicts between neighbouring districts. You know, District A not wanting a regional employment site and so therefore trying to push it onto District B, and that sort of thing. So there was in a sense a built in dispute resolution process which I think we all found rather useful"* (SP9, Mixed, West Midlands).

> *"I think regionalism to localism in terms of the loss of that strategic level has been difficult for us, because it causes some conflicts that perhaps we shouldn't have had to have with neighbouring authorities. In terms of neighbouring authorities' ambitions…being very much…'growth at any cost, just come to us'"* (SP5, Mixed, South West).

> *"People working in local government, you are almost fighting against the boundaries, that you are working within in a system that isn't ostensibly sensible, and it causes a huge amount of issues. I mean Norfolk is probably a really good example because actually we make the current system work pretty well. We co-operate across boundaries and the two tiers, and it's impossible to quantify, but the constant negotiation, compromise, lowest common denominator politics that goes on, must be an incredible brake on the economy…It seems like localism, and fair enough there should be a bit of democratic accountability, people shouldn't necessarily feel they are being dumped on, but isn't there also a strategic responsibility on the government to lead on such matters?"* (SP35, Urban, East of England).

> *"[F]rankly, I think everybody in this part of the world, they mourn the death of the regional plans; because okay it wasn't perfect, but it settled a lot of issues that then could have really focused people on implementing and delivery. We have spent the last five years [under localism] mucking about basically"* (SP40, Mixed, North West).

The SPs expressed the value of RG to provide strategic leadership and conflict resolution; however, in terms of the pragmatism and politics of representation and decision-making, the LEP and city-region structures were viewed as more appropriate than regional ones for promoting shared cross-boundary agendas based on businesses and stakeholders operating within the same localised and situated FEAs:

> *"I think that city-region, almost a Functional Economic Area, doesn't quite match here; but that type of level of governance and partnership works more effectively. Because…big players within the city, are they going to want to sit round a table with the big players from Leeds and Sheffield? And with the councillors from those different authorities, there is going to be too many people. But then, if you slim the number down, you lose that connection and understanding of the local area…I think South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire works [as a city-region scale], but once you merge them there is just too many issues to deal with; and there will be thousands and thousands of businesses across that area as a whole, and then how are a dozen or so of those supposed to represent that business community? You can't. And that is the thing that you have got to realise as well, that at a regional level you get caught in this real awkward situation of, 'So who do you get around the table to be the decision makers?'. So you might go, "Oh we have got to have someone from the Humber, someone from North Yorkshire, someone from West Yorkshire, someone from South Yorkshire". Well, that seems fine, but then those authorities fight between each other over, 'Well, who is going to represent us?'. And if you just say, "Oh it is largely the big cities in those areas", well how does the rural voice then get heard? This is what happened at Yorkshire Forward. So then they have a community group set up for the rural areas. So they get a seat at the table. But then you start working it through and you have suddenly got 25 people sat round the table, and you don't get much agreed and much taken forward when there is that number [of interest stakeholders]. Whereas here in the [LEP] boards you will be talking a dozen round the table; and I think that gives the confidence that you have got enough opinions, but actually there is a small enough number to be able to usually come to a consensus and actually take things forward" (*SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).

These expressed practical improvements to *local economic governance* potentially support the claims made by Pickles (2010) that '*we want to encourage and celebrate local leadership, ingenuity, and enterprise…to get councils and entrepreneurs working together…based on our trust in local leaders to deliver*'. In this sense, stakeholder negotiations over local economic priorities may be more efficient post-2010. However, for SP31, the shift from regions to LEPs had not changed the overall 'priorities', and in practice the reforms had served to delay strategic planning in the locality for a number of years:

> *"When the RDA was abolished here we were on the cusp of agreeing an MAA[3], and beneath that an action plan that set out a list of the priorities, which never got signed-off because the RDA was abolished; and that fell into disrepair because there was nobody to take over and there was nowhere to take that list of activities and priorities…looking at some of the things the LEP are funding now, they are almost straight out of the MAA. So it was just an unfortunate delay, and we could have been here five years ago with some of the things that we are now doing. So it's just unfortunate because the priorities are the priorities and they haven't changed. So things like investment in transport infrastructure, investment to support house building, commercial floor space, business support, and those sorts of things were all part of the conversation with the RDA"* (SP31, Urban, North West*).*

[3] Multi-Area Agreements (MAAs) are voluntary agreements between two or more top-tier or unitary local authorities, their partners and Government. The aim of an MAA is to achieve collective outcome-based targets with a view to improving economic prosperity.

Overall, the SPs largely split into 'pro' or 'anti' camps concerning the effectiveness, geography and integration of RG and LEPs, based on their LPA context and personal experiences with each structure(s). This highlights a key finding/theme running throughout the analysis chapters; that the most important factors in determining specific experiences and responses to (planning) reforms are *local contextualities*.

Here the main SP *planning concerns* around LEPs was managing and implementing the overly ambitious 'economic vision' and growth aspirations of their Strategic Economic Plans (henceforth SEPs). The general case was made that LEPs are not operated by professional strategic planners in the same way as RG, and so their SEP economic visions were largely left to LAs to implement and make 'work' despite the lack of strategic and land-use technical evidence and knowledge necessary to inform LPA Local Plans:

> *"Well it is interesting to see about how LEPs have influenced things; because at the end of the day although they are business-led, the business leaders haven't got a skill set that they can apply; their day job isn't in regional planning or sub-regional planning, it's in running a business. So although they can exert a certain discipline over how we work, the work has got to be done by the local authority at the end of the day. We have taken the lead on doing the economic strategy and we have taken the lead on looking at house building and the barriers" (SP9, Mixed, West Midlands).*

> *"LEP economic ambitions, as set out in SEPs, I think in many places are very unrelated to the actual empirically evidence-based employment sort of projections and planning processes. So you've got an immediate tension in-built there" (SP7, Urban, East Midlands).*

> *"I think for us, the big problem is the ambition of our politician and our regeneration colleagues which is manifested in the SEP, Strategic Economic Plans, which from our perspective as planners is barking. It is not predicated on evidence, it is predicated on ambition, and there is no rationale for that ambition other than we want to grow massively. So I think as councils we try and work together and try and rationalise that…and it doesn't work because it is not a sound vision" (SP25, Major Urban, North East).*

> *"I mean the Local Enterprise Partnership in the North-East hasn't really set out things like your travel-to-work areas or your housing market areas, that's been done at the local level. So the local authorities have all done their work on that, and so that was probably already in place to be honest by the time that the Local Enterprise Partnership was in place…the Strategic Economic Plan…I sort of remember it being prepared and the local authorities were aware and contributing into that; but I think you have got to almost always make a distinction between economic policy documents and spatial planning land-use documents to some extent; because there are overlaps but they tend to have slightly different purposes. So planning policy documents will have to create policies and have a vast amount of supporting specific evidence-base and a spatial focus. Whereas an economic policy document is as much a kind of bidding document, showpiece document, aspirations for the regions as much as it is to steer policy and understanding" (SP33, Rural, North East).*

Similarly, SP27 explained that "*all of the evidence base that has influenced the Strategic Economic Plan on household growth, employment growth, where that is likely to take place, has all been commissioned and driven by the city-region Heads of Planning…[so] although we are planners we are influencing that broader economic and LEP agenda*" (Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber). Likewise, SP37 explained that the Liverpool LEP will put out their growth strategy to the LAs, but they won't "*get involved in the detail then of land use allocations and things, that will be down for us to sort out*" (Major Urban, North West). Whilst SP40 explains that the Cheshire and Warrington LEP has had "*a more peripheral role certainly in terms of the statutory planning functions*" because it has not really grappled or particularly understood them; meaning that the LEP influence on the council Local Plan "*has been fairly modest so far*" (Mixed, North West). Whilst these findings highlight some *potentially* problematic disconnects and overlaps between LPA statutory land-use planning and LEP SEPs for economic governance, they also suggest that LPAs may have greater autonomy over local economic strategies under localism post-2010.

Further concerns raised issues over the previous experiences and knowledges required to meaningfully participate in strategic planning conversations, and which ultimately decide key investment priorities:

> *"You have got [planning] officers attending [LEP boards] who have got 20, 30, 40 years' experience, and some members equally who are quite intelligent people that are well versed in how to win hearts and minds. And then you get somebody come along who makes widgets, who happens to be quite vocal in the local Chamber of Commerce and Trade, and has got themselves into the position of being on a LEP board for heaven's sake; but actually then get there and thinking, 'What the hell am I doing here?'. It really has been a bit of a shock I think in terms of those type of people who are on that board, but actually they are in positions of making decisions for allocating or bidding for huge sums of money" (SP23, Rural, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

SP37 also alluded to issues around the *motivations* of some private-sector actors for attending the LEP, with some members such as the Peel Group developers becoming 'concerned' when certain (their) development proposals had not been "*prioritised highly enough*" in the SEP and LA Local Plans, such as the Wirral Waters and Liverpool Waters projects (Major Urban, North West). This underscores the need for distinction between public and private sector actors in processes that form the politics of planning.

The finding here suggest that LPAs and planners are still taking the lead on operationalising economic growth, housing and transport plans and strategies; with LEPs focussing more on being promotional and marketing vehicles with aspirational economic visions, and as a mechanism to develop partnerships and attract funding bids. In this sense, LEPs could be considered more *entrepreneurial* and (internally) *competitive* than regions. Indeed, some places did express they had strong links between LPAs and LEPs:

"Oh definitely [the LEP and council priorities are aligned]. A prime example is our LEP produced the Humber Spatial Plan, but that was basically pulled together from all the work each individual local authority had done within their own statutory plans. And of course it had to be big or visionary, so there were extras put in there; but whenever any of those extras were put in there was that assurance that it was going to align with where [council] saw ourselves heading. So there was always a very close alignment in terms of the LEP priorities and the respective local authorities" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).

"Norfolk and Suffolk share a LEP, we have had to work strongly with them on economic development in the last four or five years. We have a very good LEP and it has close links with the local authorities. So joint working between ourselves and the LEP has meant that we have worked jointly on many different projects. So there is a good level of trust there. So when it came to actually putting together a devolution bid there was good links where people know each other well which is part of the game, both at the political and officer level, for people who have that history of working together" (SP8, Mixed, East of England).

The extent to which localism/LEPs have changed the nature and delivery of strategic planning in England post-2010 is still unclear and questionable; however, the evidence suggests that strategic and economic planning work is still being "*done by the local authority at the end of the day*" (SP9). This forms one of the most significant changes from regionalism to localism, as LPAs no longer have strategic planning work and evidence conducted at the regional level and passed down for implementation; rather they have to determine and solve these economic and strategic issues themselves with some 'light touch' economic strategy guidance and funding from LEPs. On the one hand, these reforms may have freed LPA planners from RG to enact their own strategies, empowering them to have a bigger impact on their localities; whilst on the other hand it has responsibilized them to deliver their own localised solutions and future without any further government guidance, power or funding to mitigate socio-spatial risks.

Moreover, these findings also suggest that for a number of smaller and more peripheral predominantly rural LPAs, the difference between RG and LEP governance was negligible in terms of attracting funding; whether operating under a regional or localist system, their priorities were too far down the 'food chain':

"[O]ur problem is that our employers are mostly relatively small. We haven't got the Rolls Royce's that Derby has or the Boeings that Sheffield have. We have people that are in the supply for them but they are much, much smaller firms. So investing in our infrastructure to enable our sites in the [council] isn't going to bring the same bang-for-bucks that the LEP would get by rebuilding some railway land outside Derby or a flattened ex-coking works on the outskirts of Sheffield and Rotherham. The cost per job is higher. So because it's smaller firms, so it doesn't have the gloss, and because it's smaller sites the cost per job is higher. ***So we are always going to be lower down any LEP or other funding agency whatever it may be, whether it be a RDA, a LEP, or a government department directly, we are always going to be lower down the list for getting funding for our schemes****…[the] City Region largely*

focused on the big stuff too, inward investment, international investment, and so on. It is what's on their radar far more than a few million quid to get 500 jobs in a quarry in the [council]; for our local economy that's of tremendous importance, on their scale it's not. So we are down the food chain" (SP14, Rural, East Midlands, emphasis added).

The uneven outcomes of localist economic and spatial governance strategies post-2010 have formed a key area of debate in the literature. For Harrison and Heley (2015), there '*remains a noticeable silence in city-region debate concerning how rural spaces are conceptualised, governed and represented*', whereby '*a paralysis of city-region policymaking has ensued from policy elites constantly swaying between a spatially-selective, city-first, agglomeration perspective on city-regionalism and a spatially-inclusive, region-first, scalar approach which fragments and divides territorial space along historical lines*' (p.1113). The tensions between these back-and-forth scalar policy/governing approaches leads to a more fragmented and complex picture of spatial planning structures and practices across England, particularly in the most recent context of 'disorganised devolution' (Shaw and Tewdwr-Jones, 2017).

These broader national debates around economic strategy were being mirrored by local actors under localism; as SP10 puts it, "*there is an issue about what do you do in a Local Enterprise Partnership like this, do you build and invest in your successors, or do you try and tackle the worst areas?*" (Urban, South West). It is argued that such debates permeating within responsibilized localities to negotiate sink or swim economic politics in the context of strained resources represents externalised neoliberalisations.

Finally, beyond the specific structures, the overarching strategic planning practice concern here was the lack of any national level economic strategy, particularly for infrastructure investment, resulting from the '*laissez faire*' free-market approach taken by successive UK Governments. PMs contrasted the UK to the strategic planning approaches taken across Western Europe, where national governments typically play a larger interventionist role in planning to help shape and deliver development projects:

"I think we are still, despite what the Blair government said, locked into a very laissez-faire non-interventionists approach in this country. Northern European, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Denmark, etc. they are much happier for the state to provide that vison and direction on how to both plan and grow your cities, but also in terms of having it linked to a clear economic strategy. We don't even have an economic strategy in this country" (SP21, Urban, North East).

"[T]he vast majority of local authorities, and those who would look at [regions] now, would go, "Well, what we really want is strategic clarity, where are you going to invest as the government?". And so instead of just saying this is all down to us and lobby for that [investment under localism], what the authorities would want is some clarity over their role and area in relation to national policy; 'Are we going to benefit from considerable levels of

infrastructure funding?'. Because if we can, maybe we will be able to unlock a far higher level of growth…At the moment our strategic plan seems to be one of utterly laissez faire, that the growth pressures are concentrated on the South East, and it seems that five-year land supply rules the world in most of those areas…There isn't a coherent process whereby you reconcile what your vision and longer term strategy is for the growth of the country against your infrastructure investment" (SP35, Urban, East England).

However, despite general practitioner criticisms of the laissez-faire context, SP29 presented an example to argue that the market can only be shaped so far despite political intentions and planning strategies:

"When I was working in Lancashire they extended the M65, which is the motorway that used to go from the east of Blackburn to Colne. So it kind of went across East Lancashire, it was a bit of a funny road, and then it just ended just east of Blackburn and you had to go on this horrible road around Blackburn to get across the M6 and Preston. So there was an incoming case made which said we should extend the M65 so it linked straight across to Preston, so you had this motorway that went from Preston and the M6 all the way across to Colne. The whole idea of doing this, later to what they were doing with the RSS, was to make access into East Lancashire easier for business. So business could get there and they could get their goods out down the M65 on to the M6…well the way it actually worked out was it didn't make it easier for businesses to get their goods out; but it made it easier for people who had money to get out, move into Chorley, Preston, South Ribble, and commute back into work. So you took all the people who had money out of East Lancs, they all moved. So you got a great boost to the housing market in Chorley, but all their expenditure went with them, and actually East Lancs didn't benefit at all. And it's an example of how you can only shape the market so far" (SP29, Major Urban, North West).

Whilst this is a specific local example, it demonstrates the neoliberal logic that market forces drive investment and development, and the state can only influence these processes to a certain extent. The market-led localist growth strategy adopted by the Coalition was based on these economic rationales that the government should not attempt to structure or redirect market forces, but rather local markets and businesses should determine where is most suitable to their needs and to boost development. This supports the theoretical links between localism and neoliberalism outlined by Rogers (2015). It also demonstrates and reflects the arguments of the neoliberal New Right and as outlined by Pickles (2012):

"*There is no greater responsibility, no higher priority for this Government than to get the nation back on track towards renewed, long-term, sustainable growth…***Now in the past, supporting growth might have been seen as a job for the Treasury and Business Department***. But we simply don't have that luxury today…Not least because localism and growth are two sides of the same coin.* **You can't engineer, can't manufacture growth through nationally-dictated plans and blueprints***. However well-meaning, however expertly devised, Regional Development Agencies simply didn't deliver…***Instead of trying to impose growth from Whitehall, we want to encourage**

***and celebrate local leadership**, ingenuity, and enterprise…**This means making tough decisions and putting the cash where it can make the biggest difference** – not where it's most expedient, or will appease the most people*" (No page, emphasis added).

Greater acceptance of neoliberal economic rationales at the local scale, consistent with market-led localism over previous forms of state intervention and regional planning, potentially represents one of the most significant dimensions of Coalition policy and governance reforms. That is to say, the further embedding of externalised neoliberal logics into local governance approaches and structures. If this is the case, it has both positives and negatives, with stronger localities being unleashed to take charge of their own growth whilst marginalised places lose support networks and opportunities for development.

Localism and the NPPF also changed the nature of *cross-boundary collaboration* post-2010. The findings suggest that, as would be expected, the most effective collaboration under localism was found in places that had a history of collaborative working, representing a path dependency that allowed certain places to continue their approach more easily despite the potentially disruptive effects of government reforms.

One key practice challenge for LPAs under the new NPPF and localist landscape was working out what exactly was expected of the 'Duty to Cooperate'. The NPPF paragraph 178 states that '*Public bodies have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, particularly those which relate to the strategic priorities set out in paragraph 156. The Government expects joint working on areas of common interest to be diligently undertaken for the mutual benefit of neighbouring authorities*'. Needless to say, the specifics of how this duty to cooperate would actually work in practice and how it would be enforced left a lot to be desired at the local level, despite being the second most common reason for Local Plans being found 'unsound' at examination (after insufficient housing figure).

As with the NPPF, SPs did not disagree with the principles of 'cooperation', but rather had concerns about what a duty to cooperate actually entails in practice given the diversity and complexity of LG structures, politics, economic objectives and community pressures. The national policy requirement for collaboration around 'common interest' that is of 'mutual benefit' to adjoining LPAs was tempered by whether this meant reaching a full agreement or simply a more formal dialogue, which in many cases amounted to 'ad hoc' cross-boundary decision-making and arrangements:

> *"The Duty to Cooperate works to some degree, but then you get all sorts of politics that sometimes comes in as well. So that is by no means a perfect system; and it is a Duty to*

Cooperate, it's not a Duty to Agree, so even then you are not necessarily going to get the right outcome" (SP40, Mixed, North West).

"I mean I have to say up until 2010 or so I would like to think the city council was fairly happy with the way the planning system worked. The structure of regional guidance did provide a high degree of certainty about what should be delivered, and it did provide for an agreed distribution rather than relying now on the ad hoc arrangements of the Duty to Cooperate. So we were in many respects quite happy with the top-down approach rather than the system we are now in" (SP10, Urban, South West).

In terms of collaborating for growth, the empirical evidence here suggest that *relationships are more important than structures*. Furthermore, that the political control of different LPAs is not necessarily the main determinant of the level of collaboration between them, but the history and willingness to find joint solutions to cross-boundary problems. This suggests that whatever governance structures the government seek to implement (regions, LEPs, combined authorities, neighbourhoods etc.) it is people (agency) that make them 'work' and not vice versa. These findings suggest government should spend more time facilitating relationships/partnerships between LPAs, rather than deterministically searching for the perfect spatial scale of governance (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2013). However, this is not to deny the (structural) importance of Functional Economic Areas, Travel-to-Work Areas and Housing Market Areas that potentially present a more practical/functional basis for strategic and collaborative governance than traditional administrative boundaries. That is, structures and agency go hand in hand.

In this context of economic localism, Greater Manchester arguably represents the most developed and successful sub-national LG collaboration project in England. It was argued here that the structures and politics were not necessarily the main factor contributing to their collaborative governance, but rather what counted was the actors and relationships that had developed there over a considerable time:

"[T]he model, the way of working in Greater Manchester, it requires a lot of discussion, requires a lot of sign up, requires all of the leaders in all the authorities being comfortable about what we are doing. That has worked, that is partly been because **key people have been around a long time***, Richard Leese has been Leader of Manchester for 20 years, Howard Bernstein has been the Chief Executive for around about the same period. They are pretty key to how all that works in my view. There are good relationships between the Chief Executives and they meet regularly. The Wider Leadership Team, which is Chief Executives, plus other Leaders, that is the Chief Constable, Chief Fire Officer, all that kind of stuff, they meet twice a month formally, they meet more than that informally, and the Leaders also meet fairly regularly as well.* **They don't play politics***; so the Leader of Trafford isn't playing politics, it's not Tory versus Labour, they have all got Greater Manchester's interests at heart in that arrangement…***And like a lot of these things, at the end of the day it is down to relationships; you can create all sorts of structures, but at the end of the day things work because of the relationships which exist***" (SP29, Major Urban, North West, emphasis).**

Similarly for SP8, the emphasis on '*trust*' and a '*history of working together*' that form '*part of the game*' was the most important factor for the success of the New Anglia LEP in contrast to areas where they had failed to bed into local governance, highlighting that *relationships* between stakeholders can be considered as more centrally important for collaborative governance in places over their set structures.

A similar case for the importance of local relationships was made in East England, where political and professional commitment was mobilised locally to create a 'Joint Strategic Planning Unit' to address the housing numbers and distribution in Cambridgeshire after the removal of the regional government:

> *"I think importantly, as political as well as a professional view, there was a commitment to the work the Strategic Unit [SU] was doing. So I think to an authority, to every authority, when the results of that [SU report] came out we all adopted the [housing] figures that came out because we were party of that exercise. They weren't figures put upon us. They were figures that we had generated ourselves, but importantly there was a willingness for everybody to openly engage in that and work with it when the numbers came out of that…It goes back to the political will to carry on growing. So there was a political commitment from all of the authorities, even though they are different [political] colours, which is quite unique; and, dare I say, part of it is built on the almost necessity for Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire to work together. Because I have already picked up that effectively for Cambridge to meet its needs, with a fairly tight inner boundary and Green Belt, there has been a lot of working between Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire. But also, on the back of that, we have all been involved in those conversations as well…I don't know if it is necessarily unique but certainly unusual there is a commitment from all of the authorities; and without that commitment from all of them to talk together and work together, we wouldn't have the shared views that we have at present" (SP18, Rural, East England).*

The importance of relationships in overcoming political barriers to collaborative governance under localism was also expressed in the context of Oxfordshire. In relation to the planning approaches in Cambridgeshire, one PM with experience working in both LPA contexts explained the 'key differences':

> *"[T]here is a long history there of collaborative working, I think all of the councils, Cambridge is Labour, South Cambs is Conservative, and the County mainly Conservative; but had come together with the small subset of things that everybody agreed needed sorting, which was mainly transport and infrastructure. So had very successfully been able to lobby for funding, they put aside all their other differences, but really worked successfully together on the things that they could. And they got, the Greater Cambridge City Deal was the same size award as Manchester got, which is a really big deal, £500 million. Whereas I think they [Oxford] got £30 million…But over here, you have got four other councils around Oxfordshire, different political persuasion, quite a history of not getting on. And in Cambridgeshire there was also a lot of collaborative working with the health sector and the university in this, "What are the things we all agree need fixing? We'll come together and lobby government and have a stronger voice over x". That working together is not as well developed here…all those elements that helped Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire work together, they are not all in place in the same way…I think they see we need to*

> *collaborate more and speak with one voice, and support each other more, and it is coming. But I think the reason why there isn't a shared history, or shared service, or coming together, Oxford has always been the Labour authority for a long time, in amongst David Cameron's patch and things like that. So it is just* **the relationships are not there in the that way***, and the other councils have leaned towards more natural neighbours, organisations, politically easier to collaborate with I think, historically" (SP17, Urban, South East, emphasis added).*

Likewise, in the context of Lancashire, local politics has been secondary to the leadership consensus for achieving funding for growth through collaboration, highlighted in the local negotiation of the City Deal:

> *"[The City Deal] has happened with a different political party in charge, because the Lancashire County Council was Conservative, it is now Labour, Preston has gone from Conservative to Labour, South Ribble is Conservative and Chorley has switched as well now to Labour. So despite that it has still happened" (SP34, Urban, North West).*

It can be suggested, therefore, that whilst it is politically easier to collaborate with neighbouring LGs led by the same political party, in the cases where this has been overcome for collaboration around growth, politics has been less important than the commitment and relationships between LAs/agents:

> *"So when you start to discuss things across a wider area, political views of members about certain world issues tend to vary, which doesn't make life particularly easy in a planning sense. Although it has to be said, both the Labour party in [city] and the rural Conservative parties generally are both pro-growth. So whereas a lot of areas were very resistant to the levels of growth that were proposed in the old Regional Spatial Strategies [RRS] before Eric Pickles scrapped them; actually the local authorities worked collectively back in 2007 to effectively slightly increase the ambition in the RSS, and the targets that were in there were very much in line with the local aspirations" (SP35, Urban, East England).*

It can therefore be suggested that the antecedent histories, politics, geographies and institutional structures of localities are equally as important as the policy/scalar/governance reforms themselves for shaping outcomes. Again, it is not being claimed that the findings from these cases are *generalizable* across LPAs in England, but rather that these accounts present a *broadly representative* geographical mix of practitioner evaluations on policy/spatial/governance reforms under the Coalition/Conservative Governments. Some views will necessarily be unique to the LPA cases and specific SPs within this study, but other views may present more fundamental issues for (strategic) planning. These findings highlight the complexities and interplay of a combination of factors for shaping local outcomes in response to externalised reforms (neoliberalisations). The next section now examines the localisation of housing policy and delivery in England post-2010 before presenting a discussion section to close the Chapter.

