Planning at the Interface of Localism and Mayoral Priorities.

London's Ungovernable Boroughs.

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Abstract

In this article we address scalar issues of power in planning. In the context of the reengineering of governance, including the promotion of localism in England, we focus on local actors' beliefs in the extent of their power (de facto and de jure) over development decisions pertaining to their jurisdiction, on how misreadings arise and the consequences thereof. Our intervention highlights the extent and cost of ambiguity in England's discretionary planning system and asks whether and how this should be moderated.

Introduction

In this article we are focused on scalar issues of power in planning. We look at how local actors interpret the extent of their power over development decisions pertaining to their jurisdiction, at how misreadings arise and the consequences thereof. Drawing on experience of a major brownfield development in London, the broader context is the vertical and horizontal reengineering of planning linked to macro-economic change; that is, the devolution of planning powers to sub-national tiers in response to impacts of globalisation but with various motivations. And related, the redistribution of

competencies horizontally with both new actors and new roles for existing actors (Razin 2018), creating fluid scales, 'soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries', as governments engage in 'metagovernace' or the governing of governance (Allmendinger & Haughton 2007, 2009, 2010). Discussion of vertical and horizontal restructuring has often focused on city-regions and mayors as representing a response to the inadequacy of the nation state in a globalising economy.

An enthusiast-come-proselytiser for city mayors, Barber (2013) efficiently summarises this thesis in the title of his book, *If Mayors Ruled the World: Dysfunctional Nations, Rising Cities.* He argues that in the US, Washington can only look on "in wonder" as city mayors get things done. For Barber, one reason city mayors are more able to act than national governments is their ability to achieve horizontal coordination by being in touch with local stakeholders, describing Stuttgart's former mayor Wolfgang Schuster as, "…a European statesman and civic organizer, but first of all he is a municipal democrat attuned to how local democracy is enhanced by intercity collaboration" (Barber 2012;8). Although less polemic in his review of the rise internationally of the city-region as object and concept, Rodríguez-Pose (2008) reflects a widely held view of this scale of government being one that is more able to take into account the views of stakeholders at the local, sub-city level. For Moore-Cherry and Tomaney (2019) the Greater London Authority Métropole du Grand Paris and the Àrea metropolitana de Barcelona "[all] provide examples of government reforms designed to decentralise political authority to the scale of capital city-regions" (368).

However, new governance arrangements are not simply tiered down from central government, but instead lead to complex and contested spaces of governance (Allmendinger & Haughton 2009). As elsewhere, in London this has particular characteristics, where we focus on the contested relationship between the London

borough and the mayor. The potential for contestation between the two was recognised when the new mayoralty along with the Greater London Assembly (GLA)[1] was established in law in 1999, with the first mayor taking office in 2000 (Pilgrim 2006). The initial arrangement ensured that the boroughs[2] retained most of their powers, with the mayor acting as a facilitator (Gordon & Travers 2010;5), leading informed observers to note that the incumbent had been granted very limited powers by central government and would struggle to impose their will on the borough (Travers 2004). However, the first mayor, Ken Livingstone, was able to use the statutory requirement to produce a 'spatial' land use plan, "…to progressively increase his formal and de facto powers beyond those originally allocated to him by a cautious national government" (Gordon & Travers 2010;6). Similarly, in relation to housing Pilgrim (2006) notes, "…the [first] Mayor has imaginatively used his planning powers to carve out a pan-London housing role…" (231; see also Bowie 2010; Mace 2013). Planning has, therefore, become an important way in which mayors can seek to exercise 'power over' (Stone 1989) the boroughs.

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[1] The Mayor is an executive leader with other elected members of the GLA having a scrutiny function. GLA professional staff (officers) include planners who carry out the technical work of developing the London Plan under the political direction of the mayor. We refer to the mayor when referring primarily to political direction and to the GLA when primarily referencing regional planning officials. Our choice of use reflects the political/technical division.

[2] London is divided into 32 boroughs also referred to as local authorities or councils and which comprise elected officials and professional officers. The City of London sits partly outside this structure.

