

# The Making of the National Planning Policy Framework

An investigation into the practices  
and (post)politics of doing pro-  
market planning reform in the UK  
central state.

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# Summary

The UK Coalition Government came to power in 2010 promising radical reform of the English planning system, and a key part of this programme was the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). This drastically reduced the volume of existing national-level policy, and introduced measures intended to spur economic growth, increase housing delivery, and localise some elements of decision making. However, it was the *creation* of the NPPF which makes it one of the most remarkable policy episodes in the recent history of English planning reform; not only did the Government deploy novel ‘open’ policy making strategies, but it sparked an unprecedented national campaign, led by national newspapers and some of the largest membership organisations in Europe.

Despite its significance, as yet, there are no in-depth academic accounts of this important policy episode. This is partly indicative of the fact that the central state - defined here as central government departments and their agencies, the core executive, and the non-state actors who work directly with these agents to reproduce state power - very rarely comes into focus as a concrete and peopled policy making site in the critical spatial governance and planning (CSGP) literatures. Because the CSGP literatures rely on accounts of national-level policy making which rest at discursive or institutional levels of analysis, we know very little about how the actual practices, strategies, and rationalities of agents in Whitehall shape and interact with wider trajectories of spatial governance in England. In response, this thesis asks and answers the question:

How did different practices, strategies, and rationalities of ‘getting policy done’ in the UK central state shape the development of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from ideas initially presented in the green paper Open Source Planning, and what do they suggest about future trajectories in English spatial governance reform?

I draw on Bent Flyvbjerg’s ‘phronetic’ approach to social science to provide a fine-grained and ‘practice-orientated’ case narrative of the development of the NPPF. This narrative runs from the Conservative Party’s development of its 2010 manifesto, through the Coalition negotiations, the NPPF’s drafting process, departmental negotiations, and the national campaigns, to the production of the final version and its public reception. From this account, I trace out the links between the policy making practices of agents involved in the creation of the document, and wider trajectories in English spatial governance. In doing so this thesis also feeds into contemporary debates in the CSGP literature about the role of the central state in shifting modes of spatial governance, the concept of post-

politics, and to what extent it helps explain the actual policy making strategies pursued by civil servants and ministers.

The case narrative primarily draws on 27 semi-structured in-depth interviews with civil servants, politicians, and other individuals personally involved in the NPPF process, alongside documentary analysis. The findings highlight how the 'open' policy making approach deployed by Ministers rested on neoliberal critiques of state-bureaucratic power which underpinned the Coalition's wider planning reforms. Indeed, the reconfiguration of the policy making practices of, and relationships between, agents in the central state was a fundamental component of the Big Society and Localism projects. It is arguable that the key thrust of the Coalition's neoliberalising planning reforms and political strategies during this period was less about changing planning policy per se, than the ways and means by which it was *done*.

The case narrative also illustrates how important it is to conceptualise the UK central state not as a single policy actor, but as a heterogeneous collection of policy actors, each possessing different spatial governance agendas and different policy making rationalities. The institutional architecture of Whitehall systematically mediates between these different interest groups, which have different spatial governance agendas. Understanding the way these interactions are structured and restructured in practice - particularly between the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Treasury - is an important part of understanding the ways in which neoliberal discourses dominate English planning reform. Drawing on the core executive studies tradition in British political science literature, I argue that the dynamics of this DCLG-Treasury relationship during the creation of the NPPF point to important trends in the operation of the state which may have a significant bearing upon neoliberalising trajectories of spatial governance in England. Most significantly, through a process I term the 'neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model', policy making power in the central state is becoming increasingly centralised towards the core executive, with consequences for the types of policy knowledge deployed, the ability of different non-government agents to influence policy, and the framing of planning-related policy problems. Furthermore, this centralisation of power in the central state challenges assumptions - underpinning much post-politics CSGP research - about a state-level shift from 'government' to 'governance'.

Ultimately, however, this thesis' central argument is a simple and modest one; the central state represents a crucially important spatial governance policy making site, collection of actors, and target of neoliberal restructuring. As such, the CSGP stand to gain a great deal from engaging with the central state, and the day-to-day practices which comprise it.

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# 1. Introduction, overview and structure

## 1.1 Introduction

The questions which sparked this thesis were relatively simple ones. Firstly; why are there so few studies in the critical spatial governance and planning (CSGP) literatures which examine the central state - defined here as central government departments, their agencies, and the heterogeneous collection of policy actors through which these entities reproduce state power (including various functions of the legislature)<sup>1</sup> - as a spatial policy making site and collection of policy actors? Secondly, what could we learn about the contemporary politics of planning reform by breaking open this institutional 'black box' (McFarlane, 2011) to examine the actual policy practices, rather than discourses and institutions, of these actors? Both of these questions hinged around a desire to ask why - and critically *how* - central state policy makers develop spatial governance policy as they do, and what the critical significance of this was.

A general lack of in-depth planning-related research into the national-level of government was noted more than a decade and a half ago by Alterman in her 2001 edited book comparing the institutional structures through which planning functions were carried out at the national-level in ten different countries:

National-level planning in democratic countries has been almost all but ignored by researchers in urban and regional planning since the reconstruction years following the Second World War. The attention of planning theorists in recent years, as expressed in the majority of topics for empirical research and the themes of normative debate, has tended to focus on decision-making modes

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<sup>1</sup> This definition of the central state is adapted from James (2009). James doesn't explicitly define the term, but in a wide-ranging review of interpretivist political science research into the subject, includes; '...analysis of the resources of members of the executive, the relationships between senior public servants and their political masters, and the methods for coordinating across and between departments and other associated public bodies.' (James, 2009: 343). He excludes supranational governmental bodies, devolved administrations and local government. Drawing on Jessop (2015), the analysis presented here also takes into account the role of non-state agents intimately involved in the reproduction of state power in cooperation with the central state as James (2009) defines it. Such agents include professional bodies, think tanks, private consultancies, and the legislature. Writing in a geographical context, Brenner (2004) and Pinson & Journal (2016) intermittently uses the term in a similar sense to this, but again, neither explicitly define it.

relevant more to the local and individual levels than to the national one. The three compendiums of planning theory published in the 1990s... do not include even a single chapter devoted to the types of issues, institutions and modes of decision-making typical of national-level planning. (Alterman, 2001: 1)

Writing ten years later, in a paper that compared national-level infrastructure provision across three European states, Marshall (2011) suggested little had changed:

Perhaps it is time for students of planning to subject [the national] scale of planning to the same sort of attention frequently given to the local or city regional levels, in an attempt to put forward more effective models which might fit better the coming decades. (Marshall, 2011: 904)

These writers' arguments seem to have fallen on deaf ears; in the following years only a handful planning-related, or even more broadly CSGP-related, studies have examined the UK central state as a concrete policy making site or collection of practices and actors. The insights we do get come from historical reflection and/or semi-biographical sources (e.g. Delafons, 1998), work on policy transfer and national-local policy translation (e.g. Clifford & Morphet, 2013), or research into the strategies which non-government agents use to influence national-level spatial governance policy (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2016). Though the central state undoubtedly occupies an important role in much of the spatial governance literature, it usually does so in a peripheral and *spectral* sense. In other words; it is often invoked as an important political, legal, or policy context or actor in urban governance processes, but only fleetingly is it discussed in a concrete sense - only rarely is it conceptualised as a concrete and *peopled* policy making site, or community of practices, or assemblage of institutions. Studies in which the central state is the direct target of study are largely institutional or structural in their analysis, and focus on changing national-level policy discourses, ideas, or institutions - as Alterman (2001) and Marshall (2011) themselves do. This is the central state as a 'spectre'. It appears much like the ghosts of Shakespearean plays; vitally important for driving forward the narrative, or as a backdrop, or a prop, but for all this importance, it inhabits the role of a disembodied force, only partially concrete, never quite in-focus, and often just out of vision.

#### *The role and architecture of the planning-related UK central state*

Despite the shift from government to 'governance' (Metzger et al, 2015; James, 2009), *network* governance (Esmark, 2016), the 'hollowing out' of the state (Jessop, 1997), and several decades of political rhetoric to the contrary, the English planning system remains remarkably centralised (Dühr, 2009; Hart, 2015) and 'embedded within cascading, hierarchical state processes and institutional frameworks...' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013: 19). This is both in terms of policy, and how professional roles and identities are determined (Campbell & Marshall, 2005). The current UK government departments,

associated executive agencies, and non-departmental public bodies with functions most relevant to planning in England are, according to Hart (2015: 46):

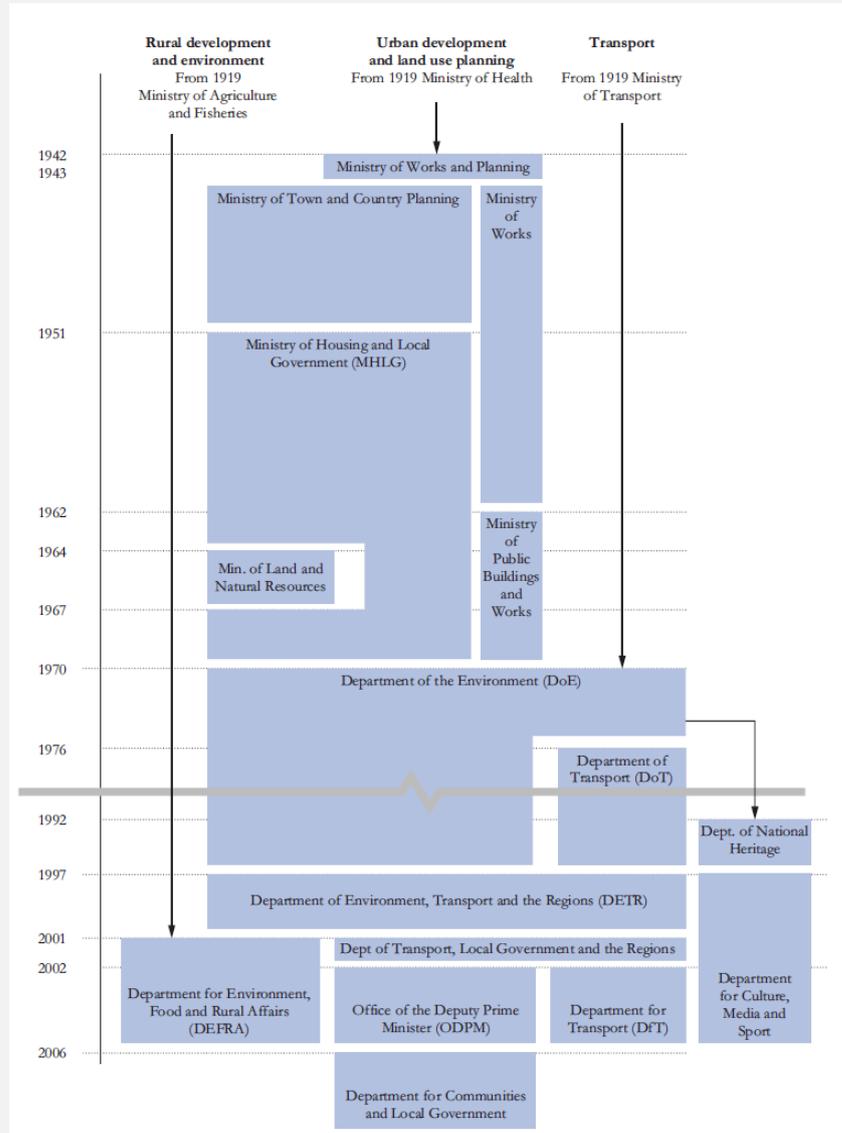
- The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
  - *Executive Agencies*: The Planning Inspectorate (PINs)
  - *Non-departmental public bodies*: Homes and Communities Agency, Local Government Ombudsman, Building Regulations Advisory Committee
- The Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra)
  - *Executive Agencies*: Rural Payment Agency
  - *Non-departmental public bodies*: Environment Agency, Natural England, National Forest Company, National Parks
- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)
  - *Executive Agencies*: Royal Parks Agency
  - *Non-departmental public bodies*: English Heritage, National Lottery Commission, Olympic Delivery Authority, UK Sport England, Visit Britain

These bodies sit alongside a range of other government departments with broader interests in the planning system, which together sit around the ‘core executive’. This is the ‘centre of central government’ (Dommitt & Flinders, 2013: 3) and is usually defined as comprising H. M. Treasury, the Cabinet Office, various offices around the Prime Minister (‘No. 10’), and other strategic units for policy implementation and oversight (James, 2009). The planning-related institutional architecture of the UK central state has been reorganised many times over the last several decades, with responsibilities for different planning-related functions shifting between departments as they have been created or abolished (see Figure 1, below). None the less, it is DCLG that has been officially responsible for national planning policy and guidance, as well as determining the structure of the system<sup>2</sup> (amongst other roles, some of which are quasi-judiciary), since 2006. It is DCLG’s Planning Directorate that is directly responsible for delivering national-level planning reform. The Directorate contains a mixture of specialist planners and general civil servants.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, it was within the discretion of the Coalition government to abolish the entirety of statutory regional planning in England with relatively few legal hurdles - at least compared to what would be the case in countries with less centralised political and planning systems (Hart,2015).

**Figure 1: The Changing Departmental Structure for Planning in England**



Source: Hart (2015)

In the UK's 'Westminster Model' the civil service is traditionally apolitical and permanent (i.e. it does not change with administrations) source of policy advice and policy management for ministers. Constitutionally, there is no division in personality between ministers and civil servants (Richards & Smith, 2016) and civil servants are similarly *traditionally* expected to provide politically neutral advice with the deliberative space to criticise, to serve *both* the government and the national interest (these may not be the same thing), and to be accountable to the minister. The minister is, in turn, accountable to parliament. There is, however, debate about to what extent this has changed after several decades of New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM reform (see Page,

2010; Richards & Smith, 2016). The work of civil servants and ministers, alongside other government and non-government agents working in DCLG's Planning Directorate, is therefore a natural focus-point for studying the planning-related policy work in the UK central state. This is one half of the thesis' research focus. The other focuses on the creation of the National Planning Policy Framework...

### *The National Planning Policy Framework*

In late 2010, against a backdrop of global economic crisis and the first hung parliament since 1974, the British Conservative-led Coalition government (2010-2015) set about reforming the English planning system. The system, the Coalition declared, was:

...a serious brake on growth, slowing the delivery of much needed new jobs and new business. There is broad recognition that the system is slow, complex, bureaucratic and responsive. Reform is imperative for our economic recovery. (DCLG, 2011d: 1)

Underpinned by the Localism Act 2011, the Coalition's early reforms introduced some important changes to institutional landscape of spatial governance in England, including the creation of a neighbourhood-level of planning and the abolition of statutory regional planning. At the time this led Peter Hall, amongst others, to declare the reforms a sign of; '...a revolution in planning policy, unprecedented in the 63-year-long history since the 1947 Planning Act' (Hall, 2010). But in many ways these changes also represented the latest in a series of broadly neoliberalising policy reforms, experiments, and spasms that have been reshaping the UK planning system since the 1980s as part of a restless search for the ideal market-supportive 'fix' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013; Lord & Mark Tewdwr-Jones, 2014). This was something which led others to observe that such claims of radical change may well prove to be 'wide of the mark' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013: 7). Indeed, Lord & Mark Tewdwr-Jones (2014) point out that over the 15-year period between 1997 and 2012 there were no fewer than five waves of 'pro-market' legislative planning reform. If we add the current Conservative Government's (2015 to present-day) reform programme to their tally, we have a remarkable average rate of slightly less than one planning-related legislative reform every two years. It seems that in the English planning system change is, in many ways, the norm.

The National Planning Policy Framework - a centrepiece of the Coalition Government's planning reform programme - proved both camps right in different ways. It was indeed another attempt to find a pro-market policy 'fix' which, ministers vehemently claimed, maintained the system's key principles (such as the sanctity of greenbelts and the planned system) whilst also 'loosening up' national-level policy and incentivising development (Treasury & BIS, 2011). But the NPPF was *also* a radical departure from the norm. Arguably not in terms of policy substance, but certainly in terms of its form, the approach

the Government took to its development, and the galvanising effect it had on public discourse and policy communities.

In creating the NPPF ministers drew on the same ideas that influenced the policy substance of their early reforms, most notably the ‘Big Society’. Deploying this concept and agenda, they challenged the traditional role of civil servants by ‘opening up’ the policy making process and inviting a group of representatives from key interest groups to personally produce a first draft of the document. What eventually came out of the civil service machine reduced the number of pages of national policy by about ninety-five percent. But even more remarkable than this diminution in policy was the immense scale of the public reaction to the Government’s first draft of the NPPF. The politics of national-level planning policy spewed out into the public consciousness. Several large membership organisations, including the National Trust (the largest voluntary organisation in Europe, with a membership six times greater than all of the UK’s major political parties put together (National Trust, 2017)), and national newspapers (most notably the strongly Conservative-leaning *Daily Telegraph*) mobilised and led a national campaign against the Government’s first draft, which they argued over-privileged economic growth and development at the cost of heritage, the countryside, and the natural environment. For first time in living memory planning-related issues were regularly front-page news over a period of several months (Allmendinger, 2016). And, after a National Trust petition garnered 228,000 signatures (DCLG, 2012), a DCLG consultation on the document attracted 16,000 responses (DCLG, 2012), 45 Conservative MPs signed a letter expressing concern (Hope, 2011), and two Parliamentary select committees recommended extensive changes (CLG Committee, 2011; EA Committee, 2011), the Government was forced to row-back on the draft’s more aggressively pro-development language.

Yet, it is perhaps symptomatic of the wider lack of CSGP research into the central state that there are very few in-depth accounts of the NPPF saga. The most in-depth so far have been supplied by the think tank the Institute for Government in a 2013 study of its development as an example of ‘open policy making’ (Rutter, 2013), and a more academic (and broad-brush) account supplied by Allmendinger (2016), which focuses on the political dynamics of the process.

## 1.2 Rationale, research question, objectives, and structure

### 1.2.1 Rationale, research question, and objectives

The NPPF is thus of both intrinsic and instrumental interest (Stake, 1995); on one hand it presents an important policy episode in the history of English planning reform, and as such a detailed understanding of its creation is of historical value in its own right. But, on the other, it also offers a valuable window into the links between planning reform and policy making practices in DCLG and the central state under the Coalition government. This window is valuable as an initial exploration of how everyday policy practices in this policy making site generally shape planning reform, but the Coalition also introduced some important changes here (in the form of both formal public-sector reforms and informal changes in working culture) which may influence and reflect current trajectories of spatial governance. Indeed, the NPPF itself was an early experiment in ‘open’ policy making which would go on to shape the Coalition’s civil service reforms via 2012’s *Civil Service Reform Plan* (H.M. Government, 2012; Rutter, 2013), and several authors note that there was distinct shift in public sector reform discourse around this period (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013; Laffin, 2015; Richards & Smith, 2016) which could have profound consequences for both planning (Laffin, 2015) and the civil service (Richards & Smith, 2016; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013), but which have not yet been subject to in-depth scrutiny in the CSGP literatures.

Indeed, the idea of ‘open policy making’ as it appeared in the *Civil Service Reform Plan* (H.M. Government, 2012) built on the principles laid out in the green paper *Open Source Planning* (OSP) (The Conservative Party, 2010a), which the Conservatives published before the 2010 General Election. This set out the key elements of the Conservative’s proposed and planning reforms, and would go on to form the basis for the Coalition’s planning reform policy over the following five years. As a case study, the NPPF therefore also presents a valuable opportunity to examine how, a) the practices of developing policy proposals in opposition, and b) the highly political process of then converting these broad ideas into workable policy options shaped the substance of the NPPF.

In the CSGP literatures the governmentality and political economy of the shifts in policy regime from New Labour to the Coalition, and development of the NPPF itself, have been interpreted via the concepts of neoliberalism (e.g. Deas, 2012; Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013) and post-politics. In this context, the latter refers to the ways policy makers

systematically foreclosed truly-political dissensus and conflict regarding the role of the planning system beyond one that is pro-development and pro-market (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2014; Allmendinger, 2016; Raco, 2014). Indeed, Allmendinger & Haughton (2014: 48) describe the NPPF as ‘both a product of and a process through which post-political planning operates’. But the value of neoliberalism and post-politics has been heavily debated, with the latter receiving particularly sharp criticism and defence within the last year or so (North et al, 2017; Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; 2017b; Swyngedouw, 2017; Dikec , 2017). An in-depth case study of the NPPF therefore also offers an opportunity to assess the value of post-politics as a critical framework for interpreting the strategies and rationalities of the agents directly involved with the document’s creation.

**Figure 2: Research Question and Objectives**

**Overall research question:**

How did different practices, strategies, and rationalities of ‘getting policy done’ in the UK central state shape the development of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from ideas initially presented in the green paper Open Source Planning, and what do they suggest about future trajectories in English spatial governance reform?

**Objectives**

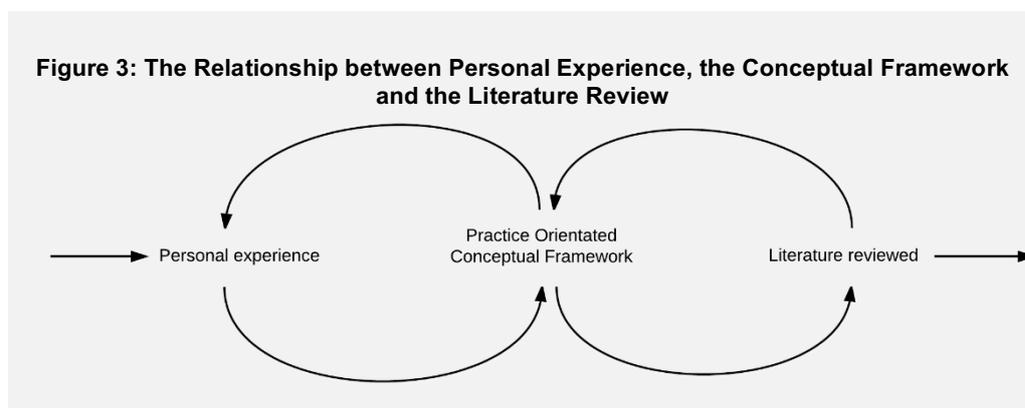
1. **To produce a historiographic account of key events in the production of the NPPF:** Contribute to the existing literature on the NPPF but developing a practice-focused, fine-grained, and multi-level historiographic account of its development as a key episode in the history of English planning reform.
2. **To produce a case study of policy making practices in the central state:** Carry out a critical case narrative-based analysis of the policymaking practices, strategies, and rationalities that underpinned the development of the NPPF.
3. **Perform a critical analysis:** Assess how useful the concept of post-politics is for understanding the political rationalities which shaped the Coalition government’s approach to creating the NPPF, and explore what the case narrative suggests about trajectories neoliberalising planning reform in England.
4. **Identify opportunities for conceptual synthesis:** Identify, based on the empirical analysis, opportunities for synthesis between the CSGP literatures and other bodies of research which may be valuable for interpreting the consequences of the changing central state for planning reform and spatial governance in England.

