Citizen's motivation in neighbourhood planning in North West England

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Although some researchers have addressed the question of what motivates citizens to become involved in lower tier planning in the UK, the phenomenon is not yet fully understood. A lack of hard data, combined with some mutually contradictory arguments in the field, makes for imperfect analysis, and this can potentially undermine the effectiveness of individual engagement in Neighbourhood Plans (NPs). This paper focuses on what motivates citizens to participate in the process of creating NPs in North West England, and explores past theories on individual motivation. This study achieved its research aims through extensive research of the relevant literature, combined with an empirical study of five neighbourhoods in North West England. The main conclusion drawn from the dissertation is that there are complex and multiple motivations of people participating in NPs, and these impetuses are affected by a range of political, environmental and socio-economic factors. This research offers opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of NPs for researchers and NP stakeholders alike.

Keywords: Neighbourhood Plans; individual motivation; community engagement

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Introduction

Scholarly attention to the importance of public participation in urban planning became prominent in the late 1960s, with most pointing to the landmark work of Arnstein (1969) in the USA and Damer and Hague (1971) in the UK as being the earliest attempts to engage with the subject. Those authors argued for the importance of such participation, now established as 'an unassailable pillar of the planning system' (Inch, 2012, p. 523). A parallel strand of research has explored the question of what motivates communities to become engaged in the planning process (Bailey & Pill, 2015; Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Durose & Rees, 2012; Ercan & Hendriks, 2013; Hampton, 1977; Olson, 1965; Painter *et al*., 2011; Smith, 1981; Tewdwr-Jones & Thomas, 1997). Early theories suggested that individuals tend to become involved in local planning for two related reasons: their attachment to place, and desire to protect it; and a sense that the local is an important point of engagement for democracy (Birchall & Simmons, 2002; Boaden *et al*., 1982; Cullingworth, 1990; Derrick Sewell & Coppock, 1977; Smith, 1981)**.** The latter is perhaps best expressed through a quote from Derrick Sewell and Coppock (1977, p.1), who argued that people want to engage in planning because 'the individual has the right to be informed and consulted and to express his views on matters which affect him personally'.

This right to be informed and consulted was a key plank of the rhetorical justification employed by the UK government for their 2011-onwards reforms to the English planning system (Department for Communities and Local Government & Eric Pickles, 2010). These reforms, the focus of this paper, are the latest in a series of attempts by governments of different political orientation to strengthen community participation in planning. These include national initiatives such as the Community Development Project (1970-1978), and local approaches, for example Liverpool's resident-led housing cooperatives in the 1980s (see Sturzaker & Nurse, 2020 for a more comprehensive review). More recently, the 1997-2010 Labour governments emphasised, rhetorically at least, the importance of participation as part of their *Spatial Planning* programme (Shaw & Lord, 2009). In 2009 the last of those governments consulted upon a proposed set of reforms to devolve power to local authorities and communities (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009). Labour lost power in the 2010 UK general election, and the coalition government which replaced them introduced their own set of reforms to planning in England, with a much stronger emphasis on devolution to communities. Those promoting the reforms claimed that they would devolve planning decision-making power to communities through the introduction of Neighbourhood Plans (NPs). NPs became a legal part of the English planning system under the *Localism Act 2011.* According to Department for Communities and Local Government and Eric Pickles (2010), the Act would

> '…enable regional planning to be swept away and in its place neighbourhood plans will become the new building blocks of the planning system where communities have the power to grant planning permission if a local majority are in favour'.

In Gallent's study (2013:374), NP was clarified as handing 'new powers to civil parishes [communities], who are able to draw up their own planning "orders"… [but these must be] demonstrably "compliant" with the content of local plans and with national policy'. For the purposes of this paper, NP is used to describe the new planning power for local communities to produce a community-level plan based on their own preferences, which local citizens truly pursue and which will then play a role in decision-making on development proposals (known as planning applications in the UK).What we know about individual motivation in planning is largely based on research undertaken with respect to "higher tier" planning processes at the local (municipality) or strategic levels (Boaden *et al*., 1982; Damer & Hague, 1971; Derrick

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Sewell & Coppock, 1977; Gallent & Robinson, 2012; Hampton, 1977; Pratchett, 2004; Smith, 1981). Despite exploration of the success or otherwise of the "area-based" redevelopment and regeneration initiatives undertaken in the UK for many years (Jones & Evans, 2008), there has been little empirical investigation into rationales for participation at the community level, though those studies which have taken place have suggested that residents more proactively participate in affairs at a neighbourhood scale rather than at a local scale (Boaden *et al*., 1982).

Early research into NP has identified a 'clear gap' in understandings of motivations for participation in it (Parker & Murray, 2012: 6) and a critical need for a 'profound understanding' of NP participatory behaviour differences Rauws (2016: 340). Only by developing an understanding of why individuals are motivated to engage in community level planning, we can deepen our understanding in the subject area (Parker & Murray, 2012).