As the London mayor has become more powerful (through formal and informal routes), the boroughs have sought to employ a range of changes in governance to push back including, since 2011, using the localism agenda which includes the English[3] planning system. While local authorities have a claim to shape the neighbourhoods they represent, they have an ambiguous relationship to localism, which circumvents local authorities as much as it supports them (Mace & Tewdwr-Jones 2019). As with community, localism can be invoked in support of both right and left-wing ideologies, given the sub-divisions within each (Hickson 2013;409). The intent of localism - and following this, its organisation – is therefore highly variable. In the UK, a basic ideological division is well-illustrated through the two parties that formed the coalition government from 2010 to 2015, described by Layard (2012) at the time,

> Broadly, the Conservatives have a clear interest in the 'nano-local' (promoting neighbourhoods, free schools and GP consortia). In contrast the Liberal Democrats argue in favour of strengthening local democracy by freeing town halls from central government control. (135)

In practice, localism was more a reflection of the Conservatives' longstanding ambivalence regarding local government and its planning role (Thornley 1991) as well as a preference for liberal governance techniques, refined in Britain in the nineteenth century (Joyce 2003; Otter 2008). Therefore, while localism represents part of a new governance arrangement, comprising changes in governance both vertically and horizontally (encompassing fuzzy boundaries), it is also a contemporary manifestation

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[3] Planning is devolved to the constituent nations that comprise the UK. We focus on England's planning system.

of a much earlier British liberal governance approach which has long distrusted 'unfuzzy' singular authority/ies (especially public), preferring to balance powers (albeit not necessarily equally), between the private and public sector..

The Conservatives' distrust of sub-national government is not limited to local authorities, as witnessed by the abolition of regional planning structures in 2011. At the same time, London retained its regional planning structure. The lesson from this being that post-2011 localism is not to be mistaken simply as central government devolving power to local government, including the competence of planning. Rather, the move to localism is analysed more correctly as following on from the previous New Labour administration's reengineering of regional governance as part of a bigger picture of state restructuring, involving the development of complex and ambiguous relationships at both a scalar level and between frontline public and private agencies (Allmendinger & Haughton 2007). This includes, as we will see through the case study, the horizontal blurring of boundaries as local authorities increasingly take on quasi-private sector roles as development partners.

Under such circumstances, Razin (2018) uses the example of Canada to argue that effective checks and balances are key to the effective operation of the described regional-city planning relationship. Although Canadian and English planning are both discretionary systems, the two vary operationally due to historical and cultural differences. Alongside formal checks and balances, the English system, reflective of its liberal governance roots, has a more deliberately ambiguous division of powers. Checks and balances exist but, rather than being specified in advance, these emerge as different tiers of planning jostling for position. Therefore, the apparent clarity of the relationship between the mayor and the London boroughs in 2000, in retrospect looks to have been a far more ambiguous settlement, or, what Storper (2014) refers to as 'tinkering'. The

relationship between the boroughs and the mayor has been fudged in no small part because this is a necessary reality of governing large metropolitan areas where multiple functions do not fall neatly into common spatial scales or into any particular organisation's remit. What Storper sees as the necessary organisational complexity of metropolitan governance is amplified by the discretionary nature of the English planning system - as well as by the stock of poorly defined terms that local planners and politicians daily engage with and employ, as they negotiate this system. These terms include localism and its attendant jargon, but also sustainability, partnership, public good and community.

These terms are not simply used in conversation between those engaged in planning, but instead find their way into policy. Once there, they require more precise interpretation. Ambiguous terms are employed in all tiers of planning documents, including the 'the presumption in favour of sustainable development' that underpins the government's National Planning Policy Framework in England. Lees and Shepherd (2015) argue that while presumptions are impossible to evidence (because they are insufficiently defined), they can *substitute* for evidence. They observe that under these circumstances, where two poorly-defined and contrary terms come up against one another, it falls to someone to achieve the 'impossible' task of resolving their incompatibility. Initially this will be local planning officers and local politicians, but where a resolution is not found, a court must ultimately weigh one presumption or belief against another (Lees & Shepherd 2015;12). The question then becomes, when expressed at a scalar level, at what point does localism (however this is defined) prevail over regional and even national planning interests (and vice versa)? This ambiguity undermines the ostensible clarity of the hierarchy of planning documents in the English system. To have full legal weight (e.g. to be adopted), lower tier plans must be in

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general conformity with higher tier plans. However, in practice, once plans are adopted they still have to be interpreted. Moreover, formally adopted plans may be important but they are not the only material consideration to be weighed by decision makers. Planning authorities at all levels produce guidance in the form of various documents. While their legal weight is not equal to adopted plans, they are not without significance as exemplified through our case-study.

Methods

The research emerges from reflection on in-depth experience, mediated through theory, rather than reporting findings from a previously constructed research programme. One of the authors (Sitkin) was a key actor in the events described, but has since moved from being inside the case study to reflecting on it from the outside. Put simply, our research question asks why events played out as they did. Our intervention focuses on the effects of different presumptions meeting - in order to ask whether and how these effects could be mitigated or avoided.