The final part of this thesis’ conceptual jigsaw is its practice-orientated conceptual framework, which is based on Bent Flyvbjerg’s phronetic approach to social science (Flyvbjerg, 1992; 2001; 2004; 2006; 2008). It influences all parts of this thesis, from the identification and conceptualisation of the research problem, through to its analysis and even writing style. It is used as a tool to burrow down below the level of discourse and institutions - at which there is a large and rich body of critical commentary and analysis concerning OSP and the NPPF (e.g. Raco, 2013; Rozee, 2014; Pemberton & Morphet,

2013) - and to maintain focus on the actual practices and practical rationalities through which OSP the NPPF was created and contested. Overall, this set of research interests and perspectives lead to the over-arching research question and objectives detailed in Figure 2, above (these are rationalised and discussed in-depth in the following chapter).

### 1.2.2 Thesis structure

Echoing Wagenaar's (2011: 241) claim that, in practice, the research process is 'spiral in nature', the relationship between my personal experience, conceptual framework, and literature review was far from linear. This is not an uncommon experience when writing theses (Carter et al, 2012), but working out how to write down and capture this relationship proved quite a puzzle. My experiences of policy work in practice were formative in that I adopted a practice-orientated conceptual framework. But, equally, these experiences were a central part of the thesis *because* I adopted a conceptual framework which valorised them. The relationship between the practice-orientated conceptual framework and the literature reviewed was similarly circular; the framework prefigured the literature review in as much as it guided my engagement with the literature, whilst the extant literature also demonstrates the value of such a framework as a way of conceptualising the 'gap' within it. Overall, my experiences played a part in determining the conceptual framework, the conceptual framework determined the value of my experiences, and the literature review demonstrated the value of the conceptual framework. These relationships can be considered as displayed in Figure 3, below.



The structure of the thesis tries to capture these relationships. Following this short introduction, in **Chapter two** I present the thesis' research topic, research question, the 'phronetic' conceptual and epistemological framework, key literature, and the OSP/NPPF policy episode as a case study. I also present key concepts and the definitions of key terms

which I engage throughout the thesis. I do this in the manner of what Van Maanen (1988) calls an ‘impressionistic research tale’. I describe the logic behind each of these component in terms of how they unfolded from my initial experiences working in DCLG, and how they were then refined through the research process and my engagement with different bodies of literature. In doing so this chapter roams across the others, setting up themes which are then developed fully later on.

**Chapter three** then reviews the critical literature on planning reform in England since the 1980s. This is mainly built around two bodies of work. The first concerns the neoliberalism of spatial governance in England, which performs two main roles in the thesis. Firstly, it provides a critical framework for interpreting the dynamics and policy context of planning reform under the Coalition (Haughton et al, 2013). Secondly, it provides historical context and a lens for interpreting how longer-term trends in spatial governance - particularly its path-dependencies - link to the NPPF (Lord & Tewdwr Jones, 2014; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013; Peck & Tickell, 2002). The second body of literature builds directly on the first, and concerns CSGP writing which deploys, critiques, or explores the concept of ‘post-politics’. This provides a critical framework for thinking through the democratic consequences of recent waves of neoliberalising English planning reform (Deas, 2013; Raco, 2014; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012). It is also useful for explaining the differences, rather than path-dependencies, between the New Labour and Coalition planning policy regimes, and provides some of the most in-depth academic accounts of the politics and events of the NPPF saga (Allmendinger, 2016; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2014). This work, however, is not without its critics. In this chapter I also discuss current critiques of post-politics as a critical tool. In the final section of the literature review I reflect on the consequences of these critiques for how the concept of post-politics is handled in the thesis, and unpack the possible reasons for the CSGP literatures’ lack of practice-orientated research into the central state. One of these reasons is a lack of engagement with interpretive British political science scholarship concerning the core executive, which I highlight here as a potentially valuable reservoir of concepts and data for furthering CSGP research in this area.

In **chapter three** I move on to discuss the research design, data collection/analysis methods, and approach to writing. Each of these features are heavily influenced by the phronetic conceptual framework and the case-narrative-based approach that it espouses. My main source of data for constructing this narrative was semi-structured interviews with civil servants, politicians, Peers and other individuals directly involved with the NPPF’s creation. As such, some of the most testing pragmatic and ethical research challenges I faced related to gaining access to and then interviewing ‘elite’ research participants. I therefore take time in this chapter to consider different conceptualisations

of 'elite' participants, and how my recruitment and sampling strategies responded to these challenges.

**Chapters five, six, and seven** present the case narrative in chronological order. The first of these chapters concerns the Conservative Party's approach to developing the green paper *Open Source Planning* before the UK 2010 General Election, and the early days of the Coalition Government in DCLG. This sets the narrative stage by providing important context, and also provides insights into how the approach political parties take to developing spatial governance policy in opposition can directly shape both its form in government and the networks of policy actors involved. In chapter six the Coalition Government's strategy for developing the NPPF, and the intricacies of how it played out in practice, are the focus. Chapter seven then concentrates on how the Treasury influenced the development of the NPPF through departmental negotiations, and the power dynamics and at play during this process. The last part of this chapter brings the thesis' empirical portion to an end by assessing the ways and extent to which the national campaign against the NPPF and parliamentary scrutiny on the NPPF influenced the final document.

In **chapter 8** I analyse the case narrative and respond directly to each of the research objectives earlier discussed. I begin by reflecting on the general, historiographic contribution of the thesis as an in-depth account of an important policy episode in the history of English planning reform. I then analyse how the policy making practices/strategies/rationalities of central state agents identified in the case narrative link to wider patterns of neoliberalising spatial governance reform under the Coalition - particularly via the concepts of the 'Big Society', 'open policy making', and 'soft space governance'. This analysis exposes the ways in which the Coalition ministers systematically reconfigured power relations between different central state actors, including civil servants and ministers, and government departments and the core executive, through a process I refer to as the 'neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model'. This may have significant consequences for trajectories in English spatial governance reform. In the remainder of this chapter I bring post-politics 'back in' to assess its usefulness for explaining the political strategies of agents in the case narrative. I argue that stripping post-politics' theoretical project back to focus only on its critical/analytical project of exposing processes of depoliticisation may be productive in several ways.

In **Chapter 9** I end the thesis by presenting possible avenues for future research into the central state, and reflecting on the effectiveness of the phronetic methodology and my 'research journey'.

# 2. The methodology, conceptual framework, and development of the thesis

## 2.1 Writing an impressionistic research account and refining the thesis' scope and research question

Practice is not simply connected to local actors operating at the frontline of the delivery of public services. Rather, practice inquiry can inform studies of national and international as well as local organisations, in both the public and private domains. It can enhance our understanding of the roles of civil servants, professionals and politicians, be it through analysis of the practices of drafting legislation, the daily routines of Parliament or the work of international consultants. (Freeman et al, 2011: 130)

### 2.1.1 Introduction

*The position of the methods and methodology within the thesis structure*

In this chapter I present the practice-orientated conceptual framework, methodology, and approach to case selection. I also discuss how these features of the thesis evolved from personal experience and my initial identification of a gap in the literature. In many research accounts the methodology and methods chapters follow the literature review as part of an instrumental, linear, enterprise; the researcher introduces the field, finds a gap or 'problem' in the theory as it is expressed in the literature, and then instrumentally sets about designing an approach to research which will best correct this, according to the chosen theory. In the following account, however, I hope to highlight the role personal experience played in the initial identification of a research topic/question, the subsequent and incremental development of the practice-orientated conceptual framework and 'phronetic' methodology, and the literature I engaged with afterwards. For this reason, and because it neatly captures key epistemological principles of a 'practice-orientated' approach to research (as described below), this methodological chapter, and the subsequent methods-focused chapter, precede the literature review.

### *An 'impressionist research tale'*

The role of personal experience is often central to accounts of the research process in the interpretive methodological literature. Indeed, from an interpretive and critical perspective, there is no 'view from nowhere' from which researchers may objectively survey the object of study, or avoid the power relations that enmesh it (Flyvbjerg, 2004; du Toit, 2015). Essentially, a researcher's own positionality, pre-held beliefs, values, and lived experiences have a powerful and inescapable effect across many - if not all - aspects of the research process. This influence is often discussed in a negative sense and as something to be minimised. However, it is the researcher's own body of experiences which provide the backcloth against which, at a fundamental level, events can be interpreted and rendered meaningful at all (Wagenaar, 2011). In this sense, reflexivity during the research process is vital not just as part of an attempt to 'suspend subjectivity' in pursuit of rigour, but to 'use the researcher's personal interpretive framework consciously as the basis for developing new understandings' (Levy, 2003: 94). The concrete effects of these influences are well documented in the methodological literature, from making particular methodological choices based on one's own skills and preferences (Probert, 2006), to the participant-interviewer power dynamics at play during interviews – a subject which I discuss in my chapter on methods (Al x & Hammarst m, 2008). Whilst this is the case, one stage of the research process in which lived experiences remain less explored is the identification of a research topic and question (Pansiri, 2009; Watt, 2007). In what follows I deploy what Van Maanen (1988) describes as an 'impressionist' research account<sup>3</sup> to capture the role these experiences played throughout the research process, from this initial identification of a research problem and gap in the literature, to my engagement with other bodies of literature, to the selection of a broad conceptual framework and methodology, and then case selection. These decisions and readings influenced the literature I reviewed, and the perspective from which I reviewed it, so this then follows. After the literature review, I then discuss my approach to research design, methods, and writing.

Impressionistic accounts explicitly use a narrative style to present events to the reader in the order in which they occurred, accompanied by 'the kind of concrete details that provide substance to remembered events' (Elliott, 2005). The particular benefit of using an impressionist account here is that it captures a view of the social science research process as being unescapably 'messy', inductive, and paradigmatically pluralistic in nature (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Nicolini, 2012; Creswell, 2007: 19). This is a view central to the practice-

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<sup>3</sup> This is as opposed to what Van Maanen (1988) calls a 'realist tale', in which the researcher is erased from the text and the research subject interpreted from one perspective, or a 'confessional tale', in which the researcher and their travails appears within the text (Elliott, 2005).

orientated approach to social science research I describe later, and it represents a supporting pillar of the methodology. Quoting Cerwonka & Malkkim (2007: 17), Wagenaar (2011: 241) sums this perspective up:

Methods cannot be seen apart from finding a good subject, becoming aware of your specific interest in the topic, formulating an interesting research question about it, becoming aware of the presumptions with which you approach the subject, collecting data on your subject, and formulating ideas and concepts that respond to that question... They are interlocked, and all move along together, mostly in fits and starts, in a process that is “more spiral in nature than linear and cumulative”, more in the nature of an extended improvisation than a well-thought-out-in-advance strategy.

An impressionistic research account, therefore, emphasises a central plank of this thesis’ conceptual framework; the highly contingent, non-linear, embodied and highly personal nature of not just the research process itself, but of social interaction much more widely. In the following account, I use several different writing techniques to capture this perspective. I place the role of my own personal experience - of practical, context-dependant knowledge and my own self-understandings - at the centre of the research tale, and centrally to my understanding of the social world. To do this, I write in the first person, using the ‘*T*’ to reject the natural-scientific claim to disembodied meaningfulness and truth about the social, often made via appeal to universal, truths, laws and theory (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Returning to Van Maanen, the overall objective here is to keep; ‘...both subject and object in constant view. The epistemological aim is then to braid the knower with the known.’ (Van Maanen, 1988, p102). Another technique I use is to document how my research objectives evolved falteringly and iteratively as I built a conceptual framework and engaged with different bodies of literature. This is mapped through four different figures (Figures 4, 5, 6 and finally 8, which summarises the overarching research question, aims in their entirety). In places, I also oscillate between and blur elements of the thesis which are more traditionally associated with methodology, methods, or conceptual chapters. For example, in Part 2.1.3 I discuss my initial interest in using the case study-based approach, based on my own experiences working in central government, before turning to the conceptual framework (Part 2.2.1), and then back to my rationale for using a case study-based approach, in the light of this earlier established framework (Part 4.1.1).

With this fluidity in mind, the following chapter is divided into three parts. It begins with a description of my personal experience of working in the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), and how this led to the identification of a gap in the CSGP literatures concerning the ways in which changing policy making practices in the central state link to the evolution of the English planning system and spatial governance. In the next section I describe how I refined and reinterpreted this initial observation through my

engagement with critical spatial governance literature, and developed an initial research aim and focus on the planning reform-related policy making practices during the Coalition Government period (2010-2015) accordingly. After introducing practice-orientated research (POR) as a useful way of interpreting the research problem, I introduce a methodology built around Bent Flyvbjerg's 'phronetic' approach to social science. In this section I describe the key epistemological and methodological features of this framework - most significantly its privileging of case-based research, its emphasis on the 'minute' and everyday practice, and developing narratives. This sets the stage for the discussion of my final case selection, which concludes the chapter.

### **2.1.2 The gap in the literature**

*"In the Thick of It" – the significance of my time working in DCLG*

The roots of this thesis go back to early 2013 and the decision to take a seven-month break from the first year of my PhD to work in the UK Government's Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on the Coalition Government's (2010-2015) reform of national planning policy guidance. The motivation behind this move was to experience planning work 'in practice'; something which I hadn't previously done, and which my supervisors and I felt might increase the chances of me producing impactful research. In retrospect, it is interesting that this decision was animated by a largely implicit belief about practical knowledge and its role in learning; this was that experiencing policy making and politics 'in practice' brings forth understandings of these spheres which would otherwise be out of reach in academia, and which theory itself cannot fully capture. This would become a key principle of the 'phronetic' conceptual framework I later adopted.

In DCLG I worked in the project team responsible for managing the Coalition government's review of English National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG). This largely involved coordinating between the different policy teams responsible for guidance on different policy areas, writing departmental correspondence, consultation analysis, and helping to redraft the NPPG itself. Just being in the hustle and bustle of policy change as it happened was thrilling enough - but to feel at the centre of it, in *the thick of it*, so to speak, was gripping. Though the work was engrossing I maintained a careful balance during this time between, on one hand, submersing myself in the work and culture of the department as much as possible, and on the other, not 'going native' and losing a critical awareness of potential research opportunities (Flyvbjerg, 2004). I maintained a diary and met monthly with my supervisors to discuss emerging themes and observations, purposefully bringing myself out of the field in the process. This was a strategy loosely based on methods for maintaining validity and reliability classically associated with

ethnographic studies (e.g. Whyte, 1955; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). My insider-outsider status also helped in this respect. Indeed, though I felt very much ‘part of the team’ I was often introduced to colleagues as ‘*Dan, who is doing a PhD in town planning*’.

#### *Early understandings of the gap in the literature*

Only a couple of weeks into the Guidance Review a sense of what the social psychologists Leon Festinger (1957) famously termed ‘cognitive dissonance’ set in; many of my day-to-day experiences working in the department simply didn’t fit what I’d expected, based on my knowledge of the planning literature and broader education. This theory-practice disconnect is widely reported, and may be one commonly felt by planning graduates and researchers as they move into practice for the first time (see the debate in the ‘Interface’ section of *Planning Theory & Practice* 1 (1), 2000; Healey, 2015; Harris, 2015), but it seemed particularly acute in this case. After returning to the literature, I realised that this was because, unlike the theory-practice ‘gap’ as it had been related to in other institutional settings (for example, Local Planning Authorities, planning consultancies, or the academy), there was little academic writing of *any* nature about the practical realities of planning-related policy work in the UK central government, and how it linked to planning reform or shifting patterns in English spatial governance.

#### *Returning to the literature and developing an initial aim*

After leaving London and DCLG I returned to Liverpool and carried out an initial literature review on subjects and concepts relating to ‘national-level spatial governance policy making practices’. To an extent this supported my initial, quite simplistic, observations. As the following literature review demonstrates, there was a large quantity of in-depth spatial governance and planning literature concerning such topics as:

- The changing institutional architecture and governance arrangements of national-level planning, or the changing roles of different institutional agents (e.g. Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Hart, 2015; Alterman, 2001; Marshall, 2011; Sheppard & Ritchie, 2016)
- The changing relationships between national-level governance structures or agendas, and other levels of governance within the planning system (Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Pemberton & Morphet, 2013; Baker & Wong, 2013)
- The role of major reviews various non-government agents in indirectly shaping national-level planning policy (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2016; Delafons, 1998)
- How national policy discourses, particularly with regards to the environment and neoliberal/pro-market ideology, have changed over the time, and the key drivers behind these changes (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013; Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014; Davoudi & Madanipour, 2013)

However, very little of the literature explored or acknowledged the concrete practices and rationales associated with actually ‘doing’ policy making work in central government institutions (Freeman et al, 2011; Colebatch, 2006; Hood, 1983, Colebatch et al, 2010), or treated spatial governance-related policy processes at this level as ‘peopled’ (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). Beyond the works of Alterman (2001), Rose (2015), and Marshall (2011) mentioned in the introduction, there was also little writing on how changes in this work might link to patterns and processes of planning reform or spatial governance more widely. Outside of the literature specifically concerning spatial governance, there *was* a large body of work concerned with studying policy practices and ‘peopling’ processes in the UK central government (James, 2009), but there were few epistemological links between this and the geographical/planning-related literature. And, with some very notable exceptions<sup>4</sup>, it was often (implicitly) highly positivist, structuralist, and empiricist in outlook (Wagenaar, 2012) (this is a subject I return to at the conclusion of the literature review). In short, this resulted in the critical literature concerning planning and spatial governance, which tends to work within the interpretive tradition, treating national-level planning policy-making institutions as what Healey (2006) terms ‘black boxes’. This jarred with my understanding of central government’s position as a crucially important site and node of policy making within (what remains) a highly centralised political system (James, 2009). It also stood uneasily with my understanding of the importance of ground-level, interpretive, research for analysing policy making and governance processes therein (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013; Healey, 1990). It thus gave rise to an initial and vaguely defined primary research question, outlined in Figure 4, below. This question evolved considerably throughout the process of developing and writing my thesis, and as such their evolution is documented in three similar figures in Parts 2.1.3 and 2.3.2.

**Figure 4: The Evolution of the Research Question and Objectives 1/4 – Initial Research Question**

**Initial research question:** How do planning practices in UK central government shape national-level planning reform in England?

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<sup>4</sup> For example; Bevir & Rhodes (2003; 2010), Mackay & Rhodes (2013) and Colebatch (2006) on central government, and Crewe (2005; 2010a; 2012; 2016) on parliament. Jo Maybin (2013) and Mary Houston (2016) are also particularly notable in that both concern the role of practical knowledge and work in central government policy making, regarding health and eDemocracy, respectively, and both are PhD theses.

### 2.1.3 Refining the scope and target of enquiry, and positioning the research

#### *The critical spatial governance literature: Neoliberalisation and post-politics*

This initial research question captured my research interests well, but was clearly far too broad and abstract. In pursuit of a more clearly defined research question and context I subsequently carried out a broad literature review on the subject of spatial governance theory, state theory, geographical political economy, critical policy studies and regulatory reform. This presented the concept of ‘neoliberalisation’ as a useful, critical, frame and perspective for interpreting and understanding longer-term changes to the English planning system since the 1980s (e.g. Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013; Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014), as well as the policy practices which constitute and contest it (Clifford, 2016; Olesen, 2014). Though ‘neoliberalisation’ was clearly useful in this descriptive sense, there is a well-rehearsed and ongoing debate in this literature about the limits of ‘neoliberalism’ as a way of *explaining* contemporary transformations in spatial-regulatory governance systems, given how variegated, hybrid, and generally multiplex the changes they have undergone are (Jonsson & Baeten, 2014). This critique has been met by a well-established shift in the literature towards an emphasis on *actually existing neoliberalisation*. An ‘actually existing’ understanding of neoliberalisation focuses on the concrete and historically contingent practices through which structures/processes associated with neoliberalism are brought into being, as opposed to an understanding of neoliberalism as a fixed and hegemonic ideology with clear-cut concrete impacts. It also emphasises ongoing and dynamic processes of *neoliberalisation* over a static conceptualisation of neoliberalism. This literature thus comprises part one of the literature review.

This literature also pointed to the increasingly popular concept of post-politics as being valuable for explaining why neoliberal planning regimes change form over time, and ways in which they restrict political debate and conflict about the role of the planning system outside of a strictly prescribed market-supportive model. However, in many ways mirroring the debate which emerged a decade ago around the concept of neoliberalism and which spawned actually existing neoliberalism, several authors have recently expressed concerns that the framework provided by post-politics essentially fails to capture the heterogeneity, contingency, and complexity of contemporary urban governance and political agency (North et al, 2017; Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; Beveridge & Koch, 2017b; Larner, 2013) Being presented as a both typically neoliberal and post-political planning reform, the NPPF thus offers an opportunity to feed into this debate. The post-politics literature thus comprises part two of the literature review, and a new objective was added and the research question revised to reflect this.

**Figure 5: The Evolution of the Research Question and Objectives 2/4**

**Revised research question:** How do changing planning policy making practices in the central state shape planning reform in England, and to what extent can they be described as 'post-political'?

**New objective – performing a critical analysis:** To assess how useful the concept of post-politics is for understanding the practice of planning reform at the national level, and the longer-term shifts in modes of English spatial governance these relate to.

*The policy work of planning reform in the 'central state'*

The critical spatial governance literature also emphasises the decentred, multi-level, and 'networked' nature of modern governance and policy processes, suggesting a focus on the 'central state' (James, 2009) rather than 'national-level' government would be more appropriate as an organising concept. The 'central state' also captured the porosity and fluidity of the 'state' more effectively than the rather more unyielding concept of 'government', and opened up analysis to the vital role of non-government agents in policy networks and assemblages, and in projecting and reproducing state power (Jessop, 2015). These agents include expert bodies, the third sector, and lobbying organisations, as has long been emphasised by the spatial governance and planning literature, *but also* the legislature - the policy impact of which a growing body of work from the field of legislative studies suggests may have been systematically underplayed to-date (e.g. Russell et al, 2017; Russell & Cowley, 2015).

My reading of this literature also prompted a conceptual shift regarding the thesis' object of study. In short, I moved from a focus on 'planning' and 'planners' in the central state, to a focus on the central state *policy work underpinning particular reforms* of the planning system, whoever the agents carrying out this work are. This decision was made for several reasons:

- *Engaging with the wider literature and improving impact:* Moving away from a more introspective interest in a particular discipline opened up the opportunity to more explicitly engage with and contribute to the wider spatial governance and policy making literature, as well as 'planning theory'<sup>5</sup>.
- *Conceptual clarity:* As the sheer number of attempts to do so suggest, 'planning' as a conceptual object in and of itself is extremely difficult to define (Alexander,

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<sup>5</sup> See Allmendinger & Haughton (2013, p24) for an outline of spatial planning's usefulness as a 'way in' for exploring variegated neoliberalism in particular.

2016). Gunder and Hillier (2009, p4) go as far as to describe planning as an 'empty signifier'.

- *Contributing to existing understandings of specific English planning reforms:* As has been argued, existing studies of changes in national-level English planning policy (such the National Planning Policy Framework or Localism Act) often place local practices/discourses, or national-level discourses at the heart of their analyses, and pay less attention to national-level practices. Focusing on how practices in this important policy making site shaped *specific instances* of reform thus presented the opportunity to contribute to a much richer and more complex understanding of the overall assemblage of ideas, rationales, power relations and practices which went into shaping each of these specific cases (Potter, 2012, citing De Vaus, 2001).
- *The phronetic methodology:* This issue/cases/practice-focused approach to research also fitted neatly with the phronetic approach to research I later adopted.