By exploring public participation in community-led planning in North West England, this paper concentrates particularly on what motivates residents to participate in NPs. It begins with an undertaking of a critical review of literature, to examine participatory motivation relevant to both high tier and low tier planning. The paper goes on to make a contribution to the field by providing empirical evidence regarding why people become involved in the community-led planning process in England. Therefore, the study provides fresh analysis for improving understanding of civic initiatives in the UK and elsewhere.

Review of related literature

The literature regarding motivation in planning reveals two clusters of explanatory factors: one cluster 'internally-oriented', i.e. to do with citizens' own individual drivers; and one 'externally-oriented', i.e. related to the activities of other stakeholders. We here discuss each in turn.

Internally – oriented motivation

Public participation in planning can be simply explained as '… making decisions with stakeholders, rather than making decisions for stakeholders' (Pettit & Pullar, 2004:1). Damer and Hague (1971:217) undertook a detailed pioneering review on reasons for the growing interest in citizen engagement. They suggested that people are motivated to engage in planning by the ideology of participatory democracy. They also highlighted that the motivation interacts with citizens' doubts about the institutional planning process. Similarly, Rydin and Pennington (2000) believe that democratic reasoning is one traditional motivation of public participation, that people want a transparent plan making process. Furthermore, in Sewell and Coppock's (1977) landmark paper, they argue that although participants may be encouraged by different reasons, they show similar aspiration on planning, that is, an aspiration of seeking 'political equality'. They believed that people who want to become engaged in planning may also have a strong belief that they have the right to be involved in planning in a democratic society, which can be termed a philosophical reason. It has been found that individuals tend to become involved in local planning making because of a sense of democracy**.**

Most of these studies were based on strategic and local planning processes, therefore, the results may no longer justify participatory impetus at lower tier plans, such as neighbourhood planning process (Boaden *et al*., 1982; Gaventa, 2004). Nevertheless, the impact of democratic motivation may still play a significant role in determining citizens' involvement in NP in the UK.

There are other types of internal factors which might motivate people. Sewell and Coppock

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(1977) highlight that people are often apathetic in many political agendas because they are not directly affected. Parker and Murray (2012) explored motivation to participate in planning through "rational choice" theory (cf. Rydin & Pennington, 2000). Such a theoretical approach focuses on the personal benefits to individual actors of making certain choices. In the case of participation in planning, the theory argues, and Parker and Murray found in relation to NP, that an individual will choose to participate (or not to participate) on the basis of whether they perceive personal benefits to themselves outweighing personal costs.

Parker *et al*. (2015) note that local communities with developed skills have a better understanding of NP making, those skills including 'better' planning background, knowledge and resources utilisation. Their study confirms that motivation becomes stronger when residents have a greater ability to influence the planning making. One later study questioned Smith and Sewell and Coppock's view, finding that 80 per cent of participants who engaged in community activity were motivated by a collectivistic motivation — people want to benefit whole communities rather than simply themselves (Aspden & Birch, 2005; Birchall & Simmons, 2002). This idea emphasises the importance of collective benefits rather than individual benefits. However, what the main motivations to engage in neighbourhood plans are remains unclear.

Externally driven motivation: difference in local contexts and participant empowerment

Democracy may give people the aspiration to become involved in planning but this may not necessarily lead to an actual engagement in planning unless the system is designed in such a way to facilitate it (Parker *et al*., 2010). Much of the literature suggests that the British planning system has created unfavourable conditions for collective participation within a substantially top-down planning system (Boaden *et al*., 1982; Bailey & Pill, 2015; Lane, 2005; Lieske *et al*., 2009; Morphet, 2008; Tewdwr-Jones, 2012), but others suggest that it is possible to reshape planning processes to become more bottom-up and facilitate some degree of community empowerment and citizen participation (Aitken, 2010; Bailey & Pill, 2015; Begg *et al*., 2015; Birchall & Simmons, 2002; Cullingworth, 1990; Matthews *et al*., 2015; Painter *et al*., 2011). However, whilst some question about the extent to which any empowerment was genuine (Brand & Gaffikin, 2007; Gallent & Robinson, 2012; Smith, 1981; Seabrook, 1984; Sturzaker, 2011), Baker *et al.* (2007:90) pointed out that in relation to a previous round of reforms, the UK government identified that improving the effectiveness of citizen involvement was 'at the heart of the reformed planning system' and the government showed its determination to facilitate the effectiveness of citizen participation through various strategies.

In summary, existing literature suggests that citizens are motivated by factors including an aspiration to achieve more democratic engagement, individual and collective benefits, and they believed they had a strengthened competence to contribute to community-led activity. Some studies emphasised that local communities were motivated by strengthened statutory power in controlling planning and were affected by local backgrounds (Morphet, 2008; Tewdwr-Jones, 2012; Parker *et al*., 2010). However, as noted above, there is a lack of research exploring motivation to engage in the new form of planning being practiced in England – Neighbourhood Planning. This is the focus of the rest of this paper.