The roots of the research places it in the interpretivist tradition, "[immersed] in the stream of events and activities of the phenomenon studied, interacting with its social actors (doing inquiry from the inside)" (Ospina et al 2017;594). Therefore, the research offers exceptional insight into the case from the practitioner perspective, but also raises obvious questions relating to objectivity which we now address.

Framing the issue, as Lees and Shepherd (2015) do, as one of incompatible and un-evidenced presumptions, has interesting methodological implications. Our case is focused on incompatible yet unprovable claims: the part of Enfield Council, drawing on the presumption of localism, that it should be able to determine and plan for its future; and on the part of the Mayor of London, following a strategic presumption that the Mayor should determine and plan for much of a borough's future. Given this, we are not

engaged in determining right or wrong, nor are we arguing for or against a given presumption or belief or for the correctness of local claims over regional or national (or vice versa) claims. Rather, we are interested in illuminating how the belief in localism - or the presumption thereof - drove local actors' decisions and the consequences. Reflecting our positionality and the methodological perspective of the research, we continue with an account in the first person to reflect the duality in one author's role.

In the knowledge that following political retirement I would be looking to publish academic research on particular aspects of my practice as councillor/cabinet member, during my final three months in post - and with explicit permission from London Borough of Enfield's in-house solicitor - I took possession of all publicly accessible Cabinet and Council reports with relevance to the economic regeneration topics I was expecting to explore. As part of this, I compiled all documents relating to the Meridian Water project, whose governance board I had chaired between 2014-2018. This compilation was then sub-divided thematically into categories including; 1) Relationships with putative procurement partners, 2) Infrastructure, 3) Local employment and 4) Planning issues. Documents classified under this latter category were then re-sorted in three ways; 1) Internal plans (reflecting Enfield Council's aspirations), 2) External plans (GLA and/or national level), and 3) Chronologically. These assortments were then crossed with a view towards ascertaining different plans' adequacy in terms of ensuring the Council's desired regeneration outcomes.

The authors engaged in several informal conversations to explore the experience and themes. These were followed by two semi-structured interviews to produce a more formal account and interpretation of events. Notes from these interviews were categorised in order to identify a series of themes. The themes were an attempt to structure the account provided by the interviews, rather than a theoretical framing of the

material. The main themes consist of planning hierarchy; timing (including political cycles); land assembly; development partners; mayoral power; and borough independence. Other headings were considered and dismissed for not 'making sense' of the accounts. Following this, public records were independently reviewed by Sitkin (including through the GLA's and Enfield's websites) in order to obtain an independent sense of how events had been framed. The first set of search terms sought to detect opposition, and included Meridian Water, +controversy, + complain(t), +protest, +oppose/opposition. Only five relevant results were returned, these were from the local press or from reporting on official political opposition within the Borough. The next set of terms were more general (Meridian Water +masterplan +agreement, +development, +regeneration, +housing), producing many returns but with multiple accounts of the same events in the professional press, e.g. Construction News. These provided a timeline and some basic figures but little else. In total twenty-three documents from the searches were accessed and read (ranging from one-page letters between the parties to masterplans).

Our eventual focus on planning documents was not the only way our case study could be understood, but it did have a twofold purpose. First, by definition it provided a documented way of understanding how events were experienced. Focusing on the role of the documents helped evidence personal recollections and interpretations of events. Second, and more specifically, planning documents feature ambient presumptions and beliefs, the interpretations of which would significantly impact the course of events.

The Case of Meridian Water

The London Borough of Enfield is a significant development partner which owns much of the land at Meridian Water, and has actively sought a partnership with a private

sector developer. This case is an empirical example of the argument of Allmendinger and Houghton (2009), that the reengineering of governance is not simple and is not simply top down. Instead, "the hybrid governance and government arrangements, with their multiscalar, multisectoral mixes, reveals the multiplicity of ways in which actors at all scales seek to address market, state, and governance failures" (631). Councils, both left and right of the political centre, team up with developers to deliver so-called regeneration schemes all across London (Beswick & Penny 2018). Our interest is in the governance issues this throws up rather than with the principle of blurring public and private sectors.

Enfield is one of London's largest boroughs by population, estimated at 332,000 in 2018. Its social fabric is very divided, with a higher proportion of middle-class homeowners in the West (Winchmore Hill, Cockfosters), and a greater number of working-class tenants in the East (Edmonton). Except for discussions about a possible future Crossrail II spur to New Southgate, Western Enfield and its homeowner commuters had heretofore been rarely targeted in the Council's growth planning. Instead, it is deprived East Enfield that has tended to attract the greatest attention. The focus is unsurprising, given that the population in question is likely to get more of an uplift from growth than their more affluent neighbours to the West. Indeed, from the Council's perspective, tying planning to an anti-poverty agenda is all the more rational because improving poorer residents' life chances – above and beyond the political halo effect associated with this kind of virtuously redistributive policy - has the added benefit of reducing demands on the Council's welfare budget.