#### *First steps towards case selection: Policy making under the Coalition*

My interests in exploring how the complexities of policy work in a particular context shaped policy outcomes pointed to a case-study based approach to my overall research strategy as being suitable (Yin, 2009; Stake, 1995). As a first step towards case selection, I narrowed down my period of interest to that over which the UK Coalition Government was in power (2010-2015). This decision was made for several closely-linked reasons, both intellectual and pragmatic. Intellectually, this period as a whole represents a major 'reorientation' of the English planning system in several ways (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013), the impacts of which are still emerging. Indeed, reforms during this period have underpinned subsequent waves of policy change (for example, with regards to local authority funding and scalar reconfigurations of governance). Much of the geographical/planning literature studying these reforms - though it largely focuses on institutional settings other than central government - possesses a critical, interpretive, and broadly practice-orientated perspective, making conceptual linkages more fruitful in analysis. The literature on reform changing policy making practices in central government also suggested that here were some particularly important civil service reforms during this period, and that these linked closely to the reform agendas highlighted in the planning literature as being significant for this sphere. For example, those relating Localism, the Big Society, Open Policy Making, and the Growth Agenda. It consequently provides a valuable battery of organising concepts and findings directly related to the reforms being studied here - though currently associated with local, rather than 'national', institutional sites.

The second set of reasons for focusing on planning reform during this period was more pragmatic. In the interests of impact and relevance to emerging policy I wanted my research to be as contemporary as possible. To this end an ethnographic or ‘real time’ study of policy work under the current Conservative government may have been ideal<sup>6</sup>, but it was also extremely impractical. Given that the UK Civil Service is famously secretive and risk-averse (James, 2009; Maybin 2013) it was extremely unlikely I would be granted the levels of access necessary to site myself inside DCLG or an alternative central government department/bodies on a regular basis, or even at all. It was similarly unlikely that I would even be able to interview civil servants in sufficient depth about current/emerging policy reforms, several of which, such as the Housing and Planning Bill 2016, were extremely controversial (see Barnes, 2016; Bridge & Clayden 2016; Blackman, 2016). These concerns were confirmed during scoping discussions I conducted with colleagues before leaving DCLG. I concluded that the period of Coalition government - which ended at roughly the same time as I began data collection - represented the best balance between producing findings which would be as contemporary as possible, whilst ensuring I would have a sufficient level of research access to collect rich and detailed data.

There were several other pragmatic considerations, relating to my own position, which suggested I would be able to gain a good level of research access if I were to study cases which took place during this period. Amongst these was the fact that because the UK Civil Service typically experiences high levels of staff turnover or ‘churn’, it was highly likely that many of the individuals who worked on reforms during this period would be working in different teams, directorates, departments, or even organisations at the time of data collection. This was something scoping conversations with ex-colleagues suggested would be particularly useful for securing interviews, as individuals would be more comfortable discussing their work in previous posts. The fact that I had kept in touch with many of the colleagues with whom I had these discussions, and that many of these individuals had worked on a range of reforms during the Coalition period, also increased my chances of recruiting a suitable number of participants, and gathering sufficiently rich data.

Also significant in shaping this decision was that during my time in DCLG I had maintained a personal diary, and collected indexed notes regarding my day-to-day work, via the systematic note taking application Evernote ([www.evernote.com](http://www.evernote.com)). These chiefly concerned the processes involved in the Guidance Review, but also regarded more general aspects of day-to-day work which I thought might be of future research interest. The fact

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<sup>6</sup> Ethnography is marked as an approach particularly suitable for unpicking the contingency and dynamics of policy work by policy analysts (Wagenaar, 2011), organisational scholars (Nicolini, 2012), and political scientists (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; 2010) with interpretive sensibilities

that these notes were neither wide-ranging nor detailed, and that my status as an ex-civil servant meant that I could not cite them directly (doing so would breach the Official Secrets Act 1989), limited their use as a primary data source in themselves. But none the less, they had the potential to inform and enrich a study of planning policy making during the Coalition era in several other ways. For example, though I worked only on the Guidance Review, they could be used to triangulate other data sources concerning other policy episodes during the period. Studying the Coalition period thus brought into play another source of qualitative data through which to seek convergence and corroboration (Bowen, 2009). These notes also provided an important source of prompts and starting points for points of enquiry as the thesis developed. However, perhaps most valuably, they contained the contact details and names of many of the key individuals involved in the Guidance Review - the majority of whom had worked on a range of other planning reform-related projects during under the Coalition Government. A lot of these individuals' contact details were not publicly available, so these notes not only aided the identification of key individuals, but also provided the email addresses and/or phone numbers by which to contact them.

There were several policy reform 'episodes' during this period which were potentially of interest. I discuss the logic behind the final selection of the development of OSP (The Conservative Party, 2010a), and of the NPPF (DCLG, 2012c) as case studies within this time period later, in Part 2.3.1, after discussing the conceptual framework which helped inform their selection.

**Figure 6: The Evolution of the Research Question and Objectives 3/4**

**Initial research question:** How did different practices of 'getting policy done' in the UK central state shape planning reform during the Coalition government, and to what extent can they be described as 'post-political'?

**Additional objective – critical analysis:** To assess how well the concept of post-politics is for explaining the policy making rationalities of agents involved in the creation of the NPPF, and the longer-term shifts in modes of English spatial governance these relate to.

**Additional objective – producing a case study:** To produce a case study of policy making practices in the central state during the Coalition, and how they shape English-national-level planning reform.

*Summary and an initial primary research question*

Overall, following the initial literature review and first stage of case study selection, my research interests had crystallised into a focus on how central state policy making

practices associated with ‘doing’ elements of the Coalition government’s reform programme had shaped the substance of these reforms, and; a) assessing how effective a conceptual tool ‘post-politics’ is to explain these practices, and b) what these practices suggested about longer-term trends in pro-market spatial governance reform. These interests led to the refinement of the initial research question into the form described in Figure 6, above. Though still quite unrefined, this question provided a basis for developing a conceptual framework and methodology, as outlined below.

## 2.2 A practice-orientated conceptual framework and a ‘phronetic’ methodology

...Agency comes from outside the realm of representation and it cannot be reduced to anything in that realm. We can build a model to forecast the weather, or write poem about spring rain, but those are not the same as getting soaked by a sudden shower upon leaving the house. (Wagenaar, 2011: 278)

### 2.2.1 Practice-orientated conceptual framework

#### *The journey towards a practice-orientated conceptual framework*

Based on my experiences in DCLG and initial literature review, my search for a conceptual framework began with an interest in tracing cause and effect between three elements; particular policy making practices/technologies/materials in the central state, the ways particular elements of the Coalition’s planning reform programme then played out at the local level, and how these outcomes then went on to (re)structure planning policy work in the central state. Two broad approaches appealed to my experiences in DCLG and were *en vogue* in the reviewed literature; complexity theory with neo-systems thinking, and policy mutations/mobilities. Complex systems thinking appealed because it emphasises the importance of dynamism, emergence, and feedback loops in social systems. As such it offered a way of thinking systematically about how relatively ‘small’ and ‘everyday’ policy practices in the UK central state related to structural features of the English planning system at different levels and as a whole, as well as periods of relative chaos and upheaval (e.g. Chettiparamb, 2014; Byrne, 2003). Deploying a complex systems-based framework might therefore have been useful for establishing to what extent the policy making sites and practices of the central state were actually an important research subject for scholars

wishing to understand the changing form and function of the English system as a whole. Policy mutations/mobilities had appeal because it offered a way of critically ‘studying-through’ (rather than ‘up’ or ‘down’) how both planning practices and concepts were shaped by policy making process and materials in the central state (McCann & Ward, 2012). Clifford and Morphet (2014), for example, explore the role of civil servants involved in the UK civil service’s ‘Five Administrations’ meetings as transfer agents, who drove path-dependency and limited policy divergence across the post-devolutionary UK.

However, given that there was very little spatial governance research specifically focusing on the role of the central state as a policy making site, I felt that there was more to be gained from focusing on that site exclusively, rather than performing an enquiry which more explicitly aimed to cut across different tiers of government or policy networks. I also felt that there was more to be gained from an approach which aimed to generate a broader interpretive understanding of different actor’s viewpoints (i.e. *verstehen*) regarding the links between practice and policy. This was as opposed to generating a more or less directly causal explanation (i.e. *erklären*), the wider applicability of which might be limited. With this in mind, a more flexible and exploratory framework/methodology that focused on the material practices of individual agents (as opposed to institutions, discourses, symbols etc), and was loose enough to provide the ‘conditions for surprise’ (Wagenaar, 2011) in terms of new findings, was ideal.

The notion of the theory-practice gap reared its head again as I was preparing readings on the subject for masters-level planning students. What caught my eye was an argument made by Bent Flyvbjerg in a 2004 journal article (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Essentially, Flyvbjerg argued, the gap between planning theory and planning practice exists precisely because planning research (and social science more generally) often tries to produce generalizable, ‘scientific’, theory, and has failed to focus on and develop practice and practical understanding. By attempting to produce theory in the natural-scientific mould, social science research often divorces social knowledge from context and produces the very gap it seeks to close down. Though less fashionable than the other frameworks and methodologies I considered, many of Flyvbjerg’s underlying arguments tallied with my experiences in DCLG; he privileged the small and mundane in enquiry, focused on practice as a way of understanding social change, and emphasised the non-linearity of social change and interaction. I outline these facets of practice-orientated research (POR) – of which Flyvbjerg’s work can be considered a branch - in detail later. However, what is most significant for the development of this ‘research tale’ is that Flyvbjerg’s article led to the realisation that POR offered a strong lens for conceptualising the research question and field, a flexible methodological framework for responding to this question, and a series of well-established methods with which to do so. Overall, it offered a route inside the ‘black box’ of the central state.

I will turn to Flyvbjerg's specific brand of POR and how it shaped my aims, objectives, and methods later, but below I discuss POR at a high level, as a school of thought and overall approach to social enquiry. I begin the section by describing POR's defining features. I then discuss its usefulness for conceptualising the research problem identified in the previous chapter. The section then concludes by turning its gaze to the wider literature, and argues that the POR perspective has many synergies with current theoretical trends in the critical spatial governance literature.

### *The key features of POR*

Flyvbjerg's 'phronetic' approach to research can be considered a branch of a wider school of thought which can be labelled 'practice-orientated research', and thinking about the approach in these broad terms is a useful starting point for exploring its usefulness as a way of conceptualising the research problem, and how it links to the spatial governance literature. Influenced by a diverse mixture of writers, from Foucault to Aristotle and Dewey to Bourdieu, practice-orientated research (referred to from hereon as 'POR') is a broad church, drawing on combination of interpretivist, post-structuralist, classical, and pragmatist philosophical traditions. It is thus better thought of as drawing on a range and combination of practice *theories* as opposed to one practice *theory* (Nicolini, 2012; Adler & Pouliot, 2011)<sup>7</sup>. None the less, POR can be seen as a 'family or related meanings' (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003, p144), that is unified by a rejection of rationalist and modernist understanding of 'practice'<sup>8</sup>. This conventional rationalist understanding of practice is deeply established within Western thought, (Flyvbjerg, 2004; Wagenaar & Cook, 2003). It treats it as the application of pre-existing knowledge and rules (i.e. theory) according to context, 'work' or simply 'doing', or in many cases as an empty signifier (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2004). This understanding of practice as the executive arm of pre-existing knowledge brings about a series of well-established dichotomies, for example; structure versus agency, or theory/thought versus practice/labour (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003), both of which are problematic for social enquiry<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Following the 'practice turn' of the early 2000s, POR came to prominence across the social sciences, including international relations (Brown, 2012; Adler & Pouliot, 2011), sociology (Nicolini, 2012), policy analysis (Colebatch, 2006), political science (Schram et al, 2006), as well as planning (Flyvbjerg, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Which, following Cook & Wagenaar (2012: 4) is defined here as; "...any kind of activity the meaning of which (including the purpose) is derived from a given context." They continue; "Scratching your ear is not a practice. Bricklaying, teaching, playing football, and brain surgery are."

<sup>9</sup> This distinction can be traced back to the works of Comte and Descartes, and should be interpreted as both normative and actual. For Comte in particular labour/practice was inferior to theory/thought – the former being fleeting, easily influenced, reactive, and lacking imagination (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003). Theory, on the other hand, is seen as angled towards positive discovery, is a process of carefully deploying

POR dispenses with this understanding. In its place it deploys one more sensitive to the role of tacit, reflexive, knowledge alongside a value-focused rationality in research and the wider social world. This is termed 'know-how' by Maybin (2013) after Ryle (1949), 'phronesis' by Flyvbjerg (2002) and 'praxis' by Bourdieu (1977). It results in an understanding of practice as context-specific (i.e. intrinsically tied to the actions and situation at hand), anti-dualistic, and fundamentally *generative* mode of navigating and knowing the social world. That is, action, rather than symbols, cognitive exercises (such as interest calculation), institutions, or discourses *per se*, comprise the essential building blocks of human experience, as it is through concrete action that these phenomena are brought into being (Wagenaar, 2011). Consequently, they argue, practice should be the base-unit of social enquiry (Beuger, 2011). POR scholars may differ in terms of the deeper ontological implications of this lynchpin viewpoint, and can be placed somewhere on a spectrum between those who treat practice as largely constitutive of knowledge and context (for example; Cook & Wagenaar, 2012; Schatzki, 2001), and those who treat practice and knowledge/context as operating within a dialectic relationship (for example; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984), but it is this understanding which binds them. In Cook & Wagenaar's (2012, p8) words;

...their argument is that formal knowledge emerges out of, and cannot be seen apart from, an often unacknowledged and largely tacit context of hunches, cues, bodily predispositions, expectations, appreciations, values, affects, and so on. That is, all knowledge, including formal knowledge, is embedded in ordinary experience, and, in an essential sense, gets its meaning, its life, from it. Traditional epistemology's characterization of knowledge as explicit, objective, disengaged, universal, wholly transparent, and necessarily prior to practice (a set of characteristics that we summarize with the term formal), an ideal of knowledge that finds its most elevated expression in scientifically derived knowledge, is actually embedded in a "prior ontology of engaged, embodied agency" (Abbey, 2000).

Overall, whatever phenomena researchers are interested in, and whichever conceptual/analytical framework they deploy, POR scholars treat practice as the 'key entry point to the study of social and political life' (Adler & Pouliot, 2011, p4).

## **2.2.2 POR, fit, and reconceptualising the initial research questions**

Before moving on to examine Flyvbjerg's phronetic branch of POR, it is worth reflecting on how POR 'fits' the research problem. Wagenaar (2011) makes the point that it is all well

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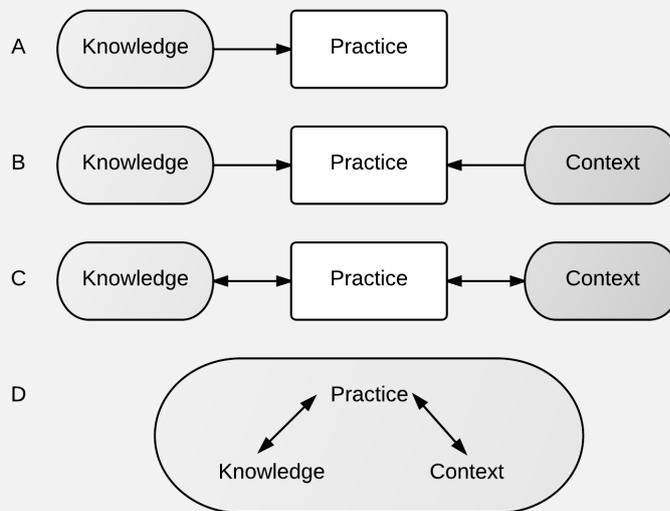
logic, and is careful to avoid bias (Wagenaar & Cook, 2003; Dunne, 1993). Overall, this way of thinking frames 'practice' simply as 'doing', and as the 'executive arm' of the rational knowledge which preceded it, applied in context.

and good to pick and combine different conceptual or epistemological frameworks as a way of gaining new perspectives on a phenomenon if one remains at the level of theory. But planners and policy analysts are in the business of shaping *practice*, and this makes the *fit* of conceptual frameworks of utmost significance. Put another way; it's fine to have different theories of bridge building, but if the bridge collapses, people die. In practice-orientated research, conceptual frameworks must be demonstrably commensurate with the world and problems to which they are applied. Wagenaar relates fit to policy-focused social science enquiry in a general, and argues that in the study of policy conceptual frameworks must 'fit' what he sees as public policy's three 'generative' properties; complexity, time, and conflict (see Wagenaar, 2011: 279). However, we can be more specific here; if we can demonstrate that POR perspective 'fits' and helps to clarify the research problem, in addition to the subject (as I have already done), we can fairly claim that this is the case.

Figure 7, below, describes different conceptualisations of 'practice' from across the spectrum of views described above. Points A and B represent the 'received view' of practice, as either the executive arm of practice, or knowledge applied according to specific contexts (Wagenaar & Cook, 2012). Points C and D describe an understanding of practice in which it both shapes and is shaped by knowledge and context, with D going slightly further than C, and positioning both knowledge and context as being epistemological artefacts of practice itself. We should now return to the CSGP literature, and more specifically how it conceptualises state actors. Referring to the above diagram, we can see that the literature generally deploys an understanding of local, urban, regional/strategic, or neighbourhood governance practices as points C or D. The actions of intelligent local actors both shape and are shaped by changing policy making contexts and knowledges. Meanwhile, the central state's role in spatial governance processes - most obviously and immediately national-level planning policy making - is treated as at point B. The notion of practice deployed here is Comtean; policy emerges from the central state as a distillation of policy knowledges (e.g. a neoclassical economic understanding of the housing market, or a neoliberal understanding of the role of private interests in public service provision) in accordance with macro-economic, institutional, socio-political or cultural contexts in which the author is interested (e.g. economic recession, the current structure of government departments). It provides a structural force, but rarely *real* agency. There is little exploration of the role that central state policy actors' actual policy making practices have on the policy contexts, or the types of knowledge they deploy *in pursuit* of policy fixes, or the very analytical categories which shape the notion of 'policy', for example. As such, with only a few exceptions, central government and parliamentary

organisations remain treated as 'black boxes' (Healey, 2006)<sup>10</sup>. In helping to reframe the research question in this way, POR demonstrates a high degree of fit to both the problem and subject.

**Figure 7: Different Ways of Conceptualising 'Practice'.**



Point A illustrates an understanding of practice in which it is nothing more the product of applied pre-existing knowledge/theory. Point B illustrates an understanding of practice in which context is also taken into account – knowledge is applied in practice, but practice is constrained by context.

Points C and D illustrate conceptualisations of 'practice' which are more compatible with POR; at Point C practice is seen as simultaneously shaping and being shaped by knowledge and context, whilst at point D knowledge and context are seen as artefacts evoked and generated within practice.

**Produced by the author, adapted from Cook & Wagenaar (2012)**

### 2.2.3 The phronetic methodology

#### *Flyvbjerg's phronetic social science*

So far, I have discussed POR as an approach to research and conceptual framework at quite a high level. In what follows I focus in on Flyvbjerg's phronetic approach to social science as an approach to POR which is particularly suitable to the research questions at hand, and which offers some clear guidelines concerning how to structure the research design and choice of methods.

<sup>10</sup> I discuss the potential reasons for this gap in the final section of the literature review.

Though Bent Flyvbjerg first made the case for a practice-orientated and value-rational approach to planning and social science in his 1992 article *Aristotle, Foucault and Progressive Phronesis* (see Flyvbjerg, 2008), Flyvbjerg's arguments for a *phronetic* social science (PSS) first appeared in his 2001 work *Making Social Science Matter*. This built chiefly on the works of Foucault, Dreyfus, Nietzsche, Kuhn, and Aristotle, and the lines of argument he developed here have subsequently been reworked and extended for the fields of political science, organisational studies, and policy analysis, amongst others (e.g. Schram & Caterino, 2006; Flyvbjerg et al, 2012)<sup>11</sup>. At its core PSS is a response to what Flyvbjerg sees as traditional social science's failed attempts to become an epistemic science in the mould of the natural sciences, and to produce universal knowledge - or 'theory' in the conventional sense - regarding the social world (Flyvbjerg, 2008). This, Flyvbjerg argues, is both impossible and severely limits social science's ability to produce useful, progressive, knowledge. Flyvbjerg makes this argument in three, closely linked, parts;

- a. That social science often underplays the deep significance of hands-on, tacit, knowledge.
- b. That by its very nature theory and epistemology are not possible in the social sciences.
- c. Knowledge of society cannot be extracted from the context in which it is produced, as it is this which lends it meaning.

These arguments each build on fundamental philosophical debates and standpoints, many of which are not at all new to planning theory or geographical scholarship (*Making Social Science Matter* itself is now more than 15 years old). What is important about Flyvbjerg's argument is the *combination* of different philosophies which he draws upon. Unpacking the lines of reason described above enables us to more clearly situate Flyvbjerg's philosophy amongst these, to make clear their important consequences for the methodological programme he puts forwards and which I adopt, and to demonstrate how this methodology 'fits' the research topic at hand. As such, they are outlined below, with reference to these wider philosophical contexts.

#### *The significance of tacit knowledge to social interaction*

The first part of Flyvbjerg's argument is one made throughout the POR literature. Essentially, all knowledgeable social activities, including apparently rule-based and

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<sup>11</sup> It should however be noted that Flyvbjerg is far from the first scholar to incorporate an understanding of Aristotle's *phronesis* into their work, with the concept playing an important role in the philosophies of such thinkers as Hans Georg Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, and Alasdair MacIntyre (Flyvbjerg et al, 2012).

instrumental behaviour (such as the carrying out of a scientific experiment), are underpinned by an intuitive feel for context and situation at hand. And, as individuals become more 'expert' (i.e. move further along the learning process) in a particular field, they increasingly move beyond rule-based learning, and act according to this experiential and intuitive knowledge – not according to context-independent rules. In fact, the Dreyfus & Dreyfus (1988) model of learning upon which Flyvbjerg's assertion is based suggests that rules can actually obstruct the functioning of high-level skills. This applies to more or less complex social activities, from chess-playing, to medical care, riding a bicycle or day-to-day social interaction. The significance of this observation here is that it challenges the rationalist view of analysis and rationality as the most important modes of human operation and behaviour. In fact, these elements are only part of a more complex interaction with intuition. Challenges to the rationalist paradigm in this way has important consequences for the generation of knowledge in the academy, and the incite Flyvbjerg (2001: 24) to the grand claim that;

...this has caused people and entire scholarly disciplines, to become blind to context, experience, and intuition, even though these phenomena and ways of being are at least as important and necessary for good results as are analysis, rationality, and rules.

Though the boldness of this claim is challengeable, his core contention - that social science teaching and research has neglected the vital role of intuition in favour of rationality - has profound consequences for one's understanding of scientific research.