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Methods

Research strategy — multiple case study approach

Creswell (2014:21) points out that 'Decisions about choice of an approach are further influenced by the research problem or issues being studied…'. The study set out to explore 'why people become involved in NPs', which requires empirical data and an in-depth study. Large scale surveys are difficult to implement across wide areas, and it may not an ideal design for generating or testing theories (Biggam, 2015). They are also inadequate for exploring varied individual motivations in depth. In contrast, case study methodology has advantages for undertaking an intensive investigation in a community. This study compares existing theories (such as internal and external driven factors, discussed above) regarding citizen motivation to engage in planning with current practice in England, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how previous theories can throw light on individual and community engagement in NPs. This research applied the research approach of multiple case studies, because this research strategy is well recognised as being of value in planning research (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and has been practiced by previous studies in this area (Bailey & Pill, 2015; Brown *et al.*, 2013; Campbell & Marshall, 2000), thus it more easily allows comparison with previous work. Furthermore, a case study approach ensures that the investigation takes place in a natural situation, and that the generated primary data has high accuracy and authenticity. A case study strategy also allows the researchers to decide their methodology according to the scope and scale of the study, in this study, the researchers used mixture of questionnaire, observation and semi-structured interviews research techniques.

Five neighbourhoods were selected for the research in the North West region of England — Melling and Lydiate (within the municipality of Sefton); Birkenhead & Tranmere, and Leasowe (within the municipality of Wirral) and Morecambe (within the municipality of Lancaster). These five neighbourhoods were selected because communities within these neighbourhoods have already completed NPs or are engaged in a NP process, so respondents from the five neighbourhoods were experienced in the process of making NPs and they were expected to have a clear understanding of what it means to be involved in neighbourhood plans. There were socioeconomic contextual differences between the neighbourhoods, with three of them (Birkenhead & Tranmere, Leasowe and Morecambe) amongst the most deprived neighbourhoods in the North West and the remaining two (Melling and Lydiate) being comparatively less deprived. These five case studies were chosen because they were the first communities in their respective municipalities to begin neighbourhood planning, suggesting that they can be viewed as local planning "pioneers" - they indicated rapid action in terms of making their own neighbourhood planning decisions, and they demonstrated a more active approach to planning compared with other NP planning groups in their local areas. They all were established between 2014 and 2016. Using case studies in different communities with different degrees of deprivation, but at similar stages of the Neighbourhood Planning process may help the researchers to identify the underlying local contexts influencing participation.

A range of data collection methods was employed across the case studies: questionnaires, observation and semi-structured interviews. A questionnaire was implemented in all five neighbourhoods, with a supplementary two methods applied at Melling and Birkenhead — observation of NP meetings and semi-structured interviews (Table 1). The reasons for singling out Melling and Birkenhead & Tranmere for more in-depth investigation were as follows: Firstly, NPs in the two neighbourhoods were at a similar stage of the process, that of inviting local people to join the NP policymaking process. Therefore, the local communities can provide valid and comparable data; secondly, the two neighbourhoods offer significant

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contextual differences in deprivation and their level of rurality, which enables exploration of the interrelationship between individual motivation and local contexts. The two neighbourhoods which were in close physical proximity but with very different contexts of deprivation, and which were actively engaged in NP processes at the time the research was undertaken (in 2015/16). The observation process helped the researchers to identify who had higher attendance rates at meetings, thus ensuring that sampling for interviews could be more robust.

Table 1. The methods applied at the five neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhoods	Questionnaire	Semi-structured interview	Observation
Birkenhead & Tranmere	√	√	√
Melling	√	√	√
Morecambe	√		
Lydiate	√		
Leasowe	√		

The following parameters were used for selecting eligible participants for the questionnaire and interviews — all research participants would have already engaged in a NP process and would be aged 18 or over; they would be able to access the Internet at home and would have a valid email account. More detail on specific sampling approaches for the two methods is discussed below.

Data collection method — Structured observation

The researchers carried out a structured observation in the two case study neighbourhoods (Melling, and Birkenhead & Tranmere). Because the NPs at the two neighbourhoods were already in process, the researchers had the opportunity to attend three meetings (two NP meetings at Melling and one NP meeting at Birkenhead & Tranmere). Nisbet and Watt (1978:13) suggest that observation output shows 'what actually happens'. The research applied observation checklist and field notes in order to improve the accuracy of observation data (Appendix One).

In addition, this observation helped to identify interviewees from Melling and Birkenhead & Tranmere, according to their attendance rates and participation proactivity. In order to explore raw data, interviewees were identified who had higher attendance rates compare with others. Observation is particularly useful for a comprehensive data analysis, because it can reflect 'whether people do what they say they do' (Bell & Waters, 2014:211). Therefore, it can be used for adjusting the reliability of interview data.

Data collection method — Semi-structured interviews

Evans (2015) suggests that simply asking a person to explain their motives is the most efficient way to understand citizens' behaviour (motivation). Adopting semi-structured interviews enables detailed investigation of citizens' motivation. A semi-structured interview was chosen because the author may uncover possible covert motivation and gather insight of individual participatory activity by asking particular questions through interview.