Planning against this backdrop is different from planning, for instance, for extensive upmarket housebuilding in a peri-urban or rural environment. In a situation like Enfield's, a council not only plans the framework in which growth takes place but

must simultaneously find a way to realise socioeconomic objectives extraneous to viability considerations (although in the case of Meridian Water the latter became important to the Council as a significant landowner and development partner).

The case study briefly reviews the background to some of Enfield Council's past recent planning decisions, before scrutinising the specific issues associated with the Meridian Water development. It concludes with analysis of the interactions between the two authorities – London Borough of Enfield (LB) and the Greater London Authority (GLA) – who were largely responsible for planning the project in question.

Enfield's Socio-Economic Context

Eastern Enfield (including Edmonton), had a very deep industrial fabric for many decades before the manufacturing closures that de-industrialised the borough in the late 20th century. The locale had once hosted a multitude of mid-technology manufacturers, including the Edison Swan United Electric Company, Enfield Standard Power Cables and the Royal Small Arms Factory. What remained after their disappearance were large pockets of ex-factory workers, many of whom lived locally and lacked skills that were transferable in the UK's new post-industrial economy. Edmonton's unemployment rose steeply, regularly exceeding 15% between the 1990s and 2015, and surpassing 50% in part of one ward abutting onto Edmonton Green (see Table 1). The decline in aggregate wages caused a sharp decline in the standard of living, with Edmonton regularly scoring as London's fourth most deprived constituency.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Table 1: In employment and employment by occupation. Source NOMIS official labour market statistics.

Enfield's de-industrialisation, measured in both the quantum and quality of blue-collar jobs lost, also had spatial implications on its industrial estates, with defunct manufacturing facilities often being replaced by low value-added distribution and logistics warehouses offering little employment per square meter. This evolution was detrimental from a local economic standpoint but, from Enfield's perspective, it suited the rest of London (including the GLA), which needed one borough to specialise in the less profitable later phase assembly, storage and delivery activities that were becoming an integral part of increasingly fragmented global supply chains. From Enfield's perspective, however, its newfound role became a huge obstacle to economic regeneration, since the borough was now asked to continue depending on a low-value added path that it had neither chosen nor wanted, and which locked it into terms of trade that were detrimental to it at several levels.

For local politicians (including Sitkin) seeking to re-position Enfield as a centre for good quality industry, the policy prescription was obvious – reverse the situation by planning for (and attracting) higher value-added companies. The question would then become whether this change in direction would be supported, much less tolerated, by other London boroughs, and indeed by the GLA at the top of the pyramid.

Residential Development Implications

Enfield's economic specialisation woes also had a direct effect on its housing profile. Because lower local wages meant less income available for residential investment, local housing prices were lower than elsewhere, hence more affordable for poor immigrant communities already scoring high on many deprivation indicators. The

social immiserization resulting from this population transfer translated, among other things, into less private maintenance spending on a housing stock that was already of lower quality in Eastern Enfield. In turn, few of the developers seeking London's next diamond-in-the-rough gentrification zone wanted to invest here, thereby sparking a vicious circle where poor housing led to little investment, hence to even poorer housing. This dilemma was long apparent to local and national politicians of all persuasions, creating a widespread political consensus that public intervention in East Enfield, starting with the Council, was both legitimate and necessary. The only question was how to start.

Around 2008, Enfield's then Conservative administration began envisioning the possibility of developing a 210-acre industrial brownfield site approximately six miles north of the Olympic 2012 site in the same Lee River valley (Figure 1).

<INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE>

Figure 1. Location of Meridian Water in London/regional context. Source: London Borough of Enfield (LBE 2013;9).

The area soon became known as Meridian Water. From the outset it was understood that this would be a challenging development environment. All that remained from the large chemicals plant once located on the site were residues of noxious effluents requiring expensive remediation and a few under-occupied industrial hangars. The industrial estates on the site's eastern edges were also dilapidated, hosting a number of low-tech and dirty industrial activities. The northern quadrant was more functional, with its large box retail park, including busy Ikea and Tesco stores. The overall sense, however, was one of desolation, exacerbated by a total lack of rail

connectivity. Add to this the fragmented land ownership in the area – both a cause and a result of under-investment – and developers were loath to invest in Meridian Water. That is, unless the Council intervened first to de-risk the project.

This challenge was taken up by the Labour Administration that came to power in 2010, especially given the party's interest in supporting its Eastern Enfield electoral heartlands. Here, like elsewhere, the political change brought on by the election of a new regime brought in a new planning impetus – as well as a number of new planning challenges.