### *Theory and epistemology are not possible in the social sciences*

The natural sciences have certainly been successful in producing rule-based, scientific, knowledge. As Kuhn (1962) famously argued, this occurs in a relatively cumulative and stable manner during periods of 'normal science', punctuated with the paradigm shifts with which Kuhn's work has come to be associated. However, for the social sciences quite the opposite is true; they are neither cumulative nor relatively stable. They have been characterised by constant instability, with researchers changing approach in 'waves' without any true paradigm shift having occurred ('...not paradigm shifts but rather style changes are what characterise social science...' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p30)). The social sciences are constantly reorganising, simultaneously, and along myriad trajectories. But could not the social sciences be essentially 'pre-paradigmatic'? If it developed for long enough towards natural science methods, could it not eventually reach the same degree of stability and apparent progress? Or, might Thomas Kuhn (1962) (upon whose work Flyvbjerg chiefly draws here), Bruno Latour (1987)<sup>12</sup>, Michael Polanyi (Brownhill, 1987) and others'

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<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, scholars such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and other authors in the field of science and technology studies have subsequently developed Actor Network Theory (ANT). ANT (which also has

arguments that natural and social science are equally subjective suggest there is common ground from the other direction? For Flyvbjerg (2001, p32), the answer is emphatically ‘no’ – there has been no sign of a move towards predictive theory in the social sciences after 200 or-so years of attempts. The reason for this lack of ‘progress’, from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective is that whilst the natural sciences’ object of study is just that - an object - the social sciences’ object of study is also its subject; self-aware human beings. Social researchers ‘must therefore take account of changes in the interpretations of the object of study’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p32). This results in a situation in which:

...the study of society can only be as stable as the self-interpretations of the individuals studied. And inasmuch as these interpretations are not constant, the study of society cannot be stable either” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p33)

Critically, and to add another layer of complexity, researchers themselves cannot be extricated from this; research must be understood according to the self-interpretations of the researchers themselves. This is what Giddens (1984) classically termed the ‘double hermeneutic’. For Flyvbjerg, it suggests both that; a) researchers are as dependent on intuitive, tacit, or context-dependant and skills as their subjects, and; b) that what constitutes ‘facts’ in a given field depends upon the researcher’s relationship with their own contexts. And as we have established, these are always changing. This results in a dilemma – if researcher’s basic skills are essentially situational, “*how does one formalize the skills, which make formalization possible?*” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p34). The study of the social sciences is thus fundamentally unstable, and dependent upon its own context-specific, intuitive, learning – despite its pretensions to the development of rule-based learning.

### *Context and meaning in the social world*

The last of Flyvbjerg’s triad refers to the intrinsic importance of context in social life and meaningful interaction. As has been established, tacit skills are central to such social interaction, and tacit skills are entirely context-specific; individuals determine relevant actions and objects in social interactions in an open-ended manner, according to context

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roots in ethnomethodology) makes similar claims about the subjectivity of scientific method, but rather than claiming a fundamental difference between natural and social science in the way that Flyvbjerg does, ANT claims that the double hermeneutic essentially applies to *both* natural and social science; science is not fundamentally different from other social activities. This move is made by granting objects agency, just as humans have traditionally been granted agency. The methodological and epistemological outcomes of this perspective are actually remarkably similar to Flyvbjerg’s in that ANT rejects a priori theory as such, and is built around the in-depth description of network properties (see Crawford, 2005).

(and their interpretations) (Flyvbjerg, 2001). Context thus defines the type of phenomenon studied. The problem for researchers is that their definition of a relevant action may not accord to the pragmatic definition applied by their subjects. And, in attempting to theorise social exchanges, they necessarily have to erase the very context which renders it meaningful. Normal theory is impossible in the social sciences.

*Flyvbjerg's Response: phronesis, techné, episteme*

Flyvbjerg responds to this problem by deliberately (re)turning to the pre-rationalist era, and to the work of the classical philosopher Aristotle. More specifically, Flyvbjerg returns to the Chalkidician philosopher's concept of *phronesis* – the value of which is clear when compared with its sister concepts, *techné* and *episteme*. For Aristotle, these were the three types of wisdom, the three intellectual virtues, and each had specific roles:

1. *Episteme* is universal, scientific, knowledge as is clear from the term's etymological links with the word 'epistemology'. It is based on generic truths or laws. It can be described as 'know why' (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 56). Flyvbjerg argues that generating this type of knowledge has been the (doomed) intent of social science to date.
2. *Techné* refers to artistic, or technical knowledge. It refers to craft, and unlike episteme it is concrete and context-dependent as it is concerned with the application of technical knowledge according to a 'pragmatic instrumental rationality', governed by a conscious goal (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 56). Again, its influence on thinking since the rational turn are clear in its etymological lineage; *technical, technology, technique*.
3. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is a term without obvious parallel in English<sup>13</sup>. Aristotle actually ranks this as the most important of these intellectual virtues, and it concerns practical, context-dependant, value-driven, wisdom and action. Both *techné* and *phronesis* are concerned with skill and judgement, but *phronesis* is concerned with value, not just production. Flyvbjerg (2004: 289) argues that Aristotle therefore sees this as the most important of the virtues '...because it is that activity by which instrumental rationality is balanced by value-rationality.'

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<sup>13</sup> It's interesting to note that *phronesis* does have parallel in the modern Greek 'φρόνιμος', transliterated as 'phronimos', meaning 'prudent' or 'wise'. This is not something Flyvbjerg notes, stating; 'The original concept is not to be found in an analogous contemporary term; it has disappeared from modern language.' (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 287).

and by which techné and episteme are ethically discharged (Flyvbjerg, 2004). It depends to a great extent on experience.

*Phronetic* social science, therefore, is research which places the third type of knowledge – phronesis - at its core. It is focused on understanding and producing practical, context-specific, and value-orientated knowledge. In Flyvbjerg's words; 'The principal objective for planning research with a phronetic approach is to clarify values, interests, and power relations in planning as a basis for praxis.' (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 289). This is rather than a focus on producing the enlightenment ideal of epistemological, theorisable, knowledge. A focus on phronesis overcomes the hurdles previously described by focusing on practical, situation-specific and value-judgement-derived knowledge.

#### **2.2.4 The key features of a phronetic methodology**

##### *A problem-driven approach to research*

Flyvbjerg is careful to avoid prescribing, *a priori*, particular quantitative or qualitative (the division between which he calls 'spurious' (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 242)) methods - both of which are regarded as equally valid within phronetic research. This is done in the interest of promoting a problem-driven rather than method-driven approach, geared towards answering the 4 value-rational questions in the context of the issue at hand. In Flyvbjerg's (2004: 291) words; 'The method employed to provide such answers is of secondary importance, in the sense that the method will be decided by the specific research problems at hand.'

##### *Flyvbjerg's guidelines for phronetic research: Cases, narratives, and social knowledge*

So, what does a phronetic approach to research mean for my methodology? Flyvbjerg lays out a series of nine 'cautionary indicators' for researchers wishing to incorporate the concept of phronesis into their work (Flyvbjerg, 2001; 2004). I drew on these, applying them to my methodology in the form of seven closely-linked 'heuristics'. These guided my approach to research design, crystallised the final form of my aims and research questions, and shaped my overall approach to writing up. As such they are outlined below.

*Focusing on values:* As Flyvbjerg observes (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 291), focusing on values is nothing new to social science, following turn to post-positivism in the 1970s. What is particular about a phronetic focus on values is that it rejects both foundationalism and relativism in favour of contextualism (i.e. situational ethics). Norms are instead established based on the researcher's attitude to the situation at hand, using the context

of the study itself as a starting point (Flyvbjerg, 2004). In the words of Flyvbjerg, phronetic researchers;

...seek to ensure that such an attitude is not based on idiosyncratic morality or personal preferences, but on a common view among a specific reference group to which the planning researchers belong... ...the socially and historically conditioned context, and not the universal grounding that is desired by some scholars but not yet achieved, constitutes the most effective bulwark against relativism and nihilism... ...our sociality and history are the only foundations we have... ... [and] this foundation is fully adequate for our work as planning researchers. (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 291)

What this means for values concerning the *validity* of research is that phronetic researchers cannot claim ‘final, indisputable objectives’ for their claims. But equally, nor is it claimed that all interpretations of a phenomena are equal. Instead, validity is defined in quite a conventional way, as ‘well-grounded evidence and arguments’ (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p292). The techniques and measures for ensuring this validity are the same as elsewhere in the social sciences.

*Power should be central to analysis:* Noting that Aristotle neglected the importance of power in his own work, Flyvbjerg draws heavily on Nietzsche and Foucault’s dynamic and relational understandings of the concept. This results in six principles for considering power in phronetic research (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p293):

- a. Power is seen as productive and positive, not only as restrictive and negative.
- b. Power is relational and ‘ultra-dynamic’; it is not merely something one appropriates, it is also something one re-appropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth movement within the relationships of strength, tactics, and strategies inside of which one exists.
- c. Knowledge, truth and rationality are analytically inseparable from power.
- d. The central question is *how* power is exercised, and not merely *who* has power and *why* they have it; the focus is on process in addition to structure.
- e. Power is studied with a point of departure in small questions, ‘flat and empirical’, not only, nor even primarily, with a point of departure in ‘big questions’ (Foucault, 1982: 217). Careful analysis of the power dynamics of specific practices is a core concern.

Combining these principles with the four value-rational questions earlier discussed, the critical focus for the phronetic researchers becomes identifying and problematizing the ‘governmental rationalities’ which underpin and rationalise different governance practices in different scenarios. As Wagenaar (2011) adds, power isn’t imposed by an

external authority, but operates through the ‘internalised ideas, aspirations, norms, and standards’ that *are* practice.

*Get close to reality:* Flyvbjerg presents ‘getting close to reality’ as the phronetic researcher’s response to the dual challenges of confronting power (as it is understood above), and of ensuring relevance in research. In response to this second, ‘so what?’, question he suggests two different strategies. One’s choice depends on whether one’s research is contemporary or historical. For contemporary studies, researchers should be close to enough to the research subject throughout the research process (including data analysis, feedback and publication), so as to become part of the phenomena studied - but without ‘going native’ as one would with action research. This strategy opens up the research, creating outside interest and allowing outside parties to evaluate the work in various ways, either negatively or positively. This degree of exposure is likely to produce what Flyvbjerg (2004: 292) terms a ‘learning effect’ resulting in improved validity, without the risk of ‘adopting the perspective and goals of those studied and use research results in an effort to promote these goals’ (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 294), as well as immersion in local power relations, which both informs the researcher’s findings, and offers them the opportunity to influence that dialogue. For historical studies, Flyvbjerg proffers deep, in-depth, archival work geared towards exploring actual, everyday practice as a means of ensuring relevance. He turns to Michel Foucault (who in turn builds on Nietzsche) to support this case; ‘Wirkliche Historie (real history), says Foucault (1984: 89), ‘shortens its vision to those things nearest to it’ (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 294). In evoking Foucault, Flyvbjerg calls for a genealogical approach to writing history; one which emphasises materiality and contingency over the grand and perhaps metaphysical. The line of reasoning behind this becomes clearer when we return to Foucault’s original writing on the subject in greater length;

Effective (real) history... shortens its vision to those things nearest to it... If it chances upon lofty epochs, it is with suspicion – not vindictive but joyous – of finding a barbarous and shameful confusion... It looks from above and descends to seize the various perspectives, to disclose dispersions and differences, to leave things undisturbed in their own dimension and intensity... Historical sense has more in common with medicine than philosophy... Since among the philosopher’s idiosyncrasies is a complete denial of the body... it should become a differential knowledge [connaissance] of energies and failings, heights and degenerations, poisons and antidotes. Its task is to become a curative science” (Foucault, 1998: 80)

This thesis has historical and contemporary elements; though the planning reforms of the Coalition government are still unfolding in practice, and individuals who worked on them are still available for interview, they occurred between six and three years ago. Both of these methodological guidelines therefore prove pertinent to this study.

*'Emphasise the little things'*: Foucault's words above link neatly and closely to Flyvbjerg's next piece of guidance; to begin work by focusing on the apparently, trivial, mundane, the everyday, micro-practices. To ask 'little questions' about 'little things' (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 296). One then works 'up' towards the bigger questions at stake. Flyvbjerg, drawing on Clifford Geertz (1995) and his arguments for 'thick description, alongside Friedrich Nietzsche (1969), argues that not glossing over such details is vital because these are the basic concern of life itself, and doing so; *'...leaves us helpless in the face of the very difference we need to explore; it does indeed simplify matters'* (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 295).

*Techniques for looking at practice before discourse*: Unsurprisingly, Flyvbjerg (2004) echoes the practice-orientated generally in viewing actions and practices as more fundamental than discourse, text, or theory. What he does, do, however, is lay out an approach for assessing the significance, meaning, and inter-relationships between, different practices and their underlying rationalities. This rests on the well-established hermeneutic technique of playing off different 'horizons of meaning' against each other (Flyvbjerg, 2004), and the phenomenological process of 'bracketing' (see Safranski, 1998; Throop & Murphy, 2002; Husserl, 1931).

*Joining agency and structure*: As previously noted, one of the rationalist dichotomies which POR collapses via its emphasis on tacit knowledge is that of structure and agency. This has been challenged, for example, through Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'habitus' (which explicitly drew on Aristotelian philosophy), and Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. For Flyvbjerg (2001), then, the challenge for social researchers is how to balance the roles of structure and agency in their accounts of the phenomena they study. Flyvbjerg admits that this is no mean feat, but suggests that once phronetic researchers *'...deliberately seek out information for answering questions about what structural factors influence individual actions, how those actions are constructed, and their structural consequences'* (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 138) balancing structure and agency becomes more a question of style than epistemology.

*Cases and the 'primacy of context'*: As has been established, practical rationality and phronetic reasoning are fundamentally context-dependant. This is true both in that the development of true expertise relies on proximity to concrete cases, and that, more broadly, knowledge of the social simply cannot be divorced from its context. It is context this which makes it meaningful. Essentially, there is *only* context-dependent social knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2006). This makes case-studies, which are defined by their focus on the relationships between contextual conditions and the phenomena of study (Yin, 1993), uniquely well-suited to producing and investigating practical knowledge. The assertion that all social knowledge is context-dependent does not mean that generalisation is impossible in single, in-depth, case-studies. Generalisation is possible

via falsification and the strategic selection of *critical* cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In other words; the selection of a case in which if a particular proposition is not valid, it is unlikely to be valid in many other cases. This has important consequences for this thesis' interest assessing the usefulness of the concept of 'actually existing neoliberalism' for explaining changing English national-level planning policy; if neoliberalism and post-politics poorly explain the practical rationalities which shaped the developed of OSP and the NPPF – by all accounts a critical case of the neoliberalisation of spatial governance (see the literature review) - then it is unlikely to be a useful explanatory tool in other settings.

*'The irreducible quality of good case narratives'*: The final heuristic I drew from Flyvbjerg's work had perhaps the greatest influence on research design, and concerns the analytical and discursive treatment of case-studies. For this he espouses a narrative approach – one which focuses on *how* cases unfold in a particular way - as well as *why*. These narrative descriptions do not start from theoretical assumptions. Rather, they develop descriptions and interpretations of phenomena from a range of perspectives (including the researcher's own) (Flyvbjerg, 2001). In doing so they should intend to capture the 'thickness' and ambiguity of the case, avoiding 'closed' summarisations of key results in favour of an 'open' approach that allows complexities and the conflicting stories actors have told the researcher to shine through. (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Flyvbjerg (2006, p238) concludes;

Case stories written like this can neither be briefly recounted nor summarized in a few main results. The case story is itself the result. It is a "virtual reality," so to speak. For the reader willing to enter this reality and explore it inside and out, the payback is meant to be a sensitivity to the issues at hand that cannot be obtained from theory.

## 2.3 Final case study selection, summary, and final aim and research questions

### 2.3.1 Cases: Open Source Planning and the National Planning Policy Framework

*From wide and shallow...*

Having established in chapter 2 that a case study-based approach focusing on planning reform(s) during the Coalition era would be suitable, and that a phronetic methodology relies on the 'irreducible quality of good case narratives' as a key way of investigating

practice (Flyvbjerg, 2001), it was clear that a case-study based methodology was suitable for my enquiry. Broadly, I had two options; to either analyse the ways in which different practices/strategies/rationalities for ‘doing’ national-level planning reform shaped one specific episode of planning reform in a ‘deep and narrow’ way, or to analyse a series in a ‘shallow and broad’ way. Initially, it was the latter option that appealed. It provided a greater sense of direction in terms of the changes unfurling in the way national planning reform is done, and more of the kind of contextual data that helps one identify pertinent information, patterns, and the ‘critical uniqueness’ of the case at hand (Stake, 1995). This was rather than the more limited ‘snapshot’ a single case might provide. I also deemed relying on a single case to be rather risky; should I not be granted research access, or find individuals reluctant to be interviewed about the specific topics, the entire thesis could have been derailed. I therefore set about collecting data relating to the practices involved in/across each of the key planning reform ‘episodes’ during the Coalition government. These were:

- a. The run up to the 2010 General Election and the Conservative Party’s production of OSP
- b. The passage of the Localism Act 2011 through parliament and the design of its elements relating to planning reform
- c. The development of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2011-2012)
- d. The National Planning Practice Guidance Review (2012-2013)

I ‘studied through’ the networks of practices constituting each of these ‘critical cases’ in order to get a sense of policymaking practices across the period, how and why these were changing over time, how they were linked to each other in a relational sense, and how they were linked to outcome of the Government’s planning reforms as a whole programme. This approach also broadened the body of literature which I could draw on and contribute to. This approach, therefore, had the attributes of both an ‘intrinsic’ and an ‘instrumental-collective’ approach to case study research, as defined by Stake (1995). It was intrinsic in that I wanted to understand more about each of the cases themselves, but from the perspective of the central state policymaking practices which comprised them. It was instrumental-collective in as far as I was studying planning reforms during the Coalition as a way of learning more about the ways in which central state policymaking practices shape planning policy.

Perhaps with the exception of the Localism Act, none of these policy episodes had been subject in-depth academic analysis. Indeed, the Guidance Review has been almost entirely ignored by planning and geography scholars – despite the fact that at the time it was a ministerial priority and introduced some extremely important changes to the way that planning is ‘done’ in England. As individual episodes these choices also had the advantage

of covering, respectively, the development of manifesto ideas, planning law, national planning policy, and national planning guidance; differences in the reform of each could be considered, and each of these reforms were always intended by the Coalition to be constituent parts of an overall ‘full-system’ reform of the English planning system.

*...to deep and narrow*

However, the concerns I had about research access never came to pass, and when I began writing up my findings for the episodes concerning the NPPF it became apparent that if I wanted to explore the case in all its richness and complexity, as the phronetic methodology implored, I would have to focus on only one or two cases. Maintaining the intrinsic-instrumental-collective approach (Stake, 1995), I therefore decided to switch to the focus of my analysis to the NPPF, and within this overall case study, OSP (the creation of which interviews suggested was vital to understanding the later development of the NPPF) exclusively. As the introduction to this thesis outlined in depth, the creation of the NPPF (including the creation of OSP) is a valuable case study in itself, for several reasons:

- a. It marked the introduction of a key reform in the history of English planning, and policy which continues to be in place under the current Conservative government.
- b. It sparked national debate/controversy about the role of the planning system in society.
- c. Studying the development of OSP (the green paper which first put forward formal proposals for a national policy framework) alongside the NPPF would provide insights into how planning policy *ideas* were generated in opposition, and then how the processes of policy making and negotiation in government and in practice then shaped their final form - this a process which has received little scholarly attention from planning and spatial governance so far.
- d. The NPPF and OSP are widely cited as archetypical examples of neoliberalising or post-political reform (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015; Allmendinger, 2016; Raco, 2014), but there are very few (if any) in-depth studies of their creation and the policy making rationalities which underpinned them in practice

Fundamentally, however, I simply found the story of the NPPF’s development from ideas presented in OSP to be *interesting*. The creation of the NPPF is somewhat infamous in the (admittedly small) UK planning research and practitioner communities as a period of national political drama in a policy sphere often characterised as ‘dry as dust’ or ‘boring’ by outside observers (Boddington, 2012; Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014). As the introduction discussed, a popular narrative has emerged about these events in both communities, but the data I collected contradicted many of its core elements in curious ways. My choice of cases might therefore be best described as guided by a kind of ‘disciplined curiosity’ (Graziano & Raulin, 2004: 4), or what George Orwell (1947 [2004])

calls the writer's historical impulse - the 'desire to see things as they are, to find out true facts and then store them up for the use of posterity.' This impulse is in part reflected in Objective 1 which concerns contributing to a more in-depth historical understanding of these events.

The data I collected concerning the other episodes (the Localism Act 2011 and NPPG) remained extremely valuable. It provided the context and 'sense of direction' which I had been so concerned about establishing previously. It was also of a good quality, and could contribute to future publications. This is particularly the case with regards to the National Planning Practice Guidance Review.

### 2.3.2 Summary, and final aim and research questions

In this chapter I have described the evolution and logic of my research question and aims, methodological conceptual framework, and cases, and how they evolved my experience of working in DCLG several years ago. As part of this story I have also tentatively sketched out links with key bodies of literature, and how they influenced the research questions and their framing. These literatures form the basis for the following literature review. The final research question and objectives are outlined below, in Figure 8 and before moving on to the literature review, it's worth briefly and finally summarising the intentions and terminology behind each.

**Figure 8: Evolution of the Research Question and Objectives 4/4**

**Overall research question:**

How did different practices, strategies, and rationalities of 'getting policy done' in the UK central state shape the development of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from ideas initially presented in the green paper Open Source Planning, and what do they suggest about future trajectories in English spatial governance reform?

**Objectives**

5. **To produce a historiographic account of key events in the production of the NPPF:** Contribute to the existing literature on the NPPF but developing a practice-focused, fine-grained, and multi-level historiographic account of its development as a key episode in the history of English planning reform.
6. **To produce a case study of policy making practices in the central state:** Carry out a critical case narrative-based analysis of the policymaking practices, strategies, and rationalities that underpinned the development of the NPPF.
7. **Perform a critical analysis:** Assess how useful the concept of post-politics is for understanding the political rationalities which shaped the Coalition government's approach to creating the NPPF, and explore what the case narrative suggests about trajectories neoliberalising planning reform in England.
8. **Identify opportunities for conceptual synthesis:** Identify, based on the empirical analysis, opportunities for synthesis between the CSGP literatures and other bodies of research which may be valuable for interpreting the consequences of the changing central state for planning reform in England.

*Objective 1: To produce a historiographic account of the production of the NPPF*

This objective ensures that the thesis produces a historical account of the development of the NPPF which is of broad interest to planners, historians, and geographers with various research interests. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2017) dictionary defines historiography as:

The writing of history; especially: the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods.

The historian Lawrence Stone famously focused on this *narrative* element of the historiographic approach to writing history as being its defining one. For Stone (1979: 3):

Narrative is taken to mean the organization of material in a chronologically sequential order and the focusing of the content into a single coherent story, albeit with sub-plots. The two essential ways in which narrative history differs from structural history is that its arrangement is descriptive rather than analytical and that its central focus is on man not circumstances. It therefore deals with the particular and specific rather than the collective and statistical...

This fits well with a phronetic approach to research, and in using this term I allude to the fact that such a robust, fine-grained, account of OSP and the NPPF does not yet exist. This objective ensured that I built such an account, and that I reflected critically upon and developed the received understandings of these events. As such, the account I outline will hopefully be valuable in itself for scholars interesting in English planning reform. The second element of objective 1 worth highlighting is its reference to helping develop a 'multi-level' historical account. In using this term, I allude to arguments for the value of multi-level analyses for capturing contemporary governance processes and forms (Evans & Davies, 1999; Rose 1997). This being said, I do not intend to put forward a multi-level analysis of the development of OSP and the NPPF here, but to contribute a national-level/central state perspective to those which currently exist, and may aid its construction across the literature.