4.2.4 Localism and Housing Delivery

Arguably the most significant and contested policy reform in this period was the 'localisation' of housing policy and delivery to LPAs from the strategic regional level post-2010. Previously housing figures had been calculated and distributed to individual LPAs by their regional government. The post-2010 system is characterised by the need for LPAs to meet an '*Objectively Assessed Need*' (henceforth OAN) based on the forecast demographic housing needs within the locality, and to provide a continuous supply of land to support housing development through demonstrating a '*Five Year Land Supply*' (herein 5YLS). The political rhetoric around the removal of regional government and shift to localism seemed to promise greater local control over housing numbers, which LPAs with restrictive planning approaches interpreted as an opportunity to put downward pressure on their figures; however, the new system under the NPPF resulted in LPAs being forced to accept more housing to satisfy their OAN and 5YLS.

These reforms were highly contentious because in nearly all cases the localised OAN and 5YLS housing targets were (significantly) higher in a number of South-East locations (typically with strong market pressures and local resistance) than the housing figures set out in the previous regional distributions. This 'locally-imposed' increase in housing was politically abhorrent for elected members and planners in LPAs that had hitherto practiced a restrictive planning approach within their locality. Furthermore, for a significant number of tightly bounded town and city LPAs, and those containing large areas of environmental protection, the new higher housing targets could not be fully accommodated within their administrative boundaries. This resulted in a reliance on neighbouring authorities to meet their unaccommodated housing need, but without any strategic level coordination or resolution mechanism. In practice, these situations often created strong local political tensions between neighbouring councils.

As a result, these tensions were often (deliberately or otherwise) left unresolved until the Local Plan examination process for individual local councils; with the most common reasons for plans being found 'unsound' being inadequate housing target provision based on OAN/5YLS over the plan period and a failure to provide evidence of meeting the duty to cooperate primarily in regard to local housing issues:

> *"[T]he removal of the regional level and the loss of the housing figure for each area means that we have spent huge amounts of time and money looking at housing numbers, which has delayed the production of the Local Plan. And it means that in the examination you have quite a big focus on the housing numbers when it should have been decided somewhere else. I think, you know, many years before there should be a figure set and that is what you plan for; and that would remove all those issues at every single examination. But that has been one of the largest implications of the removal of the regional planning level for us" (SP4, Rural, East England).*

The case was made that when LPAs were provided with a housing figure from the regional level it was 'politically helpful' because local actors could then pass the blame upwards for hard political decisions:

> *"There needs to be some structure there, and it's just not working, I think, at the moment…I'm not saying it was perfect before, it wasn't; but I do think it put the whole planning and delivery in reverse for a while, by scrapping the regional spatial strategy and the targets that everybody had in those plans. And the helpfulness of always having somebody to blame from above, politically, actually it was a kind of get out. But it is so much harder for councils to commit to their numbers; and the capacity, and the fighting and the energy that is locked up in the process we have now is wasteful. It is slowing it down, it is not really serving, in my view, the planning process, the communities we are trying to plan for now and in future, particularly well" (SP17, Urban, South East).*

Moreover, beyond the pragmatic local political advantages of receiving a housing figure from above for councillors to redirect blame for housing development; the wider experience of the 'slow' and 'painful' process of LPAs being involved in the production of a larger-than-local strategy over many years (2004-2010) only to have them abolished before many regional spatial strategies (RSS) were even completed had undermined members political faith in strategic planning and made them reluctant to 'try again':

> *"The very strong message we are getting though from the politicians is they don't want to see another Regional Spatial Strategy thank you very much; because it took up an awful lot of effort, took many, many years to actually agree, and didn't really make that much of a difference anyway in the big scheme of things because the government abolished it" (SP22, Major Urban, North East).*

This expressed lack of faith in strategic planning in England at both the national and local political levels has potential implications for deprofessionalisation, particularly as a number of experienced 'spatial' planners have since left the profession/system and are unlikely to be replaced either through planning schools or training within remaining strategic practice settings under such localist economic governance. It also brings into question whether the removal of RSSs and RG was as much politically motivated at the national and local levels as technically and economically justified as a 'failed' policy programme.

These practice challenges around the localisation of housing numbers became particularly acute in cases where urban LPAs could not meet their OAN housing figure within their own tightly constrained boundaries. Often such urban councils were penned-in by greenbelt and greenfield land under the legal authority of neighbouring LAs, meaning such constrained councils effectively became reliant on their surrounding neighbouring authorities to help assist with their 'housing shortfall'. As the need to meet

OAN had typically increased the housing figures for LPAs across the board, few councils demonstrated a willingness to take on more housing from other places (critically undermining the Duty to Cooperate).

Furthermore the irony was that the urban areas with the most potential for growth were also the ones most constrained by historic administrative boundaries and greenbelt designations to prevent urban sprawl into the countryside. As such, the status and extent of greenbelt protection/designations around urban (growth) areas became a widely controversial and emotive issue for planning during this period:

> *"[W]e are relatively constrained in terms of our boundary…and we have limited areas of Greenbelt for expansion…we are proposing to release about 350 hectares of Greenbelt so that our Development Plan can accommodate the [council] housing need, which is about 51,000 as the figure that we can actually accommodate within [city], but our actual housing need is 89,000…the [OAN] argument for us is only meaning that we have had to go into the Greenbelt; but whether it is 69,000, 79,000, 89,000 or 109,000 it doesn't really make a lot of difference because you could build on every bit of Greenbelt in [council] and you still wouldn't hit the number…and so that leaves a big number that need to be found from outside…[which] becomes more of a problem for our neighbours…the reality of it is they [combined authority] love talking about economic growth, "fantastic", but dealing with the housing that goes with it, "oh, we don't want to talk about that"…so the only reason you are doing a Local Plan is to deal with the Greenbelt…[but] the public don't like the release of Greenbelt, mainly because the government isn't very clear on what the role of the Greenbelt is and that it can be released if you have pressing needs…So that is problem number one" (SP11, Major Urban, West Midlands).*

> *"We are doing quite a lot of work on urban intensification. We are doing a very detailed pieces of work about how we can up - so we have already got a trajectory of housing delivery, we have got planning permissions already granted for about 20,000. We are trying to find another 12,000 through inefficient use of land, converting industrial to residential, reconfiguring roads and areas. So we are trying to do an urban intensification, over and above the sites we have already allocated, to max out what you can do in the urban area to minimise what you need to splurge out into the Greenbelt and beyond…there is quite an interesting debate because the adjoining authorities particularly have got this real sense that you must protect the Greenbelt. The issue for [council] is that we would rather see development on the edge of [city] than jump over the Greenbelt. Because the problem with jumping the Greenbelt is the transport and sustainability needs, because most people still choose to come in and work in [city], so the further away you put people and housing the harder it is to make their transport sustainable" (SP36, Urban, South West).*

> *"So, for example, Luton is completely constrained and an economic generator with nowhere to put housing, so how does it then have a sensible conversation with an adjoining authority to say, "We have 11,000 houses and we don't know where to put them?". The adjoining authority is going to say, "Well you can't put them here, we have our own need", so how are you going to resolve that?" (SP6, Rural, South East).*

At the same time, the central government and development industry continued to strongly argue that the sluggish pace of development is a direct result of cumbersome planning regulations and procedures. However, the SPs made the point almost unanimously that developers controlled both the speed and delivery of housing sites, and not LPAs or the planning system. From their perspective, the main delivery challenge was that developers would only build to the pace of their business model to ensure high local house prices and sales values; even where LAs had an up-to-date Local Plan and had allocated land with planning permission above the required level to meet OAN/5YLS for development within their boundary:

> *"[T]he development industry are trying to stop plans getting adopted, because that is in their interest to sort of gain control of supply, and when they control the supply that washes back into the planning process. So they are controlling [housing] delivery. It's not planning or the plan preparation that's actually controlling supply, its developers; and I think the government have, you know, patently just failed to tackle that" (SP7, Urban, East Midlands).*

Here it is suggested that volume developers have enough power and legal tools to subvert planning policy and practices that attempt to influence more control over housing supply and delivery. It was frequently argued that the government's assessment that the planning system is a persistent barrier to housing development presents a partial view of the problem and ignores the practices and business models of volume housing developers that stand to gain from land banking and transactions (holding onto land with permission as a reserve in the development pipeline or expecting an increase in value) and paced delivery rates to maintain housing scarcity and product value (Cochrane et al., 2015).

These findings are consistent with the academic literature. In the context of housing development in a Sustainable Urban Extension (SUEs) within a UK growth region, Cochrane et al. (2015) explain "*Spatial plans that, on paper, appeared to present resolutions to strategic problems have not proved a sufficient catalyst* [on their own] *to impel on-site delivery*" and "*there is little evidence that private house-builders have any particular interest in meeting housing need, nor that their business model would encourage them to do so*"; which highlights the "*continuing gap between ambitions to use planning as a driver of development and delivery in practice*" (p. 13). This has strong implications for practitioners, in terms of professionalism and public trust, that are attempting to direct change in an ostensibly 'plan-led' system.

It was also frequently acknowledged by the PMs that LAs do not actually build the houses but get the blame for slow delivery and under-supply. From the SPs perspective, the developers are in control of the supply of housing and work according to their business model and not OAN/5YLS housing targets or the Local Plan. The lack of mechanisms for councils to use to incentivise or discipline landowners and

developers to increase delivery rates was a key theme, with the power to enforce financial incentives through taxes and for local Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) being frequently proposed solutions:

> *"Now that results in us [local councils] not getting as many houses built as we have given planning permission for, and we can't force a builder to build them. Now I've suggested to central government, since they tend to use legislation to correct people's behaviour, well if you really mean business; what you would say to a developer is, "You have got planning permission to build 1000 houses", and then you would say, depending on the size of the site, we [government] would say, "We believe you should build 500 in the first year and 500 in the second. And to make sure that you do, at the end of the first year council tax at the rate of 20% becomes payable on the first 500 houses, and at the end of the second year council tax becomes payable on the second 500". You now have a real incentive to build these houses and then sell them, because that way the purchaser takes over the council tax requirement and not you [the developer]…But whilst government are very interested in that, they have been reluctant to actually do it because that would seriously piss-off Barretts, Persimmons and the other big housing developers…So government hasn't as yet shown that they are willing to help us" (SP3, Urban, South East).*

> *"To be frank, we [local councils] either need to be given genuine power and money to be able to get involved in the development industry and actually effectively be developing ourselves, or at least investing in development ourselves, and that is gradually coming from government, but very, very, very gradually. Or the system needs to be changed so that as planning, as regulatory authorities, we have the genuine ability to make someone build, to control and supply more actively. So, yeah, we actually would welcome some sort of system whereby a contract was put in place at the point of permission. That if a planning permission was granted due to lack of supply particularly, so if it was granted on the basis of a five-year land supply, then there should be a contract in place that the site is coming forward and will be built within a defined time period; and if it isn't, they lose the commission or they pay significant penalties. We need to have either the carrot or the stick, and at this point we don't really have either" (SP15, Urban, West Midlands).*

> *"I have fed back in a number of government consultations the CPO process. All right, so you give permission for someone to build some houses and then they sit on that permission; but they dig a drain and discharge the conditions so the value of that land is retained. Quite simply, if they do not build the houses within a given period of time, and I don't just mean the length of the planning permission, then you could ratchet that down a bit more. I just think the local government should be able to CPO at half the market value. Then as a house builder you are going to say, "I'm not just going to sit on this piece of land because the longer I sit on it, ultimately, it is going to be worth 50% less". But I just feel there is too much lobbying by the Home Builders Federation and the private sector that the Government are a little blindsided, because the problem is always the planners" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

These points highlight a need to strengthen planning agency by providing policy mechanism/tools to boost negotiation with volume developers; however, this approach goes against the current tide of national planning reforms which has weakened the capacity of planners through policy deregulations such as viability assessments and PDRs. Nonetheless, the PMs also expressed some sympathy with

developers over the difficulties of purchasing land at a reasonable/viable price through the land market, also noting the problem of typically high financial expectations of landowners to sell for development:

> *"I would want to see…the Mayor having strong CPO powers…we give these sites permission in principle for those landowners, and we give them three years; and if after three years they have not been built then the Mayor should have the power to take the site off them…[because] I can point to two examples where we have had developers who have put money into bids to buy sites, and they basically need to pay more than the actual market value; because we have done our own market value, so we know what it costs and we know what they have offered, and the landowner won't sell. So that is a huge frustration, because it is those sites that are sitting there that are a blight to residents, that the developer wants to build, and the landowner won't sell" (SP39, Major Urban, North West).*

In this context, SPs emphasised the need for a strong strategic body or actor, such as a Combined Authority or Elected Mayor, to enforce a system of local CPOs (see ATLAS) to hold land owners and developers to account for delivery; and to support atomised, weakly-resourced and deregulated LPAs under austerity localism, largely operating without strategic planning institutions and policy tools post-2010. SP26 was the most critical of the way that national policy served to problematize the role of LPAs in development delivery whilst ignoring the crucial role of developers and landowners in the process:

> *"[T]he latest consultations they [government] did on…a technical planning consultation on the NPPF…they stated they were considering introducing a delivery test. And that delivery test was only going to be imposed on local authorities. And I was like, 'Right so we have given them the permissions, what more can we do, how have we failed the delivery test?'. We cannot make the developer build their houses unless we are the landowner and we have got some contractual agreement in place. Yet there was no reference at all about, 'Well we need to look at who actually should be delivering', and that is the developer or the landowner. No reference to the delivery test being imposed on them and any sanctions falling on them in any way. I was just aghast" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

This 'housing delivery test' for LPAs has subsequently been developed by national government in the 2017 Housing White Paper and revised 2018/9 NPPF; however, whilst these documents pay slightly more attention to the role of developers and landowners in the process, there has been much less emphasis and specified policy obligations placed on these actors. This issue of housing build out rates was also dealt with in the Letwin Review (MHCLG, 2018) that considered that '*the homogeneity of the types and tenures of the homes on offer on these sites, and the limits on the rate at which the market will absorb such homogenous products, are the fundamental drivers of the slow rate of build out*'. It seems that there is some growing recognition within central government, particularly within the subsequent May-led Conservative Government, that there are a number of barriers to new housing supply and delivery beyond the planning system; such as the concentration of the top 10 volume house

builders in the UK means that they dominate new housing market supply, with SMEs relatively excluded from the market following the 2008 GFC; that the land market remains very opaque with owners expectations of values remaining high (above market value in a number of cases); and that the labour, skills and physical resources (such as bricks) within the construction industry are at a significantly low level to achieve the national target of 250,000 per annum. All of these remain important supply issues.

Overall these issues are consistent with the UK neoliberal political economy approach to housing, which trusts market competition and efficiency for determining prices, tenures, types and delivery rates, and distrusts LPAs as an obstacle that cannot make effective interventions, only market 'distortions'. This moves onto the wider picture, SP21 highlights the impacts of the cultural politics and financialisation of housing (policy) in England as key factors in the 'housing crisis', providing a counter-narrative to the government problematization that the planning system is generating contemporary housing problems:

> *"I think it's [the UK 'housing crisis'] much deeper than that…We are forcing people into home ownership just because of pure economics, it doesn't make sense…we have an overinflated housing market with values that are too high…What we do need is a good quality, if we had a great quality private rented sector that is well regulated then it has a massive role to play. Again it's about that laissez-faire, non-interventionist approach in government. Just let the market rip people's finances…there is a completely dysfunctional housing culture in this country and it's not to do with planning, it's to do with financing and regulation frankly, and we could make it a lot easier" (SP21, Urban, North East).*

Crucially, within the current neoliberal approach, there is little government criticism of property becoming a cultural form of '*asset-based welfare*' supported by debt-fuelled financial instruments and markets (Doling and Ronald, 2010, Dorling, 2014). Drawing on governmentality, García - Lamarca and Kaika (2016, p.313) argue housing debt mortgages are becoming a form of biopolitical '*technology of power over life that forges an intimate relationship between global financial markets, everyday life and human labour*' using the '*materiality of mortgage contracts as a means of forging new embodied practices of financialisation*'. Whilst this has been the case since at least the 1950s, the main point here is that the politics, economics and practices of the UK housing and land markets are equally as important for constraining property development and generating a 'housing crisis' (however defined) as the technical regulation and contributions imposed by the planning system when devising new national reforms (Ryan-Collins et al., 2017, Bowie, 2017, Marcuse and Madden, 2016, Clapham, 2018).

4.3 Discussion

The empirical findings here support the related academic literature that the relationships between LAs and public planners and their key stakeholders (local communities, elected members, developers and landowners, etc.) has been recast under the NPPF and (austerity) localism post-2010. The most significant reform challenges have taken the form of issues around interpreting and testing 'simplified' and 'negotiable' national planning policy, the threat of legal challenge and 'planning by appeal', negotiating the community and member politics of localism whilst supporting localised housing growth, delivering strategic planning through informal and localised cross-boundary collaboration, negotiating complex development viability assessments to gain (policy-compliant) planning obligations and providing a faster performing service; all in the context of post-crisis austerity marked by reduced resources and resilience. Often these issues framed the backdrop to attempts by LPAs to get a Local Plan in place in order to regain planning control over development within their boundary, which had been undermined by the *presumption*, 5-year supply, OAN, duty-to-cooperate and policy deregulations.

However, such attempts to reconstitute the planner's agency were not necessarily *absolutely* successful:

> *"I have been working for quite some time now, so I reflect back over the years, and the changes that have happened, and some of the things that are happening now, would have been absolutely unthinkable a while ago. And to avoid getting depressed really, with the constant blaming of planning for a lot of things that are completely nothing to do with the planning system,* ***I try to focus on what can I do locally? What influence can I have over this city and life for people positively? And probably spend time thinking about how we can get around the planning reforms.*** *So that is, and I'm sure lots of my colleagues are in that mind-set, you have to focus on what you can do. That is not to say, there are bits of the planning system that need a good shake up, absolutely, but the pendulum I think between the planning system operating in the greater good, to achieve the balance between development interests and in the public interest, has swung way, way too far. But, we are where we are" (SP17, Urban, South East, emphasis added).*

Such pragmatic responses by PMs, resigned to working within the confines of the system, but also seeking to carve out niches through which to effect positive local change, can be conceptualised as a form of 'progressive localism' (Featherstone et al., 2012); which represents the '*interstitial politics of resistance and experimentation…within, across, and beyond formations of the neoliberal*' (Williams et al., 2014, p.2798), and more broadly the exercise of the 'political' (Mouffe, 1999) by planners. Whilst all of the planning practitioners in this research expressed genuine concerns for the development of progressive agendas aligned with advocacy planning (Davidoff, 1965) and 'just cities' (Fainstein, 2010), they also felt they had less power to influence the built environment and promote the public interest:

> *"I have been working in planning for over 25 years, and I think it has been one of the most difficult times in terms of the diminution of the planning system…I mean every public meeting I go to,* **people think that planners have got much more control and power than we actually have***, so they are disappointed that we are not delivering what they want anyway; and I think the more the government go down this route then the less effective the service will be…I was at a public meeting two nights ago out in [locality], and* **this guy said, "I thought planning was meant to be about trying to help people", and reducing inequality and promoting the social; and I said, "I think you are dead right. I would love to, but unfortunately we can't""** *(SP7, Urban, East Midlands, emphasis added).*

Such understandings by senior planners that they can't promote alternative social and environmental agendas, even where they would like to do so, signifies an underlying acceptance of the neoliberal logic '*there is no alternative*'. In this context, as Grange (2014) argues, "*[w]e seem to be witnessing a crisis in planning, one of the clearest symptoms of which is loss of faith in the idea of planning*" (p. 2670). For Grange (2014) this situation has arisen because the "*current political interventions aimed at culture change in planning are deeply ideological*", and the political Left have not articulated an alternative progressive narrative since the 2008 GFC; together meaning that "*planners today are left with few means to reinterpret how political power fundamentally structures society, or their own reproduction of it*" (Grange, 2014, p. 2671). The findings here supports the literature that one of the main consequences of the sustained ideological critique of planning (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014) and its continuous reform has been a move towards the 'deprofessionalisation' of public planners and the wider system:

> *"[T]he changes that we have had in that period [2010-2016] - which actually in planning terms isn't a long time - but actually the scale of what has changed in that period has been quite significant I think, and sort of seismic almost. You know, in terms of what used to be the 1947 Planning Act as a very solid foundation of 'though shalt and though shalt not', and then suddenly so many fundamental questions about things that had been assumed were almost sacrosanct etc. being challenged and being looked at in a very different way. So I think we have gone from a position where previously planning was almost perhaps more of a 'dark art'. You know, done over here and actually let them [planners] get on with it, and not too much interference from the outside world…almost to seeing planning as any other service, and not this 'sacred cow' in terms of, you know, "There is so much at stake, and you can't possibly interfere with the planning department". Because unfortunately that is the representation that a lot of planning departments have, which is that they are full of the 1947 rule book, which says, "You have to do things like this otherwise the world will collapse on itself". So quite challenging for practitioners, because that is a very different way of looking at it to how it has been dealt with previously" (SP6, Rural, South East).*

Such accounts support the claims made by Allmendinger (2016) that the 1947 Post-WW2 welfare state planning system is being replaced by forms of '*neoliberal spatial governance*' which treat planning as any other state activity that should be open to deregulation and market forces. However, it is perhaps too early to reflect on this period, and the long-term implications of planning reforms 2010-2016

remain unclear and mixed with regards to their success for different stakeholders. For example, national government have benefited by reducing the national expenditure deficit and their public service funding responsibilities, LG may (yet) benefit from empowerment such as through the general power of competence and localism/devolution, developers have gained (financially) from national changes to viability and deregulation policy, and communities now have greater statutory power over planning policy through neighbourhood planning. So despite a number of significant practical planning challenges and national long-term strategic population, infrastructure and housing issues, we should be cautious not to argue *point blank* that all reforms in this period have been necessarily flawed. It is a political claim to state what constitutes 'progressive' developments in planning/development practices.

It is not argued here that the national planning agenda pursued by the Cameron-led governments 2010-2016 was necessarily mistaken or unscrupulous; the country remains in desperate need of economic growth, development and housing, and the NPPF, LEPs, City Deals, Devolution, etc., have all made an important contribution towards these ends. Rather the criticism is that this approach represents a partial economic understanding of planning, one that misunderstands its role in environmental and social place-making, sustainability, and quality of life. Planning has a key role in the strategic linking of development with infrastructure, transport and employment to create functional places for work, leisure and residence. Prescribing the role of planning as one thing (economic development) *a priori* in all situations is essentially removing the (local) politics of planning, through denying other political interpretations (i.e. that planning is about social justice). This is the failure of their planning agenda, whereby planners are forced into operating a neoliberal system only partially delivering for a select few.

Cynical commentators might argue that this loss of faith in planning is the result of a deliberate 'divide and conquer' governing strategy that seeks to undermine the planning system (or NHS or Education) so that citizens lose faith in its current ability to achieve results, paving the way to justify further neoliberal reforms for efficiency, deregulation, individualism and privatisation to further 'fix' the system. This view was expressed by SP13 that it felt like the government was trying to "*break the system*". In sum, the more that local communities and the national citizenry become disillusioned with planning in England, the harder it becomes for advocates to defend the value of planning through traditional justifications of the public interest and professional articulations of sustainable development in practice.

The deprofessionalisation of planning requires counter-narratives from progressive academics, activists and practitioners to question and challenge neoliberal logics such as austerity and growth-first policy where they are at the expense of other progressive social goals. It also requires professional bodies,

such as the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) to demonstrate and argue the case for the (economic) 'value of planning' (see Lord and O'Brien, 2017).

Indeed, these findings suggest that even within such a changeable and more vaguely defined planning system, after a period of time and learning from experience, planners figure out how it operates and become more confident using it to deliver plans and development in order to 'make the system work'. However, one critical perspective views consistent planning reform as a deliberate government attempt to confuse and undermine the planning system, in order to maintain planners as scapegoats responsible for broader social and economic development problems in England because it is 'politically convenient':

> *"The planning system is always required, been needed to change from their perspective, because if they stop the change, and the certainty to the planners that this is the policy framework we are working in for a given period of time, then stuff happens. And it is happening now, because the NPPF has been in place for a few years, we are confident on how to work with it. So, actually permissions have been given, Local Plans are getting in place, so we are ticking all those boxes, and then where could the problem be now? The Government might realise, "Christ it's us, we are not building. Right, so we need to say it is a problem with the planning system, that it needs to change again, because then if it is changed again it is going to take a while for local government to figure out what it means and get all their plans up-to-date. So we can just keep blaming them [planners], can't we?". If you look back at the history of the planning system, according to the media and according to government, it has never worked. Well I'm sorry, that is just a blatant lie, but it is very convenient. It is convenient to the politicians as well to be able to say it's the planning system's fault" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

The critical sentiment among the PMs of being a scapegoat was summed up by SP31:

> *"I get frustrated because there's no one batting for the other side. The RTPI is never heard of…Who's batting for the planning system? Who's batting for the planners? Nobody seems to be. Nobody's countering the rhetoric around the system being a block on development. And TV screens and column inches get filled with the house builders and the government saying, trotting out the fact that the system is broken" (SP31, Urban, North West).*

This follows the wider argument that the implications of this problematization of the planning system is greater than *only the deprofessionalisation of the planning profession* but extends and forms part of the much larger and longer-term *progression of the neoliberal project and state restructuring in England*.