Potential participants for interviews were contacted by approaching them when the

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researchers visited their neighbourhoods during observation implementation and site visiting. Observations in Melling and Birkenhead & Tranmere took place around early summer in 2016, when local forum meetings took place. The author particularly looked at the characteristics of each individual, the length of time they spoke for and the content of their statements. Observing the behaviours and activities of each individual helped to identify eligible interviewees. The interviewees were selected as they show a high degree of participatory interest and performance compared with other plan-making participants within their communities. The role differences of interview participants also enabled the study to collect data from different sides, as shown in table 2 in detail. Thus, the selections of the interviewees were intended and carefully assessed after undertaking observation during the data collection process. During the interview, the investigator took notes and recorded the dialogue with a recorder to aid transcription and data accuracy. Four interviews (two from each case study of Melling and Birkenhead & Tranmere) were undertaken, with an average length of 82 minutes, which allowed the researchers to gain an insight into variables that may affect residents' motivation and the cause of their behaviours. The number of interviewees for any research is variable (Secor, 2010), and the purpose of undertaking this method is not to communicate with many interviewees, but to collect quality and necessary data through this method. In this research, the questionnaires have conducted a large amount of data, and interviewees can provide supplementary information to understand individuals' participatory actions in-depth. One feature of the interview method is not 'to generalize to a population, but instead to answer questions about the ways in which certain events, practices, or knowledge are constructed and enacted within particularly contexts' (Secor, 2010:199). Thus, researchers stopped interviewing more people when data collected from the four interviewees showed high repeatability and similarity in relation to the research questions.

Table 2. Information about all interview participants from Melling and Birkenhead and Tranmere neighbourhood planning areas.

Interviewee	Neighbourhood	Role	Participatory status
B 1	Birkenhead and Tranmere	Senior planner, Birkenhead and Tranmere	Attended every Birkenhead and Tranmere NP meeting
B 2	Birkenhead and Tranmere	Birkenhead and Tranmere resident, member of local conservation area forum	Attended almost every Birkenhead and Tranmere NP meeting
M 1	Melling	Melling resident, planning representative of local community	Attend most Melling NP meetings
M 2	Melling	Melling resident	Attended most Melling NP meetings

Data collection method — Questionnaire

One adopted method for collecting data from all five neighbourhoods (Melling, Birkenhead & Tranmere, Morecamber, Lydiate and Leasowe) is an online questionnaire. The purpose of selecting this method is to explore the motivation among more participants in the five neighbourhoods. The questionnaire technique was chosen because it provides more primary data from five neighbourhoods, to supplement the in-depth data from the observation and interviews. Questionnaire subjects were identified by asking their role in NPs.

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Participants for the questionnaire were selected from the five communities where these neighbourhoods have already completed NPs or are engaged in a NP process. Within this sample, criteria for identifying respondents were that they had been involved in the process of making NPs, so were expected to have a clear understanding of what it means to be involved in NPs. Thus, they can provide valid and accurate evidence and information to help the authors answer the research questions. Many of the NP participants were contacted by approaching them when the researchers visited their neighbourhoods. This improves local residents' trust and improves the response rate. The researchers used two approaches to identify these subjects. The first and direct approach was to ask people's roles face to face, when researchers met individuals during their NP-making consultation workshops or regular meetings, where the researchers were allowed to attend. The benefit of this enquiring approach was that the researchers were able to directly understand an individual's participation status in the NP making process, and assess their eligibility for participating in the research – if respondents demonstrated a substantial involvement in the process, either over a long period or in terms of the depth of their involvement, they were considered eligible. Those people's presence, comments and performance during those events also directly reflected their role differences in their neighbourhoods. The second way to identify eligible participants was through looking at their profiles from existing sources, using a similar set of eligibility criteria. By looking at their NP Facebook pages, regular meeting minutes and neighbourhood newsletters, the researchers were able to find people who engaged during their plan-making process. The researchers thus contacted those people if their email addresses or other contact information could be found from those existing sources. Through making the first contact by email, phone or message, the researchers were able to check their eligibility to engage in the study by asking about their involvement in the NP process. It was crucial, for ethical reasons, to gain permission to collect and use these data from each respondent, and the researchers also acknowledged the participants' rights and data protection measurements applied in the research, as well as, the consent forms with detailed data storage and utilisation information were provided to all of the respondents.

The online questionnaires were posted on SurveyMonkey.com, which was chosen as an effective way of collecting data in a relatively short time. It allows participants to respond at a convenient time. Two types of questionnaire were designed for two kinds of informants at the five neighbourhoods — the first type of questionnaire was designed for planning officials or planning consultants (Appendix Two) while another type of questionnaire was designed for local residents (Appendix Three). Two open questions in the questionnaire for residents related to citizen motivation: Question 7 aimed to explore the indirect reasons for participating in the NP making process by asking 'how will this neighbourhood plan affect you?', whilst Question 9 asked people's direct reasons for their participation. By comparing people's answers, the research can examine whether people provide answers consistently. In order to analyse the data, the residents' responses were classified into different themes. For instance, to ensure participants of Birkenhead & Tranmere's raw feelings can be 'visible' and 'countable', the researchers defined respondents' major attitude and experience as narrative information into two themes for later structured analysis. The first theme concludes five types of attitudes respectively — Not sure, No effect on individual, Negative effect on residents, Positive effect on individual and Positive effect on individual and the community. The second theme was defined to show participants' raw description with more details. Four kind of attitudes were classified — Not sure, Participatory right, Having free time and Benefiting Birkenhead & Tranmere in terms of local communities and environment. The questionnaires were sent to around 100 possible respondents in the five neighbourhoods, with 45 responses being received (8 responses from Melling, 10 from Birkenhead and Tranmere, 13 responses from Morecambe, Lydiate and Leasowe, as well as 14 outputs from planners/planning

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officers).