*Objective 2: To produce a case study of policy making practices in the central state*

This objective links to the POR and phronetic conceptual framework I deploy which, as I previously described, treats agents' practices as the 'building blocks' of social enquiry (Wagenaar & Cook 2003). By 'strategies' I refer to the sets of practices purposefully deployed by agents in the pursuit of particular (political) goals. By 'rationalities' I refer to the - very often post-hoc - logics and reasons individuals involved in the production of the NPPF (and OSP) put forward for acting in particular ways. Flyvbjerg (2004) uses the term 'practical rationalities' to emphasise the pragmatic focus of this understanding.

*Objective 3: Perform a critical analysis*

This objective ensures that my analysis assesses how well the conceptual frameworks provided by post-politics accounts for the rationalities underpinning the practices and strategies explored in response to objective 2. In other words, whereas objective 2 asks; ‘what were the rationalities that drove the Coalition’s approach to the development of the NPPF?’, objective 3 asks; ‘...and can these be described as post-political?’. This feeds into key debates about the utility of this analytical framework for explaining and/or describing trends in English spatial governance, as I discuss in-depth in the following literature review. It also ensures that the thesis possesses a critical edge.

*Objective 4: Identifying opportunities for conceptual synthesis*

I added this objective to the thesis late on, during analysis, as it became apparent that engaging with a wide range of literature concerned with the UK central state - notably the core executive studies and British politics science literatures (the relevance of which I discuss in the final section of the literature review) - presented the opportunity to synthesise concepts which may be of value to future enquiry into trends in English spatial governance. The wording of the objective refers to identifying relevant concepts in other bodies of literature through the empirical analysis (as opposed to the literature review). This is a purposeful move to ensure that this conceptual synthesis is inductive and grounded in observations of practice, rather than abstract theorising or existing literature. As such it forms the final plank of the phronetic methodology.

# 3. Literature review

## 3.1 Introduction

In the previous section I briefly linked the evolution of the thesis' research question and objectives to two bodies of spatial governance and planning literature; a) that concerning neoliberalism and neoliberalisation, and b) that which concerns post-politics (follows I refer to these together as the 'critical spatial governance literatures'). In what follows I more firmly draw on and situate my research within these two literatures, and outline the 'work' each performs for the thesis in its efforts to develop a rich understanding of the Coalition's planning reforms, and the policy making practices, rationalities, and strategies which shaped the NPPF and OSP.

The chapter begins with a review of the critical spatial governance and planning (CSGP) literature on neoliberalisation. This provides a critical framework for interpreting long-term trajectories in pro-market planning reform and spatial governance in England, particularly with regards to its path-dependencies. As such, it provides important historical context for the Coalition's planning reforms and the development of the NPPF. In this section I also discuss the key critiques of the neoliberalism literature, and explore the concepts of variegated and *actually existing* neoliberalism (AEN) in response.

The next section then reviews the planning and spatial governance literature concerning post-politics. This builds on the above body of work to provide a critical framework for thinking through the democratic consequences of recent waves of pro-market English planning reform, and explaining the specific political strategies or system-wide logics which have shaped them. Of more specific concern to this thesis, post-politics is also useful for explaining the contradictions in the neoliberalisation of spatial governance, and *differences* (rather than path-dependencies) between subsequent governments' planning policy regimes. This is in terms of their shifting depoliticising strategies. It can therefore be applied to explain key changes in national-level planning policy between New Labour and the Coalition. This includes the rationalities and strategies of government agents involved in the production of the NPPF, as well as those of the national campaigns which arose in response.

There are, however, important limits to the post-politics literature, and these in many ways reflect or build upon the critiques of the neoliberalism literature which prompted the shift towards *actually existing* conceptualisations of that phenomena (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). Primarily, these critics argue that when one deploys ethnographic or a

more broadly *practice-orientated* analyses of changing spatial governance (which, for example, consider actual ‘backroom decisions’ (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a) and ‘communities of practice’ (Larner, 2014), it becomes apparent that the analytical categories and mode of enquiry espoused by post-politics are limited. At best, they fail to capture the full complexity and heterogeneity of urban politics, and at worst, they actually erase opportunities for political change. Some of the leading CSGP scholars on post-politics recently sought to contest these charges in a debate in the journal *Urban Studies*, and I respond to their claims as a means of concluding this part of the literature review, as well as setting the stage for my engagement with this literature in the analysis.

The final section of the literature review looks more specifically at the treatment of the central state in the CSGP literatures to-date and why, from a practice-orientated perspective, it remains ‘*spectral*’ within this body of work. I also address the consequences of the critiques of neoliberalism and post-politics discussed above for the approach I take to my own analysis of the NPPF. Two are particularly significant. Firstly, I ‘eject’ both neoliberalism and post-politics (and their vocabularies) from my analysis and case narrative, to ‘bring it back in’ during the discussion. In doing so I follow the phronetic principle of letting the richness of the case narratives ‘speak for themselves’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and avoid theorisations which detach social phenomena from the context which makes them meaningful (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Taking this approach means that I test how well - rather than the ways in which - post-politics account for the actual strategies/rationalities/practices which shaped the NPPF and OSP’s production. Secondly, it is apparent that both sets of critiques point, in various ways, to the previously identified lack of CSGP research which links practices and strategies of ‘doing’ policy in the UK central state to wider trends/episodes in spatial governance. This is the highest-level gap in the literature to which this thesis responds, and here I highlight relevant research from other disciplines, which I return to in the analysis as a way of conceptualising the governance processes identified.

## 3.2 Neoliberalism and the recent history of planning reform in England

### 3.2.1 Defining and characterising neoliberalism

#### *Neoliberalism's definitional complexity*

For better or worse, the concept of 'neoliberalism' has come to dominate and heavily structure debate within the CSGP literatures since the early 2000s (Pinson & Journal, 2016). Indeed, much of the debate around the concept's value stems from this ubiquity - countless authors offer their own definitions and criteria for identifying neoliberalism, often with subtle variations in emphasis reflecting the subject at hand, and regularly including a variety of quite variable criteria within the same pieces of work (Castree, 2006). To a great extent, these definitional differences and overlaps relate to the school of thought the author belongs to, and how they then characterise and evaluate the overall nature and effects of neoliberalism accordingly. Pinson & Journal (2016: 137) identify five such schools:

1. 'Historians of ideas' who represent neoliberalism as a fluid movement of ideas.
2. 'Anthropologists and sociologists inspired by Bourdieu's early ideas', who conceive of neoliberalism as a political project rather than an economic one. Wacquant's (2013) perspective, discussed below, would be typical of this group.
3. 'Scholars inspired by the seminal writings of Foucault', who conceptualise neoliberalism as a new governmentality, and focus on unpacking its associated rationalities.
4. 'Structuralist, neo-Marxian and class-based' approaches, which define neoliberalism as 'a political project to re-establish the conditions for capitalist accumulation...' (Harvey, 2005: 19).
5. 'Radical or critical geographers' influenced by the regulation school, who Pinson & Journal (2016) claim have 'done the most to systematically analyse the relations between neoliberalisation processes and urban setting'.

Despite this, at its core neoliberalism is usually defined across these perspectives by a fundamental belief that more;

...open, competitive, and unregulated markets, liberated from the state interference and the actions of social collectives, represent the optimal mechanism for socioeconomic development.” (Peck et al, 2009: 50)<sup>14</sup>.

It is useful to add a more explicitly political element to economically-focused definition. Refining his definition to its very essentials, Wacquant (2013: 71) and elegantly describes neoliberalism as; ‘...an articulation of state, market, and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third.’ Overall, however, the term ‘neoliberalisation’, is generally used within the CSGP literatures to describe the ongoing global reconfiguration of planning systems as a function of the state (and alongside a variety of other regulatory activities) in line with a belief in the market provides the best means by which to distribute resources. This is generally manifests itself as a transition from collectively-binding modes of governance built on direct service provision, distributive policies, and Keynesian ‘welfarism’ (Brenner et al, 2010; Ruming, 2005), to ‘marketized’ forms of social life that are primarily geared towards ‘pursuing economic promotion and competition’ (Brenner et al, 2010; Swyngedouw et al, 2002). ‘Once overtly regulatory public activities’ are subject to legislative relaxation and reformed in line with what are regarded as the logics of the market (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014: 346). In planning, this typically occurs through the deregulation and the loosening of planning controls and development rights, and a more prominent role for private actors in both service provision and policy making (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014).

#### *Neoliberalisation versus neoliberalism*

In reality, the situation is rather messier than this. Indeed, the distinction between the terms neoliberalism and neoliberalisation is important beyond semantics; neoliberalism as an ideology driving policy choices, and neoliberalisation - seen as the former’s material actions and effects upon social systems - rarely actually align (Peck et al, 2009; Brenner & Theodore, 2002), and the institutional reconfigurations associated with neoliberalisation rarely conform to a simple model of liberalisation and marketization (Collier, 2005). This is not only because neoliberalism proper rests on a core set of relatively abstract and utopian pillars (completely free markets, market equilibrium, etc) which are impossible to realise in them messiness of reality (Peck, 2010), but because it is always in a constant state of ‘becoming’. There is no endpoint at which as system could be described as full neoliberalized. Similarly, the spatial effects of neoliberalisation appear limitlessly variable both spatially and temporally, as a result of the unique pre-existing

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<sup>14</sup> Usually seen to stem from the Hayekian belief that it is impossible for the state, with its limited awareness and apparatus, to effectively predict the outcomes of its own socioeconomic interventions, in contrast to the ability of the collective logic of the markets (Harvey, 2006).

contexts of different cases and places (Peck et al, 2009). Just as neoliberalisation seems hard to pin down in terms of its defining spatial, social and regulatory impacts, neoliberalism seems equally eel-like in terms of identifying its ideological components. The English planning system is a good example of this; it has always been market-supportive to varying extents (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013), but it would be folly to say on the basis of this that planning in the UK has *always* been guided by neoliberal beliefs. The picture must be much more fine-grained.

These issues, and the apparent paradoxes between neoliberalism being everything, nothing and defined by its own inconsistency at the same time, have led some authors to argue that the concept should be abandoned all together, perhaps in favour of neoliberalisation and the term's implied emphasis on process, continuous transformation, flux, and its productive capacities (Castree, 2006; Gamble, 2009). In a similar vein, many authors also argue for an understanding of 'neoliberalisations'<sup>15</sup> (a similar notion to that of 'plannings' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013), *varieties* of capitalism (Peck & Theodore, 2007), and globalisations (Larner, 2003), as better representative of the processes' inherently variable spatial, social and regulatory consequences - as well as the fact that neoliberalisation actually comprises an extremely variable range of overlapping processes occurring across different spaces and scales (Larner, 2003; McGuirk, 2005). Allmendinger & Haughton (2003: 9) sum of these critiques neatly in the following terms:

The broad tenets of neoliberalism, its variegation and mediation may lead some to conclude that neoliberal theorists and those understanding policy change within a neoliberal framework want to have their cake and eat it: If there is a market-based policy change then it can be labelled 'neoliberal', similarly, if there is a 'u' turn in policy that involves more dirigiste, seemingly anti-market state forms then these too can be argued to fall within the ambit of neoliberalism.

Indeed, Brenner et al (2010a: 328) paint neoliberalism as something of a 'rascal concept'; it seems that if neoliberalism remains a clearly defined and internally coherent ideology it is rendered archetypical - i.e. '...something unreal that has no consequence or existence in itself.' (Castree, 2006: 4) - but if its amorphousness and variability are emphasised, the concept's identity as a coherent conceptual object begins to dissolve. As the range of definitions and schools of thought hint, this complexity has led to a proliferation of (often subtly) different epistemological, methodological and substantive positions towards neoliberalism, neoliberalisation, and their plurals (Brenner et al, 2010a), which sit

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<sup>15</sup> This 'turn' reflects similar changes and conceptual issues which beset globalisation studies after feminist and neomarxist scholars demonstrated its simultaneously globalising, localising and generally heterodox spatial effects, leading to a switch from 'globalisation' to 'globalisations' (see Larner, 2003)

uneasily alongside 'broad-brush' accounts, and often fall between the five schools of thought Pinson and Journal (2016) identify. The end result is a body of work in which '... imprecision, confusion, and controversy' have long been rife (Brenner, et al, 2010a: 328). This is a conundrum first hinted at by Peck (2001) more than a decade and a half ago, and a state of affairs which remains a focus of critical attention today (Le Gales, 2016; Storper, 2016).

In the following sections a concept of neoliberalism is expressed that offers a potential way through this conceptual quagmire, and which also provides a platform for interpreting the long-term trajectories in English planning reform to which the NPPF belongs.

### **3.2.2 Variegated and Actually Existing Neoliberalisation as a heuristic for interpreting trajectories in English planning reform**

#### *Systematic Variegation in the English context*

Allmendinger & Haughton (2013) provide a response to the 'cake and eat it' critique recited above. Their response comprises two elements, which relate the chronology of system change on one hand, and to the ongoing search for the perfect 'institutional fix' in pursuit of the free market on the other.

The first of these relates to the timescale over which the changes being theorised occur. Though the English planning system has variably seen periods of intense anti-planning rhetoric and deregulation, and periods in which it has taken a wider social and environmental role (including objectives which may seem 'anti-market'), its overall direction of travel has been towards '...facilitating growth in ways that maintain the legitimacy of planning.' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013: 3). Indeed, the 'logic' of neoliberalism may be more clearly projected during periods of outright attack, but it by no means ceases to operate during these other 'progressive' periods. Rather, in one respect these periods can be seen as neoliberalism 'rolling with the punches' over the short term, in order to maintain mainstream legitimacy over the longer-term project of state restructuring. These are characterised by Peck (2010) as 'setbacks'. In another respect, Allmendinger and Haughton (2013) critique the role of planning itself, to point out that neoliberalism is never anti-planning as such. Rather, planning plays an important market-supportive role within its framework. What neoliberalism does during these periods is reconfigure (or 'capture') planning and re-orientate it towards its own pro-growth goals, away from goals of socialisation. Planning's continuous needs to prove its legitimacy and demonstrate 'fit' as a tool to policymakers drives this process on (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013). This is typical of the periods of 'roll-out' neoliberalism

described by Peck & Tickell (2002), and in clearly present the following historical overview of English planning reform presented below.

Allmendinger and Haughton's (2013) second point relates to the fact that planning systems *generally* undergo constant regulatory and structural change in the pursuit of the 'ideal' configuration with which to achieve the changing and contradictory objectives of the state - *neoliberal or otherwise*. This constant reconfiguration is driven in each instance by dissatisfaction with, and learning from, existing structures and processes. Significantly, it also drives differentiation at local levels; the 'creative gaps' between paradigms and policies (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013: 19), and liminal spaces generated by contradictory messages from the national level, lead to opportunities for local actors to search for their own policy fixes in line with 'deeper' paradigms or discourses, such as neoliberalism. This process is intensified in the English case by the regime's capacity for professional discretion, in conjunction with a degree of local discretion.

The result of Allmendinger & Haughton's (2013) observations, however, is that lead the two authors to the conclusion that whilst 'it would be reductionist and foolish to claim that all change in planning can be explained by a broad, abstract framework' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013: 10), neoliberalism remains a meaningful concept, particularly as a heuristic and analytical tool for understanding the longer-term drivers and context shaping the relationships between the philosophies, paradigms and policies driving change in a given period of time (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013). Indeed, they add:

Any periodization of neoliberal strategies will always amount to a heuristic given the multiple threads of evolving and overlapping policy, time lags, and the need to generalise across space and scale (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013: 13).

Of course, as well as pointing to neoliberalism's value as a heuristic, this conclusion also points to the dangers posed by 'bulldozer' conceptualisations of neoliberalism as a universal and totalising force (Larner, 2003: 509). Rather, it is varied spatially and historically and as such should be thought of as *variegated* neoliberalism, in the words of Brenner et al (2010b). To be more precise, what Allmendinger & Haughton's (2013) arguments point to the fact that it is *systematically* variegated (Brenner et al, 2010b). This is a critical point, which Brenner et al (2010b: 330) summarise it thusly:

...neoliberalisation [is a] variegated form of regulatory restructuring: it produces geo-institutional differentiation across places, territories, and scales; but it does this *systematically*, as a pervasive, endemic feature of its basic *operational logics*. (emphasis added)

### *'Actually existing' neoliberalism*

Another, similar, conceptual innovation which emerged in the CSGP literature in response to these critiques, initially via Brenner and Theodore's work (2002), was 'actually existing' neoliberalism (AEN). In the words of Ruming (2009: 83):

It was the recognition of these spatial and temporal contingencies which prompted Brenner and Theodore (2002) to call for the study of 'actually existing neoliberalisms', the empirical study of neoliberal tendencies imposed upon specific path-dependent and contextually constructed places, cities and regions.

This perspective is similar to that of variegated neoliberalism, but it places special emphasis on the study of neoliberalisation as it occurs on the ground, in equal combination with other phenomena, and in *practice*. Part of the reason for this focus on practice is AEN's origin as an early backlash against overly structural 'bulldozer' (see Larner, 2003, p509), or 'tsunami' (see Ong, 2007, 4), conceptualisations of a totalising global neoliberal 'project' (Brenner et al, 2010; Olesen, 2014; Peck et al, 2009; Larner, 2003 p509; Ruming, 2005), which leave little room for agency, and treat neoliberalism as an overarching 'big Leviathan' against/within which other social phenomena occur and are assessed (Larner, 2014; Collier, 2012). Overall AEN, as its name suggests, therefore points to the messiness of neoliberalisation, and how the (ostensibly) pro-market restructuring of regulatory systems *actually* occurs on the ground. It also has an important

### *Tracing path dependency and crisis in actually existing neoliberalism*

Crucially for this thesis, as well providing a response to 'cake and eat it' critique, AEN and Allmendinger & Haughton's (2013) systematically-variegated conceptualisation of neoliberalism points to the value of the concept for critically interpreting the concrete impacts and longer-term trajectories of planning reform. The key, *systematically variegated* pattern here is produced by continuous pressure for neoliberalising planning reform (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014) in pursuit of the perfect market-supportive 'fix' for the planning system (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013). When these neoliberal fixes invariably fail, path dependency (a product of neoliberalism's internal logics) means that further, though varied, rounds of neoliberalisation are presented as the answer, for both practical and ideological reasons. I outline structuring forces and the logics driving this pendulum effect below, before deploying them heuristic tools to interpret the recent history of planning reform in England, and how this shapes the Coalition Government's own reform programme.

As part of an effort to 'depoliticise' and de-risk policy states often 'spin off' regulatory functions to a commixture of technical agencies, meta-regulatory frameworks, and

routinized conventions which tie themselves into neoliberal approaches (Peck et al, 2009). These are often para or supra-state (Peck & Tickell, 2002)<sup>16</sup> and serve to ‘fix the rules of the game’, removing the state’s ‘room to manoeuvre’ at various levels and in various ways (Boyer & Hollingsworth, 1997, cited in Peck & Theodore, 2007). Further practical constraints arise from neoliberalism’s emphasis on the reducing the size and capacity of the state and other collectives through downsizing, privatisation, and cuts (Peck, 2001), as well as the deployment of particular technologies (e.g. new financial instruments, or quantitative methods of impact assessment) (Bourdieu, 1998). This leads states towards the ‘denigration of their own capacities’ to act in ways which are not dependent upon the market (Peck, 2001; Bourdieu, 1998), locking themselves into the process procedurally. Seemingly immutable laws appear even more immutable, being embedded in a vast array of governance practices and prevailing institutional norms. This is not to say that states become less powerful or smaller (i.e. increasingly ‘hollowed out’), rather, they reorganise the way through which they govern, towards an increasing reliance on intervention through the market. Such procedural and practical path-dependencies are buttressed by neoliberalism’s status as a ‘strong discourse’ (in Bourdieu’s (1998) terms); further, more aggressive, rounds of neoliberalisation are seen by policymakers as being the only viable response to repeated neoliberal policy failure – the blame for which is placed on unsuitable regulation by an overbearing state, or ‘atmospheric’ economic conditions which need to be appeased. When these subsequent rounds of neoliberalisation also fail (often because of the very fact that neoliberalism’s ‘immutable laws’ and universal cures fail to translate into specific contexts), they are yet again treated with the same tonic, which again increases the likelihood of policy failure and another round of neoliberalisation (Peck et al, 2009). To paraphrase Peck (2010: 17), neoliberalisation ‘fails forwards’.

### **3.2.3 Using neoliberalism as a heuristic to understand change in England; an extremely brief history of planning ‘under attack’**

With these dynamics in mind, actually existing neoliberalisation can be usefully deployed as a way of identifying path-dependencies, points of transformation, and underlying rationalities which drive particular waves of reform to produce particular trajectories in English planning and spatial governance. Doing so up to the point of the Coalition

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<sup>16</sup> These also operate across traditional scales and levels of spatial governance and are therefore harder to hold directly accountable (Peck & Tickell, 2002).

Government's planning reforms thus provides critical context for the creation of the NPPF and OSP.

Particularly authoritative accounts of the neoliberalisation of planning in England since the Thatcher-era are put forwards by Lord and Tewdwr-Jones (2014), who chronicle the various attacks on the English planning system since the 1980s, and Allmendinger and Haughton (2013) who focus on the scalar reconfigurations brought about by waves of neoliberalism, and provide the spine of the following brief account, which provides context for understanding the Coalition's following reforms (see Figures 9 and 10, below, for a brief summaries of key reforms over this period).

**Figure 9: Key Planning Reforms and their Means and Ends 1979-1997.**

Period	Approach	Means (in order)	Ends	Examples of change
1979-1988/89	'Project-led': reduce strategic role of planning and make decisions on their merits  Development led	1. Market-orientation  2. Rule of law  3. Centralisation	Deregulation of controls (release pent-up demands through targeting supply side constraints)  Make system more 'transparent' by reducing local planning authorities discretion  Do not alienate conservation-minded voters	UDCs EZs SPZs Circular 22/80 'Lifting the Burden'
1988/89-1997	'Plan-led' Reintroduce a (modified) element of strategic role for planning that takes strong central guidance into account  (Illusion of) locally led planning to reduce responsibility of Secretary of State	4. Centralisation  5. Rule of law  6. Market orientation	Control planning through strengthened central mechanisms  (Grudgingly) introduce environmental concerns and design criteria	Elevation of importance of development plans Revised PPG series Rio commitments Section 54A <i>Our Common Inheritance</i>

Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones (2000)

### *The collapse of the post-war consensus and the rise neoliberalism*

The basis of the modern English planning system came into existence with the passage of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. Forged as a key part of the Beveridgean welfare

state, the act established the modern concept of planning permission, nationalised the right to develop land, and gave local authorities powers of Compulsory Purchase (Roze, 2014; Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011). However, in the following years the post-war social contract became exhausted, and faith in the highly rationalist, state- and expert-led post-war planning system was mortally wounded for a range of reasons (see Adams Tiesdell, 2013). It eventually collapsed under the weight of critique from both the left and the right of the political spectrum (Allmendinger, 2017). A global economic crisis ended the post-war boom in the early 1970s, and by the late 1970s ‘proto-neoliberal’ ideas and experiments began to diffuse through the planning system in England, seriously challenging the post-war consensus (Peck & Tickell, 2002). With this began an era of instability and uncertainty concerning the role of the English planning system, and the first neoliberal decade.