Critical planning (theory) is important because it is one of the key public service 'front lines' on which the battle for neoliberal state restructuring is being fought (or accepted) by LPAs and planners; that is to say, planning is '*the last line of defence to space itself being neoliberalized*' (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014, p. 357). Resembling most critical planning theory (Sager, 2013), this analysis has demonstrated

the negative impacts of neoliberal reforms on planning and planners in England. However, although unevenly distributed and achieved, there has also been a number of positive outcomes of policy reforms (and austerity) in the forms of improved efficiency, customer service, innovation, self-sufficiency, performance, delivery and local democracy that should not be discounted or underplayed.

Neoliberal programmes of reform are not a challenge to planning in an absolute sense, that is, it is not attempting to remove planning completely, but rather seeks the reorientation of its functions and goals. Whilst a number of these policy reorientations are potentially problematic from a social justice and democratic planning theory standpoint, others can lead to wider improvements in the planning system:

"*While there has undoubtedly been some aversion to, or even hostility towards, the reorientation of planning, neoliberalism has also provided an opportunity for planners and planning for reinvention and relevance. Compared to the cruder deregulatory regimes under neoliberalism that sought to reduce planning, the 'roll-out' approach requires an interventionist form of planning even if that is different to the more traditional regulatory planning*" (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 122).

In this context, the introduction of localism and neighbourhood planning, whilst rooted within the wider neoliberal planning system, does provide planners with an opportunity to reinvent themselves as proponents of local democracy and community engagement (Parker and Salter, 2016b), which can build on collaborative planning theory and support 'neo-advocacy' practices (Parker and Street, 2017). So whilst the findings in this research support the arguments that English planning is in 'crisis' (Ellis and Henderson, 2016), this masks some of the potentially positive outcomes of austerity, localism and the NPPF, with regards to long-standing planning theory concerns with efficiency, democracy and delivery.

This chapter has presented empirical data on the national planning policy reforms/deregulations and localism agenda enacted under the Cameron-led Coalition and Conservative Governments 2010-2016. It has focussed on the 'effectiveness' of these latest reforms from the perspective of management-level planning practitioners and formed explanations drawing on a neoliberal structure-agency framework. The next chapter presents the empirical data and analysis on *local authority planning under austerity in England post-2010*. These austerity reforms were enacted during the same period as the NPPF and localism and were heavily interrelated in practice (but separated here for clarity of structure/argument).

Chapter 5 - Local Authority Planning under Austerity Post-2010

"*If we don't get a grip on government spending, there will be no growth…I have done everything I can to move Britain out of the financial danger zone…[but] cutting budget deficits can never be just an exercise in economics…Just as we should never balance the budget on the backs of the poor, so it is an economic delusion to think you can balance it only on the wallets of the rich…Everyone in our society has had to make a contribution towards dealing with the debts*"

George Osborne (no date).

'*Neoliberal responsibilisation involves the offloading of responsibility from the formal institutions of the state to individuals, communities and localities in the name of self-reliance and resilience*'

(Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015, p. 95).

This Chapter is divided into three main interrelated data-driven sections on the various *experiences* and *responses* to austerity for Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) across England. The first section examines *Local Planning Responsibilisation: Resilience, Self-Sufficiency and 'Commercialisation'* (5.1); the second evaluates *Social-Spatial Development and Localised Responses: Structures, Contexts and Politics* (5.2); and the third probes *Managing Austerity Planning: Practice Culture Change and Service Restructuring* (5.3). These sections seek to address *research questions* four, five and six and *research objective* 4:

RQ4) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the demands of austerity (urbanism/governance/localism) as imposed by central government since 2010?*

RQ5) *What are the financial/budget and capacity/resilience pressures on planning services, and how do they relate to the impacts of austerity on local authorities (landscapes of antagonism) more generally?*

RQ6) *To what extent have austerity logics been internalised or resisted by local authority planning managers? How have these austerity measures shaped LPA practice cultures and structures?*

RO4) *To present practitioner evaluations of public planning under austerity in relation to the diversity of local contexts, structures and geography of LPA planning across regions in England 2010-2016*.

Firstly a few paragraphs are necessary here to set up the context for the following findings and analysis presented in this chapter. The most significant is that according to the National Audit Office report on the '*Financial sustainability of local authorities 2018*', '*Government funding for local authorities has*

fallen by an estimated 49.1% in real terms from 2010-11 to 2017-18. This equates to a 28.6% real-terms reduction in 'spending power' (government funding and council tax)' (NAO, 2018). These figures highlight the substantial fiscal reductions that have taken place since the introduction of the national austerity agenda by the Coalition Government in 2010. Despite a number of high-profile domestic and international political changes in this period up to 2018, not least Brexit and Trump, austerity has been continued by the May-led Government and remains a core practice challenge to councils across the UK.

The experiences and responses of LPAs to austerity are explored here because despite being a national level structural reform agenda, '*[t]he actual detail of how austerity is strategically and operationally implemented and managed is very much a devolved process to urban spaces and state agencies*' (Fuller, 2017, p. 745). Following their localist approach, the Coalition government did not dictate how or where savings should be made but rather left the responsibility to each LA to determine how they will respond to austerity; that is so long as they achieved their imposed budget reductions, maintained their core services, and did not pass on significant costs to their local communities (such as rises in council tax or public service fees). Here *austerity was not only about cuts* but also restricting the size and reliance on public sector employment and services with the intention to concomitantly boost the role of the private sectors in these areas of employment and service delivery; following neoliberal thinking that 'big government' serves to 'crowd out' the market for investment opportunities and that bureaucracy is inefficient and produces poor outcomes in terms of effective management and allocation of resources. This attempt at sectoral rebalancing from public to private sector dominated local economic activity across regions the in England demonstrates how austerity can be seen to fit within a wider process of state restructuring in the UK post-2010. So whilst austerity can be understood as a form of Statecraft with the Coalition and Osborne positioning the challenge in terms of it being 'everyone's responsibility to reduce the deficit', the austerity agenda was about much more than simply 'balancing the budget'.

Given the stated research design (Chapter 3) there is a focus on the 'geography' of austerity. In this respect the findings suggest that regional variation was important generally, but not specifically; with more wealthy LPAs (with regards to tax base, expenditure on public services and other assets/reserves) and predominantly rural authorities across regions sharing more in common with likewise high value councils regardless of whether they were based in the north, middle or the south of the country. The rural-urban classification highlighted some important differences, with cities with high social costs also having strong economic opportunities to grow and generate revenue, but also being heavily dependent on the physical constraints of Green Belt, heritage and collaboration with neighbouring authorities. As expected the economic 'value' and 'structures' within LAs played a crucial role in responses to austerity.

Lastly the emphasis on LPA senior management is because they are tasked with the role of constantly reconfirming austerity institutions, '*through enactments of social control and coordination of market and bureaucratic values within the organisation, and guiding the daily practices of officers*' (Fuller, 2017).

The next section develops the argument that LPAs have been forced (responsibilized) into developing new 'commercialised' strategies consistent with 'growth-dependent' planning (Rydin, 2013) to manage reduced resilience and achieve financial self-sufficiency in the context of significant austerity cutbacks.

5.1 Local Planning Responsibilisation: Resilience, Self-Sufficiency and 'Commercialisation'

RQ4) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the demands of austerity (urbanism/governance/localism) as imposed by central government since 2010?*

The purpose of this section is to present the resilience, self-sufficiency and commercialisation pressures faced by LPAs in response to austerity. It is argued that this represents a neoliberal shift in responsibility for economic development and service provision, and the risk of financial default, to the local scale.

The empirical findings presented here strongly support Bailey et al. (2015) and Hastings et al. (2015), that whilst efficiency measures initially proved to be effective responses to budget cuts in the early phases of austerity, these budget saving strategies became increasingly exhausted over time, with Planning Managers (PMs) arguing that further cuts would likely be 'unsustainable' in the future. Moreover, as the most achievable efficiency savings became exhausted, PMs were forced to consider alternative service delivery models and more radical innovations consistent with longer-term budget sustainability strategies. In the later stages of austerity (circa 2013-16), the only options that appeared available were advancing into new areas for commercial income generation or else face the political consequences of retrenchment in non-statutory/discretionary service areas. At the local government level, planning services were particularly susceptible to having their budget/resources reduced relative to other council services, but whilst also having more responsibility to deliver revenues through growth.

The overall argument presented here is that these conditions form a neoliberal 'responsibilisation' strategy (Hastings et al., 2015) that seeks to download responsibility from the national to local scale; and that whilst the resilience narrative of LG survival/adaptation seems to hold true thus far in response to austerity (Shaw, 2012, John, 2014), the potential for a future 'punctuated shift' in local services (Gardner, 2017) and residualisation/marginalisation (Hastings et al., 2015) remains a significant threat.

In this context, critical questions are to be asked regarding the (long-term) impacts of the emerging shifts to commercialised and self-sufficiency strategies for the future of LG and role of planning services.

Firstly, the context of austerity meant that LPAs needed to develop a mix of efficiency, retrenchment and growth strategies to manage their budget reductions and maintain service capacity and resilience. In general, PMs stated that some good efficiency savings had been made to 'keep their services going' in response to austerity; however, that the prospect of being forced into making further budget reductions would significantly impact the capacity and resilience of their services. It was expressed that early efficiencies were achieved through incremental budget reductions and service changes, but that subsequently a 'step change' innovation was increasingly required in order to develop more complex long-term growth-based revenue strategies or face the political costs of service retrenchment. Notably these changes had to be achieved within the strict time frame before the total removal of government Revenue Support Grant (RSG) in 2020 and whilst maintaining the core front-line planning services:

> *"[A]s an authority over umpteen years now we have done what all authorities have done, we have salami sliced budgets down, we have taken tens of thousands of pounds out here, and £20,000 out there, and bits and bobs we can take out. Latterly we have started moving into income generation areas as well. So for instance, our department is looking at delivering commercial services on a private basis. So a simple example of that is our arboriculture team will provide a service to you to have your tree chopped down. So we are looking at where we can make money in externalising services. We have looked at where we can charge more for things, some of the mandatory stuff, but also some things that are not mandatory like car park charging, some things that are discretionary. To give you an example, we charge developers for street naming and numbering, so things like that where we have introduced a charge where there wasn't one before…that is a big step we are taking, because having pared everything down to the bone and then being faced with another £2 million gap, there isn't anything left of significance to have a go at reducing. So it is either going to be reducing staff beyond the point where you could deliver services optimally, stopping doing some services, or doing that bigger thing like a local authority trading company. There is a step change in the way you can drive income by doing things you can't do just within the current local authority legislation. So we can't go and build houses, but we could if we got a local authority trading arm…that is our response to it but it has got to be swift, we are facing that pitfall in 2018/19" (SP16, Mixed, West Midlands).*

Whilst such changes demonstrate examples of commercial innovation within LPAs, PMs raised concerns over their ability to generate efficiencies and increased revenues from planning services whilst also maintaining enough staff and resources to provide those services and to justify the fees for them:

> *"I suppose from a planning perspective, what I'm responsible for we had to save a lot of money over the last probably three, four, five years now since the Coalition came into being. First couple of years, that wasn't too much of an issue, because there was quite a bit of fat within the department anyway. But it is starting to - and that could be done by bringing in*

technology improvements, more efficiency. So that was fairly necessary really. And when the Government talked about efficiency, actually you could probably say, "Yeah, fair point"…[but] there is becoming an issue now about what more savings can truly be delivered. And I think if much more comes out there is no doubt it will have to effect service provision. It's not like we - I mean we have increased our charging opportunities, so pre-application meetings we charge for all those now, charge for members to sit, charge for people to present to our planning committee as well. So we have become, I think, much cleverer in terms of drawing money in. But there still becomes that challenge of, 'Well you have still got to have enough people there to then provide the service that is needed if you are charging for it'. And that is a tension, there's no doubt about that. But I think, as local government, it should just be the accepted norm" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).

The understanding that these conditions should be accepted as the "norm" suggest that local councils and managers have resonated with the government's austerity discourses, that the country is in a debt crisis and therefore money is going to be tight and difficult decision will need to be taken as the world has changed post-2008. Like all political agendas, there are both elements of truth and deception in such positions, nevertheless this supports the concept of 'austerity realism' identified by Davies and Thompson (2016) that practitioners have few options available but to manage the impacts of austerity.

The findings here demonstrate the practical challenges faced by PMs to offer a more efficient and commercial planning services, as a means to make savings and raise incomes, but within the general context of a reduced internal capacity of staff, specialist skills and resources. It was stressed that as an LPAs internal capacity is reduced as a result of cutbacks, so is its ability to generate revenue from planning services over the short and long term, which is needed to support other areas of the council:

"The income we get from planning application fees is not ring-fenced, but essentially the service operates on the basis that it will generate a certain amount of income per annum. So, you know, the income it might be there, the actual costs of the service are there, so every-time you cut the councils revenue into a service and you get rid of staff, your ability to generate the income goes down as well. And that gap between the two has been increasing in the last 10 years because as the number of applications is reduced, or you get less and less major schemes, you therefore cut your staff but also your ability to then generate income…the way that the performance policy is written at the moment, we have to refund fees if we don't determine applications within a certain amount of time; so we are now going through the stage of actually putting more resources and staff into the service to ensure that we are not refunding fees. So, you know, we are looking at planning as basically we want to generate more income for the council through the planning fees but also, with that planning fee, then getting a development to happen; and then we are getting the New Homes Bonus, the business rates, the council tax. And planning is now seen as a strategy of getting the council out of the financial hole that it is going to be in, so it is about growth and income generation" (SP39, Major Urban, North West).

Overall, PMs concerns centred on the diminishing *resilience* of planning departments to withstand further budget reductions whilst still having the future capacity to deliver more than their basic services:

> *"The big issue is one of resilience. We haven't got the capacity. Well, you know, if somebody goes off and people call up and say who is dealing with their work, and we haven't really got anybody who can…any further savings the performance would drop dramatically…I can see going forward, and almost the way the council is funded now, that we have that base funding left that can provide just a 'bread and butter' service, and actually anything that we want to deliver over and beyond that is funded separately" (SP5, Mixed, South West).*

SP concerns that continued austerity would result in planning departments only being able to provide a 'bread and butter' service in the future forms a key area of debate around institutional resilience in the academic literature (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013, John, 2014, Hastings et al., 2015). The findings here suggest further cuts may potentially lead to a spiral of decline for weaker LAs as their (financial) resilience and internal capacity (staff, resources, specialisms) become eroded to unsustainable levels. It also raises questions around whether such work then has to be contracted out to the private sector, particularly given the proliferation of planning consultancies during the same period (Parker et al, 2018).

In relation to academic debates around the future of LG under austerity, this research positions itself with Gardner (2017) that '*local authorities may indeed be resilient, and change processes appear incremental, but it is too early to rule out the possibility of a punctuated shift in public services*' (p. 165). In other words, simply because LAs have managed to survive austerity to date, that does not mean that this is a sustainable long-term approach for local public services in England. In this respect, Gardner makes the significant point that although the '*national punctuation*' of resources through austerity has so far been translated into '*pragmatic*' and '*incremental changes*' for service delivery at the local level; '*the ideational changes may be building the potential for more radical alterations in the future*' (p. 151). Only time will tell if this is the case, but findings here suggest the LG 'resilience' narrative still holds true.

The main empirical findings presented in this section are that planning departments have become more deeply embedded within the wider financial 'self-sufficiency' (economic prosperity) corporate agendas of their LA under austerity, and that this has taken the expression of increasing efforts to promote new forms of (growth-dependent) revenue generation and developing strategies for 'commercialisation':

> *"My view on planning, and the way I have tried to position it…is at the heart of that city growth agenda, and if we get the planning right with that positive enabling role, it can help to deliver on those broader agendas like how does a local authority become self-sufficient…because of austerity and the need to do things more cheaply and find savings*

and raise income, we have had a particular focus on how to make the planning service more business-like, more commercial" (SP27, Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).

"Government's drive for local authorities to become more self-sufficient financially…that's new to us, and new to planners historically, linking now the driving of local authority revenues and the planning process…almost the commercialisation of the planning system because we have to grow our local tax base…and for the politicians, it's wholly new, they are just unaccustomed to thinking commercially" (SP31, Urban, North West).

"What we are trying to do is to really build on how do we encourage business growth in the district, economic growth…that obviously is something that is very much in our leader's mind…because we need to be able to underpin our finances going forward. So it's not just really about planning is it? It is the wider prosperity agenda" (SP19, Urban, West Midlands).

In this context, PMs have had to adapt to manage not only the financial and service pressures within their own departmental remit, but to now consider and act according to the broader corporate financial strategy of the council. This was marked by a growing conscious recognition within council management that planning is an 'income generating' service, leading to increasing pressure and internal 'scrutiny' for PMs to simultaneously make large budget reductions and simultaneously raise incomes for the council:

"For us at [local authority], [austerity] has meant a significant challenge, and it's really a domino effect. So the reduction, the significant reduction in our government settlement as a local authority, means there is significant pressure on every service area in the council. And generally, in terms of how the city council has operated and functioned, if you are a service area that brings in an income then you are the subject of some considerable scrutiny. In terms of increasing that income and lowering the costs, and trying to redress that balance as far as you possibly can, which is very difficult to do…the current government settlement for last year was £2.2m for the council and that will be by the end of the MTFS, the Medium Term Financial Strategy period, so I think by 2019/20 that will reduce to £22,000. It is a 99% reduction in our government settlement over that period…means that it is huge decisions about what direction we go in as an authority and how we do things, and that filters down across the whole authority. We are no different, and because we bring an income in we are under that additional level of scrutiny" (SP13, Urban, East Midlands).

In this way, PMs experienced pressures to cross-subside other statutory functions which could not be readily open to commercialisation, such as local plan-making and policy, from parts of the service that could increase revenues, such as Development Management. Such strategies were viewed as necessary in order to cross-subsidise statutory service areas both specifically *within* their planning departments and *across* council services more generally (such as the need to support education and social care).

The core theme of the planning services 'commercialisation' agenda is the emphasis on generating (new) revenues from local council planning services and assets in order to respond to budget reductions.

However, this was problematic for PMs because not all of their typical eight LPA service areas; (1) *Building control*; 2) *Development Management*; 3) *Planning Policy*; 4) *Environmental Initiatives*; 5) *Economic Development*; 6) *Community Development*; 7) *Economic Research*; 8) *Business Support*) are amenable to being opened up to processes of commercialisation. Whilst Development Management and Economic and Business related service functions quite clearly have the scope to become more commercially orientated, it is harder to find a 'client' to charge (and hence find new revenue streams) within the Community Development (despite private consultants charging for advice on neighbourhood planning) and Environmental Initiatives service areas. Likewise, it is hard to determine a clear 'customer' of the Local Plan and planning policy. As such, the council have to bear the expensive democratic engagement and technical-judicial requirements necessary to form a robust evidence base but have no obvious private 'client' to charge for against its production and implementation (beyond council tax).

One PM, working for a city council in South-West England, explained that their Planning Service costs £5.5 million and generates £5.8 million, leaving them with a net budget of only £300,000. These fine margins between costs and revenues has meant that the department is completely reliant on money coming in from fees through various charging mechanisms, such as pre-application advice, capital projects and Building Control. The Policy Team costs the overall department £757,000 but has almost no mechanisms through which to charge a fee to a specific client. Therefore, that policy work is only tenable because the Development Management service costs £2.6 million but raises £2.9 million. In practice, planning policy was not being paid for from the overall council budget, but rather through cross-subsidy using other planning services revenues. These findings suggest that planning policy is now becoming more dependent on the overall external service demand and performance of the department; "*If the fees went down what struggles is not the Planning Team, it is the fact that it is subsidising the Policy Team, so there is a lot of cross-subsidy going on. So because the Development Management fees are healthy in [city] I can support a Planning Policy Team*" (SP36, Urban, South West).

SPs, particularly urban and city PMs, made the case that what had changed under austerity was that now every council project needed to attract a fee to justify undertaking a piece of work and that everything they do must be predicated on a clear business case and economic uplift. These practice changes towards the primacy of economic considerations under austerity governance were contrasted to the expressed previous degrees of flexibility and professional discretion to develop projects:

> *"So there's almost no money, there's nothing left in the Planning Division that I can have doing things just because we think they are the right things to do. I have to be sure that I've got a way of paying for them. And that is what has changed over the last few years; because*

> *in the old days [New Labour] you would have had some general revenue money coming in that gave you flexibility about how you prioritised work and what there was to do. Now I have to be sure that it can be paid for some way or another" (SP36, Urban, South-West).*

> *"[W]hat is driving that model now is you have got to prove the GVA uplift, the economic uplift…I think there has definitely been a shift towards spending that money on things that shows the economic return, and it is harder to justify investing just on the basis of making somewhere a nicer place to live or to look better, because you have got to show the economic rationale for it, and how that leads to more jobs or more investment" (SP27, Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

These findings suggest that in the context of financial constraint and the legal requirement for LAs to set a 'balanced' budget (one in which costs and revenues are aligned so as not to accrue debt), planning services and projects now have to 'follow the money' to make things happen. The potential implications are that policy and project work, that are "*the right things to do*" from a professional standpoint, are becoming relegated to operating within the confines of the LPAs commercial strategy/business model.

In arguing that LAs have become more commercialised under austerity post-2010, this is not to argue that 'commercialisation' is a new phenomenon within public sector institutions. Shifts towards more '*entrepreneurial*' forms of urban governance (Harvey, 1989) and economic logics around New Public Management (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994) in public service management and delivery have been developing since the 1970s. Austerity policy post-2010 represents an extension of these economic logics in the context of a rejuvenated post-crisis neoliberalism. So whilst these trends are not necessarily new, one of the key differences now is that all councils have to be entrepreneurial under localism in order to respond to austerity or else risk financial collapse (Bailey et al., 2015, Kennett et al., 2015).

Under the previous New Labour Governments 1997-2010, public services '*Modernisation*' and '*Best Value*' agendas firmly rooted New Public Management thinking into LG and planning practices around efficiency, performance, and customer services (Sanderson, 2001, Newman, 2001). These government policies represented 'roll-out' neoliberal strategies to reform these institutions/actors with mixed overall success (potentially because stakeholders had enough discretionary space to mediate changes). For PMs, the scale, scope and highly localised responsibility and risk for dealing with austerity post-2010, however, resulted in a context beyond simply complying with and implementing new national reform initiatives at the local level to a matter of public *organisational survival* (Hastings et al., 2015).

In this context, council planners had less scope to shape how they responded to austerity localism, because much more was at stake than getting designated as 'poorly performing' under the previous

targets-based audit regime. Post 2010, the combination of national policy reforms and austerity created the 'perfect storm' (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013) conditions of mutually reinforcing financial hardship and statutory requirements necessary for all councils to support growth as a means to achieve their own self-sufficiency and to maintain control over development within their locality. These challenges were underscored by the constant threat of further financial and policy reform by central government that created uncertainty in the short-to-medium term and further bolstered the reform discourses for change in practice culture, such as being seen to be 'Open for Business' (Inch, 2017).

The empirical findings in this research support the critical literature that austerity has become the new 'normal' or default state for public sector services, rather than as an emergency response to economic 'crisis'. For McBride, '*there is a clear trend to render austerity policies a permanent, constitutionalized response to economic challenges 'for all seasons''* (2016, p.5). In this context, the (post-political) decisions over continued austerity measures are removed from liberal democratic politics and relocated behind the power relations that embed neoliberal practices and policies as 'normalised', which then filter into the micro-practices of the LAs. McBride (2016) terms this 'Constitutionalizing Austerity', one that can be understood as a form of neoliberal post-political governance (Swyngedouw, 2014a). This situation is conceptualised here as a more mature (end) stage of the 'Root and Branch' restructuring of the (welfare) state by austerity that Taylor-Gooby (2012) warned of early on in the developing social policy agenda of the Coalition Government.

However, austerity was not a new policy tool or concept introduced into UK politics by the Coalition in 2010, rather it has long matched "*the ideological, managerial and fiscal perspectives of the new right and other governments committed to the containment of social expenditure*" (Mowbray, 1983, p. 238). The political discourses for a smaller, leaner, smarter state that can "do more with less" outlined by the Cameron-led governments post-2010 (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012, Lowndes and Gardner, 2016) is only the latest reiteration of long-standing New Right perspectives on the nature and role of the state. Nonetheless, as (Hill, 2015, p. 50) argues, contemporary austerity in the UK is different to the Post-WW2 '*socialised austerity*' that emphasised individual restraint as a means to support civic investment as part of the developing welfare state between 1945-50. Rather the austerity measures implemented in the 1980s and the post-2010 iteration can be viewed as a neoliberal approach to state austerity.

As with previous rounds of neoliberal state austerity and planning reforms, this latest round of post-GFC austerity has served to perpetuate the long-standing national reform agendas promoting a culture towards '*planning positively for development*'. These reform discourses have been developing since the

1970s but has taken its latest expression in the NPPF and the *presumption in favour of sustainable development*. There has long been a sustained national policy pressure for LPAs and PMs to better support business and their customers, however, under austerity this approach also requires further efficiencies, practice innovations and the search for commercial activities to generate (new) incomes. Together these pressures drive LAs towards the 'growth-dependent' planning model (Rydin, 2013).