The questionnaire included 10 non-technical questions and started from the most straightforward question, which helped avoid perfunctory answers. The research adopted two data analysis techniques — thematic content analysis and case study analysis. The former is designed to extract the main theme from open questions and to group them into different thematic units (Horn, 2012). This approach helps the investigator to quantify qualitative data by measuring the frequency of repeated words and the order they occur, which helps clarify textual data for data analysis (Horn, 2012).

Data analysis method — coding and content analysis

In order to improve the effectiveness of the information analysis process, the information was "cleaned" once the data was collected. This data cleaning stage happened just after the raw data was collected, which including reduction of unnecessary information and recording the original findings from the raw data. The reduction of irrelevant data made useful information clear. Data cleaning also aimed to identify the key theme or information generated during observations and semi-structured interviews. In the secondary analysis stages (in-depth information synthesis), the researchers mainly adopted combined coding and content analysis methods.

The coding process involved categorising information according to the themes. This coding process transformed the raw data into codes. Then, these codes can be measured by frequency of use, such as how often one theme had been discussed by the participants, and how many participants discussed the same theme. The purpose of applying the coding analysis method is in order to define the key theme, which is the motivation of respondents in planning. This also improves the accuracy of data by comparing data generated from the three techniques (observation, interview and questionnaire). The trustworthiness of information was secured by contrasting information between different research techniques. This systematic data analysis process helped the author developed a comprehensive understanding of the primary data. Figure 1 shows the process of data analysis stages diagrammatically.
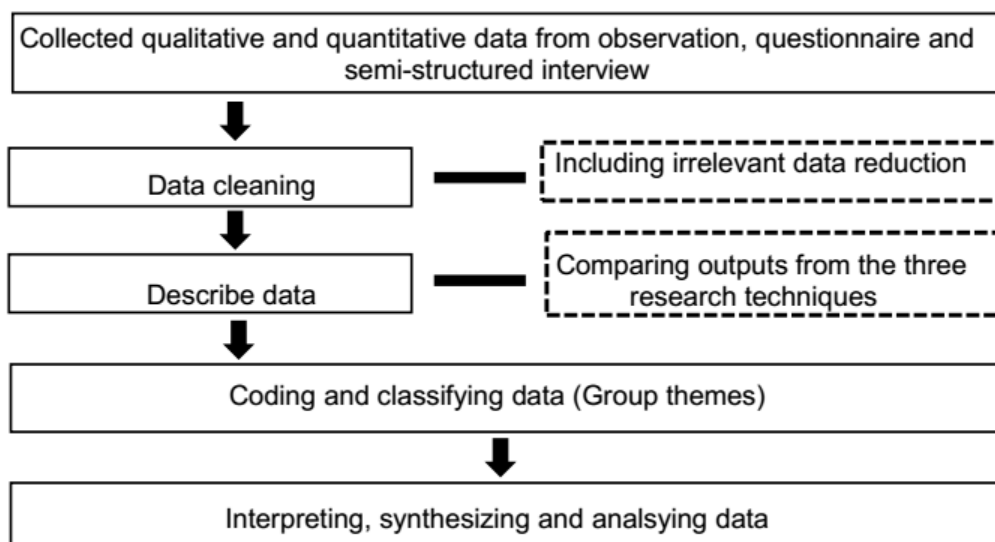

Figure 1. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis process.

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Content analysis has been widely used in qualitative projects (Kumar, 2014). Qualitative data can show people's attitude, feeling, views and behaviours, etc. Generally, content analysis is used to analyse 'the contents of interviews or observational field notes in order to identifying the main theme…' (Kumar, 2014:318). In this study, coding and content analysing have both been adopted to help identify the main themes emerging from the research. The themes have been defined both by looking at frequency of use as well as content. These themes helped the undertaking of in-depth analysis. The interview raw data, such as interviewees' ideas, have been quoted verbatim below.

It is important to avoid any ethical risks to the research participants. All the participants in this study signed a consent form and agreed how the author will use the data. All the primary data generated in this research has been anonymised.

Findings and discussion

Benefiting from quality data from 49 participants (four interviewees and 45 questionnaire respondents), the research therefore can report what raw data reflected, and building analysis on the meaning behind the data. The data was analysed based on local contexts and compared with previous literature. Case study analysis allows the analysis of data relevant to each case. The data generated in the study was used for obtaining insight into individual impetus in NPs. In what follows we primarily draw upon the questionnaire data, using interview extracts only to add depth where appropriate, given the asymmetry of data between our case studies.