**Figure 10: Key Periods of Planning Policy and Reform 1979-2013**

<b>Period</b>	<b>Key Features</b>
<b>Late 1970s - early 1990s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand focused planning system</li> <li>• Introduction of enterprise zones</li> <li>• Simplified planning zones</li> <li>• Emphasis on speed of planning permits</li> <li>• Monitored using targets</li> </ul>
<b>Early to late 1990s</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction of ‘plan-lead, pro-active’ planning with central government policy guidance and emphasis on plans for consistency and certainty.</li> <li>• Introduction of S106 enabling ‘planning gain’ to be used for community purposes including affordable housing.</li> </ul>
<b>2000 to 2005</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued emphasis on speed and certainty and top-down housing targets</li> <li>• Treasury concern about the economic consequences of planning and infrastructure constraints</li> </ul>
<b>2006 to 2010</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasis on regional and sub-regional planning, particularly for housing delivery</li> <li>• Continued emphasis on streamlining planning system, especially with respect to infrastructure (through Planning Act 2008)</li> </ul>
<b>2010 -</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Localism Act 2011 introduces ‘pro-market localism’ with rhetoric on local level variations in policies and approaches and introduction of neighbourhood plans</li> <li>• National Planning Policy Framework 2012 introduces ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’.</li> <li>• Abolition of regional spatial strategies.</li> <li>• Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013: Introduction of local incentives through New Homes Bonus and the allocation of business rates.</li> </ul>

**Adapted from Gurran et al (2015)**

A wave of deregulation followed in the 1980s, as business interests began to exert more influence over public sector reforms and neoliberalisation became a full-blown political-economic project (Allmendinger, 2017; Peck & Tickell, 2002). This period has been characterised as one of 'roll-back' neoliberalisation in which reform across the public sector concerned the ideologically-driven 'destruction and discreditation of 'Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions' (Peck & Tickell, 2002: 384; Peck, 2010). No regulation was seen as the alternative to some regulation (Allmendinger, 2017). Some of the concrete impacts of this period of reform thus included the abolition of strategic planning authorities, the imposition of centrally-controlled development corporations, and the introduction of simplified planning or 'enterprise' zones (Reimer et al, 2014).

However, tensions between the Conservative government and its tradition rural support' over the role of planning in relation to development 'led to dramatic shifts in policy that clearly defined the role of the planning system as being a tool of rural preservation dressed up in discourses on sustainability and environmental protection' (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2000: 1379). Some of the more aggressively centralising and pro-market reforms of the decade were softened by a shift back to Local Authority-led decision-making and an increasing interest environmental concerns (Tewdwr-Jones & Lord, 2014). And, by some accounts, whilst the wider public sector reforms of this period were severe the planning process itself came out remarkably unscathed (even if the planning profession and associated institutions did not) (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013).

### *New Labour and Spatial Planning*

By the end of the 1980s the 'crudely deregulatory' approach to public-sector reform which had characterised much of the decade was judged to have failed (Allmendinger, 2016). Nonetheless, the planning reforms of the New Labour government were characterised by two broad, neoliberalising, currents which had a far greater impact on the process itself (Clifford & Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). On one hand, 'spatial planning' signalled a shift to a more positive role for planning, which choreographed rather than strictly regulated the market. The planning system was to provide 'a framework for private sector investment' (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones 2014, citing Morphet et al, 2007). This was partly a response to negative consequences of crude deregulation in the previous decade, which had resulted in (amongst other consequences), an inability to deal with local resistance to development, increased market uncertainty and risk, and infrastructure overload (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013). On the other hand, the view that planning was a brake on economic growth endured (Tewdwr-Jones & Lord, 2014; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). This was especially prominent during the economic boom of the early New Labour government, but was persistent throughout, and following the slow adoption of 'spatial planning' by local authorities, led to a series of high-profile and Treasury-led

reviews into streamlining the system (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014). This included ‘Barker Reviews’ of housing and planning (2003; 2004; 2006), the Eddington Transport Study (DfT, 2006), and the Killian Pretty Review (DCLG & BERR, 2009) of the planning application process (which actually proposed the creation of a new national planning policy framework). These reviews argued for a new pro-market ‘culture change’ in the planning profession.

In practice, this led to the introduction of a more plan-led system in 1991, a bought of strengthening regional and strategic planning 1997-2004, and the introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies in 2004 (Reimer et al, 2014). This was alongside a simultaneous strengthening of national policy, broadly defined localism agenda, and streamlining of process. Thus, a shift towards ‘roll-out’ neoliberalism in which neoliberalised state forms were ‘constructed and consolidated’ (Peck & Tickell, 2002: 384), layered over the roll-back neoliberalism of the Thatcher era, defined the New Labour period.

## 3.3 Post-politics and the transition from New Labour to the Coalition

### 3.3.1 Introduction

Overall, the literature on actually existing neoliberalism offers a series of useful concepts for interpreting the macro-level path dependencies and shifts in English spatial governance and planning, from the Conservative government’s deregulatory reforms of the 1980s up to the Coalition Government’s ‘Big Society’ and ‘new’ Localism agendas. The next section turns to the post-politics literature as a way of thinking through the democratic consequences of these trajectories. It also builds a fine-grained understanding of the political rationalities that drove the key national-level planning policy shifts from New Labour to the Coalition Government. For the latter task, I focus on Allmendinger & Haughton’s (2012; 2015) distinction between strategies of *deferring*, *displacing*, and *transferring* the political. The post-politics spatial governance literature is a relatively young field, but in the last couple of years it has attracted quite staunch criticism regarding the binary distinction between *politics* and the *political* that lies at the heart of its critical project. These critiques link closely to those discussed in the previous section with regards to neoliberalism, and the need to think in terms of *actually existing* neoliberalisms, and I

explore their consequences for the understanding of post-politics I deploy during the analysis in the final section of this part. This discussion lays the ground for the next part of the literature review, which reflects on similarities between critiques of neoliberalism and post-politics in the light of the POR perspective, possible reasons for the CSGP literatures' current lack of critical engagement with the central state, and bodies of literature in other disciplines which may help address this.

### **3.3.2 Post-foundationalism, politics, and the political**

The rapidly growing urban/spatial governance literature on post-politics draws on the work of post-foundational theorists<sup>17</sup>, most notably that of Laclau (1996), Žižek (1999), Rancière (1999), and Mouffe (2005). To summarise a very complex and divided field too briefly, what unites these theorists is that they challenge foundationalist theory, which asserts that society and politics is grounded in principles or rules that are located outside of society itself, and are immune to revision (Marchart, 2007). This would be to assert, for example, that all politics is *really* a matter of the laws of economics, as economic determinists might do (Marchart, 2007), that there is single or fundamental 'nature' 'out there' which demands 'sustaining' (Swyngedouw, 2007: 7), or that society can be founded on concepts like 'class' or the 'nation' (Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw, 2010). Post-foundational theorists do not deny the existence of all foundations (as to do so would be perversely foundational), but rather they subject foundations to 'ontological weakening' - attacking foundations which appear self-evident, and treating them as 'necessarily contingent' and multiple (Marchart, 2007: 14). In other words, they direct their attention 'to what is excluded by the erection of foundations' themselves (Marchart, 2007: 14).

Central to the post-foundationalism as a political project is a critique of representative forms of democracy (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014), and particularly the post-Cold War liberal-democratic political consensus. This asserts that representational political systems, buttressed by a range of governance arrangements associated with participatory and/or direct forms of democracy and combined with the rational, managerial, technological regulation of conflict, will find optimal policy solutions which satisfy all parts of society (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). Francis Fukuyama's 1989 declaration that society was witnessing 'the end of history' and '...the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of

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<sup>17</sup> Though a large body of work within post-politics also draws heavily on concepts and authors more commonly associated with the field of science and technology studies (STS) and actant network theory (ANT), for example, the work of Latour (1987) and Marres (2005).

human government' (Fukuyama, 1989: 1), or Giddens' claims that the citizenry's overriding concern was pragmatism or 'what matters is what works' in a post-ideological and increasingly individualised age (Raco, 2014), present two influential archetypes of this view. The post-foundationalists' critique of the liberal-democratic consensus pivots around a distinction between the *political* - the way society is constituted and reconstituted through ongoing power struggles, conflict, and antagonism - and *politics* - the practices, policies, and institutions through which society is organised in the context of the political (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Mouffe, 2005; Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw, 2010; Marchart, 2007). It is this relationship between the *political* and *politics*, and the ways in which the former displaces the latter, that is at the heart of post-foundational political theory. Linking back to post-foundational theory's philosophical interest in divisions between the fields of the ontic and ontological, Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw (2010: 1580) summarise this as:

...the political institutes society (Costariadis, 1987) through suturing the social field in ways which disavow or displace the inherent antagonisms, the split of and in the people. In that sense, politics tends towards consensus, towards papering over the absent ground of the social, the ontological given of differences and antagonisms which split One of the people into the many of the multitude. The field of politics/the political is thus split into two: on the one hand, the political which stands for the constitutive lack, the ontological condition of society's absent ground or, in other words, the impossibility of securing a stable ground/basis on which to found society (like community, 'class', 'the people', 'the nation'); whereas politics stands for the ontic, the always contingent, precarious, and incomplete attempt to institutionalise the social, to offer closure, to suture the social field, to let society coincide with community.

From this perspective, contemporary forms of depoliticisation are characterised by a weakening of democracy and the public sphere by 'an unquestioned framework of representative democracy, free market economics, and cosmopolitan liberalism' (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014: 6), which colonise truly *political* space (Wilson & Swyngedouw, 2014). The antagonisms and fractures that mar and define society are thus disavowed (Žižek, 1999). It is this distinction between politics and the political, and how these two categories interact, which the critical spatial governance literature is increasingly drawing on in its own efforts to understand the democratic implications of ubiquitous and powerful policy terms, such as 'governance' (as opposed to government), 'partnership', 'stakeholder', 'creative city', 'smart growth', or 'sustainability' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; MacLeod, 2013), and the associated rise in increasingly opaque and complex governance arrangements (Raco, 2014).

#### *The concept of post-politics and its use in the spatial governance literature*

The post-foundational theorists point to various strategies by which this consensus is achieved and the political displaced in Western democracies, of which *post-politics* can be

seen as just one specific combination (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015; Metzger et al, 2015). Van Puymbroek & Oosterlynck (2014: 98) drawing on Rancière (1999), for example, argue that contemporary post-politics should be seen as possessing dynamically related para-political, meta-political, ultra-political, and archi-political elements (these are discussed in detail in Figure 11, below). Whilst this perspective is useful for thinking through post-politics’ underlying social dynamics, the concept has generally gained purchase in the spatial governance literature as a broader label and shorthand. Here it refers to an analytical framework that focuses on the various ways in which the political is foreclosed or displaced in specific policy episodes or policy regimes (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015).

**Figure 11: Van Puymbroek & Oosterlynck’s Matrix of Depoliticisation**

**Para-politics:** emphasis on seeking consensus on specific issues through governance-mediated networks of stakeholders (as well as superficial competition between different opinions and parties). E.g. the use of deliberative dialogue procedures and stakeholder consultation boards.

**Meta-politics:** A rendering of society as, underneath these channels of communication, nothing more than ‘market-based relations of competition’. E.g. Marxist critiques which portray parliamentary institutions as nothing more than distractions from fundamental economic inequalities

**Ultra-politics:** A portrayal of any alternative to free-market society as beyond the realms of possibility or even symbolic comparison, to the point that discussion dissolves into a matter of ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the enemy). E.g. contemporary framings of terrorism and the extreme right.

**Archi-politics:** A presentation of communities and publics as being undivided and composed of equals, with a shared destiny and beliefs. e.g. the concept of the ‘Big Society’.

In this conceptualisation of post-politics the relationship between each strategy is relational, and built around elements of diagnosis and response (Van Puymbroek & Oosterlynck, 2014). The diagnosis refers to something which reveals the contingency and hierarchical differentiation of any social order, while the response aims to mask these differences in order to preserve the status quo. ‘Sets’ of political diagnosis and response shift between assumptions that society is fundamentally split (as in archi- or ultra-politics), and that society is fundamentally united (para- or meta-politics), in order to prevent claims for equality being founded in the solid (political) ground provided by either set (Van Puymbroek & Oosterlynck, 2014). These constant shifts are most simply understood in terms of a matrix, as illustrated below with regards to the example of multiculturalism.

		Diagnosis	
		Society is not internally split	Society is internally split
Reply	Policing through a Specifically Political Sphere	<b>Ultra-politics:</b> <i>New Racism</i>	<b>Para-politics:</b> <i>Liberal Multiculturalism</i>
	Policing through the Denial of any Specifically Political Sphere	<b>Archi-politics:</b> <i>Civil Republicanism</i>	<b>Meta-politics:</b> <i>Ethnostratified Class-Struggle</i>

**Source: Van Puymbroek & Oosterlynck (2014)**

Whilst the concrete form these post-political strategies take are highly contingent upon specific local circumstances - particularly with regards to a territorial activity like spatial planning (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015) - they nonetheless result in what is described as a 'post-political condition', in which 'contestation and conflict are supplanted by consensus-based politics in ways that foreclose all but narrow debate and contestation around a neoliberal growth agenda' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012: 91). The consequences for policy making is that, in the words of Deas (2013: 75):

Decision-making is therefore viewed as helpfully depoliticized, cleansed of ideology and free of burdensome responsibilities - consultation, participation, scrutiny - which detract from the single-minded pursuit of economic growth.

However, because of the very nature of the political, post-political efforts to foreclose it will inevitably, eventually, result in it resurfacing beyond the pale - from outside of the 'proper' institutional/procedural realms sanctioned for it by the state (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015; Legacy, 2016). When this occurs it is treated as unhelpful, irrational, noise, and positioned outside of 'legitimate' institutionalised processes of negotiating consensus (Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw, 2010). The political's emergence in the face of deadlock ultimately undermines the legitimacy of the post-political regime, which in the words of Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw (2010: 1582) is quite simply; 'bound to fail... due to the impossibility of founding a politics on consensual negotiation'. This is not to say that there is a foundational realm of 'pure politics', or that it is necessarily possible to declare particular governance arrangement post-political or not (Loepfe & Van Wezemaal, 2015), or indeed that all Rancière's 'police orders' are all 'as bad as each other' (Metzger et al, 2015). Rather, at least from for scholars building on the work of Mouffe (2005), there is a constant and dynamic tension between politics and the political, and politics is always 'in construction and contested' (MacLeod, 2013: 20). It also points to a dialectic that resides at the heart of post-political theory; spaces for the truly-political emerge from its attempted foreclosure by the political.

### *Post-politics in the planning literature: trends and examples*

Given these concerns, and the post-foundationalists' critique of Third Way politics, it is perhaps unsurprising that the late 2000s saw a steep rise in the popularity of post-politics as a critical lens with which to understand planning phenomena (Metzger et al, 2015). Indeed, this period saw increasing concerns about the democratic consequences of 'governance' (as opposed to government) under rolled-out neoliberalism (Metzger et al, 2015), and it became apparent that Habermasian communicative planning theory - seen by many authors to have achieved the status of *the* planning theory paradigm by that point (Innes & Booher, 2014; Murray, 2006) - had mutated from a critical theory *of* planning into a theory *for* planning (Metzger et al, 2015). Finding its way into English policy in the

form of New Labour's spatial planning (introduced in 2002), it had become geared towards building consensus and partnerships in pursuit of the narrowly-defined and growth-orientated interests (Metzger et al, 2015; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2011; 2015). Across Europe 'Spatial planning' itself evolved into a normative (rather than descriptive) notion of 'territorial governance', which has subsequently been widely linked to the proliferation of increasingly opaque and nebulous networks of policy practices and institutions (e.g. Raco, 2014; Raco et al, 2016; Metzger et al, 2015; Haughton et al, 2016; Legacy, 2016). Overall, Haughton et al (2016: 479), summarise:

...politics is pervasive within the planning system, but with its increasing focus on achieving consensus-based techno-managerial solutions, it has alienated those not willing to compromise their views in order to become recognized stakeholders. The danger with this is that planning no longer provides a stage for more radical disruptions of our understanding of what and whom planning is for.

The full range of planning-related phenomena upon which post-politics has been put to work belies the field's youth. For some spatial governance and planning scholars drawing on post-politics it is the insurgent, democratic, potential of truly political moments, and why they can fail in the face depoliticising strategies, which are of central interest. These studies often focus on specific, local, policy episodes and/or conflicts as ways of exploring the concept of the post-political itself. For example, Haughton et al (2016) analyse the post-politicising tactics a city council deployed in response to an 'ordinary' urban protest over tree felling in a public park. The protest was short-lived; the council successfully painted the protest as failing to acknowledge officially-sanctioned scientific reports or means of consultation, while the protests 'remained primarily articulated around particular social or ecological demands, failing to universalize to the dignity of a political interruption' (Haughton et al, 2016: 487). Other authors have examined the ways in which the concept of the traditional 'compact city' was applied as an undoubted ideal to all citizens of a district of Stockholm, obscuring key social divisions (Tunström & Bradley, 2015), or how public drinking regulations in the same city spurred public controversy and wider reflection on balancing 'openness and order' in public space (Bylund & Byerley, 2015).

Another body of work emphasises the inevitability of post-political consensus collapsing, and explores ways in which they do so in specific local or regional cases. In this camp, for example, Oosterlynck and Swyngedouw (2010) are concerned with the doomed efforts of the Belgian government to reconcile the demands of private market actors, affected communities, and environmental concerns regarding the expansion of a major logistics firm's night flights at Brussels Airport. The debate was framed by national and city-regional elites as being a balancing act between the needs of 'the profit-driven and growth-driven interests of the just-in-time logic of the new informational economy', and

subordinate ecological and social interests (Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw, 2010). After a proposal to ban night flights was met with staunch criticism from the private sector, attempts were made to negotiate quotas for a particular number of night flights over the Brussels area. This was done through the creation of a series of stakeholder forums (amongst other consensus-orientated methods), which led to proliferation of a series of local committees, each arguing for their own interests and the fair distribution of flights over the city-region. This produced political deadlock, and eventually led to the logistics firm moving its core businesses elsewhere.

A third group of authors apply and tests post-politics more theoretically, as a tool for reflecting on and developing planning as a social and political activity in itself. This group one might find work which has combined a post-political theoretical frame with concepts from Deleuze-Guattarian assemblage theory (Loepfe & Van Wezemaal, 2015), or communicative planning theory (Bond, 2012), to build conceptual frameworks which better capture the realities of power in urban governance processes, and to provide more democratic platforms for decision making in the future. Others have proposed alternatives to planning approaches inspired by communicative, collectivist, and empowerment theories which force consensus and pursue an impossible common ground, and instead aim towards reconciliation (Pløger, 2015).

### **3.3.3 Post-politics and interpreting differences between New Labour and Coalition planning policy**

The post-politics literature discussed so far provides interesting insights into specific local policy episodes, the 'post-political condition' as a general social phenomenon, and the nature of contemporary planning. This is useful context. However, this thesis's focus is the policy making rationalities which underpinned the Coalition's approach to developing its key planning reforms, and the post-politics literature is also valuable in this regard. A handful of writers – most notably Mike Raco (Raco, 2013; 2014; 2015; Raco et al, 2016), Philip Allmendinger, and Graham Haughton and Phil Allmendinger (Haughton et al, 2009, 2013; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010; 2012; 2015; Allmendinger, 2016) have deployed post-politics as a framework for explaining shifts and continuities in national-level (neoliberalising) planning policy and policy making rationalities in England. This especially the case with regards to the;

...the framing work of recent changes to the planning system, especially what is understood to be within the remit of planning, who engages with the system and under what terms. (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012: 92)

In what follows focus on this fourth strand of CSGP post-politics literature, and particularly that concerning shifts in national-level policy. I begin by discussing Mike Raco's work (2013; 2014; 2015; Raco et al, 2016). This provides context in the form of a *system-wide* reading of the post-political logics driving the Coalition's planning reforms, their roots in New Labour's Third Way agenda, and the extent to which they are prone to path dependency. I then discuss Philip Allmendinger and Graham Haughton's (2012; 2015; Haughton et al, 2013; Allmendinger, 2016) work in depth. Together, this research focuses on explaining key differences between New Labour and the Coalition's national-level planning policy (as embodied by OSP, the NPPF and the Localism Act) in terms of its post-political strategies/rationales. And, though it is brief, Allmendinger (2016) provides what is probably the most in-depth critical and historical analysis of the development of the NPPF available in the planning literature<sup>18</sup>. I use this account as a point of reference during the presentation of the case narrative, and critique it in the analysis, so I go into it in some detail here.

*Post-political interpretations of the Coalitions reforms: out-put focused service provision and path-dependency*

One of the key consequences the *government-governance* shift in the Global North, and the advent of the 'Third Way' as a political doctrine in the UK, was the proliferation of practices and institutions associated with modernisation and 'Good Governance' (Raco, 2013; 2015). And, one of the core elements of Good Governance (as it is defined by the United Nations and other groups) is an ostensibly non-political focus on 'what works matters', underpinned by a conceptualisation of citizens as individual consumers. In other words; for policy makers the value of the state has become increasingly measured by its ability to deliver services to citizens, rather than by the opportunities it provides for democratic engagement. This can be thought of as a shift from an *input-focused* way of thinking about state legitimacy, to an *output focused* one. Raco (2015: 156) is unequivocal about its impact, arguing that 'delivery has replaced democracy as *the* core principle of good governance' (emphasis in the original). But this is only part of the picture; in parallel, state functions have been increasingly privatised as a result of a familiarly neoliberal way of thinking that 'equates sustainability with private-sector led 'efficiency' and managerialism'<sup>19</sup> (Raco, 2014: 25). This has created a dynamic in UK urban governance policy whereby democratic input/conflict are seen as a risk and impediment to the private

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<sup>18</sup> The other in-depth account of the NPPF is provided by Rutter (2013) in the *Institute for Government* report *Open Up Policy Making*. This is discussed in-depth in the empirical chapter #.

<sup>19</sup> This has ironically leading to *increasing* state expenditure, as multinational consultancy, investment, and services firms such as Deloitte, KPMG, McKinsey Global Institute, G4S and Sodexo clamour for lucrative government contracts (Raco, 2015).

sector's ability to provide services (which are of course the key measure of a successful state). Both politics and the political are therefore increasingly 'managed out', and long-term contracts are written up which shield urban infrastructure providers, for example, from scrutiny in the name of providing investment certainty.