Given the necessity for planning departments to raise incomes, as a means to cross-subsidise policy functions and continue to employ specialist staff among other things, one of the most typical responses has been charging for pre-application (pre-app) services. Such 'new' revenue streams, or more accurately more recently utilised charges, have formed a core response to increase Development Management fees and respond to austerity. In all cases, the informants reported that they had made use of pre-app charging to support their revenues. This is likely explained by the fact that this was a relatively easy strategy to adopt and implement into practice across the board. Pre-app charging could be introduced by any council, as opposed to the specific contextual factors that proved critical to the particular responses and successes of other LPAs to austerity. These factors include the amounts and values of public building and land assets, private-sector investment within the local economy, the local council tax base, levels of community social deprivation, and so on (further discussed in Section 5.2).

As one PM explained, the advantages of doing pre-apps is that the developers are effectively paying the council "*before the clock is ticking*". The point was made that this is also beneficial in procedural terms, because when the application is then formally submitted, the council need to spend less time processing it because the proposal has already been "*polished*". Overall this meant that the developer is effectively paying twice for two services now, the first for consultation and the second for the decision process. This was positive for LPAs because it also meant that applicants were also submitting a better version of their application that is quicker to determine because the pre-app planner has already done most of that work. In addition, the pre-app fee has also covered most of the cost of processing the final submitted planning application. As a result the cost advantage was stated that the planning department is "*already kind of 'quids in' I suppose before we get to the application*" (SP6, Rural, South East).

One potential new revenue generating strategy for 'high-value' LAs was to develop a council-owned trading company using the new provision of the General Power of Competence under the Localism Act (2011). These quasi-public bodies could effectively mimic land and development promoters, such as Richborough Estates or Gladmans, but for council land and assets; providing a particularly effective strategy for LAs with sizeable public land and property assets. Alternatively a council trading company

could be used to pursue joint-ventures with local developers to take shared risks and ownership of projects. One PM explained the motivation and rationale for developing one such trading company:

> *"The Engine of the North is like a delivery company for the council. So the council has quite significant land holdings and essentially, historically councils haven't always been very good at doing land development, it varies enormously but it's often been a bit of a weakness. So the idea of Engine of the North is it is a wholly owned company but it is a separate company. It's a separate legal entity. So some of the council's assets are assigned to that company, and the company is then there to promote their development in the way that Richborough Estates, or Gladmans, or any other land promoter would do…I think it's really good because it does mean that you do have that opportunity for the authority to be able to get its land holdings out there and developed… [Engine of the North] was just that, trying to give [council] a bit more commercial edge and that degree of independence. So when a council, and it's quite right for a public authority, you are hide bound by a lot of prescription in terms of the way you operate, in terms of your procurement, all those sorts of things. As a private company, you have much greater freedom to go and get bits of advice and you can operate in a different way. You can operate more flexibly. You can operate more commercially" (SP40, Mixed, North West).*

In this case, the primary rationale for developing a council-owned trading company was expressed as the desire to act more like a private company that could operate with more independence, flexibility and commercially with its assets and investments than a LG can because of its legal public body status. The shift to more effective commercialisation strategies therefore required a break away from the statutory laws, rules and procedures that govern the acceptable behaviour of public bodies. It is worth noting, however, that the secondary rationale was closely aligned with protecting the public interest in the development of public council-owned land. This case suggests that even where PMs are being forced towards developing commercial 'growth-dependent' strategies, they remained concerned with how such strategies could be aligned to benefit their local community and based on the public interest:

> *"I mean we could perhaps just as easily have done a procurement exercise and found a preferred development partner [rather than use the council-owned Engine of the North]. So we could have teamed up with Gladmans or some other developer, and that would have had all the same benefits. But we thought well actually far better to do it as a wholly owned company because then any developed benefits go directly back to the residents. So if we had done a deal with whoever, some other promoter, obviously they would take their slice of the value and spend it wherever. They could spend it on a corporate yacht if they want to. Whereas the model that we have is that any profits are pretty much ploughed straight back into the community. Because it is, if you like, the community's assets, then if it has benefited by being developed, then that benefit goes directly back into paying for infrastructure services and all the rest of it. So that was part of the thinking. It was a little bit paternalistic I suppose, but it's just thinking 'Well we don't really want somebody else running off with what is essentially council taxpayers' money'" (SP40, Mixed, North West).*

Drawing on the theoretical framework, the need for LPAs to respond to external neoliberalisations and the structures of austerity through more commercial practices is still subject to planners using their agency to enact actions for the 'public interest' and in line with their professionalism that forms a key part of 'trust' in planning (Swain and Tait, 2007, Tait, 2011, Parker et al., 2014). In this respect planners are both agents and mediators of neoliberal reforms. This also supports the literature on 'progressive localism' (Williams et al., 2014, Healey, 2015) in which Coalition localism is both a controlling and empowering policy context, whereby agents are directed towards working within the confines of neoliberal structures, but that can also develop their own agendas in ways unintended by government.

In this context of commercialisation, the Localism Act (2011) presents the limits to commercial activity for councils when exercising the 'general power of competence':

'*Limits on doing things for commercial purpose in exercise of general power:*
(1) The general power confers power on a local authority to do things for a commercial purpose only if they are things which the authority may, in exercise of the general power, do otherwise than for a commercial purpose.
(2) Where, in exercise of the general power, a local authority does things for a commercial purpose, the authority must do them through a company.
(3) A local authority may not, in exercise of the general power, do things for a commercial purpose in relation to a person if a statutory provision requires the authority to do those things in relation to the person' (Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 4, p.20).

These statutory limits provide some safeguards against LPAs becoming fully 'commercialised' service delivery bodies; however, some degree of cation should also be taken to the exact nature of these quasi-public actors. Numerous studies have demonstrated deepening neoliberal logics and investment strategies within public institutions and infrastructure provision. Sager (2013) draws attention to the ways that private investment in public infrastructure, such as motorways and airports, is used as a means to generate investment opportunities and sustained revenues; such as tollbooth charges for upgraded roads and retail and hotel complexes allied to airports. Evidence for neoliberal logics entering into the public sector are also expressed in Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), which utilises private capital to develop public services as investment opportunities in order to harness favourable public repayment revenues over decades and transfer private risk through public contracts (Musson, 2009, Raco, 2013).

The findings here support the *Financial Sustainability of Local Authorities* report produced by the House of Commons (HoC) Public Accounts Committee, that '*revenue pressures have led to changes in the nature of capital spending with authorities focussing more on schemes intended to generate future revenues. Many are investing less in physical assets, such as libraries, museums and parks, and spending more on commercial investments, often involving investing in property*' (2016, p. 3). These changes raise questions over whether local (planning) authorities are being forced into becoming 'developers', with clear business models/longer-term investment strategies, and for the future delivery of public services. This would mark a return to this role for LG prior to the 1980s shift towards 'enabling' development.

Furthermore, whilst LG *revenue spending* on services has fallen since 2010-11 under austerity, *capital spending* has seen a slight increase in real terms for LAs as a whole. Capital spending is used to pay for local assets such as leisure centres, libraries and roads. However, this '*overall increase masks changes in the purpose of capital spending as authorities now focus increasingly on using their capital programmes to generate revenue returns rather than solely to provide services*' (HoC Committee of Public Accounts, 2016, p. 4). It is interesting to note that whilst LG current revenue spending has been drastically reduced according to austerity fiscal policy, that capital spending has been maintained and slightly increased is more in line with an economic stimulus approach to ensure that investment is sustained during low growth conditions associated with economic recession. So the picture of budget reductions is not so clear-cut, but critically may be explained by the objective to shrink the public sector.

Overall, the report expressed strong concerns over the limited information and appreciation within the government on the uncertain and cumulative impacts of LG shifts to commercial activities and self-sufficiency as responses to austerity, and particularly the risks these could present the sector over time:

'*The Department [Communities and Local Government; DCLG] expects authorities to become more 'entrepreneurial' as it encourages local government to become largely self-financing. But we are concerned that the Department appears complacent about the risks to local authority finances, council tax payers and local service users arising from the increasing scale and changing character of commercial activities across the sector. The Department does not have good enough information to understand the scale and nature of authorities' commercial activities or which authorities are placing themselves at greatest risk and it does not use the information it does have to give it a cumulative picture of risks and pressures across the sector*' (HoC Committee of Public Accounts, 2016, p. 3).

The empirical findings in this research support the Committee of Public Accounts report. This section presents some initial findings on these issues; however, further research is needed on the scale and impact of commercial activities on LAs and planning services to develop a more complete evaluation.

Indeed, practical concerns were expressed around the potential limits to the commercialisation agenda. These were based on normative distinctions between commercialisation and privatisation in practice. PMs emphasised that the statutory requirements and nature of the public sector 'ethos' effectively limited how 'commercially' LAs and planning services could function and compete when compared with private sector (planning) actors, such as consultancies and third-party providers:

> *"[T]he cost of providing just the Development Management service, so that is just the people that deal with the planning applications and the administrative support, and some of that committee cost, the amount of income I generate more than covers the cost of providing that service. So that is used to fund Enforcement elements and fund, although it doesn't fully do this, some of the Policy work. So, all of a sudden, if a private company looks and does a detailed analysis on that DM activity, they could quite easily turn round and say, "Well, actually, we could do all that activity for, I don't know, maybe £200-300 grand less than what the local authority is doing it for". And I will have to say, "Well yeah, I could do that. I am doing that, but who is going to pay for all these other bits then?" If they [company] want to take all this stuff as well then fair enough, but they don't want to have any of that stuff because there is no income to be generated" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

SPs made the case that planning departments could attempt to operate more purely on a business model through managing expenditure and revenue accounts; but ultimately there are things that LAs 'have to do' and cannot get away from given their role as public service providers. These additional requirements and services effectively obstructed their ability to compete with private sector providers focussed only on revenue streams, *even if planners only wanted to focus on income and cost savings*.

As the concept is used here, *commercialisation* is a process that is shaped by externalised reforms, but developed from 'within' LAs, through the internalised discourses and actions of LG senior management (planners). This is subtly different to processes broadly labelled as 'privatisation'; which can crudely be conceptualised as the material shift/transfer of service delivery away from public to private provision. Under commercialisation as defined here, public service delivery stays with the LG, but the nature and objectives of public services more strongly reflect economic logics that mirrors private-sector practices.

Furthermore, the pace and scope of austerity and reforms created both significant financial and policy uncertainty within planning departments; effectively inhibiting local councils from developing 'effective' and 'sensible' long-term 'resource management strategies' in the same way as private businesses:

"[T]here is a whole range of things that actually mean you can't sensible plan just how you are going to do business, never-mind working through the nature of delivering on what the government actually want us to do…No business could operate on the basis that we [local government] are expected to operate, in terms of managing budgets and resources in a sensible and cost effective way" (SP7, Urban, East Midlands).

Such restrictions on councils to compete were not limited to the private sector. One example supported the *disciplining ideology* of neoliberalism to weaken the role of local state and open up spaces for public and third sector actors under Big Society Localism. In this case, the council had to reallocate its funding to other external actors in order to capture the value that they were not allowed to develop themselves:

"So a lot of my work is supporting Heritage Lottery Bids and, for example, there is a big Heritage Lottery Bid at the minute to support growth in the rural area of [council], but we have had to hand all that over to Groundwork Trust because we can't recover our costs. So it is stacked against local authorities even if you bid, we got £3.3 million, and we can't touch that because we are not allowed to recover our costs. So we hand it onto Groundwork Trust who are a charity and they can recover all their costs. It's really difficult. We were recently meeting with Heritage Lottery and they were saying, "Well why aren't councils bidding for Heritage Lottery funding anymore?", and, "Well, we can't because there are no resources to do it, and we can't recover costs"" (SP25, Major Urban, North East).

Crucially, the national government strategy of devolved responsibilisation also had to be enacted by LPAs as a means to reduce their costs and transfer pressures downwards to their 'customers'. This highlights the *scaling effects* of austerity localism, as responsibilisation is double-devolved by the local state in order to respond to structural reforms (Peck, 2012). SP31 explained how they had adjusted their minor applications process in order to transfer the costs and risks for delays away from the council:

"[T]hrough our delegations we have become much more disciplined in how we deal with the minors; so we won't accept an application that's missing information, we won't book it in, we won't process it until it is dead right, so the clock doesn't start until we are happy with it, and then we're getting into very much a process of principles as opposed to fine-detail just because of cost. So we are becoming much more commercial. And I can see a point coming where you move more towards self-service, that says, 'Look if the application fulfils these criteria, these five or six things, then it goes through the self-service portal'; and then if there is a snag it comes into the people, almost like car insurance on the phone or something, you will do it yourself if you fulfil these certain things, but the cost will be on you the applicant. So if you are going to find an architect or an agent it's that relationship that is key before you enter the planning system, and if you get to that point in the planning system and you've fulfilled all the criteria, you then go off into a fast track; and you do it yourself and it's down to you then in terms of being answerable to any check in the future. You are liable, so if you haven't built it according to plans or whatever then you're then liable. So I think it would be like that in future with a block of minors you will have a self-service portion, then you will have a light-touch council portion, and hopefully a much

smaller portion which is heavier-touch from the council as that is where your cost is and so you are going to minimise that" (SP31, Urban, North West).

In this future approach, planning applications that fulfil the basic criteria can go directly to a self-service portal, only requiring council staff/resources directly when there is a problem. It is likely that these '*responsibilisation*' strategies (Hastings et al, 2015) will become more widespread across council (planning) services as technology advances and budget pressures increase the need for LAs to devolve downwards to reduce pressures on service demands. This is notwithstanding the fact that austerity-driven changes may well provide a *better overall customer service* despite this transfer of responsibility.

As well as customers, this responsibilisation/risk was also devolved by LPAs to some of their specialist staff, which were now having to demonstrate that they could (re)cover their employment costs through additional external work to justify their positions within the department in austere times. Just as council planning *projects* now need to generate their own revenue streams to justify being undertaken, council *staff* were also being subjected to the same economic logics of austerity. One PM, working for an urban authority in the North East, explained that they had overseen a 50-60% reduction in their staff. A situation that had resulted in some staff, particularly within specialist areas such as Conservation and Ecology, having to generate their own income through various means in order to maintain their position; "*So to keep some of my staff employed to do statutory services they have to get income into the authority. So that may be doing consultancy work for other authorities, or consultancy work for private individuals and communities, or whatever, which is another challenge*" (SP25, Major Urban, North East).

The findings here therefore suggest that the neoliberal logics of transferring responsibility and risk are being downloaded and internalised by public institutions and actors. In such cases, the responsibility for ensuring secured employment is shifted downwards again from the LPA to the individual level and placed on specialist staff to maintain their position through additional commercial activity rather than being directly funded by the council. It can thus be suggested that planning staff are essentially becoming *personally tied into council commercialisation strategies*, as the discipline of self-sufficiency is placed on the responsibilized actor to think and act in a rational way to maintain their job (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). This follows governmentality theory and the subjectification of the conduct of actors.

Similarly, SP27 faced this challenge with their regeneration staff, which the council could no longer afford to fund their positions (Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber). Such staff were now dependent on generating an income through securing various funding bids in order to maintain their posts within the department. In the context of austerity, they explained the financial tensions between knowing that

there was a big capital pot available to bid for projects; weighed up against the resources necessary to assemble an expert team that could develop a credible business case for the funding; and the risk that such resource-intensive bids had no guarantee of securing any funding. This situation was contrasted with the previous regeneration model that had delivered a lot for the city centre, based on an officer-led approach paid for by the council that worked with partners to develop large Regional Development Agency and European funding bids. Despite greater reliance on funding, reduced staff/resources meant less could be 'risked' for such bids under austerity governance; leading to the criticism that only well-resourced LAs could risk bidding for capital funding at the expense of other more needing councils. This supports the shift to forms of '*tournament financing*' by public institutions under austerity (Peck, 2012).

Overall, the findings here support the critical planning literature that a neoliberal 'austerity localism' governing approach was adopted by the government post-2010 to transfer responsibility and risk away from the national government downwards to local councils, some of which then subsequently had to be further double-devolved onto their staff, communities and customers. This can be seen through changes to the planning application process to pass on "liability" to the applicant and the pressures on LPA specialist staff to generate their own external revenues to justify their employment. Austerity as a state strategy can therefore be understood as more than about cutbacks to reduce the deficit but as part of the Cameron-led government's claims to create a smaller, 'smarter state' (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016) supported by leaner councils that provide only essential services and light-touch regulation. It is too early, however, to make any forgone conclusions about what this means for the future of state-society-market relations in the UK; these reforms may create more resilient national and local states by making them more self-sufficient in the long-term. In this sense we should not assume that the growing shift towards public commercialisation strategies are necessarily a problem for LPAs or wider society. In many respects, such responses represent innovative advances in LG services and self-sufficiency.

Indeed the long-term implications of the emerging and established LA responses to austerity are not entirely clear at this stage. A pro-development culture shift in approach, especially within LAs that previously prescribed a narrow restrictive strategy for planning, can necessarily be considered a positive outcome of austerity in a country that desperately needs more housing and infrastructure. It is worth stating that this is not a criticism of the logics and practices of the private sector, which plays a significant role in the economy delivering development (Adams and Tiesdell, 2012). Rather it is the criticism of *the public sector imitating the private sector too closely*. Despite being a core function, planning should never become solely an enabler of private market activity (Fordham, 1990), even if this is the primary goal in national policy. This is even more salient in the context of austerity where the

significant pressures for growth-dependent revenue is elevated to priority status, potentially relegating traditional professional and ethical concerns with local democracy, social justice and the environment that have dominated planning theory literatures (Fainstein and DeFilippis, 2015, Allmendinger, 2017).

5.2 Social-Spatial Development and Localised Responses: Structures, Contexts and Politics

RQ5) *What are the financial/budget and capacity/resilience pressures on planning services, and how do they relate to the impacts of austerity on local authorities (landscapes of antagonism) more generally?*

The purpose of this section is to present the empirical data and examine to what extent there is an uneven geography of socio-spatial development under 'austerity localism' governance following the literature (See Beatty & Fothergill, 2013, Hastings et al, 2017) and whether this is in line with the existing regional disparities across England (Martin, 2015). The findings here also highlight how LPA E&Rs to austerity reforms are dependent on their institutional structures, antecedent contexts and local politics, amongst a number of other factors. Most notably, the specific amounts and values of public building and land assets, private-sector investment within the local economy, local council tax base, relative levels of community social deprivation regionally and nationally, and so on, within the LPA cases. It takes the critical position that austerity localism is serving to further extend and embed socio-spatial inequalities between places across England as a result of the national government *laissez faire* approach to planning and development post-2010 which follows a strategy of roll-back neoliberalism (Peck, 2010).

Here the most significant implication of moving towards a commercialised growth-dependent planning model is that a pro-development approach becomes the only goal of planning, leaving environmental and social policy, and directing development to sustainable locations through 'place-making', as secondary concerns. Rydin (2013) argues that the problem with the growth-dependant planning model is that it often does very little for social and environmental objectives, or '*just sustainability*', a situation that is exacerbated when such a model is applied universally across LPAs in England. Whilst growth-dependent planning can be a workable model for specific contexts and projects, it should not be considered the only option. Other planning models should be utilised across different places and times alongside market delivery to achieve the best planning outcomes for all (Fainstein, 2010). It is in this context that planning commercialisation is potentially problematic, rather than being *a priori* in all cases.

The most 'typical' response was for councils to try and '*grow their way out of austerity*'. At the LA level, this encapsulated the economic logic of investing in areas with the most potential for growth in terms of employment or Gross Value Added (GVA) to the local economy. In this way, LPAs are pushed towards

localised growth strategies that mirrored the Coalition's economic approach of 'backing the winner' by investing in projects that provide the most 'bang for your buck'. Going back to Pickles (2012, no page) that "*Instead of trying to impose growth from Whitehall, we want to encourage and celebrate local leadership, ingenuity, and enterprise…This means making tough decisions and putting the cash where it can make the biggest difference – not where it's most expedient, or will appease the most people*". The discipline of austerity localism and post-crisis neoliberalism localised responsibility and risk for the future economic development of places; with the likelihood that many relatively disadvantaged places would not be able to compete under such a model without some form of support. Indeed, the policy approach enacted by the Coalition post-2010 leads O'Brien and Matthews (2015) to conclude that we are now living in a 'post-regeneration' age. On the one hand this is local 'empowerment' for future growth, but on the other it is a politics of 'abandonment' (Davies and Pill, 2012, Raco, 2013) that sees the people and places most in need of public services and regeneration left to solve their own problems.

At the heart of this empowerment/abandonment dualism is the uneven ability of LAs across England to boost development and generate fees for self-sufficiency. Contextual factors such as the dynamics of the local economy, community politics and attributes of the natural and built environment within and across councils (i.e. their local market and physical/social conditions) directly influenced their capacity to enact commercialised growth strategies. In such cases, a LA may want to grow, but does not have the sufficient land (value) or market interest to deliver; and, as a result of the new LG financial settlement underpinned by growth-based revenue, incentives and competitive bidding, fall even further behind those councils with more available resources and investment opportunities. It is in this sense that austerity localism further exacerbates the unequal socio-economic geography in England:

> *"So that whole thing about development, retaining business rates by 2020…there's two sides to it, isn't there? You achieve all that business rate growth in yourself, you are financially self-sufficient, or you don't and you are stuffed because all the government money has gone. So that puts the pressure on the planning authority to be positive about growth from the corporate level. From the very top the corporate message is, 'We want the benefits of growth and we need to make sure the planning authority is doing all it can to deliver growth'" (SP27, Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

Furthermore, even where pro-development (culture) changes are accepted by LPA staff and elected council members, this may still not be enough in many cases to overcome the various physical/natural and political/social barriers to responding to austerity through the 'growth-generated revenue' model:

> *"[T]here are districts that are almost 75% Greenbelt or whatever, and so their prospects of getting further development is pretty limited, but also the local people don't want it. So*

how on earth they fund themselves then through business rate retention, or New Homes Bonus, or CIL, or whatever, I don't know; because it is all geared now towards growth-generated revenue that makes up the difference from what we are losing from the Revenue Support Grant. So there are some winners and losers" (SP9, Mixed, West Midlands).

This system of local '*winners and losers*' under austerity localism undermines a more sustainable and equitable approach to funding planning and development across the country. This is critical for social justice and public interest perspectives because '*localized austerity is a recipe for yet more marked forms of uneven socio-spatial development, rather than simple convergence*'; with the places most (likely to be) impacted generally already being known because '*[t]he resulting landscape of austerity urbanism may be uneven, but it will not be entirely chaotic or unpatterned*' (Peck, 2012, p. 647-8).

The PMs were keenly aware that if they could not 'grow themselves' out of austerity, then they would be forced to make otherwise politically unacceptable decisions for (discretionary) service retrenchment:

"Every council that I know of is adopting the same type of strategy, they are trying to grow themselves out of the current economic circumstances; they are defining themselves then with the reduction in grants, so this council has got to save £126 million over the next four years…So the only way to close the gap…if we can't meet the budget gap from income generation, then we are only going to be able to meet it from service reduction…politically not acceptable really" (SP37, Major Urban, North West).

The most extreme cases highlighted the sheer challenges of incentivising and facilitating development in weak land markets necessary to generate revenues using the growth-dependent model (Rydin, 2013):

"[W]hat you are probably seeing is a pragmatic approach by the council which says that, 'Well given the value in that land…', and it may be the councils land in this case, the council essentially will sell the land for £1. Now can you imagine selling land for £1 there [points to the South East on map of England]. So effectively we put a line on a spreadsheet that says its £1, so we sell the land for £1, and the value that the council gets from that land is essentially what it gets through the door in terms of business rates or New Homes Bonus or council tax. So there is nothing in the land, there is no capital receipt, it's essentially we are giving the land away for nothing; on the basis that that's the only way you will see development in some cases, but not all, in some parts of the borough that are significantly deprived where we are keen to promote regeneration" (SP39, Major Urban, North West).

These challenges stand in stark contrast to the strongest LPA cases of '*managing growth, not decline*':

"Our challenges are managing growth, not decline…Meaning for the whole of my duration down here, and I came down here as I say in the back-end of 2008, I haven't seen any signs of austerity at all. That's not to say that it's not difficult for some people, I'm not making that point, but we are in a very atypical place, and we have seen a lot of private sector

investment as well, so it's quite different…We have seen public sector cuts but we have generated new income to the point where for the next two years we are not making any more cuts in either council; because we have taken budgets out early and we have changed what we do, but actually we are delivering more with fewer people…Other places, big Mets, it is harder if you are trying to find cutting £100 million out of a big budget. It's harder than cutting three, four, five million, and we have been doing it for a long time, so we have cut about £10 million out of the two authorities' budgets…We are small districts but we are still doing fantastic things, and we are still willing to spend £30 million to buy [local site] and lead the development ourselves. If austerity was driving us to just be cautious, watch every last penny, you wouldn't dream of doing things like that. So there's a willingness to invest, generate returns, do new things" (SP20, Mixed, South East).

"It [austerity] isn't so critical, and the council probably has the best council tax base in the north of England. So, you know, we are very fortunate in that you have large council tax revenues; that don't entirely cover the costs, but it does mean the council is far less dependent on grants and other, particularly what people used to call the 'funny money', various programmes and that sort of thing. A lot of that is down to, well partly it's because we have got the council tax base, we have got land holdings, and because market interest is high…we are selling it at good market rates. So we sold a site…that went for several million…The council is fortunate in that it has some fairly extensive land holdings…It is a very different context [to other local authorities]" (SP40, Mixed, North West).