Multiple drivers as key determinants for engagement in NP from the residents' viewpoint

By identifying key-words-in-context, word frequency and cognition grouping, the researchers have extracted three main reasons for resident participation in planning processes from questions 7 and 9 of the residents' questionnaire. The responses illustrate participants' various and complex motivations in Birkenhead & Tranmere NP. From the answers of Question 7 in Questionnaire for residents in Birkenhead and Tranmere, two responses mention because they have free time to contribute and likes to be informed about what is happening in the area, and five explain they want to benefit Birkenhead & Tranmere, in terms of the local community and environment. Similarly, responses from Question 9 indicate consistent answers when they provide more informative answers. Specifically, five Birkenhead & Tranmere residents state that through involvement in NP making, they want to achieve local improvements, and some of them also in order to achieve community coherence and contribute to the area. Two of them are motivated by a belief that the chair of the NP forum can make the plan better for them. Two of them state that their motivation is influenced by their time availability and the existence of plan-making power (residents' planning empowerment). Two respondents state that they try to provide contribution and are curious about NP, and only one respondent is motivated by a will to influence NP decision making. Despite the variety of motivations, the data indicated one frequent factor from eight respondents — that participants hope the plan can bring benefits to the neighbourhood — 'The plan will make the wider area a better place to live and work', 'Will improve the town which is badly needed' and 'Better environments for us all'.

Similar comments were encountered during observation and interview — 'those (the Birkenhead & Tranmere NP) policies protected the viability of the high street. In the way, if the local plan goes through, as suggested, this could lead to the death of the high street' 'it's a small change, but a positive change' (Interview). Although data collected from observation

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show people may talk about various topics (such as, meeting participative rate, feelings about local councillors, etc.), discussion on the impact of the community plan and procedures and content design of the plan led to heated discussion and conversation. Therefore, one common motivation for Birkenhead & Tranmere NP participants seems associated with local improvement.

These findings may accurately reflect Birkenhead & Tranmere citizens' motives because they are triangulated from different data sources (observation, interviews and questionnaires). The findings corroborate the results of Parker *et al*. (2015), who found that local communities' motives are linked with improving local planning. However, it remains unclear to what extent people want to achieve improvement through the NP in Birkenhead & Tranmere.

Compared with Birkenhead & Tranmere informants, Melling residents indicated a different set of priorities motivating their involvement in the NP. Specifically, three of them mentioned the importance of preventing over development within their village. At the same time, they also indicated their desire to protect the local environment. Another three residents see the participatory process of the NP as allowing them to have a say in planning decision making, thus, guaranteeing their democratic rights and influencing future development. People express differently about what they want to secure through Melling NP. For example, people point out because 'it will help…… ', 'it gives me opportunity……', 'it will keep……' and 'It will enable us to…… '. These responses suggest they have one consistent view of the NP, which is trusting in the benefits of NP. For instance, one resident directly says 'it will benefit all the residents in Melling……' (Interview). By looking at the data collected from observation, people can find that traffic, housing and rural environment were the three main conversation topics during the NP making meeting in Melling.

Noticeably, a previous paper from 50 years ago (Damer & Hague, 1971:217) identified 'a growth of public interest in the urban environment' in higher tier planning, while this research argues that people may have special concerns about the rural environment as a dominant driver for participating in the NP process, which is similar to what Gallent (2013) concluded. Melling respondents also placed greater emphasis on 'maintaining' the local environment rather than 'improving' it. This result was confirmed during interview and observation, where people in NP meetings mentioned rural environment quality particularly and M 2 noted that:

> 'The only personal thing I want, is to remain a lovely area to live in…. They want Melling to remain, if it does not improve, they do not want that it goes down. They want to maintain this, what we've got' (Interview).

Data from Morecambe, Lydiate and Leasowe indicate there are various individual motives for participating in NPs compared with both Melling and Birkenhead & Tranmere. According to the views of residents from Morecambe, Lydiate and Leasowe, two replied that they participate because they working as councillors. Six indicate that they were motivated by a desire to provide personal contribution. Four express that they distrust the local authority and also want to influence NP decision making (neighbourhood autonomy). In particular, the evidence also indicates three typical reasons for their participation. 7 of 13 respondents consistently suggest they trust in the benefit of NPs. Meanwhile, 5 of them also say their democratic rights and preventing future over-development or protecting local characteristics were variables stimulating participation in NPs making process in these three localities. In other words, communities from the five study neighbourhoods demonstrate distinctive motives behind NPs participation.

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Past studies have tended to emphasise broad brushstroke explanations (Aspden & Birch, 2005; Birchall & Simmons, 2002; Gallent & Robinson, 2012; Parker & Murray, 2012) rather than providing detailed interpretations based on empirical data. For example, previous studies have argued the importance of personal and collective benefit consideration (Aspden & Birch, 2005; Birchall & Simmons, 2002; Gallent & Robinson, 2012; Hansen, 2008) and the current research suggests that this 'benefit' is related to local condition improvements, the protection of local features and restrictions on development within neighbourhoods. Therefore, the study may provide more detailed knowledge and evidence to support the ongoing theoretical debate.