Planning for Meridian Water

By 2011, Enfield Council's new leadership team had started drafting a Meridian Water Masterplan - ultimately published in 2013 – that together with the borough-wide Core Strategy 2010-2025 would cement two new development planning principles (see Figure 2 for timeline).

(1) To de-risk Meridian Water, the new consensus was that greater intervention, hence control, was required on LB Enfield's part. The new plans were therefore designed to adjudge the Council a quasi-developer's function, legitimising the business interest it had in buying, in its own name, land that it would then enhance and sell on. Similarly, increased control was also considered useful in helping the Labour Administration achieve its aforementioned socioeconomic regeneration ambitions. Enfield's new Administration wanted and needed to engage more than local authorities usually do in a development (Chakrabortty 2014). Its first planning documents were therefore used to announce this aspiration.

(2) The second new policy enshrined in the two plans expressed the Administration's desire to avoid dormitory developments offering housing but no jobs. This reflected

politicians' belief in holistic "balanced growth" – deemed more in sync with the aspiration for sustainable cities (Maheshwari et al 2016) – as well as recognition that the Council's future financial well-being was predicated on its maintaining an industrial base of business rate payers (increasingly important in the UK but not as significant as, for example, in the US where there is a closer link between business rates and local authority income).

In terms of reading signals, the Meridian Water Masterplan and the Core Strategy were significant. They encountered little resistance through to their completion. The Core Strategy's adoption and GLA planners' acceptance of the Masterplan was construed by the Council as signifying support for a new hands-on approach, in which Enfield would be free to make business decisions ensuring Meridian Water's financial viability. The Council assumed further common ground, given the shared interest for government, the Mayor and the Borough in accelerating housing delivery on one of North London's few remaining significant brownfield sites. However, the Masterplan was not binding - and the policies in the Core Strategy, although it had greater legal status, only contained broad/strategic policies. The end result was to lower the threshold for the plan's acceptance by planning authorities with whom Enfield had a subsidiarity relationship in relation to Meridian Water (the GLA regionally; the Secretary of State nationally). This is significant, as while higher tier authorities accepted the two planning documents, much interpretive scope would be allocated to planning officers and politicians, both in the Borough and at the GLA (Lees & Shepherd 2015).

<INSERT FIGURE TWO ABOUT HERE>

Figure 2: Timeline of case-study

During 2014 it became clear that the Masterplan (and Core Strategy) had not locked external planning authorities, including central government, into the Council's vision. In November 2014, the Council gave its internal approval to the development of a Central Leeside Area Action Plan. An Area Action Plan (AAP) is a planning document that is recognised by the current government, although its use is not encouraged. The Central Leeside AAP, later known as the Edmonton Leeside AAP (hereafter the AAP), was intended to be a step above the existing Masterplan. The AAP would have formal legal weight, and so be more robust than the advisory Masterplan. Two motivations for the AAP included first, the need to have more control over other landowners; and second, the need to address rapidly changing housing targets. Turning to the first of these, in 2014, the Council was negotiating with a local landowner who had put in an application to build large logistics 'sheds' that were broadly compatible with the Masterplan's storage or distribution uses (classified by government as 'use-class' B8), but totally at odds with the Council's aim of co-locating residential and industrial uses – a policy that could only succeed if the industries in question did not generate significant amounts of heavy lorry traffic. This nuance in B8 land uses (the idea that warehousing and storage would only be acceptable if lorry traffic were managed) is neither specified in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) nor through use-clauses, meaning that Enfield's arguments had no legal leverage when the landowner launched a judicial review against a Council Planning Committee decision opposing his application. This was an early case at Meridian Water of higher tier planning documents (in this case governmental), being unsupportive of a lower tier local authority's concomitant development interests.

Second, an increase in annual housing targets placed ever greater pressure on the development to deliver Enfield's housing. GLA-specified housing targets rose steeply from 2011 onwards. In 2013, Enfield Council was being told to build a minimum of 560 homes per annum. By 2017 this was up to 1,876 (Figure 2). Partly, this was the effect of population growth, but also of the coalition government's housing benefits cap which priced households dependent on the benefit out of more expensive Inner London and into the city's less expensive outer boroughs (Shelter 2014). Because the Meridian Water Masterplan (like so many other planning documents) had not been designed to be evolutive, its "delivery target and specific scope" was deemed out-of-date almost by the time it was published. This was critical given Meridian Water's paramount responsibility for hosting new housing development. The new AAP would increase the quantum of housing at Meridian Water. It would also bolster the Council's ability to oppose property interests interfering with its vision, including by acquiring land, if need be, via Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers.