These findings suggest that having a high council tax base, high private sector and market investment interests, and council-owned public land and building holdings offer the most effective 'protective factors' against austerity. However, these are not conditions that LPAs can easily develop over the short or long-term; for example, LPAs can only go so far in influencing market forces and actors to invest, land ownership may not be transparent, fragmented or already monopolised by private actors, and council tax depends on the wider employment status and affluence of the local population. These protective factors have not been newly developed and deployed by LPAs *per se* but represent their antecedent conditions pre-GFC and austerity. This highlights the role of 'path dependency' (Gains et al., 2005) in shaping the available responses to austerity for LPAs and how they have experienced reforms.

As would be expected, the LAs that can be described as '*high value*' (with respect to having various combinations of the key local characteristics of a high GVA, high council tax base, low population dependency costs, high market interests, large land holdings, etc.) were the least impacted by cutbacks. They had the most options available to respond to austerity in effective or innovative ways, regardless of their regional context. It is therefore argued that whilst overall regional variations in the impacts of austerity are important in *absolute terms*, a more nuanced focus shows that LG 'value' provides a clearer picture with *the geography of austerity more closely matching the pre-existing economic geography of England*. For example, high value rural LAs in the North West had more in common with high value rural councils in the South East and others across the country, than with their neighbouring

councils or wider sub-region. Equally, the relatively '*low value*' urban councils all had similar problems in responding to austerity, despite these being *typically* more pronounced in the north of England.

Despite austerity impacting the north of England to a greater extent than the south of England *in general terms*, this masks the local variations that suggest austerity is further entrenching pre-existing inequalities between relatively affluent and disadvantaged LAs in England. The perverse consequence is that LG planning becomes more difficult and less well-resourced in precisely the localities most in need of socio-economic regeneration and growth to generate funding to meet cutbacks. The findings here support the literature that some LPAs have a much greater capacity to raise revenues and support their communities in the context of austerity. Most worryingly, the places and people most in need of regeneration and supporting services are situated within the local councils with the least capacity to respond to austerity through growth-led strategies (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013, Hastings et al., 2017).

Whilst there is nothing wrong with trying to achieve the best economic results from the (supposedly) decreasing amount of public money available to invest into a project or place, it does potentially move the planning rationale away from traditional concerns for promoting social and spatial justice (Davidoff, 1965). Thus, whilst economic growth is a necessary and positive goal for the development of advanced liberal societies, the type and distribution of growth is significant to avoid further socially polarised and economically unequal communities and places across England (Beatty and Fothergill, 2013, Gardiner et al., 2013, Hastings et al., 2017). Indeed, the sustained Coalition and Conservative rhetoric for nationally '*rebalancing the economy*' through developing local economic growth, devolution deals and the 'northern powerhouse', have been significantly hampered by the parallel national austerity agenda (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012); and without more political and financial support, seem unlikely to have any meaningful impact for changing the persistent UK spatial economic inequality (Martin et al., 2016).

Most notably, the largest and (relatively) well-resourced councils pursued more ambitious commercial strategies that sought to 'rent out' their core and specialist services to surrounding smaller councils, as well as offering a service to assist with processing their planning applications. This formed part of a new 'business model' to more closely mimics the operations of a planning consultancy. SP27 explained that they were starting to develop a model of the city becoming a "*planning centre of excellence*", where they can charge out their specialist services, such as landscape, design and policy to assist smaller authorities with some of their work and create new income streams. Such a model builds on the understanding that austerity has significantly reduced the internal staff capacity and access to technical specialists within the majority of councils, particularly for the smaller and relatively lower-value LPAs:

> *"We are doing a piece of work with…a business transformation part of Capita, to advise us on commercialisation…and they are helping us with things like how you get your charging right, and can we potentially start to provide a service for other authorities. So it is not inconceivable that we could start doing planning applications for surrounding authorities…I think you will start to see the bigger local authorities becoming more commercial, and the smaller local authorities shrinking their planning teams and just buying in the expertise when they need it, rather than trying to operate a very small specialist service themselves" (SP27, Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

Such emerging commercial strategies highlight the potential for innovative entrepreneurial approaches to managing planning services in the future in the context of fewer resources resulting from austerity (Lowndes and McCaughie, 2013, Raco and Moreira de Souza, 2018). They can provide access to the resources of other councils in order to address internal capacity and resilience issues on a more formal basis, and to staff with a greater range of skills and experience across LG boundaries. This represents the potential 'scaling' effects of austerity, as the strongest and largest LAs manage to maintain their resources and prosper in harsh economic conditions, and smaller councils become reliant on them for specialist services and other capacity challenges. These arguments for the scaling effects of austerity also extend to individuals; Pill and Guarneros-Meza (2017) highlight '*austerity's multi-scalarity*' through the emergence of '*hybrid officers*' as the combinations of front-line actors working across third sector and public institutions in response to austerity-driven local governance transformations. In the bigger picture this means recognising that austerity has international, national, local and individual dimensions.

Such models could potentially represent a new local government service hierarchy, optimally suited to city-regions, that concentrates specialist resources and services in key areas that can be accessed when necessary by smaller councils. This could produce efficiencies for smaller councils and generate incomes for larger authorities. However, this does raise the question of how smaller and low-value authorities can access such specialists and core resources in localities that do not have a proximate 'centre of planning excellence' to mitigate budgetary pressures (Etherington and Jones, 2009). Nonetheless, in the context of severely reduced capacity and resilience, such commercial strategies can be considered positive local responses and innovations to the challenges faced by many local planning departments.

Overall, these findings support Peck that '*[t]he devolution of austerity is driving a sharp wedge between those cities that can feasibly go it alone and those that, by virtue of local economic fragility or high poverty rates, have no real option but to downsize municipal government and retrench public services*' (2012, p.633). This may be the future 'sink or swim' landscape of English LPAs under austerity localism.

Furthermore, it was clear from the empirical data that the institutional 'structure' of LAs played an important part in the types and severity of pressures faced by austerity. Whether a council was a standalone unitary authority or part of a two-tier county and district structure was significant because unitaries had the additional responsibility for funding education and child and adult social care services; which were the services under the greatest financial pressures from high demand and the key political priorities for protection. For the two-tier district councils, responsibility for these services still resided with the country council, and so they have been relatively sheltered from these more significant financial pressures. Therefore these findings suggest that the strength of pressures for budget savings and revenues expected from (planning) services seem to be greater within unitary and county councils:

> *"[I]t would be a complete nightmare to my mind had [the council] been a unitary authority and had to deal with those social services pressures and the education pressures, all those funding issues. And so the fact that the County council is there means the County council has rather more serious budget problems than the district councils, and so to a certain extent it insulates us, but that is only because that is where the big expenditure is" (SP35, Urban, East of England).*

> *"I think planning has been better protected in districts, so where you have got a two tier local government, district authorities have a tendency to protect planning to a reasonable extent. So yes we have been through significant austerity and significant cuts as an authority, but generally speaking planning is actually reasonably well protected" (SP15, Urban, West Midlands).*

> *"[W]e are not like the County council at the moment, which has gone through tremendous financial issues and quite frankly will probably go bankrupt in two years if they don't sort themselves out. They are going through various redundancy packages, massive service cuts at the moment which are upsetting a lot of people, but they have got to do it; and so they are having to adjust now to reflect the austerity that is coming in, we have not been in that position" (SP30, Rural, North West).*

> *"Whether that level of efficiency [imposed on planning services] has been applied across local authorities and into more sensitive areas, so children, young people service, adult care, that type of stuff, has always been a moot point; because if you get something wrong there, when you hear of Baby P and things like that, then clearly the senior managers and the members are going to be very reluctant to hive significant chunks of funding off their budgets. However, when you look at our budget as a council, I think we have halved it in terms of our revenue cost, and it has come down from about £450 million to just over £200 million now. But all that's happened is the percentage of that budget has just massively increased in terms of adults' and children's services. So you arguably, for the future savings that are needed, you could probably just close the Regeneration Department; so not just planning, above that, you would still be short. So there is becoming an issue now about what more savings can truly be delivered. And I think if much more comes out there is no doubt it will have to affect service provision" (SP26, Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

These education and social care cost pressures within unitary authorities resulted in an even sharper focus on the need for planning services to go beyond self-sufficiency to revenue generation strategies, particularly in more deprived localities that had higher levels of social and health related problems within their population. The findings suggest this situation was different for district councils, potentially because of a mixture of factors; including that they were protected by their county from the harshest service budget pressures, have less 'urban' problems to address within their local population and demand for such services, and can *typically* raise more local revenues being rural and affluent in nature. In contrast, one PM, working for a low-value urban unitary authority in the North West, explained that the financial strategy of the council had to be '*growth-based revenue*' in order to meet these growing service demand pressures; making the point that, "*You know, like a lot of other councils within five years there won't be a council there, because if you take out what the council has to spend on schools and social care services then the council won't have anything left to do the streets and the bins*" (SP39).

Research by the National Audit Office (NAO, 2018) estimates that 10% of single tier (unitary) and county councils with social care obligations have less than three years' financial reserves left if they continue to routinely deploy them at current rates to cope with increasing service demands under austerity. Furthermore, a survey conducted by the County Councils Network (CCN, 2018), a special interest group of the Local Government Association (LGA) which represents all 27 county councils and 9 county unitary authorities (collectively responsible for service delivery to 27 million people), found that a third of these would struggle to balance their budgets for 2019-20 without extra funding, with this figure rising to two-thirds by 2020-21. This is based on the latest CNN budget analysis estimates that county councils face a £3.2 billion gap between income and costs over the next two years primarily caused by projected extra demand for social care services and government cutbacks. Indeed, the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) for county councils will have decreased by 93% by 2020, faster than any other council type, with the CNN arguing the government's 'hand to mouth' funding approach is unsustainable in the long-term.

A case in point, and potential window into the future, is that in February 2018 Northamptonshire County Council became the first local authority in two decades to issue a Section 114 notice because it was unlikely to be able to balance its books and was therefore at risk of being unable to set a legal budget for 2018-19. Despite dogmatically following the government guidance on how to restructure towards a new model of 'next generation' councils under austerity, this means the county was effectively declaring bankruptcy. Indeed, it seems very possible that a number of English LAs may soon join the US city municipalities that have had to file for bankruptcy under the conditions of austerity urbanism (Peck, 2012). Patrick Butler, social commentator for the Guardian newspaper, reported that:

"*The clean steel and glass lines of One Angel Square were supposed to enshrine the modernising dynamism of its owners, Northamptonshire county council. Instead, the £53m headoffice is more likely to end up as a symbol of one of the biggest municipal failings of recent times…One Angel Square is likely to be put up for sale, three months after it was formally opened by the communities secretary, Sajid Javid. A fire sale of assets is the only way to keep the council afloat, say officials, though even this temporary fix may not be enough to save it…The irony is not lost on some observers that the first local authority to go bust under austerity is not the profligate Labour municipality of media caricature, but a Tory-run council in the heart of middle England…Furthermore, it has crashed after rigid adherence to the Tory ideological rulebook for local government. Northamptonshire embarked on a "next generation" reform plan in 2014. Services would be outsourced or turned into profit-making companies. The council would drastically shrink in size and be run like a business. "The old model of local government no longer works," it declared. The grand plan failed at a cost, say critics, of more than £50m on consultants and rebranding. Expected efficiency savings did not materialise, some privatised services have since been hauled back in-house and the scheme's political architects, including the then council leader Jim Harker and the then chief executive Paul Blantern, have departed. After years of freezing council tax bills on principle, the authority has raised them by 6%…Northamptonshire faces huge structural pressures. The number of residents aged over 65 will increase by an estimated 28% by 2024 and record numbers of children are being taken into care…Government cuts have obliged Northamptonshire to make £376m of savings since 2010 and it estimates that another £111m must be cut from annual spending by 2021. How it will do this while maintaining the services it must legally provide is unclear.…Even a skeleton service may not be enough to balance the books in the long term*" (11th February 2018).

Beyond the importance of LG institutional structures, the academic literature suggests that austerity is predominantly an 'urban' crisis, with towns and cities being home to the main targets of austerity policies for budget reductions/savings aimed at the sections of the population most dependent on public sector employment and welfare support: '*[C]ities are disproportionately reliant on public services; and in the sense that they are 'home' to many of the preferred political targets of austerity programs—the 'undeserving' poor, minorities and marginalized populations, public-sector unions and 'bureaucratized' infrastructures. Cities are therefore where austerity bites*' (Peck, 2012, p. 629).

This urban funding crisis is set against government policy that also prioritises core cities and city-regions as the 'engines of the national economy' with the most potential to achieve growth, highlighting the government's vision to reform towns and cities across England into lean, competitive and private-sector

driven urban spaces. However the picture is more complicated, with a number of medium-sized secondary urban cities and towns having structural constraints to growth, such as constrained LA boundaries or their historic built environment, meaning that the relationship of the *rural* and *urban* to income growth through development is more complex and notwithstanding issues of rural deprivation.

Rural LPAs have been impacted by austerity, but they also tend to be district councils that are relatively more protected by their county council than unitary and city authorities and with less social costs and more available and desirable land for large scale developments. For example in one city situated in the East Midlands, SP13 made the case that surrounding rural councils with greenfield land could generate more growth through large housing developments and planning application fees than the urban centre:

> *"[O]ne of the upsides that many of my colleagues in the surrounding districts have in my position [planning manager] is that, I bring in £350,000 a year in income, they have been bringing in £2m in income; because they have been getting these 500 houses on greenfield sites cropping up and just being pinged in speculatively, but it means at least they are not under pressure from an income perspective. I think also in terms of how we operate, it is because the service is under this continuous pressure which makes it very difficult. Add to that the fact that as a district, as I've said, we have very tight, small boundaries; we don't really have the ability, because of the size of us, for schemes to attract large planning fees. So we don't get a new agricultural building which is a maximum fee somewhere in the middle of nowhere, which has got very little impact on anybody and is quite easy to deal with. We haven't got the luxury of having areas of land like that where we can attract those sorts of fees; our sites tend to be smaller but much more involved because they are in a tight urban context. A huge number of our buildings in the city are listed, so all applications for those buildings have no fee, take a lot of work, take a lot of time, mean you have to have a highly qualified conservation officer, means we have to have a highly qualified city archaeologist. A lot of other authorities pool these resources county-wide because they don't have that level of issue. So, comparatively speaking, we are an expensive authority, if you want to call it that, because of the nature of our district and because of the nature of the fees that we get for the work that we get" (SP13, Urban, East Midlands).*

These 'urban' funding pressures were representative of the broader challenges facing many medium-sized secondary and tertiary urban areas outside the eight core cities in England, with high-cost boundary and conservation/heritage challenges that impact their types of development and fees. This suggests that the ability for LPAs to develop revenue-based growth strategies in relation to rural and urban contexts are not so straightforward; whilst urban areas certainly have the most potential for growth and employment in general terms, they typically have higher built environment and social costs and less desirable land when compared to rural areas, particularly in regard to housing development.

Again, the tension between *general* and *context specific* responses to austerity is raised here, this time in relation to urban and rural contexts. The evidence presented here does not claim to represent all

'types' of LPAs and responses, rather this analysis aims to highlight some of the general and particular responses to austerity within a number of different geographical contexts across England. These can then begin to shape understandings of austerity in relation to planning practices for *future research*.

In terms of the political differences between the LA cases, there was *some evidence* to suggest that Conservative-led councils valued maintaining low council tax and public service costs and quality of life considerations under austerity. Similar anecdotal evidence suggested that Labour authority councillors and leadership typically placed stronger emphasis on affordable housing and protecting social provision:

> *"I'm not quite sure what the future of local government finance looks like. Of course, certainly this council has not put council tax up; we took advantage of the council tax freeze. You would expect that, it is a Conservative run council, that was national policy, and our members are always reluctant to increase council tax. So, you know, at the moment the way councils fund themselves there are few variables" (SP16, Mixed, West Midlands).*

> *"I do think that austerity has had an impact, because inevitably district councils have had their budgets cut and there is a limit to the extent that we can increase our income. Both [local councils] prides themselves on not having raised fees and charges and in some circumstances. Well in [local council], for example, currently has free public car parking right across the district, provides a free garden waste collection service and has one of the, if not the lowest, council tax in England. And they are proud of that and that is what they think is important for the community in times of austerity. The consequence of that though is there is less money available to employ staff. So there are consequences of that. [Neighbouring] district council similarly, although they do charge for car parking and for garden waste, they pledged not to raise their fees and charges. And over the last three years, or probably longer than three years, have had the biggest reduction in their level of council tax. Or one of the biggest reductions in council tax of any council in the country, and last year actually reduced their council tax for the same reasons. You know, what they are concerned about is the money in people pockets and again the inevitable consequence of that is the council has to make a fair amount of savings" (SP2, Rural, South East).*

Despite tentative evidence for different political priorities under austerity conditions in this research, this seems a reasonable postulation that different places and political members have different service priorities when enacting budget cuts. The evidence here suggests that political tensions predominantly gained expression through *competing Conservative agendas for national growth and local conservation*, rather than one fundamentally between Labour and Conservative councils per se. This is likely because at the time of the research the overwhelming majority of LAs in England were Conservative-run councils:

> *"[T]here is a huge disparity between what is coming from a Conservative-led government in terms of what we need to do, the numbers of housing and the crisis that we are in, and that it is the planning system's fault that we are in that position. However, at grassroots level in a lot of the rural districts, which tend to be Conservative-led councils with*

Conservative majority members sat on their planning committee, they are the members by and large which are refusing the highest percentage of planning applications. So the national message is not getting to their grassroots politicians, and that is a significant problem, and that is quite often going against officer recommendation. So it is not the planning system, or the planning officers, or the planning authority that is having that impact, it is the politicians that are making the decision at planning committee. And that I think is something the government need to really look at quite seriously, because that is as much of an issue as anything else" (SP13, Urban, East Midlands).

"I can understand the need for the government to want to incentivise delivery, and they want to sort out the political log-jams in authorities that want to avoid some of the really difficult decisions. The irony is, I think a lot of those areas are actually the leafy Tory Shires where local politicians are being very resistant" (SP7, Urban, East Midlands).

One government proposal for LAs to mitigate budget cuts and generate efficiencies was for them to develop cross-boundary 'shared services'. Given the diminished capacity and pressures on planning services, PM needed to consider potential moves towards more cross-boundary, joint-working and shared services arrangements to overcome individual council shortfalls. However, despite shared services being regarded as an effective response to austerity for LAs in general terms, a number of PMs explained that this was more challenging to implement for planning specifically. In one case, this was because planning is not a major staffed area that could generate the sufficient efficiencies and cost savings necessary to justify the organisational and political transaction costs of moving to a shared arrangement. In one case (SP34), even where three councils had a history of working together and had produced a joint Local Plan, this was still not considered worth losing their individual local autonomy, along with the politics that the two rural councils had concerns that the urban council would 'take over' the local planning agenda. Furthermore, these political concerns to maintain planning decision-making autonomy proved to be expressed even more strongly for their Development Management services:

"I think the view with shared services is that to really make efficiencies and generate big savings it is some of the big major staffed areas. So Revenues and Benefits, lots of staff, IT could be another one, maybe where you could pool some of those corporate services. With planning, we have looked into it, the obvious one was on the policy-side; we have worked together on the Joint Plan, so why don't we just go one step further and combine the teams?...Although saying that what do you do, you combine three [council] teams of say five staff on average, and your saving is maybe two managers? But looking bluntly, OK it is so many tens of thousands a year saving, but I think that there wasn't that big carrot there for those authorities I don't think in terms of major savings. So it is not live at the moment on the table. We discussed the same with Development Management and that is even more [politically] sensitive" (SP34, Urban, North West).

This suggests that whilst austerity has driven efficiency and innovation within planning departments, it has not necessarily provided the sufficient (financial) motivation and (political) traction to embrace a

fully shared services agenda; particularly given the LA politics around housing and growth since 2010. Even where councils had created collaborative governance arrangements across their administrative and county boundaries and implemented a comprehensive strategy to merge 'back-office' services to make savings, control over key frontline services such as planning remained with each individual council.

One PM explained that a cross-boundary district and county LG arrangement to make back-office savings, the 'Vision 2020' Partnership, had been successful. They explained that this was because the back-office transactional services such as finance, legal, IT, human resources, and revenue and benefits services are "*the kind of things that can be the same everywhere and don't need to be tailored to specific local needs*" (SP2). This partnership for sharing the costs of these functions has allowed the four participating councils to make and project significant savings, which was then reinvested back into maintaining front-line services or simply to deal with further government cutbacks. For SP2, the vision partnership represented innovation and bravery to work across local council and county boundaries to make savings, although that planning services remained individual and more controversial for sharing:

> *"[I]n terms of front-line services, planning is the only service that is not shared…I think planning will probably be kind of the last bastion of individuality in terms of the councils. Both of the councils, and the other two that are in the [Vision] 2020 Partnership, are very clear that they want to maintain their own identity and they want to deliver services that are appropriate to their particular area. And I think planning inevitably is seen as the key, probably the most important local service that a district council provides. I think that there is scope to share specialist officers in the planning service, and its right that because of the nature of planning you need people who know the area to deal with the issues in that area. But in both councils we have for instance specialists in conservation, environment, natural heritage and so forth, and I suspect that over the course of time we will find it harder and harder to recruit those jobs to have them in-house. We currently have to buy in expertise in those areas from time to time depending on the complexity of the issue. So I think it is highly likely that over the course of time those resources will become shared, because that is about technical expertise rather than local knowledge. But I think it will be some time before there is a fully shared planning service" (SP2, Rural, South East).*

These findings suggest that whilst collaboration on planning projects, such as local plan-making, was perceived to have benefits under austerity; the political costs weighed against relatively moderate savings deterred moves towards more fully shared planning and development management services.

Overall, the findings in this section are as expected, that local geographies, structures, contexts and politics play a key role in shaping how LPAs have experienced and responded to austerity. They also highlight the core role of the local economy and land markets, particularly private sector demand and investment, for LPA capacity to develop growth-dependent planning models. The implications are that

without any regional or national redistribution mechanisms to support more 'marginalised' LPAs (e.g. weak local economies, high social costs, traditionally more dependent on government funding, public sector employment and welfare protections), they will fall further behind exacerbating uneven social-spatial development across England. This supports Berry (2016) that '*the growth model supported by policy elites in the post-crisis period sustains patterns of wealth distribution similar to those which pertained in the pre-crisis period, albeit with inequality arguably more pronounced as financial and property wealth remains largely intact while earnings are held down and redistributive mechanisms are withdrawn*' (p. 110). The next section moves on to examine the role of PMs in making government austerity reforms 'work' in practice through discursive and structural changes within their LPA services.

5.3 Managing Austerity Planning: Practice Culture Change and Service Restructuring

RQ6) *To what extent have austerity logics been internalised or resisted by local authority planning managers? How have these austerity measures shaped LPA practice cultures and structures?*

The main argument presented in this section is that planning managers (PMs) are playing a key role in the (re)production of austerity at the local scale as a result of their senior 'frontline' position and relationships within the wider council leadership. Whilst some PMs perceived and embraced the changes associated with austerity reforms enthusiastically, such as greater efficiency, innovation, self-sufficiency and a positive approach to development, others were more reluctant and concentrated on the necessity to respond in order to sustain the service, support growth and continue to meet their communities' needs as best possible. Here the differences between these PM's understandings and approaches to austerity have been termed as '*enthusiastic reformers*' and '*reluctant pragmatists*' respectively. It is argued that despite these contrasting personal positions, each are having to make the system reforms 'work' and so become 'agents' in the neoliberalisation of their LPAs to varying extents through the internalisation of austerity logics into their practice cultures. This is not to argue, however, that such practice changes are necessarily 'bad' outcomes as many potentially represent positive steps forward in LA service delivery; rather it is to *evaluate the management of austerity within various LPAs*.

The findings in this section support the literature that emerging shifts towards commercialisation within English LPAs form part of the broader expression of planning 'culture change' in the UK (Inch, 2017). These culture changes are associated with, and reinforced by, the various national government policy reforms enacted over the previous two decades in the UK, focussed on performance, speed, efficiency, customer service and supporting growth in planning (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006) and within LG as modernised, joined-up governance partners and 'enablers' more generally (Wilson and Game, 2006).

This follows Gains et al. (2005) that there is a '*path dependency*' to the reform of English LG. In this sense, despite being a radical shift in LG finances and management, austerity can be seen as a continuation of this trajectory for planning under a neoliberalized political economy (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2013). This section is therefore partly a response to increasing calls in the academic literature for planning research to focus on the 'cultural dimension' of reform (Grange, 2014, Inch, 2012, Inch, 2017). These findings tentatively provide some preliminary evidence/examples of contemporary practice culture change within English LPAs; however, more research is needed to make stronger claims.

Preliminary evidence for changing practice cultures within the LAs cases was the '*growing recognition and acceptance*' demonstrated by (planning) service managers, elected members and the corporate leadership that they needed to adopt a pro-growth stance in order to respond effectively to austerity:

> *"Within our leading members, both the leaders of the councils and the planning and economic development portfolio holders, so the cabinet councillors, there is a real acceptance that they have to go for growth; and that's the way forward both in terms of what is good for [the region] and 'UK plc.' as people like to say. So there is an acceptance of that, but also now recognition that a lot of government finance particularly at district level is going to come from New Homes Bonus and in the future from Business Rates, and if you are looking for a reasonable future for the local authority you have to keep those streams coming through. So there are quite a lot of things that are pushing you in the direction of more growth" (SP8, Rural, East of England).*

Practitioner language on 'acceptance' and 'recognition' is potentially telling because it suggests that a form of 'pragmatic consensus' for growth has taken a long time to develop and become internalised by council actors despite their initial reservations. Although not part of the theoretical framework heuristic deployed here, the insights of *discursive institutionalism* theory can be used to suggests that these 'discursive' responses to austerity have taken a number of years to become fully 'codified' into the 'deeper frames of reference' of LA (planning) leadership and to find expression in ideational changes supportive of growth that have created a new 'sedimented' practice culture (Hay, 2006, Schmidt, 2010).