As part of this overall increasing reliance on the private sector (in conjunction with Coalition government's austerity programme), the UK government has increasingly relied on private firms for expertise in particular fields of activity, and critically, how to regulate those field of activity (Raco, 2015). Fields of state activity such as planning or infrastructure provision have thus become increasingly prone to regulatory 'capture' and deregulation (Raco, 2014: 43), and governance processes themselves have effectively been privatised (Raco et al, 2016). Private Finance Agreements (PFI - in which private corporations take ownership of public infrastructure and then lease it back to the state), he argues, are symptomatic of this post-political state of state of affairs, being 'public-private hybridities made up of powerful corporations, elites, and state agencies' which are 'crystallised around consensus-based, technical frameworks such as those associated with sustainability indicators':

...The key point about this privatisation is that it represents the logical consequence of a sustainability-driven discourse that is fiercely anti-state and pro-privatisation. Private companies have been handed the ownership of assets and resources with long-term contracts of up to forty years, and this circumscribes the possibilities for policy change for the adult lifetimes of most citizens. There has been little democratic discussion about the impacts of this PFI provision on strategic planning. (Raco, 2014: 36)

PFI agreements as a specific policy tool may be synonymous with New Labour, but for Raco (2013; 2014; 2015) the Coalition's Localism Agenda (as embodied by *Open Source Planning* (The Conservative Party 2010a), the *Localism Act 2011*, and the NPPF) represents a broad continuation the broadly privatising, 'contractualising', output-focused, and post-political policy making rationalities they embody. He does, however, identify two key differences between the Coalition's preform agenda and New Labour's. Firstly, through its attacks on target-setting and plan-making structures the Coalitions' planning reforms point to a deeper critique of the very *legitimacy* of governments and state planning (for example, by forcing Local Authorities to transfer assets to communities or the private sector). Secondly, and closely connected to the former, New Localism's critique of the state assumes power to more or less exclusively reside with either the state or with local communities, and that this is a zero-sum game; if one removes top-down control, local communities will be empowered (Raco, 2013; 2015). Yet, this perspective fails to take into account the fact that as a result of reforms described above, decision-making power in governance processes has been redistributed through an ever more complex, opaque, and rigid entanglements of private interests. As a result, at the local

level Localism has actually served to ‘open up numerous opportunities for the mobilisation of expert knowledge and power, much of which is derived not from civil society but from the private sector’, and which has had serious democratic consequences (Raco et al, 2016). This has taken the concrete form of ‘development machines’ - complex assemblages of public and private sector experts, who utilise their expertise to limit and/or manage public involvement in contentious projects, in the interest of expediting delivery (Raco et al, 2016).

At the national-level, Raco (2014;2015) argues that these dynamics have resulted in high degree of path-dependency. This is not only a result of the ‘regulatory capture’ previously described; by Raco’s reading the Coalition government became caught in a discursive and rhetorical ‘trap’ in which the key difficulties the administration faced in delivering a responsive planning system were a result of ‘private sector asset ownership and contractual service’, but it was exactly this they looked to as a role model for their welfare reforms programme:

The Coalition government has been unwilling to tackle these structural barriers to political empowerment, for to do so would require recognition that the limits of the planning system are not primarily a consequence of over- powerful bureaucracies. To try and unpick the complexities and entanglements that now dominate the welfare policy-making landscape would also require a rejection of privatisation, at a time when the private sector is being presented as a role model for wider welfare reforms. There is thus little or no recognition given to the difficulties that private sector asset ownership and contractual service provision will have on the aspiration ‘to create a genuinely responsive service’ through the devolution of power... Instead, there is a tendency to isolate planning as a separate sphere of activity that is always in opposition to devolved, community-centred localism. (Raco, 2015)

A combination of an output-focused understanding of service delivery and privatisation have resulted in a chronic lack of democratic input in the planning system, and have rendered governments unable to respond to issues when they arise. Overall, Raco’s (2013; 2014; 2015) system-wide reading of the Coalition’s planning reform programme focuses on three underlying policy making political rationalities<sup>20</sup>:

- a. An output-focused rather than input-focused understanding of planning and service delivery

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<sup>20</sup> With regards to the rest of the post-politics literature, Raco (2015) concludes that (partly due to a lack of grounded, empirical, research) it has both underestimated the degree to which, a) governance arrangements in the UK ‘really do eradicate conflict rather than merely aspiring to do so’ (Raco, 2015: 154), and; b) the extent to which representative democratic structures - often taken for granted by the post-politics literature, and themselves the product of political struggles (Raco, 2015) - have been seriously undermined with regards to urban policy.

- b. An emphasis on privatisation and a ‘deep’ critique of the legitimacy of the state in delivery planning and other public services
- c. A notion of Localism which fails to take into account the extent to which key elements of the planning system have been privatised

These high-level/system-wide logics and post-political strategies are valuable for interpreting, and can be *broadly* applied to individual policies and policy documents, such as the NPPF and OSP. However, they are less useful for explaining changing *specific changes* in key national-level policies from New Labour to the Coalition, or for explaining the policy *making* strategies the Coalition deployed when implementing its planning reforms. For this, can turn to Allmendinger & Haughton (2012; 2015; Allmendinger, 2016).

In broad agreement with Raco, these authors characterise both the Coalition and New Labour’s reform programmes/policy regimes as being facilitative of neoliberal growth strategies and the post-political condition which maintains this trajectory (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; 2015). Indeed, both government’s purposeful deployed ‘fuzzy’ and non-contestable policy terms to legitimate their pro-growth ambitions, such as, under New Labour, ‘smart growth’, ‘urban renaissance’, or ‘sustainable development’ (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010). Or, under the Coalition; ‘Localism’, ‘open policy making’, and the continuing use of ‘sustainable development’. However, Allmendinger & Haughton’s (2015) analysis points to *differences* in the depoliticising strategies the two policy regimes/reform programmes deploy, and the role these differences play in shaping wider policy formations. More specifically, drawing on Allmendinger (2016), I argue that examining these strategies may give insights into the policy making rationalities that shaped the actual production of the NPPF.

*Post-political interpretations of the Coalitions reforms: Depoliticising strategies and changing policy regimes*

Allmendinger & Haughton (2012; 2015; Allmendinger, 2016) take their analytical starting point from the observation that as post-political regimes begin to fracture in the way described in Part 3.3.2, policy makers rework existing institutional/democratic structures in search of new ways of managing dissent, or depoliticising the reappearance of the political (Haughton et al, 2016). This can be done in many different ways, but the aim is essentially to maintain neoliberalism’s legitimacy in the face of protest and validity in the face of recurring policy failure (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015). From a post-political perspective, key shifts in neoliberal planning policy from New Labour to the Coalition therefore relate to policy makers’ attempts to correct collapsing institutional ‘fixes’ that were introduced under previous regimes, as part of an ongoing effort to maintain consensus around the need for growth within a neoliberal model (Allmendinger &

Haughton, 2015). Allmendinger & Haughton (2015) use the concepts of *deferring*, *displacing*, and *transferring* the political as tools with which to systematically trace these changing post-political strategies and rebuilding efforts between the two reform programmes, which they term ‘Third Way’ planning, and ‘Big Society’ planning. They define each as follows (see Figure 12, below, for a summary):

- a. *Deferring*: Strategies of putting off conflict to some future point in time
- b. *Displacing*: Shifting the political to other arenas and groups, such as planners
- c. *Transferring*: Taking conflict away from the immediate community and representative processes, and into ‘fuzzy’ communities of interest and democratic processes that may not align or map onto experiences of change ‘on the ground’

**Figure 12: Selected Characteristics of Post-Political Planning under New Labour and the Coalition**

	<b>Deferring the Political</b>	<b>Displacing the political</b>	<b>Transferring the political</b>
<b>Third Way</b>	Multi-sectoral and spatial coordination blurring responsibilities and locus of accountability and legitimacy. Planning as a fleet of foot process, difficult to tie down - no concrete forum for the political. Partnership-led consensus through consultation and ‘front loading’ involvement blurring issues of growth management. Heavily stage-managed consultations, often involving specialist consultants.	Technical, bureaucratic processes and procedures led by ‘experts’ and accountable to stakeholders as much as political representatives. Objective and ‘scientific’ identification and management of planning ‘problems’.	Democratic processes around ‘consensus’ and partnership. ‘Experts’ and illusion of objectivity of quantitative-based processes and techniques in being objective. New systems of monitoring, audit and use of indicators introduced to drive forward policy implementation in pursuit of measurable, tangible outcomes.
<b>Big Society</b>	Encouraging ‘local solutions’ to planning ‘problems’ though definition of ‘problem’ is determined centrally around neoliberal growth. Those neighbourhoods and communities that are active and likely to resist growth engage in neighbourhood planning, sometimes unaware that important political issues are not considered ‘legitimate’ subjects for their work.	Growing use of financial incentives - commodification of political and appeal to individual and community self-interest.	New formulations of communities and neighbourhoods that are left to be self-selecting. Abandonment of universal coverage, for instance by neighbourhood plans, and acceptance of ‘white spaces’ on the policy map.

From Allmendinger & Haughton (2015)

**Figure 13: Third Way and Big Society Post-Political Planning Strategies**

	<b>Third Way planning</b>	<b>Big Society Planning</b>
<b>Process</b>	Technical and bureaucratic. Detailed prescription of process and required evidence base for plan making and decisions.	Less prescriptive on process and evidence base leaving more to the discretion of planners and local authorities to determine though within broad limits and presumptions.
<b>Actors</b>	Planners charged with consensus-building to delivery growth, particularly, housing. Search for consensus on interpretations of urban renaissance or smart growth.	Planners to explore and experiment with process towards growth-led outcomes reconciling contradictions in Big Society agenda along the way.
<b>Means</b>	Widespread use of partnerships and coordinating mechanisms such as LAAs backed up by funding.	Localism and neighbourhood planning to encourage diversity and local 'buy in' to growth agendas, i.e. identifying where, not if, development will occur.
<b>National role</b>	Plethora of national planning policy and best practice covering and prescribing planning processes and outcomes.	Much scaled back national policy agenda. Presumption in favour of sustainable development provides overarching objectives and flexibility on means.
<b>Breakdown</b>	Consensus broke down and conflict arose when implications of post-political approach became apparent. E.g. when development details published.	Breakdown emerging as neoliberal growth agenda becomes apparent and decentralisation is clearly within strict central purview.

**From Allmendinger & Haughton (2015)**

In many ways mirroring Raco's (2013; 2015) diagnosis, the post-political elements of New Labour's spatial planning were geared towards *deferring* the political though:

...appealing to open-ended processes of multi-scalar and sectoral coordination and integration. Regeneration and spatial planning were on-going processes where the political was always someway off in the future. Conflict was minimised through requiring strategies to be achieved through multi-sectoral working and partnerships, working on an assumption (false as it turned out) that this would lead to long-term buy-in to the strategies by all those involved. (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015: 44)

In contrast, under the Big Society deferral is achieved via a self-selective (rather than universal) process/model in which local communities most affected by political issues are

those most likely to respond, and produce a neighbourhood plan. The range of action open to local communities is more prescribed by national-level policy than it at first seems, and though they are empowered to act through a range of policy vehicles they are not always provided with the public finance required to actually do so (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015).

Similarly, under New Labour the political was *displaced* via a technical and expert-led processes. Technical ‘win-win-win’ solutions for balancing economic growth with a range of other objectives were emphasised and became an integral part of the planning system. As part of this centrally-mandated reports were outsourced to ‘neutral’ and ‘expert’ private consultancies. In contrast, the Big Society downplays expert-led technical processes, and relies ‘more on self-interest as the rationale of communities comes under greater influence of financial incentives’ (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015: 46). And finally, with regards to the *transfer* of the political, under the Coalition modes of democracy shifted from New Labour’s emphasis on a combination of well-established representative modes of democracy, buttressed by opportunities for participative and consensus-orientated processes, to more direct forms, directly determined at the local supra-local level (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015).

Allmendinger & Haughton (2015) regard some key features of national-level planning policy under the Coalition as being a *direct* result of strategies to obscure contradictions inherent to the purposefully ‘fuzzy’ notion of the Big Society, and purposefully vague central government policy, which only begin emerge with clarity only ‘at concrete points of action and decision-making’ (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015: 48). Different faces could be presented to different groups; anti-regulation rhetoric to developers and big business, Localism to community groups, and the Big society being presented as a shield against accusations that ministers just wanted a smaller state (Allmendinger, 2016) (see Figure 13, above). As evidence of this increasing vagueness, they point to emerging national policy and guidance being increasingly signalled via informal means, the responsibility for balancing different agendas then being that of local decision makers (e.g. via ministerial speeches in parliament and during interviews) (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015).

The territorial consequences of these post-political strategies include the creation of the ‘soft spaces’, which proliferated during the New Labour and then Coalition eras (Haughton et al, 2013; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2010). These ‘fuzzy’ constructions are “in-between’ spaces of governance that exist outside, alongside or in-between the formal statutory scales of government, from area masterplans to multiregional growth strategies’ (Haughton et al, 2013: 217). A good example are the voluntary and non-statutory Local Enterprise Partnerships which the Coalition government replaced New Labour’s Regional

Development Agencies with (see Haughton et al, 2013; Pike et al, 2013; Bentley et al, 2010). Crucially, though they may form for a range of reasons (some progressive, others less so), for Haughton et al (2013) such soft spaces represent the emergence of a different type of *politics* around neoliberalisation and its consequences. In short, though they allow a 'diversity of actors to be involved in the governance of space', and 'for particular demands to be voiced and negotiated', this is only the case so long as 'they do not question and disrupt the overarching framework of market-led development' (Haughton et al, 2013: 222).

Turning to the NPPF more specifically, Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015 (48) paint a picture in which it:

...reduced over 1,000 pages of detailed national planning policy guidance to 50, simplifying the system whilst increasing scope for both discretion and ambiguity. This is presented rhetorically as a mechanism that empowers local actors, yet it also creates an obscured policy space within which different interpretations of the Big Society can be projected: the NPPF is both a product of and a process through which post-political planning operates.

In this way the NPPF is held up as an archetypically post-political; both as product and process. However, it can also be interpreted as typically post-political in a third way; when the government was forced to make 'concrete action and decisions' the public saw through the fuzziness of the Big Society, and there was an intense political response to its obscured neoliberalising, pro-growth, policy substance (Allmendinger, 2016). With this concern we arrive neatly at Allmendinger's (2016) post-political reading of the NPPF's development. As well applying a post-political framework to the document's development, it is also one of the most in-depth accounts of its development available. As such, I discuss it in depth below.

*Post-political interpretations of the Coalitions reforms: The (post)political strategies that drove the development of the NPPF*

Two processes emerged which challenged the legitimacy of New Labour's post-political planning policy regime. Firstly, communities faced the 'realities of actual development' (Allmendinger, 2016), the concrete consequences of which had displaced and deferred from public contestation. And, secondly, 'delivery partners' (e.g. developers and infrastructure providers) who had signed into agreements before the 2007/08 financial crisis attempted to renegotiate more favourable positions (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015). Both of these processes were relatively slow-burning, and in the case of the former, took time for local protest to gain momentum. In contrast, conflict around the Coalition's post-political strategies and neoliberal agenda erupted early on in their administration, from naturally Tory-leaning groups, and played out at the national-level in reaction to the Coalition's development of the NPPF in July 2011 (Allmendinger, 2016). This represented

what Allmendinger & Haughton (2015: 48) term a ‘concrete point of action and decision making’ in as much as it forced the Coalition to be clear about its intentions beyond the rhetoric of the Big Society.

**Figure 14: Key Differences in Political Planning Strategy between New Labour and the Coalition government**

**The role of ‘big ideas’**

- **New Labour:** One ‘big idea’ in the form of ‘spatial planning’.
- **Coalition:** Several often competing and contradictory ‘big ideas’ including Localism, the Big Society, open policy making, etc, reflected in a lack of agreement in the government about how to approach planning or respond to conditions imposed by austerity.

**Discourse, rhetoric and action**

- **New Labour:** Selective deployment of multiple discourses.
- **Coalition:** Selective deployment of multiple and sometimes discourses, and large gap between rhetoric and policy/action (e.g. the Big Society, in contrast to centralising initiatives)

**The role of think tanks**

- **New Labour:** Think tanks played a central role in providing broad directions for policy.
- **Coalition:** Think tanks played a central role in providing both broad directions and developing the details of policy.

**Adapted from Allmendinger (2016)**

In Allmendinger’s (2016) words, the first draft of the NPPF (presented for consultation in July 2011):

...read as though it had been written by different authors, each seeking to emphasize different roles for planning. Planning was tasked with achieving social, economic and environmental objectives, the reconciliation of which would be left to local communities though within the broad steer that growth should drive and even trump the other dimensions.

The source of the draft’s ambiguity was, partly, a result of the confusion about how to respond to the economic crisis which had gripped all the major political parties after 2007/08 (Allmendinger, 2016). But, echoing Allmendinger & Haughton (2013; 2015), for Allmendinger (2016) it was also a *deliberate* political strategy, and part of ‘to mislead regarding the coalition’s true intentions’, and present different arguments to different groups. The government’s motivations notwithstanding, the response was powerful; the National Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England, other major conservational and environmental NGOs, and sympathetic newspapers (especially the *Daily Telegraph*)

launched a national campaign in response. The Government's consultation received more than 10,000 responses (partly as a result); and two linked parliamentary enquiries, carried out by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee and Environmental Audit Committee, launched.

The select committee enquiries reported that in trying to balance Localism with growth, the environment, and the demands of various competing interest groups, whilst also cutting the volume of government policy from 1000 to 50 pages, the government had tried to do too much in this draft. The result was a confusing and contradictory policy document. Its linking of the phrases 'presumption in favour of' with 'sustainable development', and its conflation of 'sustainable development' with 'sustainable economic growth' left policy wide-open to interpretation and threatened environmental safeguards (Allmendinger, 2016).

The campaign groups and newspapers, meanwhile, saw this confusion and obfuscation as a deliberate, political, attempt to justify a reduction in traditional restrictions on development in the countryside and protected areas such as greenbelt. Indeed, this interpretation of the Government's motivations was encouraged by initially combative language from Cameron, Osborne, and other senior ministers regarding the role of planning in restricting development and economic growth (Allmendinger, 2016). The CPRE and National Trust's campaign gained momentum, while the *Daily Telegraph* broadened out its coverage to document communities across England that were fighting against development proposals, and Tory backbenchers (many, but not all, from rural constituencies) became increasingly restless, eventually writing a petition against the pro-development tone of the draft.

Ministers tried to allay campaigners' concerns by claiming that there had been a misunderstanding, whilst also signalling to business groups they were devoted to removing constraints on growth (Allmendinger, 2016). However, in the face of potential backbench rebellion and an unprecedented national campaign, the government was eventually forced to clarify its proposals. It's worth turning to Allmendinger's words here, to get the full sense of the cut and thrust of his argument. Along with Allmendinger & Haughton's (2013; 2015) tripartite scheme, I will return to these comments later (Part 8.3) in response to Objective 3. Bearing this in mind, Allmendinger (2016) argues in no uncertain terms that the campaign represented the resurgence of the political, and forced the government to clarify purposefully obfuscatory language:

The attempts to reform planning through the sleight of hand in the draft NPPF had clearly not worked to the point of being damaging to the government and forcing it to be clearer than it would have liked about its intentions. The headlines that spoke of a 'war on the countryside' had been harmful, alienating rural areas and vocal organisations with large membership such as the

National Trust. The need to clarify the deliberate ambiguity of the draft NPPF demonstrated a return of the political.

In Allmendinger's reading, the campaign forced the government was to clarify its intentions towards the NPPF, if not change policy direction. From a post-political perspective, Allmendinger (2016) concludes:

...the debate helped to bring the political back into planning, echoing the position of Rancière, amongst others, that the political is never permanently foreclosed and will always re-emerge. Through the pages of the Daily Telegraph, other national newspapers and media outlets there was a national debate on planning policy and reform over a period of months... Rather than using the ambiguity of the catch-all phrases such as 'sustainable development' wrapping within equally ambiguous and competing narratives around localism, the Big Society and deregulation to approach different factions and constituencies, the debate over the draft NPPF forced some clarity. This greater transparency was only partial in that the NPPF ultimately retained its mixed messages and remained wrapped in the competing tensions of promoting economic growth, giving greater control over planning to communities and encouraging a more active society. An exegesis of the final NPPF could still support each of these views.

Subsequently, the coalition's agenda for planning did begin to become clearer as the tension between the government's desire for deregulation and devolution was tested through some local attempts to resist development leading to what became known as 'muscular localism'.

From the higher-level perspective offered by AEN, the story represents another episode in the continuing, fruitless, search for a stable pro-market neoliberal policy 'fix' for the English planning system.

### **3.3.4 The limits of post-politics**

From the literature discussed so far, and in relation to the aim and objectives of this thesis, post-politics appears useful in three ways. Firstly, it explains the political significance and drivers of shifts in key aspects of national-level neoliberal planning policy regimes, particularly between New Labour and the Coalition. Secondly, it also explains the system-wide logics and path-dependencies which may guide these strategies/practices (e.g. output-focused conceptualisations of service delivery and regulatory capture). Thirdly, it throws into relief the influence the government's depoliticising strategies (and their political contestation) had over the creation of the NPPF and its policy substance

However, whilst recognising that post-political thesis has contributed some valuable insights into the political/democratic significance of recent governmental innovations (Bylund, 2012; Larner, 2014; Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; Puyembroeck & Oosterlynck, 2014) and as such should not be 'thrown out with the bathwater' (Bylund, 2012), there is

a growing body of work which critiques some of its core assumptions. Because these critiques cut to the core of the mainstream post-politics literature/project, it is important they are addressed here. The broad line of criticism this writing follows is that because of its reliance binary post-political/proper political, good/bad distinctions, and a broad diagnosis of a post-political condition, much current work in the field fails to provide a sufficiently nuanced or pluralistic account of urban politics and society (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; Van Puymbroeck & Oosterlynck, 2014). As a result, they contend, post-politics runs the risk of overlooking the very opportunities for radical political change which it seeks to reveal and nourish (Larner, 2014; North et al, 2017).

### *Post-political correctness and the Big Leviathan*

Bylund (2012) discusses post-politics in terms of the dynamics of academic discourse, debate, and writing. He argues that the field is in danger of succumbing to 'post-political correctness'. As the field crystallises, the post-political/proper-political, bad/good, either/or binary runs the risk of becoming a normative and analytical 'sorting principle' against which both social phenomena and academic research are judged, rather than a critical tool that provokes fresh insights into complex situations (Bylund, 2012; Bylund & Byerly, 2015). And, as subjects are fed into this 'grinder' valuable oddities 'strange fits', and the messy political practices which fit between these poles may be lost, as researchers conform to post-politics' vocabulary and analytical categories (Bylund, 2012; Bylund & Byerly 2015). The post-political/proper-political binary also has a narrow proceduralist focus on public contestation through assertions of a 'right of equality' (Swyngedouw, 2009). Could not the formation of publics and the properly political reoccur and be constantly actualised around other concerns, such as art, or ecologies (Bylund, 2012; Bylund & Byerly, 2015; Grange, 2015)?

Other authors' critiques come to a similar conclusion, but from more empirical angles. Several of draw on the diverse economies literature, and its focus on ethnographic modes of enquiry, as their starting points (e.g. Collier, 2012; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Larner, 2014). It is worth burrowing down into two of these arguments in order to bring out their subtleties, and the means by which they reject the charge that in the context of the post-political condition, the 'polis remains almost entirely moribund' (Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2015: 222), and that contemporary politics of resistance amount to 'impotent acting-out' (Swyngedouw & Wilson, 2015: 215). Below I focus on arguments and cases made by Larner (2014), and North et al (2017), two authors writing from outside of the post-politics literature.