In 2015 the mayor announced that Meridian Water was to receive 'Housing Zone Funding', a bespoke payment that was intended to help overcome barriers to housing delivery at Meridian Water. This was another signal, if one were needed, of the importance of delivering housing on the site. The Council again took this as representing support for its approach, and focused much time and resource in attracting investors to Meridian Water via a procurement process set out in a further document, the Master Development Framework Agreement (hereafter MDFA). The AAP was supposed to support the MDFA procurement process (and the ensuing development) by creating a framework enabling a mixed project materialising Enfield's four aspirations for Meridian Water: local jobs; place-making; affordable housing; and enough owner-occupied or private rental sector homes to subsidise the first three policy goals. The

hope was that with its adoption, the Council's planning and development interests might go hand-in-hand.

Two major problems that manifested between 2014 and 2018 prevented the AAP's rapid adoption, however. The first became apparent after the March 2015 public consultation when a decision was taken not to submit the AAP to the Secretary of State because of the need to integrate "higher population growth rates and projections [and] updates to the London Plan and housing supply targets" (LBE 2017;6)[4]. This was redolent of the delays that the old Meridian Water Masterplan had suffered before its final approval by all statutory consultees. Consultation and approval processes associated with many planning documents often take upwards of two years before final adoption. This means that the authorities testing a plan's validity at the end of a process often see numbers that, in a fast-moving environment, may no longer be credible - at which point, the proposed plan is often returned to its authors for more editing, causing further delays (the AAP process was still not complete in early 2019, with some significant alterations – to wit, a downsizing in the housing quantum – being widely mooted later in that year).

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[4] https://governance.enfield.gov.uk/documents/s62457/Appendix%201%20-%20Statement%20of%20Reasons%2006.04.17_THLv2.pdf "The AAP went to public consultation between January 2015 and March 2015 and received 22 representations. The AAP was not submitted to the Secretary of State, and so has not been adopted. This is because significant changes, particularly with regard to Meridian Water, necessitate an update of the AAP. The key changes are: 5.11.1 higher population growth rates and projections; 5.11.2 updates to the London Plan and housing supply targets…" (p.6)

It is the multi-layered nature of the UK's current planning document approval process that causes this problem, which can therefore be seen as endemic to the existing regime. On the other hand, a second key problem affecting Meridian Water's planning framework was specific to this one project alone; namely, a change of mayor. When Sadiq Khan entered office in 2016, like his predecessors, he set about developing his own London Plan.

Enfield's Problems With the New Mayor's New London Plan

As a background to this section, it is useful to remember the different pay-out profiles of each of the land-uses (employment; social amenities; housing with different kinds of ownership or tenure) that were meant to co-exist at Meridian Water. Some uses (fully owned or private rental sector housing) were expected to generate large surpluses; others (industrial estates) more moderate yields; and others (affordable housing and social amenities) minimal or even negative financial returns, meaning they would require cross-subsidisation. The land-use mix agreed with developers – and planned by planners - was therefore a key viability constraint for Enfield Council at Meridian Water, stuck between its desire to achieve certain socioeconomic outcomes and the price its development partners were prepared to pay for this work. The only way Council planners felt they could arbitrate these conflicting constraints was if they had the freedom to judiciously slot different land uses on different locations, both on-site at Meridian Water and elsewhere in Enfield. Over the course of the new London Plan development process, however, the autonomy that Enfield sought would increasingly be taken away from it.

The specific bone of contention between the GLA and the Council was the allocation of Strategic Industrial Land (hereafter SIL), across Enfield. London's housing crisis had long changed the economics of residential vs. industrial land-use, with rising

prices for the former causing a decades-long displacement of the latter. The net effect was that the quantum of industrial land in London had shrunk markedly, to such an extent that protecting surviving estates became paramount in the nascent London Plan, which seemed to categorise Enfield as one of the few potential remaining repositories for the agglomeration's future industrial activities. This was a depiction that the Council considered unfair since it sanctioned ex post facto Inner London boroughs' previous release of SIL in exchange for more lucrative housing developments, while preventing Enfield Council from doing the same.

In communications with the GLA from late 2017 onwards, the Council formulated the argument that it would be unequitable were the new London Plan to prevent it from altering local land-use in a way that increased its chances of attracting higher value employers to Meridian Water. This was happening at a time when certain GLA officials were telling Enfield that it might not even be allowed to distance existing nuisance waste activities from the new residential units that the Council was hoping to build at Meridian Water. In the view of the Council's politicians, this micro-management of a lower (local) authority by a higher (planning) authority ran counter to the devolution agenda to which so many political voices had ostensibly lent their support.