The results presented above show high reliability and accuracy because they were obtained through implementing the three research techniques (observation, questionnaire and semi-structured interview). One potential problem is that the findings are unable to verify the level of significance of each determinant factor for influencing residents' motivations in different regions, because some individuals' participative actions may be driven by several reasons, and it is hard to assess which factor has the most important impact. Another limitation is that the result may merely reflect people's attitudes in North West England rather than those of other parts of the UK.

By analysing data from planners/planning officials, it seems apparent that planners hold consistent views on why local people engage in the NPs making process. For example, six of 14 planners/planning officials agree that people decide to engage because they want to prevent certain development which they see as 'inappropriate', and to ensure both private and collective benefits, through influencing decision-making to achieve their purposes. It is noteworthy that this motivation also highlights those people's attitude of distrusting local authorities. However, the information from planners/planning officials shows a particular concern with the political environment. They report the importance of planning empowerment and cannot neglect the impact of planning system reformation. And as result of these factors, people can gain power and motivation to participate. Interestingly, planners observe that preventing development is one demonstrable factor to the active NP participants, while residents themselves refer to the desire to 'maintain' the local environment. It seems that to local people there is no way to 'maintain' their local environment under development threats.

Meanwhile, question 6 of the residents' questionnaire presents the answer to the prompt: "This neighbourhood plan for our neighbourhood is…". Although around one to two people express concern about the possible negative impact of NPs (such as 'risky' or 'unlikely to have any effect') within each neighbourhood (except Birkenhead & Tranmere), the benefits of NPs more than its negative impacts have been widely acknowledged by all 45 respondents from the five neighbourhoods. For example, evidence can be found in Birkenhead where all people indicate either they 'Strongly agree' (60%) or 'Agree' (40%) about the 'beneficial' impact of the NP.

The results indicate, however, that local residents may define this positive impact of the NP in different ways. For example, Birkenhead & Tranmere residents associate the positive effects of the NP with improving business development along with influencing NP decision-making. By contrast, Melling residents see the positive impacts of the NP as protecting local characteristics/environment and a guarantee of their democratic rights. Although individuals consider this 'benefit' differently, it is possible that people recognise the benefits of NPs more than their negative impacts, and this perception may trigger those individual participatory behaviours. This attitude was also supported by the comments for question 7 in the questionnaire, which shows the respondents identifying themselves as positively affected by NPs outnumber those who see themselves as negatively affected in all five neighbourhoods.

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It can thus be suggested that one of crucial motives for people engaging in NPs may be quite simply that people expect to receive a positive impact from NPs, and if they believe NPs to have a beneficial impact on individuals and their communities. This motivation as one of the six is worth discussing in detail, as this motivation was found within the all the communities, and has been interpreted differently by two neighbourhoods with very different local conditions. In other words, one key trigger for individual involvement in NPs is whether people value the influence of NPs as negative or positive. In particular, the aspect of individual understanding of the benefits of NPs may be a common one, because it was found within all five different neighbourhoods: the benefits identified by respondents are related to local condition improvements, the protection of local features and restrictions on over-development within neighbourhoods. Thus, this finding may be considered more widely applicable to other neighbourhoods in North West England.

Previous research rarely discussed whether a determinant factor in community-led planning may be that individuals may be motivated by a belief that they would be positively impacted by NPs. For instance, Gallent and Robinson (2012) believe that individual benefit consideration is important, while Aspden and Birch (2005) and Birchall and Simmons (2002) found that collective benefits consideration is the dominant factor. The past debate is mainly around 'who' would benefit from NPs rather than 'how people value' the impact of NPs. Therefore, the current study sheds new light on individual motivation in the NP process and the originality of the findings complements previous studies.

This paper finds that local communities indicated major six motivations for involvement in NPs in five neighbourhoods in North West England. When a person may have multiple purposes, instead of defining each given reason or list every single given reason, it is important to extract more 'representative' and 'generalised' information to understand people's main driven. This can be done through analysis the content of information and the frequency of them. Interestingly, all the six motivations behind engagement in NPs are 'neighbourhood' specific. Respondents might want to protect characteristics of the communities, and they also want to improve the environment of their communities. The second factor is consistent with previous studies (Boaden *et al*., 1982; Derrick Sewell & Coppock, 1977; Gaventa, 2004; Parker & Murray, 2012). The final motivation is associated with an expectation of the positive impact of NPs on local communities, which may be one universal variable for people involved in NPs in different neighbourhoods in North West England. The results, as shown in table 3, demonstrate six determining motivation factors that most affect individuals becoming engaged in NPs in North West England.

Table 3. Six vital motivation factors behind participation in NPs in the five neighbourhoods.

The motivations were frequently found from the local residents for reasons in engaging NPs	
1. Local environment promotion. 2. Guarantee of democratic rights; 3. Protecting local characteristics;	4. Influencing NPs decision making; 5. Preventing over development; 6. Trusting on the benefit of NPs.

Conclusions

The findings, combined with the outcome of the literature review, achieve the research aims — to explore the underlying motivations of communities for engaging in Neighbourhood Plans in North West England and to advance understanding of the impacts of local contexts on individual motivation.