The necessity for LPAs to set their own fees to a level that could recover the costs of operating planning services and achieve self-sufficiency was a commonly recurring theme across the cases. However, PMs demonstrated some sympathy with the government's reluctance to raise or allow locally set fees without some link to improved efficiency and performance, and their views were heavily couched in terms of the need to deliver the most efficient service possible to 'customers'. This suggests they had internalised the (neoliberal) discourses of performance and efficiency as the criteria that should be attached to funding increases for the sector. However, they also balanced this New Public Management

framing with concerns for the public interest. This supports Clifford (2012, p.553) that '*planners are redefining the customer concept as they embed it in practice in ways which are far removed from the traditional model of the 'sovereign customer'…[that] draw on older conceptions of planning serving society which form a key part of their professional identity, resulting in a weakening of the customer concept*'. In this way, planners are both agents and mediators of neoliberalism at their local institutional scale, uneasy to abandon their professionalism but governed towards enacting practice change/reform.

The Coalition encouraged these changes through policy tools that provided financial incentives for LAs in exchange for local development (Clarke and Cochrane, 2013). The introduction of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) and partial localisation of Non-Domestic (Business) Rate Retention both offered LAs financial incentives to encourage delivery of more houses and employment development respectively. In the context of pro-development national policy, localism and austerity self-sufficiency reforms, these additional policy tools placed further pressure on LPAs to change their practice culture towards growth. The PMs were acutely aware that such incentives were designed to exert central control and modify local practices and conducts through 'bribery and blackmail' towards supporting the national agenda:

> *"So they [central government] have done an awful lot of work trying to encourage us [local authorities] and…that's bribery if you like, we are being bribed into doing it, but we are also being blackmailed into doing it [promoting development]" (SP3, Urban, South East).*

> *"[T]here is an awful lot of things going on and change. So we are having to change the way in which we are sort of conducting ourselves in terms of overall corporate changes and moving towards a business model that is far more growth orientated in terms of the way in which we operate. When maybe two years ago we might have said to certain developments, "not a chance", and now the stance is "why not?"" (SP6, Rural, South East).*

In these cases, the previous approach based on *planning restraint* has been 'layered' over, although not completely replaced, by a pro-development practice culture; which support the New Institutionalism theory conceptualisations of 'sedimentation' (Clifford, 2016). They also highlight how the 'conduct' of local agents are shaped to towards certain governing ends as outlined in governmentality theory. As well as post-political theory claims for '*a conscious and deliberate role for planners in not just supporting but also rolling out and helping constitute strategies of depoliticization…[and] the changing role of planners from a progressive function, underpinned by agreed values and an apolitical self-perception, to a narrower, partisan, pro-growth and development sensibility*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 192). Each of these theoretical explanations are viewed here from a broader *structure-agency* theory perspective dependent on national-local state *power relations* and driven by the goals of *neoliberal ideology*.

The findings here suggest that austerity has helped to accelerate practice culture changes within LPAs. Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that '*Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Local planning authorities should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area*'. This outlines the government's expectations for local planning and provides the (externalised) policy logics being transferred onto planners. It can thus be suggested that whilst LPAs have been receiving national policy messages along these lines for some time now, the 'crisis' politics of austerity has internalised these logics and prioritised the need for such culture changes to a much greater extent than previously.

In effect, austerity seems to have been a much more effective 'roll-out' neoliberal programme of reform for achieving culture change than target/audit regimes attempting to embed performance, competition, collaboration and growth or cruder 'roll-back' deregulatory reforms trying to bypass LGs altogether. These findings are potentially enhanced by the conceptual insights of governmentality theory, through which governments in advanced liberal democracies can be more effective at achieving their goals of governing by modifying the conduct of individual agency to their desired ends (Foucault et al., 2008, Dean, 2010). The Coalition managed to download the personal responsibility for 'deficit reduction' onto LAs and individual actors, as a highly successful form of (neoliberal) political statecraft (Gamble, 2015).

Some attempts to categorize LA responses to austerity are emerging in the practice/applied literature. In their case study of local government financial resilience in Austria, England and Italy, Barbera et al. (2017) demonstrate how the interaction of environmental conditions and vulnerabilities produced different patterns of financial resilience over time. They classified these different LG responses to austerity into three groupings, '*self-regulators*', '*constrained or reactive adapters*' and '*contented or powerless fatalists*' (p. 675-679). This research does not explicitly adopt a typology of local management agency responses, but does also suggest three potential groupings, '*enthusiastic reformers*', '*reluctant pragmatists*' and '*counter-conduct agents*' that can provide a useful heuristic to be further developed. One reason for this is that regardless of the personal and political beliefs of individual PMs, these were effectively moot in terms of the necessary financial responses needed across the board. In other words, LAs in England have to operate within the context of '*austerian realism*' (Davies and Thompson, 2016).

Furthermore, Fuller (2017) highlights that austerity institutions have been characterised by high staff turnover through restructuring programmes, with those strongly aggrieved having voluntarily left, being forced out of the council or eventually complying with the new agendas; "*[t]he construction of*

austerity institutions is interwoven with significant management and officer turnover following the restructuring of the council. This can be situated within the context of long-term pro-business management models seeking to foster entrepreneurship and innovation, and organisation initiatives designed to indirectly reduce expenditure, as well as promote revenue-generating activities" (p.757). This suggests either the removal or strategic management of those 'not on board' with the corporate agenda and with 'outdated' values/attitudes to those needed to cope with 'contemporary' planning.

In his case study of Edinburgh City Council, Inch (2017) demonstrates how such planners that were reluctant towards the 'necessary' practice culture changes were characterised as '*dinosaurs*'. In other words, planners that expressed reservations to the logics of austerity were 'particularised' (Žižek, 2000) as the misunderstanding of a small group of out-of-touch individuals within the profession; effectively presenting and containing such views as marginalised positions, rather than constitutive of underlying and widespread concerns about the impacts of austerity. This suggests that power is used to promote the discourses around the need for change by the council leadership whilst also seeking to downplay or displace dissent within council staff through means outlined in post-political theory. However, there was only tentative and partial evidence to support such claims to internal LA power relations in this research, given *the predominant focus on structures rather than on individuals or institutions per se.*

Broadly, the PMs with the most positive accounts can be characterized as '*enthusiastic reformers*' that strongly embraced the government agenda and were already working to get the best outcomes in the new context of austerity localism. The more sceptical PMs could be termed '*reluctant pragmatists*'; they accepted the need to respond to austerity through growth, efficiency and retrenchment, but were more critical of the logics of austerity as a strategy that could be used to improve public services. Finally, there was little evidence here for PMs that could be termed '*counter-conduct agents*' based on governmentality theory (Dean, 2010). Again, this is likely because after dealing with austerity for six years since 2010, any resistance had become weakened and less vocal as the 'reality' of austerity had become discursively/institutionally embedded within LAs (Davies and Thompson, 2016, Clifford, 2016).

Whilst a more developed typology/categorisation would undoubtedly provide a useful tool for further conceptualising planning agency under austerity, this was not possible in this study beyond the three simplified roles presented here. Further research taking the individual or institutional level as its main empirical focus may serve to develop such models and expand our theorisations in such areas. However, there is the danger of overly-simplifying or pigeonholing PMs into 'boxes' that fail to fully reflect the complexities of their professional backgrounds, understandings, motivations, values, relationships,

contextual settings, and so on. The findings here support the literature that LPA E&Rs to national reforms are heavily contextualised as they are mediated by local agency, meaning that the LG cases have not explicitly been developed into a typology as this may strip them of their local contextuality. The same challenges therefore apply when trying to categorise planning agency without taking account of these institutional and structural forces. An academic 'model' forms a simplified presentation of the world to aid understanding, but they can also mask as much as they reveal depending on the level of analysis being undertaken. Therefore caution has been taken here not to claim any clear classifications.

This follows Guba and Lincoln (1982) that '*it is virtually impossible to imagine any human behaviour that is not heavily mediated by the context in which it occurs. One can easily conclude that generalizations that are intended to be context free will have little that is useful to say about human behaviour*' (cited in Farthing, 2015, p. 84); and Gioia et al. (2013, p.16) that "*the single most profound recognition in social and organizational study is that much of the world with which we deal is essentially socially constructed…Studying social construction processes implies that we focus more on the means by which organization members go about constructing and understanding their experience and less on the number or frequency of measureable occurrences*". Nonetheless a number of LPA E&Rs here were cross-cutting, such as efficiency, retrenchment, capacity/resilience, commercialisation and self-sufficiency.

Returning to the empirical data, drawing on the two most extreme examples for one of the strongest enthusiastic reformers and the closest offering to a counter-conduct agent demonstrates the scope of the debates around the impacts of austerity presented within the 40 LPA cases. As one of the strongest examples of an enthusiastic reformer, SP20 understood austerity as the 'creative' power driving innovation and as the government employing 'nudge theory' (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008) to modify local practices. Moreover, they claimed they were already following this path, and that austerity has only accelerated these trends rather than acting as the overall or single driver motivating local reform:

> *"It pains me to say it really, but Eric Pickles, the bête noir of local government, was not wrong on a lot of this stuff. That there was, I wouldn't say fat, but there were things that we could change to offset the loss of funding…So forcing change, because if you don't you go out of business or you are making people redundant, actually that's been incredibly creative…**[Austerity] was more nudge theory**, that they [Government] haven't taken all the money away. They have taken a certain amount, and we have been willing to respond and innovate, not complain about it, but get on and make changes…What austerity has forced us to do, whether it's cuts to public funding, has driven innovation absolutely. It's made us think beyond the box…**but austerity was not, hasn't been the driver for any of this stuff at all**" (SP20, Mixed, South East, emphasis added).*

This finding was unexpected and suggests that consecutive planning reforms promoting efficiency and business approaches had already taken hold in a number of well-resourced LPAs, such that austerity served as an additional catalyst. However, whilst public sector/planning reforms in the UK have been pushing in this direction for some time, austerity was generally expressed as the main driver for changes across the board in the other cases. Perhaps more importantly, such cases highlight that whilst some LPAs are being 'nudged' in this direction by government, others are being *pushed* into such a model.

In contrast, SP13 was the most critical of the austerity reforms, and hence the closest offering to a 'counter-conduct agent' by providing a reflective critique on privileging financial savings and income generation over the more fundamental values and costs of planning. They explained that previously the council accepted that although planning services generated an income, it still needed to be heavily subsidised because of the nature of the service. Whereas the emphasis has shifted onto how to increase planning services revenues, with planning management now having an annual 'income target' that is significantly above what the department can typically generate per annum. SP13 argued that such a target was 'crazy' because it goes beyond their control to influence local development and fees to that extent. For them, the general implication of austerity was a shift to an overly financial focus of planning:

> *"[T]he general implication, I think, of austerity…is probably too much focus on the financial side, from my perspective. And I think arguably some authorities are possibly in this position already, but you could soon get into the position of just trying to simply exist as cheaply as possible and ultimately, at the end of the day, what is the point? Why are we here? And it is that kind of, 'You may as well not exist if that's the MO', because there is a reason why we are here and there is a cost to it [planning services]" (SP13, Urban, East Midlands).*

These more critical accounts were far detached from the positive framings of enthusiastic reformers. In contrast SP27, for example, presented the commercialisation agenda as an opportunity for "*making sure the local planning authority is seen as a supporter of growth and helps developers and investors to achieve what they want, rather than being seen as regulatory tick this policy box*"; as part of a wider culture shift towards "*more of a focus on the customer and what we deliver*" that was already underway and only "*accelerated by the austerity agenda*" (Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber). The empirical findings here demonstrate the differences in understanding and responses, but further research would be valuable for determining what impacts these different types of situated planning management (agency) have for *specific outcomes*, such as the number of permissions granted, percentage saving targets achieved, use of commercial services, new revenues generated, staff turnover/well-being, etc.

SP9, a PM working for a borough council in the West Midlands, provided another enthusiastic reformer account of the necessary "*culture changes*" that they had overseen in the years following austerity. This account was typical of the type of 'positive' culture change the enthusiastic reformer were attempting to foster within their planning departments across the LPA cases. For SP9, the economic development potential of the Planning and Development Management service led them and the council to initiate a strong push to be "*an open door for developers to encourage development and to give a welcome, as well as work towards a 'yes'*". This was to counter the long-standing "*bad reputation*" the council held concerning development, leading to a transformation process with the aim to "*change the culture of our approach*". The interesting point here is that whilst austerity was not the "*original motivation*" for culture change, which was stated as the LPA having a 'bad reputation' for supporting development, budget pressures acted as the catalyst for promoting such change. This suggests that it is harder to ignore or resist the calls for reform and culture change under the 'crisis' conditions of austerity than during the 'good times', even if the same messages for efficiency and growth were still being promoted.

SP9 explained that the situation had developed within the department because case officers were being heavily criticised by elected members and the local community, leading them to feel "*beleaguered and undervalued*". In response, the transformation process emphasised the importance of getting to a 'yes' for a development; "*because that was the prime principle of planning to say yes unless there were very good planning reasons for saying no, and to work positively with planning agents and applicants towards that end. To give a service in other words*". SP9 echoes the NPPF *presumption in favour of sustainable development* as the "*prime principle of planning*" and expresses New Public Management logics by explaining the rationale that "*that service was being paid for through the planning fees, so there was an expectation there that we should be delivering positively*" (SP9). This could potentially be explained by their previous employment experience working in the private sector as well as for councils, although it also potentially highlights the synergies between budget and policy reforms to foster culture changes.

Reflecting on the success of this transformation within their planning department, SP9 believed the approach had 'largely worked'; albeit with some 'backslide' over the last year fostering the need to 'keep momentum going' against "*the human nature for people to revert to type*". This evaluation was based on planning agents feeling that "*there had been a considerable change for the positive in the way in which we approached things*", which was understood as "*a real measure of success*" for the council. The 'positive' culture change that SP9 was attempting to embed internally within their department, and demonstrate externally to developers and planning agents, was clearly expressed as supporting development; "*I'm a great believer in being positive about development…people want to put their*

money where they know it is going to be successful, and if it is too difficult, or they have not got a warm welcome, then why would they bother?". Here local planning agents had influenced practice changes by stressing that a 'welcome approach' was a key developer consideration, which further "*reinforced the fact that we should be heading down that pro-development route*" (SP9). This supports Gunn and Hillier (2014) that external actors, in this case local planning agents, play a role in mediating LPA reforms.

Returning to the example of the council attempting to set up a 'planning school of excellence' (to rent out core services and undertake work on behalf of other LAs) provides insight into the leadership challenges to embed culture change. Here the challenge is that PMs have to promote a commercial model, which 'makes sense' as a response to austerity at the senior management and corporate level, to their staff that are reluctant and not accustomed to working in such commercial and flexible ways:

> *"It is really interesting [renting out resources], but although at senior level and as managers we can see that is a real positive, because instead of just having to keep on cutting posts we can try and develop a more commercial model that helps to pay, to us that makes sense; but for the staff who are used to working in a certain way, to staff who are not used to doing that, they are like, "Well, no, I work for [Council A]. Why do I want to go and process a planning application for [Council B]?" (SP27, Major Urban, Yorkshire and the Humber).*

The counter-case was made, however, that whilst planning resources and specialist staff could often be maintained within large urban authorities, and therefore could potentially be rented out, this does not necessarily mean that their surrounding rural areas, which would most likely be in need of these resources at certain peak times, could actually afford to pay for these services from larger authorities:

> *"[W]e have got an urban design and heritage specialist, because of the city scale we operate I can still afford to pay for that…so no I've not needed to do that [share specialist staff]. Who knows, in the future? But most I find are like North Somerset, I can use them as an example, they have got nobody anyway, and they have got no money to buy it even if I said, "Well do you want to pay for two days of [planning staff]" (SP36, Urban, South West).*

There was some evidence here to suggest that PMs regarded it as their role to get their staff 'on board' with the broader council corporate agenda for growth. This had to be achieved through explaining that *planning services had changed*, particularly increasing in importance within the overall council, and that as a result a different approach was required to support development as a means to foster growth:

> *"[W]e need town planning, and we certainly need it in today's market because we need more properties to be built; and there are planners, I mean I have had heated discussions with some of my own planners here because, you know, some of them just regard their role*

in life to prevent development…and I think our planners here now realize that we have to build and we have to develop" (SP3, Urban, South East).

"Now I'm a planner by profession, but I cause a few concerns with my planning policy colleagues because I tend to take some different views on land use and things like that from time to time; because I'm here to do planning, but I'm also here to get investment, and jobs and those things" (SP37, Major Urban, North West).

These findings are corroborated by Anna Rose, president of the Planning Officers Society. She explains business development skills are becoming increasingly more relevant and that this is "*a completely new thing for local government to see a planning authority as a business*" (*Planning*, Issue 2044, p. 18). From this perspective, commercially-minded planners must now demonstrate a sharper emphasis on treating customers with respect and showing empathy and understanding towards their business needs to win them over through planning services. Such changes raise questions around the skills that are considered most valuable within the planning profession going forward, with economic and business knowledge, such as around development viability, potentially becoming more prized by LPAs under austerity.

SP6 provides a 'case study' of the most innovative commercial strategy found in the 40 LPA cases. As a Director responsible for Planning Services and working for an affluent rural authority in the South East, they represented the strongest example of the innovation and leadership necessary to develop a commercial and customer-focused approach that could both recover the costs and make a profit from planning services. In an effort to make efficiencies and save costs, they conducted an analysis that found the council was spending over £600 determining average household applications when they only generate a fixed fee of £152 set by central government. From this, they implemented a 'systems review' based on the need to understand the "true costs of planning" and to make "*the system fit the fee*" determined by the government. The first step, and one of the most difficult barriers in creating a leaner system, was overcoming the "*expectation culture*", whereby parish councils and communities would expect constant updates from the council on all planning matters rather than using the Planning Portal website. This suggests that austerity-driven 'cultural change' has to progress first before more material changes are enacted, or in Peck's terms '*[b]udget cuts…may prefigure structural reforms*' (2012, p. 640).

The case of SP6 demonstrated that *the role of the Chief Executive was critical* in the transformation process; through continually pushing for greater efficiency and speed in the average application process, supported by the increasing interest of the council leadership in planning services for generating savings and revenues. These findings and other recent studies demonstrate the progress towards addressing the previous concerns raised by Geddes and Sullivan (2011) that '*leadership, specifically 'local political*

leadership'…[i]s a neglected but significant element of local governance and neoliberalization' (p.391). It also highlights the need for more research on institutional and cultural change within planning from an agency perspective which could not be addressed fully within this broader study of LPA austerity.

SP6 made clear that these council leadership and management concerns emphasised the customer's rather than the council's time, and the need to get to a 'yes' quickly. This was achieved through developing an algorithm that could determine whether an application meets all the basic criteria to make a provisional decision within 20 minutes. The need to reduce costs and simplify the average minor planning application process was contrasted with the more important complex major applications for large housing developments. This was based on the understanding that energy and resources should be focussed on these because they have the most impact on the physical local community and actually generates substantial money for the council. This was framed in terms of the need to "*differentiate the business services*". This strategy to reform planning services involved creating a district-wide Local Development Order (LDO) for household applications, which meant that as long as the applicant had certified the conditions and informed their neighbours, the council would process it within 10 days (only taking two in practice). However, the LDO strategy was only the first phase of the new business model.

Following on from this, SP6 explained that the second phase involved the council commissioning six consultants to process minor applications on their behalf in order to provide more choice, speed up the system and gain a commissioning fee. As a result of these strategies, "*so our headline figures are we have gone from a net cost of £1.5 million in the DM [Development Management] area to around a £400,000 surplus*". This case presents an example of how LPAs can move past *reactively responding* to austerity cutbacks towards *proactively* getting ahead of the total removal of the RSG in 2020 and self-sufficiency. The final step focussed on selling their approach to other councils to assist them with their efficiency and cost savings; "*hopefully we will get other local authorities that are interested in learning from us and paying us to help them do it; so that is part of the business model, we get them to pay for what we have spent a lot of time and energy doing to help them get the same efficiency*" (SP6). Whilst this is potentially a positive step for LPAs sharing resources, it also highlights their uneven capacities.

Overall, such new business models demonstrate evidence for *opportunism* by larger and more affluent LPAs to capitalise on the widespread need for financial efficiencies across the sector, particularly for those councils in '*a spiral of decline*' that now have fewer planners and an inefficient operating system. As a clear LPA front-runner in commercial and cost saving innovations, SP6 exemplifies the emerging strategies taken by strongly resourced authorities that are seeking to rent their resource capacity,

specialisms and knowledge to surrounding councils for a fee comparable to planning consultancies. The rationale for these new business models were expressed as new 'opportunities'; "*Now for us that could be an opportunity, because maybe we could run their planning service for them. So our view is, 'Well why couldn't we be a qualifying body in someone else's district and do their business, if they are a poorly performing authority, why wouldn't we pick up the slack as an opportunity?*"" (SP6). Such examples of practice culture changes and service reorganisations potentially provide a preliminary window into how local authority planning could be funded, designed, operated and delivered in the future in England.

These findings suggest that PMs have a significant role in fostering pro-development culture change, getting their staff 'on board' and shaping local responses and reconfirmations of austerity governance. This supports Fuller (2017) that austerity decision-making was concentrated within the corporate management level of the LG; and the key role for '*senior management to constantly reconfirm austerity institutions*' (p. 759), specifically through formulating 'discursive institutions' based on market and bureaucratic values that seek to '*guide the daily practices of officers*' (p. 761). This is consistent with the literature that responsibility for governing austerity has been devolved from national to local level actors to implement the reforms (Peck, 2012), signifying the role of PMs as agents in neoliberalisations.

Following Gardner (2017), these results highlight that '*[u]nderstanding differentiation in the objectives and motivations of change agents is especially useful in a local government context, because it takes into account that actors will have differing levels of power and divergent motivations or political positions, affecting their desire to promote change or maintain stability*' (p. 153). They therefore make an empirical contribution that can provide a potential foundation for future research into the ways that austerity is practiced, resisted or reproduced by different agents within LAs and their planning services.

These findings also suggest that practice culture changes were being developing into *material changes to the departmental planning service structures*. The rationale behind these material changes to LPAs were both to produce efficiencies through service integration and to ensure that such services were more effectively tailored to the needs of their customers and business clients. It is argued that these strategies represent the 'material' dimensions to austerity that build on and reinforce the 'discursive' practice culture changes towards 'positive' pro-development planning as the main objective of reforms.

Here SPs highlighted the increasingly important role of restructuring departments to save resources, take a more joined-up strategic approach to economic strategy and provide a business-focussed service:

"[T]he teams much more multi-disciplinary; more a sort of crossover between Development Management, Planning, and Regeneration. So they all sit together as one team now, and I think that has been very successful. It is trying to encourage people with different skill sets working more across the board…So inevitably as resources diminish and as the service gets tighter, the principle is what you don't want to be doing is working in silos…there are still too many local authorities that have a local planning team that is split, with one team doing the development plan, another team doing the economic strategy, another team that does planning management, and they never talk to each other. They just do their thing, and it is just not a coherent way of going about business" (SP11, Major Urban, West Midlands).

"So when I'm talking to developers, I can say "tell me what you need and I can get a meeting with", because they are all under my remit. I can say, "I can deliver you your highways, I can deliver your strategic planning, I can deliver your development management. I have got education jobs for skills, so if you want training and access to colleges I can do that". And then we are very, very clear about it all, and how it is all about growth. So all they are set up to deliver is growth, and to support developers to deliver growth; because that is pretty much how they are all prepped, because that is what gets us income, and that is what enables us to deal with the [budget] challenges" (SP29, Major Urban, North West).

"So we need to be marrying up our planning strategy with our economic strategy much more closely; with a view to the fact that we are planning for business growth, and with that comes new development and business rates, we are generating money that will come to the council for us to spend" (SP30, Rural, North West).

These findings support the new institutionalism theory outlined by Hay (2006) that '*ideational change invariably precedes institutional change*' (See also Gardner, 2017). This indicates that such material institutional changes (physical service restructuring) within LPAs become prioritised only after the discursive (practice culture) changes that drive them have become embedded within individual agency. Albeit one important caveat being that the immediate efficiencies and reductions in the early stages of austerity (circa 2010-2013) were predominantly concerned with 'surviving' the budget reductions, rather than the more deliberate attempts to create integrated and commercial planning services during the later stages of austerity (circa 2014-2016) observed in this research. Whilst more supporting evidence is needed, one potential explanation is that institutional structures are more 'fixed' and always playing catch up with the latest reforms and discourses (governing rationales) that shape agency. The findings here suggest practice culture changes have been internalised within LA council leadership and planning management, which have gradually been translated into restructurings for planning services.