The problem was not that Enfield Council disagreed with GLA's concern for the preservation of industrial activities in the nation's capital. As Enfield already hosted London's second largest industrial estate (after Park Royal), the Council was committed to maintaining its manufacturing base. But from its perspective, the most effective way of achieving this, while also meeting housing objectives, was to allow local planners to "release" SIL designations from the few sites like Meridian Water, where housing could be built at scale and compensate for this loss by intensifying industrial activity

elsewhere in the borough. Ideas floated to satisfy the GLA's new SIL prescriptions, included re-designating brown field land in the Green Belt and using the value uplift to fund greenfield protection (Mace et al 2016); building multi-story industrial units and using floorspace instead of site area to quantify the quantum of SIL on any one site; or planning new small-scale industrial activities on sites adjacent to existing SIL covered by other Council masterplans. None of these approaches were being applied at the time by the GLA, but neither would any be allowed.

The deal that the Council wanted from the GLA – that it accepted the release of a modest amount of SIL at Meridian Water in exchange for an intensification of industrial activity elsewhere – was of particular importance given its increasingly urgent interest in getting the AAP finally agreed. There were two reasons for this sense of urgency.

(1)   The vacuum caused by the delays in the AAP's adoption caused the Council problems in spring 2017 when its Planning Committee felt unable - due to the insufficiency of existing planning documents - to refuse a development application that interfered with other key Meridian Water sites. Granting planning permission to a plot that was probably going to be ultimately subject to a CPO would have the effect of increasing the Council's land acquisition costs. The GLA did not share this extra cost.

(2)   Even more ominously, planning disagreements with the new GLA Administration began to complicate the Council's negotiations with potential developers. The goalposts had shifted from the land uses originally planned at the start of the MDFA procurement, with the new SIL prescriptions directly impacting the project's quantum of residential development, hence its financial viability. Such uncertainty had a clearly negative impact on developers' willingness to bargain flexibly.

Over 2017-2018 Enfield Council planners and senior officers and politicians would spend hundreds of hours lobbying their GLA counterparts to get them to approve a Meridian Water land-use mix, enabling enough non-subsidised housing on-site to make the project financially viable. In its developer role, the Council was free to plan for the kind of growth it wanted. In its institutional role, it had to accept a whole set of planning principles determined by external bodies with whom it often disagreed but that occupied a higher position in the national planning hierarchy.

Discussion – Ungovernable Boroughs?

A period of academic interest followed the creation of the role of Mayor of London in 2000, including the style of the devolution settlement (Travers 2002; Sweeting 2002), the politics of the first mayor, Ken Livingstone (McNeill 2002a,b) and, reflecting the focus of this article, the implications for land use planning (Rydin et al 2004; Thornley et al 2005). There has been relatively little academic attention since this time although notably, ten years after the post was established, Gordon and Travers (2010) published a piece focused on the mayoral role in spatial planning and, importantly, how it has been employed by mayors to enhance their power. Their title '*London: Planning the Ungovernable City*' referenced Yates's work on the impossibly complex role of New York's mayor (Yates 1977), which he attributed to "the inherent fragmentation" of both service delivery and urban policy-making (7). As Gordon and Travers (2010) noted, one importance difference between New York and London is the role of the boroughs in the latter; therefore, any analysis of London's governance must be mediated through an understanding of the role of the boroughs.

The mayoralty was structured to avoid anticipated confrontation with the boroughs (Pilgrim 2006), but from the borough perspective the mayor may now appear more as a city boss than the originally intended 'consensual facilitator' (John & Cole

1999). The first mayor was adroit at using his position to exercise power beyond that which was formally available to him, and the government has since extended mayoral powers. This can be explained by the mayor seeking to make London more governable by establishing ever greater authority over the boroughs. But, as our case study illustrates, this may be occurring at the cost of making the boroughs seemingly less governable. A neutral observer might note that the boroughs could simply have accepted more readily the de jure and de facto powers of the mayor to avoid the problem. However, as Storper (2014) recognises, the reality of governing large, and therefore organisationally complex, metropolitan areas is that there cannot be a perfect or complete solution.