Six determinant motivations were suggested as main drivers for people participating in NPs in North West England by undertaking the empirical research. First, based on empirical investigation, the study explores six key motivations for why people become involved in NPs by undertaking an empirical study of five neighbourhoods across North West England — working as councillors, protecting democratic rights, making a contribution, achieving community improvements, protecting neighbourhood characteristics and believing in the benefit of the plan. In particular, the study suggest that participation is associated with a belief that benefits can be achieved and thus, individuals want to take part to produce the Neighbourhood Plans, although there were differences in how those individuals defined these benefits.

This paper builds on previous research into motivation to engage in planning (Aspden & Birch, 2005; Baker *et al*., 2007; Rydin & Pennington, 2000). In terms of research methods, one contribution this paper makes is that it uses empirical evidence to explore integrated motivations for participation in recent Neighbourhood Planning processes. Previous studies have suggested that our understanding of citizens' motivation in planning may be incomplete, in terms of understanding dynamic individual motivations behind the plan-making process (Aspden & Birch, 2005; Gallent & Robinson, 2012; Hansen, 2008; Parker *et al*., 2010). One significant value of this research is that it fills the gap by interpreting the factors necessary for stimulating civic initiatives from different perspectives (such as the planning members were from the neighbourhood and diverse NPs benefit consideration). These six motivations are all 'neighbourhood' relevant. Therefore, this research is important as it provides insights into the variables behind of local residents' participation in planning interests and it offers material for further investigation. The strength of this study is that it triangulates data collected through both qualitative and quantitative research methods, although further investigation could be done in term of the relative importance of the motivating factors.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix One: Observation checklist

<div align="center">

Observation Checklist

</div>

Title:

Organiser:

Background :

1. Who attended meeting?
2. Who proactively interested in the process and have attend the NP events regularly.
3. Could I interview with them people or send them questionnaire to understand the reasons beyond their attendance?
4. Does their motivation is different compare with past study?

Person (Characteristics)	Speak times	Nod times	Body language	Main Content of speaking

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Appendix Two: Questionnaire sample for planning consultants and planning officials in the NP

Questionnaire Sample for Planning Consultants and Planning Officials in the NP

The motivation of people to engage in the process of creating Neighbourhood Plans in England

1. What is your employment (or how do you describe your role in neighbourhood plan making process)?_____

2. How would you rank the importance for people to engage in this plan making process?
Very significant   significant   neutral   less significant   very insignificant
not sure

3. Please list three main reasons you engaged in this planning process.

1: _____;

2: _____;

3: _____.

4. How significant would you rate the following factors in affecting you to engage in the plan making process? (type the number)

	Not significant (0%)					Very significant(100%)
Citizen right	1	2	3	4	5	6
Citizen obligation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Accessibility of meeting place	1	2	3	4	5	6
Time arrangement for meeting	1	2	3	4	5	6
For community benefits	1	2	3	4	5	6
Impacts by the plan	1	2	3	4	5	6
Lack of trust in official decision	1	2	3	4	5	6
Confidence to bring new Knowledge and information	1	2	3	4	5	6
Responsibility to the area	1	2	3	4	5	6
To influence plan outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6
Curious/subject interests	1	2	3	4	5	6

5. In your opinion, how neighbourhood plan will affect local communities?
_____

6. Other comments:
_____

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Appendix Three: Questionnaire sample for residents in the NP

Questionnaire Sample for Residents in the NP

The motivation of people to engage in the process of creating Neighbourhood Plans in England

1. (Optional question) In what year were you born?_____

2. what is your employment (if you retired, what was your employment before retired): _____

3. How do you describe the role you play in this neighbourhood plan making process? _____

4. How would you rank the importance for you to engage in this plan making process?

Very significant   significant   neutral   less significant   very insignificant   not sure

5. For you, how importance to engage in the neighbourhood plan compares with engaging in the local plan making process?

Very significant   significant   same   less significant

very insignificant   not sure   Never heard about Local Plan

6. NP for our neighbourhood is:

	Strongly agree	agree	neutral	disagree	strongly disagree	not sure
Beneficial	1	2	3	4	5	6
Difficult	1	2	3	4	5	6
Risky	1	2	3	4	5	6
Unlikely to have any effects	1	2	3	4	5	6

7. How this neighbourhood plan will affect you? _____;

8. How significant would you rate the following factors in affecting you to engage in the plan making process? (type the number)

	Not significant (0%)				Very significant(100%)	
Citizen right	1	2	3	4	5	6
Citizen obligation	1	2	3	4	5	6
Accessibility of meeting place	1	2	3	4	5	6
Time arrangement for meeting	1	2	3	4	5	6
For community benefits	1	2	3	4	5	6
Impacts by the plan	1	2	3	4	5	6
Lack of trust in official decision	1	2	3	4	5	6
Confidence to bring new Knowledge and information	1	2	3	4	5	6
Responsibility to the area	1	2	3	4	5	6
To influence plan outcome	1	2	3	4	5	6
Curious/subject interests	1	2	3	4	5	6

9. Please list three main reasons you engaged in this planning process.

1: _____;

2: _____;

3: _____.

10. Other comments: _____