Such strategies for departmental reorganisation primarily aimed to provide a more *integrated* planning services with a sharper focus on delivering development to raise incomes in response to austerity. Such changes were also justified by the need to develop a service approach that could counterbalance the tendency for different built environment professionals to 'pull in different directions' when they work

independently. This was based on the rationale that a Highways officer has a different professional background, skill set, and development priorities to that of a Strategic Planner, or a Development Management or an Economic Growth officer. In this context, SP29 understood their role as the strategic management needed to coordinate the work of different professionals within the council to ensure that the sum of these different views on a specific development all add up to the 'whole' of growth:

> *"They [built environment professionals] are all looking for slightly different things out of the development in their kind of pure professional area of expertise, so my role is to bring all those people together and say, "Actually we have got a single outcome that we want, which is how to get this development up and running". So your role, from your professional area, is to deliver that single outcome; and that means everyone is aiming in the same direction, and it is all about getting growth and development, and making sure that we are making joined-up decisions" (SP29, Major Urban, North West).*

Here planning services had been restructured to create a single 'functional service area' that brought together 'strategic housing', 'strategic growth', 'economic growth', 'town centres', and 'sustainability' to work much more closely when making decisions and delivering services. These findings suggest tentative evidence for a shift towards a new role for planning directors and managers, one where their main role is as the strategic coordinator of different planning service areas and professional actors towards the shared objective of supporting development. Such a model means they play a more strategic role coordinating local stakeholders and the different built environment professionals within the council to "*see the bigger picture*" and ensure the service is "*connecting all those dots together*" to provide a more integrated service (SP29). This supports the role of planners as 'facilitators', 'mediators' and 'enablers' between different stakeholders developed in Collaborative planning theory (Healey, 1997a, Innes and Booher, 1999). They also echo the third-wave 'network' and 'joined-up' governance approaches outlined in the public management reform literature (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2017). Such changes have been advocated through government reforms in the UK since the 1990s and go beyond simply being developed as responses to austerity; however, it is likely cuts accelerated these processes.

The overall rationale for restructuring and merging related *planning and development* departments was the expressed need to provide a better service to developers that is efficient, integrated and proactive:

> *"So I think putting the three together [Housing, Regeneration and Planning Services] gives us an opportunity to shape things. I will also have some highways in there, which again is helpful, because when you are talking to developers and others what you need to be able to offer them effectively is a one-stop discussion about all of the issues. So you are not sending them off here, there and everywhere" (SP37, Major Urban, North West).*

These restructuring strategies were also expressed as positive changes for dealing with capacity and resilience challenges going forward. The value of this approach was expressed as the ability to create a more interdisciplinary planning department team, where staff have a wider skill set and can therefore work across a number of different service areas when necessary. SP11 explained that a development management officer could help with a planning policy document to unlock growth on a particular site, or regeneration staff could be used to process planning applications. The rationale was expressed as developing greater capacity within the department; "*so peak time for planning management you have the capacity there to put people in to help that out, or on the Local Plan or whatever, you can get people to support. So it is a good future approach really*" (SP11). These practice changes towards integrated departments and cross-trained staff were also seen as advantageous in terms of providing PMs with greater flexibility to manage large projects and peak workflows and more resilience for budget planning:

> *"[I]n terms of future budget planning…delivering something like a Local Plan for example is a big, big push for a number of years. Then you wouldn't do one again. So what you will tend to see is teams expand and contract, to reflect major projects or pieces of work like that. And you may buy in extra staff or have temporary contracts and things. So you want committed staff, but also you need flexibility to deal with the financial pressures" (SP17, Urban, South East).*

These planning services reorganisations have also been largely implemented to respond to austerity by *reducing posts and employment costs* for the council. They also form part of a wider trend in the way planning services have been combined under one senior level manager or 'strategic director' to also include Regeneration, Housing and Economic Development services. These more subtle changes in the *employment titles, remit and expected roles* of planning managers potentially provide insights into the trajectory of local authority and planning management going forward as the 'rules of the game' change.

Finally, one unanticipated finding was that PMs found *recruitment* one of their key practice challenges in this period of austerity; however, not necessarily because of a lack of resources but the actual number of available planners within the public sector system and coming through planning schools. Furthermore, the findings suggest this recruitment challenge was the case regardless of whether the LPA was high or low value in terms of its economy and resources. Some cases provided anecdotal evidence to suggest that the prestige of working for 'a big urban authority' or within a 'scenic rural setting' as counter-reasons for why they have been able to attract planning candidates to their LG area:

> *"Interesting at one of the DCN [District Council Network] meetings I went to down in London a few weeks ago, when we were talking about the change to fee setting and those sorts of arrangements. There was a rhetoric coming from the civil servant guy that was*

leading this conversation saying, "We have been told more resources are needed, and you seem to be telling me that you don't need money". And a couple of us pointed out, "Yeah, actually you need to look at what we are saying". The resourcing issue that we have faced as a council, actually for most of us in the room, and there was probably 30 or 40 of us there, it has not been a resourcing issue of not being able to put funding into the planning service. The resource issue is actually there is often not the people to bring into the sector, as a consequence of closing down planning schools, there is a consequence of cutting back on training, there is a consequence of growth booming in other sectors and people moving about…The resource issue is not necessarily one of cash, it is one of getting somebody to sit on the chair. We have expanded our services" (SP30, Rural, North West).

This unexpected finding suggests that for district councils facing less severe financial budget gaps, the issue of capacity in planning services was about *more than funding*. In these cases, the deeper problems around planning capacity resulted from the broader impacts of austerity on LG and the wider public sector. Concerns were raised that austerity had devalued the public sector, making LG planning far less attractive to potential candidates than the opportunities in the private sector. Smaller councils also expressed concerns that they could not compete with larger LAs in their region for fees and lifestyle.

Moreover, a significant number of older and more experienced senior planners had left the profession following the budget and staff cutbacks in this period, exacerbating these recruitment challenges. This raised practical concerns about the loss of *organisational memory*, *tacit knowledge*, *specialist skills* and *experience* within public sector planning. It can thus be suggested that the underlying problems are more complex with deeper practice challenges around capacity facing the majority of LPAs than simply pressures of funding/resources and the ability to compete with private sector planning employment. In this context, the most common response to recruitment and skills challenges was by far the decision of LPAs to invest in 'growing their own' planners for the future with some also paying for university courses:

"We are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit good quality planning staff now. One would have thought that post-recession there would be a lot of people who were maybe made redundant from the planning profession that wanted to come back in; but I don't gain any impression that is the case. And, because private sector and larger local authorities are recruiting, it means district and borough councils like ours always come at the bottom of the pecking order. We can't compete on the same salary levels or the conditions of service with the private sector and bigger local authorities; and that has always been the case and now is no different, but we have had to recruit posts once someone has left and have found that very, very difficult. You know the quality of applicants has been low and quite poor, and I don't think it's down to what our expectations are, i.e. that they are too high. I just think there is a papacy of good quality candidates that are prepared to come to an area like [locality]. So we are very much trying now to just grow our own and take a longer-term view and creating a career structure that allows good individuals to progress" (SP9, Mixed, West Midlands).

Taken together, these changes to practice cultures, professional roles and skills, material restructuring and recruitment go to the heart of the future of local authority planning and professionalism in England. On balance, the evidence suggests that more integrated, joined-up and cross-trained planning services and staff can be considered a positive innovation resulting from austerity pressures; particularly for the overall self-sufficiency agendas of local councils and the new range of positions and skills that are expected from both planners and managers. However, concerns that austerity has *devalued the public sector* (Bach, 2012), meaning that LG is a less attractive option for newly qualified planners, and the overwhelming corporate emphasis and reliance on a growth-dependent planning model, suggests the autonomy for planners to enact more traditional social and environmental goals may be undermined.

5.4 Discussion

Overall this chapter has attempted to present the reader with a range of PM experiences and responses to austerity within their LPA context, based on the empirical data collected from the 40 cases. The decontextualised analysis demonstrated the cross-cutting themes of practice culture changes towards commercialisation of LA practices to generate revenues in order to achieve financial self-sufficiency; whilst the contextualised analysis highlighted the importance of local structures, contexts and politics. The findings here support Bailey et al. (2015) and Hastings et al. (2015), that whilst efficiency measures initially proved to be effective responses to budget cuts in the early phases of austerity, these budget saving strategies became increasingly exhausted over time, with PMs arguing that further cuts would likely be 'unsustainable' in the future. Moreover, as the most achievable efficiency savings became exhausted, PMs were forced to consider alternative service delivery models and more radical innovations consistent with longer-term budget sustainability strategies. In the later stages of austerity (circa 2013-16), the only options that appeared available were advancing into new areas for commercial income generation or else face the political consequences of retrenchment. At the local government level, planning services were particularly susceptible to having their budget/resources reduced relative to other council services, but whilst also having more responsibility to deliver revenues through growth.

One of the main empirical findings presented here was that planning departments have become more deeply embedded within the wider financial 'self-sufficiency' (economic prosperity) corporate agendas of their LA under austerity, and that this has taken the expression of increasing efforts to promote new forms of (growth-dependent) revenue generation and developing strategies for 'commercialisation'. The overall argument presented here was that these conditions form a neoliberal 'responsibilisation' strategy (Hastings et al., 2015) that seeks to download responsibility from the national to local scale; and that whilst the resilience narrative of LG survival/adaptation seems to hold true thus far in response

to austerity (Shaw, 2012, John, 2014), the potential for a future 'punctuated shift' in local services (Gardner, 2017) and residualisation/marginalisation (Hastings et al., 2015) remain a significant threat. In this context, critical questions need to be asked regarding the (long-term) impacts of the emerging shifts to commercialised and self-sufficiency strategies for the future of LG and role of planning services.

This shift towards 'growth-dependent' (or revenue-dependent) planning (Rydin, 2013) was the aim in all of the LPA cases, however, the ability for all councils to operate on this model was criticised. Indeed, the LAs that can be described as '*high value*' (with respect to having various combinations of the key local characteristics of a high GVA and private sector investment, high council tax base, low population dependency costs, high development market interests, large public land holdings, and so on) were the most able to develop new revenue streams and innovative coping strategies for alternative service delivery models, and as a result were the least impacted by cutbacks. The opposite was *generally* the case for relatively '*low value*' LAs that struggled to attract private sector investment and development on the grounds of weaker land market values, viability and other higher risk concerns. In other cases it was their tight administrative urban boundaries, high level of greenbelt or natural protected land, physical morphology or built environment and heritage that prevented large amounts of additional development and hence income being generated through planning fees, NHB, CIL, council tax, and so on. The findings here support the literature that *the geography of austerity matches the pre-existing economic geography of England* and that, rather than lifting-up weaker performing local economies, the sink or swim approach of austerity localism is further entrenching this uneven geography within England. This provides a critique of the neoliberal *laissez faire* approach to planning and development.

Here the most significant implication of moving towards a commercialised growth-dependent planning model is that a pro-development approach becomes the only goal of planning, leaving environmental and social policy, and directing development to sustainable locations through 'place-making', as secondary concerns. Rydin (2013) argues that the problem with the growth-dependant planning model is that it often does very little for social and environmental objectives, or '*just sustainability*', a situation that is exacerbated when such a model is applied universally across LPAs in England. Whilst growth-dependent planning can be a workable model for specific contexts and projects, it should not be considered the only option. Other planning models should be utilised across different places and times alongside market delivery to achieve the best planning outcomes for all (Fainstein, 2010). It is in this context that planning commercialisation is potentially problematic, rather than being *a priori* in all cases. So whilst the long-term implications of the emerging and established LA responses to austerity are not entirely clear at this stage, the critical concern was developed that the significant pressures for growth-

dependent revenue under austerity may mean this is elevated to priority status, potentially relegating traditional professional and ethical concerns with local democracy, social justice and the environment that have dominated planning theory literatures (Fainstein and DeFilippis, 2015, Allmendinger, 2017).

Whilst such shifts towards more commercialised councils can be viewed as a positive for local self-sufficiency, it should be noted that simply because LPAs are *acting more commercially* this does not mean that *more development activity* is actually taking place; rather it just means they are more reliant on such activity for self-sufficiency. Indeed, a number of the LPAs in this study that have attempted to adopt growth-dependent business models still fail to attract the necessary investment and cannot provide funding or infrastructure support to developers; instead then having to sell public land cheaply or waiving planning obligations. So the proposition is that *a commercial approach by LPAs to support development is not the same thing as achieving investment and funding for or from that development*. The SPs in this study highlighted how stalled major developments often just needed the seed funding for infrastructure, such as an access road or contamination works, to kick-start some projects. However, LPAs were often reliant on sub-national funding from LEPs, City/Growth Deals or Devolution to deliver such infrastructure to support growth, typically having very few local resources themselves to invest in projects and suffering from the wider lack of national funding available to support them under austerity.

These findings also support the literature that LG corporate and senior management are the main actors tasked with the role of continuously reconfirming austerity institutions, through enactments of social control and coordination of market and bureaucratic values within the organisation that guide the daily practices of officers (Fuller, 2017). Whilst PMs were responsible for promoting and delivering practice culture and organisation changes within their department, either enthusiastically or reluctantly, they still rationalised their approaches around delivering for their locality and the public interest. This supports Harris and Thomas (2011) that there are now competing logics in the British Planning System, between '*the logic of professional judgement exercised in the public interest typical since the 1940s, and the logic of performance targets and efficiency which has grown since the 1980s*' (Clifford, 2016). It also remains to be seen whether commercialised pro-development approaches and delivering the public interest will *necessarily clash* once these practices become more embedded within the planning system.

Arguably the planning profession seems likely to attract people that would be uneasy or resistant to accepting such a pro-development framing for planning given their professional training and education within planning schools, which have been particularly influenced by collaborative planning theory over the past two decades (Healey, 1997a, Healey, 2003), along with long-standing traditions in the public

interest and environmental sustainability (beginning with public health and quality of life). Despite this conjecture, to have any significant scope to exercise agency, an LPA would have to have an up-to-date Local Plan with a demonstrable five-year land supply that also meets its objectively assessed need; a relatively sustainable financial settlement and asset base with healthy local revenues (that could afford legal challenge or resist financial incentives); prove the demonstrable harm of proposed development given the shift for the presumption in favour of sustainable development; have the specialist knowledge and skills to negotiate development viability necessary to provide adequate planning contribution; and have the support of their local community. In practice, the cases only met a few of these criteria in a mixture of various combinations. This meant that the prospects of planners at any level in LG resisting such changes were severely limited. In sum, the deck was stacked heavily against local planners, and elected members and communities, to enact any meaningful local determination that was counter to the national fiscal consolidation and planning growth agendas, despite the political rhetoric of localism.

It is in this sense that by being forced into 'making the system work' through the powerful structures of national policy, localism and austerity, that local government planning practitioners have become the agents of their own neoliberal reform governing their conduct to new ends of efficiency and growth. Such changes to public planning practice cultures, professional roles and organisational restructuring that seek a more integrated, joined-up and cross-trained planning services and team can be considered positive innovations/opportunities resulting from austerity pressures; particularly for achieving local self-sufficiency and developing the new range of positions/skills that are expected from both planners and managers. However, they also raise fundamental questions about the future of the profession, and more research is need on the changes to institutions and individuals within local government planning.

Eventually, as Peck (2012) argues, the combination of layering (sedimented) neoliberal externalizations, downloading strategies and austerity measures together present a fundamental challenge to urban local governance; '*Neoliberalism operates as an ideological frame – one that defines, in effect, the politically tractable solution space from which 'mainstream' remedies can be sought. And where it is matched with advanced forms of externalization and down-loading (legacies, also, of earlier rounds of neoliberalization), the cost of austerity measures quickly cascade down to the state and local level, raising the real prospect of (local) state failure*' (p. 630-1). This brings us to the overall argument that whilst the planning reforms in the period 2010-2016 have built upon and extended earlier rounds of neoliberalisations in the English planning system, effectively *embedding externalisations* for efficiency, performance, responsibility and risk; the additional and simultaneous impacts of contemporary post-crisis austerity on local authorities and planners has exacerbated deepening *neoliberal internalizations*.

The post-2010 reforms built on top of previous neoliberalisations of planning and local government, that served to force the neoliberal approach to planning forward by advancing/extending its influence on LPAs across England, and therefore can be seen as a continuation of a state-led neoliberal approach to planning that developed in the 1980s and continued to various extents by New Labour until 2010. However, what makes this period so important *is the depth and scope of austerity being enacted at the same time as fundamental planning reforms* to both national policy (NPPF) and scalar governance through localism/devolution. So whilst the approach of the Cameron-led Governments 2010-2016 does not mark a *break* from the neoliberal political economy that emerged in the 1980s, it does demonstrate a *significant period of change* that has challenged fundamentals as a 'paradigm shift' in public planning.

Ironically, responsibility and risk are not experienced by elite political and corporate actors in the same way as those 'empowered' local actors that they are forced upon; the former attempt to offload costs and download responsibility for their actions, whilst claiming that the latter need to take more responsibility for their locality and themselves or else embrace the costs of economic and social failure. These are not the foundations of a planning system delivering 'sustainable development' or one that will drive economic growth outside of the core cities in England. These are the contradictory conditions of 'creative destruction' whereby neoliberalisation is sowing the seeds for the next 'crisis' by strengthen socio-economic inequality across the country, the long-term consequences of which are yet to be seen.

This chapter has presented the empirical data on the experiences and responses of local government planning managers to the national austerity reforms enacted under the Cameron-led Coalition and Conservative Governments 2010-2016. It has presented practitioner evaluations of public planning under austerity (localism) in relation to LPAs across England. Now that the empirical findings have been presented in Chapters 4 and 5, the focus can now turn to presenting the conclusions to the research.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

This research has presented empirical findings on how local authority planning managers in England have experienced and responded to the national planning reforms and austerity measures introduced under the Cameron-led Governments 2010-2016. This final conclusion chapter has three main sections; the first reviews the empirical findings to the research questions set out at the start of this project (6.1), the second reflects on the challenges and limitations of the study (6.2); and the third presents the researcher's 'final thoughts' on the research (6.3). Together these bring this thesis to its conclusion.

6.1 Research Questions and Closing Positions

The purpose of this section is to summarise the empirical findings for each of the research questions underpinning the thesis and their relation to the theoretical framework that informed the approach:

RQ1) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the planning system reforms and policy deregulations introduced by the central government since 2010?*

Beginning with RQ1, the empirical data and findings can be summarised into four key messages. Firstly SPs viewed the principle of the NPPF as a positive attempt to simplify the planning system (something that the majority agreed was much needed); however, that in practice this 'simplification' led to increased policy uncertainty and greater challenges to planning professionalism from stakeholders as the planning system had become more flexible, interpretative and negotiable; Second LPAs and planners are in a weaker position to negotiate planning gains with developers on behalf of their communities' post-2010 because of stronger national policy and development emphasis on viability considerations combining with the need for growth-dependent planning (Rydin, 2013) under austerity and more delivery incentive-based and competitive 'tournament' funding (Peck, 2012); Third the small potential pay-offs of piecemeal planning deregulations through permitted development rights that did deliver additional housing units were viewed as far outweighed by the harm such policies could cause to localities through poor design, loss of employment and challenges to plan-making (place-making); and fourth that the speed of the planning application process is a poor measures of planning performance when compared with the quality and sustainability of the new developments being produced. These practice-based criticisms revolved around professional, technical and public interest planning concerns, such as for sustainability, design and communities that need time to be properly addressed, particularly when dealing with major development projects that have a larger local impact.

Overall these findings support Ellis (2015) that national pro-growth policy and deregulations mean that planning is less powerful in relation to the market and so offers fewer opportunities for planners to make progressive interventions and counter the neoliberal reforms that seek to place growth, efficiency and speed above practice-based concerns with design, sustainability and public interest/obligations (professionalism). These national structures served to delineate/bound local planning agency and show the extent of power asymmetries between national and local government within the planning system.

RQ2) *What has localism meant in practice for local planning authorities and their relationships with local communities?*

In terms of RQ2, despite government claims that localism would 'free the shackles on local government', PMs expressed that in practice 'actually existing' localism had not heralded a radical shift in power from the central to the local scale, with both planners and councillors feeling they had *less control* over local development as localism was de facto secondary to the growth agenda (NPPF) in practice. Additionally, PMs understood community-level localism and neighbourhood planning as embodying 'good principles' for local empowerment but suffering from practical and political challenges; not least the potential to clash with the 'strategic' national housing and growth agendas and austerity cutbacks that had taken on renewed planning policy emphasis post-2010. They emphasised their difficult position as the middle-ground between upholding national policy/agendas and attempting to meet the (diverse) needs of the local communities as walking the 'tightrope between the NPPF and localism'. PMs expressed that this had caused a lot of distrust between their LPA and communities as the promises and mixed-messages of localism had to be explained and negotiated at the local scale. This was exacerbated by also being a time when a number of LG services were having to be 'streamlined' or removed in order to make financial savings, issues that also caused contention within and between LPAs as well as stakeholders.

RQ3) *What have national planning policy reforms and localism post-2010 meant in practice for the economic and collaborative approaches of LPAs to strategic planning and housing policy and delivery?*

In terms of RQ3, PM evaluations of the effectiveness of the shift from strategic planning under a regional governance framework to a localist economic governance approach based on LEPs and city-regions was mixed and heavily dependent on LPA context (landscapes of antagonism, Newman, 2013). The PMs were less explicitly critical of the government claims for the need to shift to economic localism, most likely because the context of austerity and incentive-based funding meant that growth was the only option for some LPAs to secure self-sufficiency going forward. Although the PMs did express some

concerns about the potentially problematic disconnects between statutory land-use planning and economic strategies (Strategic Economic Plans) and between LPAs and LEPs. The Duty to Cooperate was also regarded as an ineffective tool for promoting cross-boundary collaboration under localism, with the findings showing that those with a history of (institutional) collaboration pre-2010 were the most likely to continue to make best use of the new system. It was also widely unclear what was expected with the phrasing 'a duty to cooperate, not a duty to agree' being commonplace. It is yet to be determined whether combined authorities and city regions can deal with these collaboration challenges between LPAs, particularly given the contention around housing allocations and greenbelt.

By far the most contested policy reform in this period was the 'localisation' of housing policy and delivery to LPAs from the regional strategic level post-2010. It was strongly argued that planners do not control the delivery of housing, and that the problem is also developer's business models that seek to exert control over housing supply and value and over-inflated landowner expectations to sell their land. At the more strategic level the point was frequently raised that strategic planning and housing policy in England needs a coherent national plan and structures to both deliver economic competitiveness and sustainable place-making. Here the examples of planning approaches across Western Europe were compared to the 'laissez-faire' and non-interventionist UK neoliberal growth model under localism.

RQ4) *In what ways have local planning authorities experienced, and responded to, the demands of austerity (urbanism/governance/localism) as imposed by central government since 2010?*

In terms of RQ4, the main finding here was that planning departments have become much more deeply embedded within the wider financial *self-sufficiency* and economic prosperity corporate agendas of their LG institution under austerity, which has predominantly taken the expression of increasing efforts by PMs to promote revenue generation and *commercialisation* strategies. This was most evident in the challenge of cross-subsidising across planning department functions, with planning policy and project work becoming more dependent on the overall demand and performance of the development management service as the main revenue generator, as well as reliance of areas that could be more easily adapted to fee charging such as pre-application services. SPs emphasised that what had changed under austerity was that now every council project needed to attract a fee to justify undertaking a piece of work and that everything must be predicated on a clear business case and economic uplift in the context of extreme financial constraint/margins and the legal requirement for LAs to set a 'balanced' budget (i.e. that planning services and projects now have to 'follow the money' to make things happen).

RQ5) *What are the financial/budget and capacity/resilience pressures on planning services, and how do they relate to the impacts of austerity on local authorities (landscapes of antagonism) more generally?*

In terms of RQ5, the findings support the academic literature (Hastings et al., 2015, Bailey et al., 2015) that efficiency measures proved to be effective responses to budget cuts in the early phases of austerity, with SPs agreeing they were largely necessary to an extent; however, that these strategies became less effective over time (law of diminishing returns). As the achievable efficiency savings became exhausted, PMs were forced to consider alternative service delivery models and more radical innovations consistent with longer-term budget sustainability strategies or else face the political consequences of retrenchment in non-statutory/discretionary service areas. Across the board, the PMs stated that good efficiency savings had been made, however, the prospect of being forced into making further reductions would significantly impact their capacity/resilience going forward. This follows the literature that whilst the resilience narrative of LG survival/adaptation seems to hold true thus far in response to austerity (Shaw, 2012, John, 2014), the potential for a future 'punctuated shift' in local services (Gardner, 2017) and residualisation/marginalisation (Hastings et al., 2015) remains a significant threat.

The findings also demonstrated that local geography, contexts, structures and politics play a key role in shaping how LPAs have experienced and responded to austerity; and the core role of the local economy and land markets, particularly private sector demand and investment, for LPA capacity to develop growth-dependent planning models. The implications are that without any regional or national redistribution mechanisms to support more 'marginalised' LPAs (e.g. weak local economies, high social costs, traditionally more dependent on government funding, public sector employment and welfare protections), they will fall further behind exacerbating uneven social-spatial development across England. This argument followed Berry (2016) that '*the growth model supported by policy elites in the post-crisis period sustains patterns of wealth distribution similar to those which pertained in the pre-crisis period, albeit with inequality arguably more pronounced as financial and property wealth remains largely intact while earnings are held down and redistributive mechanisms are withdrawn*' (p. 110).

RQ6) *To what extent have austerity logics been internalised or resisted by local authority planning managers? How have these austerity measures shaped LPA practice cultures and structures?*

Lastly, for RQ6 the findings highlight how PMs, through their senior role and relationships with the wider council leadership, are being forced into playing a role in the (re)production of austerity at the local scale. Whilst some PMs perceived and embraced the changes associated with austerity positively,

such as greater efficiency, innovation, self-sufficiency and a positive approach to development, others were more reluctant and concentrated on the necessity to respond to sustain the service, support growth and continue to meet the needs of their communities as best possible. Provisional evidence suggested that internalised/discursive practice culture changes towards delivering a pro-development customer service had been further developed by implementing material changes to the physical structures and functions of planning departments to respond to the demands of austerity and growth.