In the case of London, the 'failure' to fall in line with mayoral priorities drew on a long tradition of local authorities jealously guarding their autonomy. It was not simply hubris. Rather, it reflects a longstanding technique of liberal governance in the UK. That is, that the ambiguous and constantly negotiated nature of checks and balances in the system reflects central government's reluctance to establish clear and absolute lines of authority through formal structures that exist in countries other than the UK (Razin 2018). The 'playing off' of parties, horizontally and vertically, includes the provision of ample signals that boroughs can interpret as legitimising their claims to promote relatively independent agendas, and justifying this by the primacy of localism. But, as noted, localism is ambiguous in relation to the power it confers on boroughs, and indeed, on local communities. We have focused on the role of multiple planning documents in the case of Meridian Water. At different levels these documents all contained assertions that remain to be tested in practice. Therefore, while the Council took adoption to mean that others were buying into the documents, in practice it remained for local and regional planning officers, politicians and ultimately the law, to

resolve the ambiguities within (Lees & Shepherd 2015). In the meantime, ambiguity creates hope value for participants believing they will be able to successfully make their case, fuelling the contested nature and uncertainty of planning decisions.

The documents added to uncertainty in two other ways. First, the status of each document must be weighed as a material consideration, something that includes balancing their formal or advisory status. Second, timing is also a crucial factor. The London Plan process draws power to the mayor as it can be revised or rewritten more quickly than a borough's core strategy/local plan can. This is greatly aided by the accepted practice of altering, rather than rewriting, the extant London Plan. Along with the uncertain weight given to local planning documents below the local plan/core strategy, this allows the mayor to wrong foot the boroughs. Changes in mayor and associated shifts in priorities (sometimes arising from earlier mayoral decisions) only serve to reinforce for boroughs the uncertainty of the institutional and local environment in which they operate.

The liberal governance approach comes with the cost associated with uncertainty. As we have shown, tensions are inevitable – and compromises rare – when a relationship of subsidiarity exists between two planning authorities representing public bodies pursuing separate interests. This further complicates the delivery of large urban brownfield schemes that are inherently complex (Quod with Shelter 2006), yet play an important role in delivering the housing that politicians have committed to facilitating. Even with a fair wind, major brownfield sites take years to deliver, and therefore span electoral cycles. The election of a new London mayor saw rapid changes in the approach to Strategic Industrial Land (SIL). This became a critical issue for Enfield Council which, as a development partner with 'skin in the game', was keenly focused on planning decisions and their implications for the viability of the land use

mix. After all, the final bid that the master developer would make to the Council depended on the quantum of different types of housing (private rented sector, affordable, etc.) that it could expect to get planning permission to build at Meridian Water. The problem for the Council (as public body and private sector partner) was that what it ultimately perceived as interference from the mayor pursuing his own planning agenda, created last-minute uncertainty about the ultimate quanta of housing that the developer could count on. In business thinking, uncertainty quite normally tends to have a negative effect on a putative investor's "animal spirits".

Conclusion

The research emerges from experience of local political practice in London rather than a previously constructed research programme. We have asked why events in the case described played out as they did. However, the specific case sits within the broader context of the rescaling of governance and associated redistribution of competencies. Rescaling is never a singular nor a unidirectional event, but rather will be contested and negotiated. In the case of planning, policy and related documents (e.g. guidance) are an important part of the process of negotiation. They contain often ambiguous terms that Lees and Shepherd (2015) argue sometimes substitute for evidence; are sometimes incompatible with one another, and require adjudication. Judging what certainty is provided by a planning document, is further complicated by the different timescales for changing local and regional plans. Given the existence of incompatible yet unprovable claims, in this case regarding the 'correct' relationship between the boroughs and the mayor in London, our interest is in the extent and effect of the ensuing ambiguity.

Viewed from the perspective of certain planning systems in other countries, the response might simply be to get the mayor to plan strategically for all of London by taking charge of planning in each borough. It is true that this might be more efficient -

but the kind of acceptability it requires is historically and geographically contingent. The tradition of British liberal governance has long traded off efficiencies of standardisation against distrust for an authority that is in a position to standardise (Otter 2008). Planning in London generally reflects the central state's preference for fragmentation, both within the public sector and between the public and private sector. It is in this context that we must understand the contestation and confusion that has arisen from the creation of the mayor, the localism agenda, and the increasingly dual role of public authority and development partner.

Meridian Water is, therefore, not a single instance but demonstrates how in London every planning document and major planning decision offers the potential to recontest the relationship between the local and the regional. No planning system, discretionary or regulatory, can dispense with complexity (Booth 1995) - but Meridian Water exemplifies the specific excess of uncertainty in London's planning.

More formal ways of managing conflict already exist, one example being the Ontario Municipal Board system with its formalised arbitration (Razin 2018). This indicates that it is possible to avoid rerunning scalar battles with every new planning document and decision. Beyond this and following Storper (2014), we might also argue that means must be found to give greater airing to the costs of the ambiguity within the system, and to open up to public debate the costs and benefits of giving greater authority to either the mayor or the boroughs. Meridian Water illustrates the need for system change in London to challenge the instinct for checks and balances by contestation, in order to reduce uncertainty and increase governability.

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