Closing Positions

These findings provide a perspective which indicates the normalisation of a planning system in a near constant state of (neoliberal) reform, one constantly grappling with new policy initiatives and the legacies of previous iterations. This presents an uncertain, destabilising and complex acting space for planning practitioners as well as for developers and local communities, a context which Parker et al. (2018) term 'fragmentation' and a cycle of 'perma-reform' of change in the English planning system. This project has provided some new insights into these 'important' but 'poorly understood' questions concerning '*the types and understanding that local planning officers actually need in this environment*' and '*how a fragmentary planning system is navigated in practice*' (Parker et al., 2018, p.7). This work is important because the primary goals of planning as an activity is a strategic and long-term assessment of land-use and societal needs now and in the future (Rydin, 2011); however, the uncertainty created by national policy-spatial-institutional reforms fosters a short-term pragmatic management approach as practitioners have to 'relearn' the rules of the game, potentially at the expense of attempts for sustainable development and integrated strategies prioritising strategic planning and public interest. This comes back to the PMs desire for more clarity on the national strategic planning and housing policy approach in England, codified in a coherent national plan and with appropriate (funding) structures to both deliver economic competitiveness and sustainable place-making over the medium to long-term.

These findings also demonstrate that the LAs with the strongest antecedent economic sub-markets, public assets and net social tax bases have found it much easier to adapt to austerity conditions and pursue effective (commercialised) coping strategies. These LPAs have experienced negotiating fast-paced and difficult budget and structural changes, but not the 'organisational crisis' that threatens planning departments within councils that have high social care and housing benefit costs and low development market demand to stimulate local investment, revenue and planning obligations. The LG capacity challenges being faced across England means that 'geography matters' when examining these reforms. Most worryingly is that austerity localism seems to be exacerbating the existing uneven

economic and social geography of England (Martin, 2015), as only the 'strongest' LPAs can adapt to the 'sink or swim' conditions of austerity urbanism/governance (Peck, 2012). The findings also suggest that planning managers (and the council corporate leadership more widely) have become complicit in the production and reproduction of austerity at the local institutional level consistent with Fuller (2017) and are key (although not necessarily willing) agents in austerity governance at the local scale. These follow one of the main concerns in the literature that the growth revenue-dependent approach become the only goals of planning, leaving environmental and social policy, and directing development to sustainable locations through 'place-making', as secondary concerns in their practice (Rydin, 2013).

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

As with all research, there were a number of different theoretical lenses, methodological positions and research design approaches that could have been adopted and deployed to undertake research in this disciplinary area. The decisions that were made throughout followed the researcher's specific readings of the literature and judgements based on their positionality and world view that values practice-based research through a neoliberal lens. However, a number of studies on the same area and conducted at the same time have taken different approaches. For example, in his case study of city government under austerity in England, Fuller adopts a 'pragmatist sociology' approach '*to examine the construction and deployment of discursive institutions seeking to control the behaviour of actors, including reducing critique, with the intention of legitimising austerity programmes. Such discursive institutions establish semantic links between the discursive aims of those seeking to control and the pragmatics of the everyday lives of those subject to such institutions*' (2017, p.745). Similarly, Lowndes and Gardner (2016) investigate local governance changes under austerity through an institutionalist theoretical framework, whilst Peck (2012) examines austerity governance through neoliberal structural accounts and Gamble (2015) views austerity as a form of political 'statecraft'. Likewise, contemporary research on localism has been undertaken using governmentality (Davoudi and Madanipour, 2015), democratic theory on collaboration and agonism (Parker et al., 2017a, Bradley, 2015) and post-political theory (Haughton and Allmendinger, 2013). It is argued that each of these different theoretical approaches adds strength to the wider literature by presenting a plurality of perspectives and explanations of practice. Again, this follows the researcher's conviction that '*there is no one planning theory that we can assimilate and take into practice. Instead, there are a range of competing ideas and theories that will, to greater or lesser degrees, correspond to our values and views of the world*' (Allmendinger, 2017, p. 27). In sum, there are a number of different ways that this research *could have been conducted* in the design of this study.

During the completion of this project a number of related research work in the planning literature have highlighted the increasing number and role of private consultants in the English planning system (Parker et al., 2018). In the UK, LG planning policies and practices have witnessed significant changes since 2010, with practitioners being pulled in different directions by austerity measures, the localism agenda and increased emphasis on housing supply and viability within the NPPF and associated deregulations such as permitted development rights. Taken together these changes have created a number of new practice challenges for public planners, which have increasingly been taken-up by the rise in private consultancy work and associated privatisation within the system (Parker et al., 2018, Linovski, 2018, Hurl, 2018).

These studies mark an important avenue in future planning practice research; however, they only began to emerge during the closing stages of this project, and so one limitation is that this study could not benefit fully from their insights. Despite this, the findings here and elsewhere highlight that more work is needed on the impacts of privatisation and the related commercialisation of LPAs on the planning system and practices going forward. For example, Bel et al. (2018) examine inter-municipal cooperation, mixed public/private delivery and contract reversals as three alternatives open to local governments to help assist markets for public service delivery as a dynamic process and address a wider array of public goals beyond cost efficiency concerns. However, whilst this study and others emphasises wider changes in the system through the 'commercialisation' of English LPAs under austerity localism (See also Jones and Comfort, 2018), we should also be aware that Whitfield (2002) was writing about the '*Impact of privatisation and commercialisation on municipal services in the UK*' at the turn of the 21st Century under New Labour, highlighting that these trajectories have longer histories than the post-2010 reforms.

More research is needed to understand the long-term impacts of austerity on planners and planning services. Even if local planning authority funding and resources return in the medium term, which appears unlikely in the context of Brexit, the practice culture and organisational changes in the period 2010-2016 may continue to shape practices over the long term. More attention also needs to be given to the claims and outcomes of planning reforms, particularly for how they reshape the planning profession, the boundaries between the local state and markets and the integrity of local democracy.

The findings from the 40 LPA cases here support the literature that experiences and responses to reforms are heavily mediated by context; however, further research is needed on how local contexts are mediating austerity, localism and policy reforms to reshape planning practices at the fine-grained level. Such new work with a focus on 'agency' is necessary to understand how planning cultures are responding to these changing institutional and practice environments which is under-researched in the

literature (see Grange, 2014 and Inch, 2017). This would fit neatly with a number of the emerging and developing work on institutional changes within English planning authorities resulting from reforms. Whilst this research touched upon institutional change from a broad structural perspective, such professional agency accounts of institutional change would build on these findings. Despite these limitations, this is also a strength given that one of the core contributions of this project is that it is one of the first empirical qualitative 'national' study on planning and austerity reforms in England post-2010.

Further research on state-led 'neoliberalisations' of planning are needed to evaluate the cumulative impact of reforms on the objectives and outcomes of local practices that have developed and waxed and waned under different political leadership since the 1970s. This may be particularly salient for the next decade, as Brexit threatens to remove a number of pieces of EU legislation and regulations for environmental protection and EU Structural Funding for social cohesion and regeneration in depressed economic regions. It is not clear that these international protections and funding will be taken up by the UK national government. It is also unclear whether English devolution will regain the momentum developing between 2014-16, a domestic issue that will be more important under a post-Brexit UK given the need to secure economic competitiveness beyond traditional trading partners in the EU. It therefore seems likely that these conditions of high practice uncertainty and fragmentation will only become further exacerbated under such undefined national and international political conditions. The May-led Government remains rooted within neoliberal ideology and has been largely overshadowed by Brexit. This is at the same time as the latest national policy changes have been produced in the revised 2018/19 NPPF. All of these issues should be subjected to both empirical and theoretical scrutiny.

6.3 Final Thoughts

In March 2018, two years after the original target date, Britain had eliminated the deficit on its day-to-day budget, the target originally set by George Osborne when he imposed austerity on public services in 2010. On the news that the UK is now running a surplus of £3.8bn on its current budget, Osborne posted on the social media *twitter* that "*We got there in the end - a remarkable national effort*" and Cameron responded with a message saying "*It [austerity] was the right thing to do*" (BBC News, 2018). Indeed, the Cameron-led governments did reduce the budget deficit from £143.5 billion in the financial year 2010/11 to £76.6 billion in the financial year 2015/16, a reduction of £66.9 billion over this period. However, the record of austerity policy on UK national debt tells a different story. General government gross debt was £1,651.9 billion at the end of the financial year ending March 2016 (representing 87.8% of UK GDP); however, this figure was £1,214.5 billion (76.3% of UK GDP) at the end of the financial year

ending March 2011. This means that the UK national debt increased by £437.4 million under the fiscal economic austerity policies pursued so fervently under the Cameron-Osborne governments 2010-2016.

The ideological success of austerity can therefore be seen in political terms through creating a smaller, leaner state (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016) with a much reduced public sector employment, consistent with the ambitions of neoliberal elite actors such as Cameron; rather than to reduce national debt, which arguably was never the real intention behind austerity as a form of 'statecraft' (Gamble, 2015). As at September 2018, the current Chancellor Phillip Hammond has only signalled that the government may end the austerity drive on government spending and investment in the 2018 Autumn Statement '*if economic conditions continue to improve throughout the year*'. Clearly, whilst the economic success of austerity is highly debatably within academic circles, its political success as a form of UK statecraft is undeniable. This is crystallised by the Conservative Cabinet commitment to austerity post-Cameron.

In terms of looking to the future, despite the strong political discourses that have operationalised austerity as a 'normalised' and accepted working conditions within the public sector in times of financial hardship (Farnsworth and Irving, 2018), the project of austerity will eventually undermine its own legitimacy as crisis conditions begin to dissipate and expose its political and ideological underpinnings. In the same way as other neoliberal policy strategies, austerity must continually evolve in order to maintain legitimacy and deflect criticism (Peck, 2010). Its hegemony can never be fully completed as a state project (Rancière, 1999, Mouffe, 2005), regardless of its ideological and discursive dominance at national and local scales since 2010. In moving on to the question of what next for UK austerity, some comfort can be taken that; '*economic statecraft in the UK cannot continue to use the 2008 financial crisis as a legitimising pillar indefinitely. As an idea, austerity is perennial, but only really functions as a response to crisis. Austerity is not in itself a permanent way of economic life, and the economic order that it seeks to defend and promote must develop new ways of justifying its existence eventually, including in a clear demonstration of its ability to create genuine prosperity*' (Berry, 2016, p. 111).

This understanding of politics and hegemony provides some comfort to progressive academics and activists. However, despite austerity measures only being able to sustain short policy cycles of intense political 'crisis' justifications and economic legitimacy, the consequences appear set to be reproduced at the local level for at least the near future. The ideological/discursive power of austerity (prudence, responsibility, autonomy, and other claims to living within our means and having 'no alternatives') to influence individual conduct means that austerity continues to be performed at the local municipal level in a number of different ways even after the national government has ceased to *explicitly* promote

deficit reduction measures under the May/Hammond administration. These deficit discourses have persisted following the resignation of David Cameron after the 2016 EU Referendum and the removal of George Osborne from the government cabinet and his subsequent stepping-down from formal politics. To borrow from Deas and Ward (1999), *the song of austerity has ended but the melody lingers*.

These findings beg the question whether Coalition and Conservative era austerity and planning reforms can be reversed, and whether this would be desirable given the changes, both positive and negative, that have already been embedded in the system and practice cultures in England. It is not possible to say if the scope and depth of austerity logics has become so firmly entrenched into local government institutions and planning practices that they cannot be reversed. For example, a new Labour government, particularly under Jeremy Corbyn, could signal the end of the UK national government commitment to austerity policy; however, whether planning practice could return to a stronger focus on professional understandings of sustainable development and public interest rather than commercial, managerialist or privatised agendas is questionable. As the findings here demonstrate, the ideational and discursive damage may have already been done as the conduct of planning managers and new planners entering the system may now be hardwired into accepted conducts and practice cultures. Particularly given the proliferation of planning consultancies and their growing influence on practice.

Peck (2012, p.651) cautions that '*if austerity defines a new normal, it is a state of normalcy at the very cusp of crisis*'. Indeed whilst local government and public planning may have now arguably been set on a new trajectory (Taylor-Gooby, 2012), this new state is fragile at best, and the potential for the political to emerge around a new funding landscape always remains as a future possibility. The planning literature on post-political theory demonstrates that government attempts at reform are not always successful, and dissatisfaction and resistance can be found in many forms at different spatial and organisational scales. A case in point is the widespread and well-publicised resistance to the draft NPPF in 2011, which led to it being significantly amended before its adoption in 2012. In this case, a number of alternative roles for planning, particularly environmental conservation, were brought to the fore to challenge the overly pro-growth narrative being presented (Allmendinger, 2016). More recently the dominance of viability considerations has been slightly softened within national policy through the 2018 NPPF; and the need for LPAs to have some basic level of resourcing to support developers has gained recognition resulting in a 20% increase in fees so long as this is reinvested back into planning services.

Overall, the core argument of this thesis is that the neoliberal reallocation of responsibility and risk through linked policy, localism and austerity reforms has been key to the unfolding state and society

restructuring in England post-2010, with planning further becoming both a punch bag for, and agent of, neoliberalism. However, that through planners professional capacities and skills, planning agency '*is in many respects the last line of defence to space itself being neoliberalized*' (Lord and Tewdwr-Jones, 2014, p. 357). This is to say that whilst national policy and funding 'structures' work to circumscribe and direct the scope and remit of planning practices, the agency of planners remains to pursue their own agendas in places based on their professional training, ethics and close relations to representative democracy.

The more provocative critical claim is that the particular scope, scale and temporal context of austerity, localism and planning reforms in England post-2010 represents more than a neoliberal 'business as usual' approach, but rather a more fundamental set of (post-crisis) changes to the professional roles of public planners and objectives of the planning system. This is deliberately to challenge the reader (whom is presumably reading this because of their concern for progressive planning) to be political and recognise that planning forms one key 'front' in part of a much broader and longer-term political project centred on variegated neoliberal governing attempts at public sector state restructuring. In this sense it is partly a call to action and warning that this is about more than just the technical operation and funding of the planning system but more fundamentally market-state-society relations that have far reaching impacts for society and sustainable development (that manifest such as in the 'housing crisis').

In conclusion, it seems likely that the current UK Conservative Government will continue to deploy neoliberal policies and initiatives in an ongoing attempt to (re)shape the conduct of individuals, communities and councils through national policy reforms in England for at least the near future. Only time will tell if the Cameron era proves to be a 'transformative' moment in planning history as predicted by Taylor-Gooby (2012) and outlined at the very start of this thesis (indeed it is easy to overstate the long-term importance and impact of events at the time without having enough distance to enable a clearer perspective). Finally, it is paramount that critical academics continue to work on these areas and to hold power to account as part of a broader commitment to society. Planning is, after all, about creating a sustainable future, and planning academics have a responsibility to practitioners and society.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Email Template

Hello [name],

My name is Mark Dobson and I am a PhD planning researcher at the University of Reading. My research is focused on the experiences of senior planning practitioners, and responses of local governments, to austerity and planning reforms since 2010. It is concerned with examining the changing nature of planning in England as part of the wider public service reform agenda through informed practice-based insights into the realities and pressures of contemporary local government planning.

Given your experience and senior position as [position and council] I am emailing with regards to a potential meeting with you at the council? I am conscious of your time and would appreciate no more than an hour interview.

The interview will not be overly structured, but as an example of the themes that I would like to cover: Austerity - the impacts of funding cuts and uncertainty over future finance settlements on planning provision and services e.g. level, quality, difference compared to pre-2010 and concerns for the future. Planning reform – the challenges faced in responding to national government statutory policy and agendas e.g. NPPF and Localism/Devolution and the impact of these on planning practices, relationships with stakeholders and delivering local plans and agendas.

I look forward to hearing from you.
Kind Regards, Mark Dobson.
Real Estate and Planning Department
Henley Business School
University of Reading.

Appendix B

Research Participant Information and Consent Sheet

Researcher information: Mr. Mark Dobson – Email: [redacted]

What is the study?

This research project is being conducted in fulfilment of a PhD in Real Estate and Planning at the University of Reading.

Why have I been chosen to take part?

Your views are being sought based on your professional knowledge and experience in local government and planning.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether you participate. You may also withdraw your consent to participation at any time during the project, without any repercussions to you, by contacting the researcher's supervisor using the contact details below.

Dr Emma Street - [redacted] Dr Steve Musson – [redacted]

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in an interview regarding your professional experiences of planning reform and austerity in the Cameron-led Coalition and Conservative Government period 2010 and 2016. The interview will be recorded as a memory aid to assist the researcher.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part?

The researcher does not intend to collect any confidential data from you in this study. The record of your interview will only be seen by the researcher and supervisor listed in this sheet. The findings will be written up in the student researcher project which will not be published but *will* be available in the University library and therefore accessible to students and staff.

What will happen to the data?

The data from your interview will be combined with that of other local government planners with a view on synthesising the experiences of planning reform and austerity on local government planning in different social-spatial contexts across England. **The names of interviewees will not be referred to in the written report.** Instead a general identifier and the region in which their local authority is situated will be used in the report. For example:

"*Planner X working in the South-East of England made the important point that…However this experience did not seem to be evident for Planner Y based in the North-West of England. Instead they highlighted that…*"

The records of this study will be kept private. A record of interviewee identities will be kept, however the notes of interviews will be separated from this, coded and stored securely to preserve anonymity. If you would like to see interview notes prior to them being integrated into the written project, please let the researcher know so that this can be arranged. Research records will be stored on a password-protected computer and only the student researcher will have access to the records. Once the final

report has been submitted and subject to external examination, interview recordings, records and transcribed interview notes will be destroyed.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can change your mind about taking part in the research at any time without any repercussions. Simply inform the student researcher of your intention to withdraw from the study using the contact details on this page.

What happens if something goes wrong?

In the unlikely case of concern or complaint, you can contact the student's supervisor Dr Emma Street by email [redacted] or by phone [redacted]

Where can I get more information? If you would like more information at any stage of the research process, please contact either the student researcher or supervisor using the contact details on this page. We do hope that you will agree to your participation in the study. **By taking part in an interview, you are consenting to its use by us as part of the project.** This application has been reviewed following the procedures of the School of Real Estate & Planning Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

Consent Form

Project title: Planning Reform under Austerity: Experiences and Responses of Local Authority Management Planners in England.

I have read the Information Sheet relating to this project.

I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me, and any questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to my participation. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the project any time, without giving a reason and without detriment.

I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying Information Sheet. I voluntarily agree to: *Please tick as appropriate*

I consent to take part in a research interview ☐

I consent to this interview being recorded ☐

Name: .....

Signed: .....

Date: .....

Appendix C

Interview Guide - Initial Questions:

Local Authority and Planning Context:

Can you briefly outline:

- The key challenges that your department/authority has faced in the last couple of years?
- The specific planning and development issues/pressures that are important locally?

Planning Resources and Budget (Austerity):

- Can you outline how your planning department budget has changed over the last 5 years?
- What service efficiency strategies have been introduced to save money and resources?
- Is the planning service budget 'protected' for statutory functions?
- Have budget changes been offset by changes in planning income? E.g. the impact of financial incentives such as the New Homes Budget?
- Has your authority introduced charging for pre-application discussions and other services? If so how effective has this proved?
- Are there any discretionary services that can no longer be freely provided by the department?
- How have funding reductions affected the *performance* of planning?
- In what ways has the planning *service* been affected by austerity and resource changes?
- What are the practical impacts of uncertainty over the future finance settlement on planning?
- What has austerity meant for the internal capacity of the planning department? (E.g. in terms of staff numbers, expertise, recruitment or reliance on external consultancies in your authority).
- What has austerity meant for the level and quality of planning services and delivery/outcomes that can be provided by the local authority?
- What has austerity meant for the capacity to plan for growth/infrastructure in your authority? (E.g. ability to raise revenue, relationships with key development actors, lead regeneration).
- What strategies have been used in your authority to maintain and improve planning services and outcomes in the context of reduced resources and financial uncertainty? (E.g. outsourcing planning functions, cross-boundary collaboration, alternative service delivery models, etc).
- Overall how has austerity effected the role and capacity of local government planning?

Planning Reform and Practices:

- How have you experienced and responded to the planning reforms introduced by the Coalition Government in the period 2010-15? The NPPF and most significant impact on practice?
- What have been your experiences of 'Localism'? What has it meant for your practice/locality?
- How do you evaluate the latest wave of reforms to planning against the New Labour regional spatial planning approach? I.e. more efficient, administrative or democratic planning system?
- What are your thoughts on local government organisation and cross-boundary collaboration?
- In general how do you think planning service/practice has changed over the last 5 years?
- Has there been an increase in the use of external resources over the last 5 years and if so in which areas have they provided support? E.g. policy evidence base, S106 negotiations etc.
- Have collaboration arrangements or resource sharing of specialist skills with neighbouring authorities increased in the last five years?
- Has there been an increase in experimentation with Alternative Service Delivery Models?
- Has there been an increase in Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs) or other such delivery arrangements to reduce pressures on decision-making timescales and quality?
- In your experience has the continued national government emphasis on reforming conditions for Local Plan and decision-making proved effective at the local scale?
- In your professional experience what have been the key positive and negative consequences of the planning system reforms enacted under the Coalition Government 2010-2015? (e.g. NPPF, Five Year Supply, Localism, New Homes Bonus, Permitted Development Rights, LEPs).
- What are your professional reflections both positive and negative of the previous regional spatial planning system compared with the localism and devolution agendas?
- What has localism meant and has it changed your planning practices?
- What have been the challenges of practicing and delivering planning at the local scale in the context of uncertainty surrounding constant and wholesale planning reform particularly in regard to managing strategic (long-term) planning issues?
- What is your professional understanding of the national agenda for planning and centralisation of planning powers and functions with regard to the relationship between central and local government and potential tensions between national and local community agendas?

Strategic Planning and Housing:

Given that one of the core rationales behind the regions was to remove inter-regional competition between geographically proximate places and foster collaboration based around a spatial planning policy framework, from your perspective, how has cross-boundary competition and collaboration been impacted by the localism and devolution agendas? How do you evaluate the latest approach to strategic planning in England since 2010 based around Local Enterprise Partnerships and Combined Authorities? Thoughts on what spatial scale is most effective to intervene and coordinate economic development? Shift away from traditional bounded spaces such as administrative boundaries based on the full national coverage of places through regions and LEPs toward fluid relational spaces based on selective networks of functional relationships characterised by the approach of George Osborne to devolution deals. From your practical understanding and local government experience how do you evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of national government policy solutions introduced since 2010 to 'streamline' the planning process and increase housing delivery and economic growth? Such as City Deals, the New Homes Bonus, Community Infrastructure Levy, Permitted Development Rights, the NPPF and Five Year Land Supply, the requirement to have a Local Plan in place by 2017 etc. What has been the impact of local communities being given increasingly more input in making planning policy through localism and neighbourhood planning? What do you think these agendas mean for local politics of planning and for housing?

Funding Local Planning Services and Infrastructure:

How significant is development viability and the capacity to seed fund and unlock infrastructure locally? How is the planning service allocating, prioritising and investing resources given the uncertainty of the future financial settlement through the removal of the revenue support grant, shift to 100% business rate retention, increasing pressure to raise council taxation and the inability to set planning fees locally? Given the significant reductions to local authority budgets what has austerity meant for the internal capacity of the planning department in terms of staff numbers and expertise, recruitment and reliance on external consultancies in your authority? In response which transformation strategies have been considered or implemented in your authority to maintain and improve planning services such as outsourcing planning functions to the private sector, increasing cross-boundary collaboration and resource sharing, experimenting with alternative service delivery models, developing external trading companies, etc.? What has this meant for the capacity to plan and deliver growth and infrastructure and the level and quality of planning services that can be provided by the local authority?

Appendix D

First Phase NVivo 'Organising' and Sub' Code Framework:

First Phase 'Organising' and 'Sub' Codes Framework:

Organising code: Austerity and Local Government Financial Settlement:

Sub-code 1: Capacity of Planning Services.

Sub-code 2: Innovation and Shared Services.

Sub-code 3: Revenue and Budget (Covering the Costs of Planning).

Organising code: Change in English Local Government Planning:

Sub-code 1: Local Politics and Governance.

Sub-code 2: Organisational Structure and Culture Change.

Sub-code 3: Performance, Role and Value of Planning.

Sub-code 4: Planners and Members Attitudes to Development.

Organising code: Growth, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning:

Sub-code 1: Collaboration and Competition.

Sub-code 2: Growth and the Local Economy.

Sub-code 3: Infrastructure, Funding and Viability.

Sub-code 4: Strategic Planning.

Organising code: Housing:

Sub-code 1: Constrained Boundaries and Greenbelt.

Sub-code 2: Housing Delivery by Developers and Councils.

Sub-code 3: Housing Policy, Numbers and Appeals.

Sub-code 4: Mixed Tenure, Affordable and Starter Homes.

Organising code: Localism:

Sub-code 1: Communities and Development.

Sub-code 2: Local Autonomy.

Sub-code 3: Neighbourhood Planning.

Organising code: National Policy Reform:

Sub-code 1: Housing and Planning Act.

Sub-code 2: Permitted Development and Brownfield Land.

Sub-code 3: Planning Reform and National Frameworks.

Sub-code 4: Practitioner Solutions.

Organising code: Local Plan-Making, Strategy and Uncertainty.