Larner (2014) argues that much of the post-politics literature continues to regard neoliberalism as an overarching 'Big Leviathan' (Collier, 2012), or explanatory background, against which other things must be understood. Instead, neoliberalism

should be treated as a the 'same size' as other things, and the relationships between them traced out in a relational way (Larner, 2014). This entails acknowledging, for example, the impact radical social movements can have upon neoliberal governance, *as well as* the ways in which neoliberalism may co-opt radical social movements for its own ends (Larner, 2014; North et al, 2017). Similarly, interpreting all technologies of government that promote consensus and partnership as being a smaller part of a bleakly post-political/neoliberal picture may obscure their radical, political, potential. It is vital to acknowledge the 'antagonisms and heterogeneities that through neoliberal political projects' (Larner, 2014: 197).

Larner (2014) illustrates this argument with reference to action research she carried out on the work of an entrepreneurial grass-roots urban development Community Interest Company (CIC). This organisation possessed several attributes which could be read-off or assumed as typically 'post-political' or neoliberal: The CIC aims to provide a space and support for a wide range of groups and individuals (social enterprises, health practitioners, artists, etc) with a view fostering 'environmentally sensitive urban regeneration and social innovation' (Larner, 2014: 189). It does not deploy an oppositional form of activism, and some of its strategies explicitly focus on job creation and economic development. However, closer investigation reveals the CIC to draw on a range of overlapping discourses and self-understandings, only some of which fit with the post-political thesis. These includes community development (and related ideas such as partnerships, networking, and consensus-building) and institutionalised notions of sustainability and grassroots environmentalism, but also anarchism and entrepreneurialism. These understandings are all grounded in a critique of unsustainable capitalism and a resistance to corporate businesses and formal political structures. She concludes:

...in contrast to the 'enlightened experts and political elites' who receive attention in accounts of post-politics, there are multiple and heterogeneous actors assembling around this initiative. Their strategies do not involve the competitive comparisons and top-down partnerships that feature in technocratic management... ..they fundamentally question the status quo and actively seek political alternatives. (Larner, 2014: 191)

Though many elements of the CIC's work are clearly 'neoliberal', cynically presupposing organisations such as this to be co-opted by the neoliberal project is dangerous as it dismisses their radical potential for positive social change (Larner, 2014). North et al (2017) provide another valuable example of this broad line of argument, and respond to the post-political critique of climate policy and urban sustainability strategies (as put forward by Swyngedouw, 2010). To this end they present an account of the work of the Liverpool Green Partnership (LGP) - an ad-hoc partnership advocating for the strategic decarbonisation of the city at the city-level. Rather than either radically challenging or

submitting to elite actors in the city who regarded low-carbon initiatives in neoliberal terms (as a source of jobs and business growth within the context of austerity urbanism), LGP took a third route; ‘negotiation and engagement in which there is openness to new ideas’ (North et al, 2017). LGP therefore ‘developed its perspectives through discussion and engagement’ with other bodies, rather than through technocratic administration as the post-politics literature might presuppose (North et al, 2017: 10), and directly challenged pro-growth discourses. This was not done in an antagonistic way, but via co-production and ‘agonistic debate’ as part of a series of strategies which aimed to use engage with a range of existing policy programmes associated with pro-growth, technocratic, and competitive approaches to ‘sustainable’ urbanism (e.g. by bidding for the title of European Green Capital, and recommending a popular model for strategic urban response to climate change which maintained the city’s competitiveness). The fact that the LGP eventually failed in its task to reduce the city’s emissions to a level sufficient to avoid climate crisis - except for where they were a necessary part of economic restructuring in a post-industrial city (North et al, 2016) - might point to the post-political thesis being correct in this case. But, North et al (2017) argue, subaltern actors are not able to progress city-level decarbonisation alone, and if one reads the case-study for its ‘latent possibilities’ it is apparent that key concessions were made and political change wrought through LGP’s activities. For example; a future Green Capital bid is still a possibility, the city’s Climate Change Strategy is under review, the Council has agreed to review its carbon mitigation strategy, and addressing energy policy and greening the North of the city is on the agenda. They conclude:

This suggests that negotiating with partners and taking their ideas seriously rather than disrupting them can advance the agenda, and forms of economic development that take climate seriously are to be welcomed not presumptively dismissed as neoliberal.

This is going beyond challenging silence; not only disrupting, but enacting a different socio-environmental future for the city, something activist citizens cannot do alone... .. It is not the case that debate or contestation about possible socio- environmental futures will inevitably be closed down. There are debates to be had about what ‘the sensible’ looks like, and the task is to construct movements able to enact them rather than assume that they will fail. (North et al, 2017: 16)

There is a critical ‘flip side’ to the claims these authors’ arguments. Whilst Larner (2014), North et al (2017) and other authors, who make more theoretical critiques of the post-political thesis, are primarily concerned with its potential to overlook the contingency and political potential modern (neoliberal) governance arrangements (Van Puymbroeck & Oosterlynck, 2014<sup>21</sup>; Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; Bylund, 2012; Loepfe & Wezemaël, 2015),

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<sup>21</sup> Van Puymbroeck & Oosterlynck (2014) put forward the relational matrix-based understanding of post-politics described on page 58 in response to these critiques.

other authors argue that the same dynamics result in types of depoliticisation which do not operate through the repression of conflicts being overlooked (Grange, 2015). This might include processes which operate through identification, in which subjects unconsciously internalise political objectives. As a result of this, they never becoming a potential source of conflict (Grange, 2015).

### *The normative consequences of a lack of empirical research*

For many of these authors, a key reason why the post-political thesis fails to capture the contingencies of *actually existing* politics is that it makes assumptions about neoliberalism (and associated technologies of government) without ‘examining the actual initiatives, ideas, and techniques involved’ in concrete cases (Larner, 2014: 191). Overall:

...the ‘post-political’ thesis ignores the nuances of urban politics which are not determined exclusively by neoliberal rationalities, but by political contestation, by ‘struggles and bargains between different groups and interests in cities’. (North et al 2017: 1798, citing Harding, 2009: 35)

This results from a lack of detailed, practice-orientated, or even generally empirical research in the field which ‘cracks open the black box of the post-political condition’ (Van Puymbroeck & Oosterlynck, 2014: 103) and explore the specifics of different situations; of different communities of practice; of the actual self-interpretations of actors within them; (Larner, 2014; Byelund, 2014; Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; North et al, 2017); or, of the specific institutional forms post-politics actually takes in different places (Raco, 2015). Instead, the literature relies on assumptions about, for example, decision making in top-level institutions; specific practices of government; how urban managers balance competing pressures in policy making, and the fixed nature of political agendas (Raco, 2015; Van Puymbroeck & Oosterlynck, 2014; North et al, 2017; Larner, 2014). For Beveridge and Koch (2017a) these assumptions about higher-level policy making go some way to explaining the post-political literature’s ‘fatalistic tone’, and lead to a perspective in which; ‘post-politics tends to happen to people, who occasionally react with radical reassertions of the political but generally do not’ (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a: 38). Treating politics in this way, they argue, will always result in it seeming deficient (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a). Going against the grain not only of the mainstream post-politics literature, but of these critiques, Raco (2015), extends this line of criticism further to argue that these assumptions have resulted in the field underplaying the extent to which depoliticising strategies have undermined *representative democratic* structures - which are so often themselves the target of post-political critiques. He summarises:

...the writings of post-political authors... fail to acknowledge the scale and significance of the political battles that have created, albeit imperfect, contemporary democratic systems. Democracy becomes a rather taken-for-granted term that no longer had to be fought for, but naturally ‘exists’... (Raco, 2015: 157)

As Raco's (2015) above quote suggests, this state of affairs has important consequences for the literature's normative, as well as analytical, project. In addition to 'setting the bar too high' (North et al, 2017) by demanding a radical disruption of the 'sensible' (North et al, 2017) post-politics' tendency to interpret action via a strict good/bad, either/or, binary means that the literature risks fatalistically dismissing or overlooking the very grass-roots alternatives to neoliberalism (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a; Loepfe & Wezemaël, 2015), and long-term institutional change (Legacy, 2016), which it seeks to nurture. As alternative economies inspired authors such as Lerner (2014), North et al (2017) have shown, 'real political' opportunities for change can be found in quite unexpected places. This has direct consequences for the planning literature. In Loepfe & Wezemaël's (2015: 102) words:

...in turning a blind eye to the micropolitics in actual planning practice that could further de-politicise or politicise... post-political theorists are not able to provide opportunities for a way out of the post-political order.

### **3.3.5 The response from post-politics authors, and the difference between post-politics in theory and in *practice***

#### *The Urban Studies debate*

As stated in the introduction, the debate about the merits and limits of post-politics is still very much alive. Indeed, several of its proponents – Derickson (2017), Dikeç (2017), and probably the key vector for post-politics in the CSGP literatures, Swyngedouw (2017) – recently took to the pages of the journal *Urban Studies* (54, 1) to defend post-politics against the above critiques, and in particular argument made by Beveridge & Koch (2017a). I have cited this critique of post-politics in several places above, however its central thrust is, in their own words, that: '...the binary understanding of the real political/politics as police [that is prevalent in the post-politics literature] negates the in-betweenness and contingency of actually existing urban politics...', and that this results in a 'perceived omnipotence of the post-political order' that actually serves to obscure the urban as 'a political space of resistance and emancipation' (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a: 31). On this basis the authors do not quite argue for a complete abandonment of the notion of the post-political (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a), but rather a more 'differentiated' and conceptually agile one, that is able to capture the heterogeneity of urban politics.

Unpacking how Derickson (2017), Dikeç (2017), and Swyngedouw (2017) respond - or otherwise - to a particular thrust of this argument relating to practice and theory gives valuable insights into the limits of post-politics as it is applied to spatial governance practices, which neatly draw this part of the literature review to a close.

### *Post-politics bites back*

The common response from Swyngedouw (2017) and company is that, firstly, Beveridge & Koch (2017a) have failed to fully engage with the post-foundational theory underpinning post-politics, and secondly, that post-foundational theory actually has a much more dynamic understanding of the boundaries between the political and politics than its critics give it credit for. This, they contend, completely undermines Beveridge & Koch's (2017a) protestations. For example, Swyngedouw (2017: 55) identifies, a 'lack of real engagement with the theoretical foundations of the post-politicisation argument' in Beveridge & Koch's (2017a) arguments, and claims that 'the view that post-politicisation as a particular form of de-politicisation evacuates politics from its field of operation' is a common misconception, present in their writing and other critics'. Similarly, Derickson (2017: 44) claims that Rancière's understanding of the post-political is 'mischaracterised in Beveridge and Koch's retelling', and that:

...they entirely ignore what I take to be Rancière's central point in his writing on the post-political condition: the irreconcilable fact of the 'part of those that have no part' as the constitutive outside of the 'partition of the sensible'...

She goes on to outline the ways in which, through a conceptualisation of the police order as 'symbolic construction of the social' rather than a social function, Rancierian post-foundational philosophy actually draws attention to the constitutive 'outside' space from which the truly political always emerges. Dikeç's (2017: 50) article follows a similar pattern, but makes its claims in even stronger terms. He calls Beveridge & Koch's (2017a) article 'polemical', and castigates them for basing:

...their arguments on a typecast version of the notion [of post-politics] rather than on a careful engagement with it. In the end, the notion turns into such a caricature that it becomes possible to pronounce ready-made, bite-size critiques without having necessarily engaged with the notion and literatures most relevant to it.

He goes on to claim and - and it is worth quoting him at length again here to get across the strength of his claims and language - that:

Beveridge and Koch criticise Rancière through Swyngedouw's interpretation rather than by engaging with Rancière's own writing on politics... This tendency to rely on proxy reading, I am afraid, leads to simplistic arguments about the strands of thought that gave rise to some of the contemporary debates about politics, and polarises the debate to the point of caricature'... ...If the authors had engaged with this strand of political thinking, they might had, I suspect, a more nuanced understanding of it. (Dikeç, 2017: 50)

### *A response to the response*

In their starkness, the above comment from Dikeç (2017) provides a useful 'jumping-off' point for a response. In addition to the fact that these authors' responses come dangerously close to an unproductive academic dogfight over whether their critics sufficiently 'get' the theory, their responses miss the mark on two fronts. First, Beveridge and Koch (2017a) are speaking to post-politics' application *within* the CSGP literatures, as they themselves point out in a later response to their critics (Beveridge & Koch 2017b). Whether or not they relied on 'proxy readings' of the key post-foundational texts is therefore a moot point; the original works of Ranciere, Arendt, Mouffe, et al, may well present a sufficiently dynamic understanding of politics/the political to capture the dynamics of urban politics in practice, but this simply does not matter if 'a binary understanding permeates and frames much of the literature referring to the post-political city' (Beveridge & Koch, 2017b). Indeed, as Beveridge & Koch (2017b) suggest, Swyngedouw's writings - one of the key vectors by which post-politics has established a foothold in the CSGP literatures - are especially guilty of defining the division between the political and politics in stark, binary terms, which seem to close down the possibility of the political. Swyngedouw & Wilson (2015: 215) claims that the contemporary politics of resistance 'amounts to 'impotent acting-out' provide a good examples of this.

Second, and very closely related, though they do not say as much in so few words, and despite some forays into critiques of post-foundational writers which left them very open to critique on that front, the nub of Beveridge & Koch's (2017a) critique is that post-political *theory* doesn't capture the heterogeneity of political contestation and foreclosure in *practice*. This criticism also still holds. Put another way, Beveridge & Koch (2017a) (along with Larner, 2014; North et al, 2017; Loepfe & Wezemaël, 2015) attack the suitability of the application of post-foundational philosophy - through post-political theory - to concrete, empirical, cases in the field of CSGP. It is in this deployment in concrete cases of spatial governance and planning practice that post-politics emerges as problematic. Dikeç (2017), Derickson (2017) and Swyngedouw's (2017) defence of the robustness of the work of the post-foundational writers which underpins post-political *theory*, therefore does little deflect this claim.

From the perspective of phronetic social science, and POR more generally, this looks very much like a problems associated with putting theoretical framework before practice, and not using the former as the basis for enquiry into the social. Phronetically speaking, enquiry that *begins* from a theoretical standpoint can never capture the heterogeneity of practice - political or otherwise.

## 3.4 Conclusions: shared problems in practice, potential reasons for the gap, and the potential value of the interpretive British political science literature

### 3.4.1 Summary of arguments made so far

#### *The roles of neoliberalism and post-politics within the thesis*

Before reflecting on the reasons for the lack of practice-orientated CSGP literature concerning the central state and concluding the literature review, it is first worth summarising the key bodies of literature I have reviewed and the role they play within this thesis' analysis.

I began the literature review by positioning the CSGP literature on neoliberalism and planning reform as a valuable tool for tracing out key *path dependences* (and political rationalities underling these path dependencies) in English planning reform since the 1980s, and particularly between New Labour and the Coalition. The closely-related CSGP literature on post-politics, on the other hand, is presented by its proponents as way of explaining shifts in planning regimes and, critically, how these relate to the political strategies deployed by the central state in order to maintain the neoliberal project in the face of political contestation and policy failure. The democratic consequences of these strategies, and how they may be contested, are also of utmost interest to this work. Of particular importance for this thesis, one segment of the post-politics CSGP literature, embodied by Allmendinger (2016) and Allmendinger and Haughton (2015), deploys the lens of post-politics to explain the policy making rationalities and practices which characterised the creation of the NPPF – it being central in the shift between from New Labour's planning regime to the Coalition's. Furthermore, the accounts provided by these two articles provide the fullest yet produced on the production of NPPF, as an example of policy making in the central state.

#### *Neoliberalism and post-politics: Shared problems in practice?*

However, as I have documented, an intense debate currently rages about the value of post-politics for understanding the political dynamics and potential of various spatial governance processes. The fundamental thrust of the critiques of the post-politics and neoliberalism literatures discussed here can be boiled down to one core argument; that by neglecting the specific 'communities of practice' (to use Larner's (2014) terminology) that bring different power relations and patterns of spatial governance into being, the

conceptual frameworks put forward in each of these fields fails to capture the complexity and heterogeneity of the governance processes in which they are interested.

Perhaps because it is 20-or-so-years older than its post-political counterpart, there has been a response from some branches of the neoliberalism CSGP literatures, which now contain a rich corpus of work which deploys various concepts or heuristic devices (such as actually existing neoliberalisation) to focus on practice, agency, and heterogeneity in urban and local governance. Indeed, some influential scholars of neoliberalism come tantalising close to advocating a POR-approach full-stop. Take this excerpt from one of Peck & Theodore's (2010: 172) most widely-cited papers on policy mobilities, for example;

Larner and Laurie (2010) make the case for extending the reach of these modes of analysis to include the embodiment of more "practical" policy knowledges and capabilities. Policy transformations such as privatization are clearly not realized declaratively or through administrative fiat; they are also embodied practices. "Functionaries" of various kinds play important, though often neglected, roles in realizing such projects—in ways that are far from functionally determined... ..There is a range of ways, in fact, in which practical programming knowledges and street-level expertise have assumed greater significance in policy making processes, even across transnational domains...

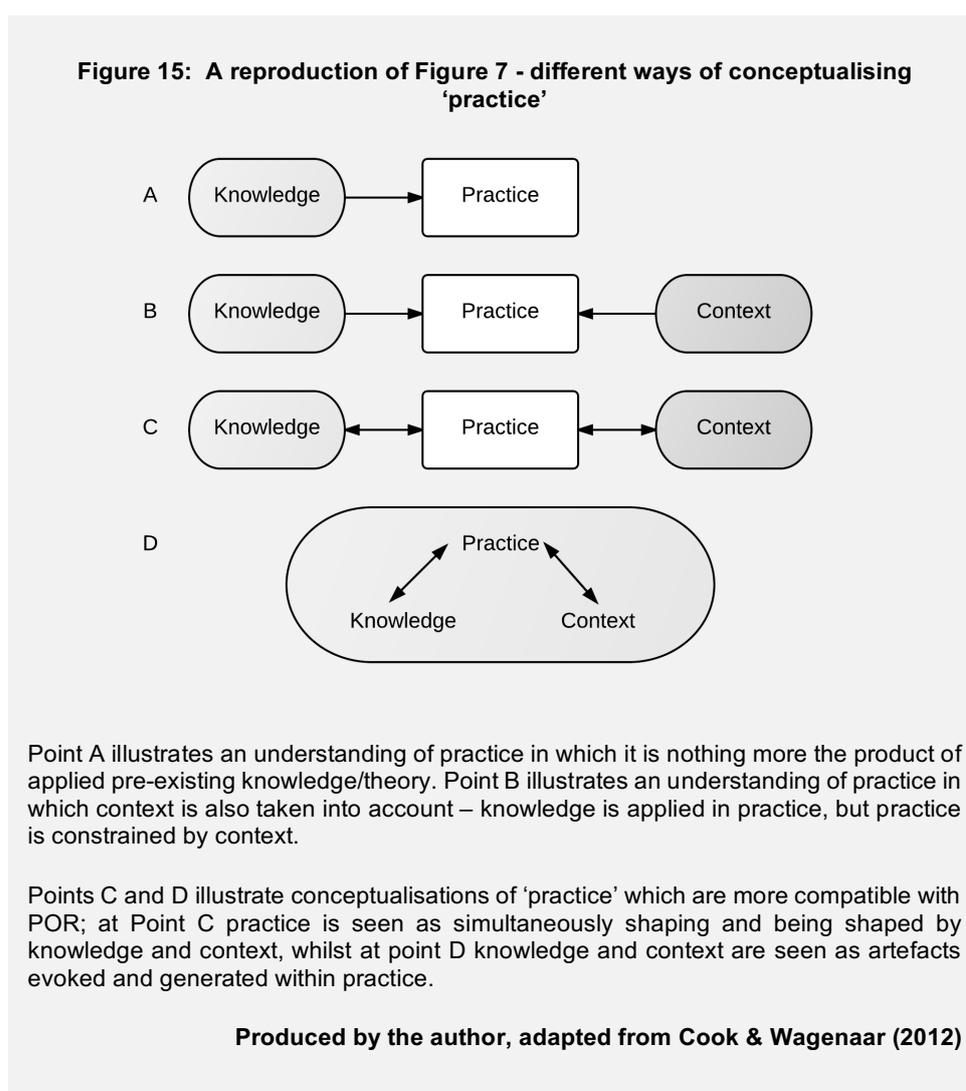
More recently, Storper (2016: 258) has made high-profile arguments for more fine-grained accounts of policy which acknowledge 'the many complex pragmatics' of different situations (Storper, 2016: 258), and which discuss agents' actions and motivations in their own words. Echoing one of the core credos of Flyvbjerg's phronetic social science, for Storper (2016) recourse to broader frameworks for understanding macro-level political/policy phenomena may follow such accounts, but not necessarily.

For post-politics - a much younger field of enquiry for which there remains few practice-orientated studies of governance practices - there is rather further to travel. This being said, there are signs of POR sensibilities emerging through the theoretical critiques discussed earlier, and a handful of empirical cases put forward by authors such as Van Puymbroeck & Oosterlynch (2014), who further a dynamic and relational understanding of post-politics, and Loepfe & Van Wezemael (2015), who draw on assemblage theory.

In sum, whilst both literatures have been criticised for rarely examining the actual practices of state actors in all their heterogeneity and oddness, this is currently less of an issue for the neoliberalism literatures, which has evolved over time, through concepts such as *variegated* and *actually existing* neoliberalism, to take greater account of practice as a starting point for critical enquiry. It is a consequence of this, and the fact that it supplies the most in-depth academic accounts of the NPPF's creation, that this thesis' analysis focuses on post-politics.

### 3.4.2 Potential reasons for the gap in the literature, and the British political science literature as a potential route forward

Whilst there has been the progress towards more practice-orientated analyses in the neoliberalism literature described above, as a whole, and as I sketched out in the introduction to this thesis (see Part 2.1.2), there remains almost no in-depth, practice-orientated, analyses of governance processes within the central state in either body of work. This is despite the central importance that the literature reviewed in this chapter places upon it as a key actor within a political system that remains (despite much political rhetoric to the contrary) tightly hierarchical (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013).



Viewing this discrepancy through the lens of POR reveals it to be one of different conceptualisation of practice being deployed at different levels of government. As I argued in Part 2.2.2, whilst GSCP often deploy a conceptualisation of practice as generative, or at least simultaneously shaped by, context and knowledge (Points C and D in Figure 15,

above) in studies of local, regional, or generally urban governance, studies of national-level governance are predominantly structural, and treat national-level policy as the application of particular policy knowledges and discourses in particular contexts (Point A or B in Figure 15, above).

So why is the CSGP literature's conceptualisation of governance practice at the local/regional/urban level so much more advanced than that deployed in relation to the central state and 'national level'? Four factors seem particularly likely. As I show below, identifying these possible reasons is a valuable exercise because they point to potential ways towards a more advanced conceptualisation of the central state in the CSGP literatures.

*1. Tobler's law and a lack of spatiality:* Planning theorists and critical geographers may have an understandable propensity to focus more on the practices of actors and policy making sites 'closer to', or physically engaged with, shaping the urban environment and politics. This tendency echoes Waldo Tobler's famous 'first law of geography', first proposed in the 1970s; 'everything is related to everything else but near things are more related than distant things' (see Tobler, 2004). In this light, the central state feels 'urban' nor 'close' – despite the fact that basing a focus on 'closeness' seems a hard standpoint to defend in an era of nested assemblages rather than scales, relational understandings of governance, and globalization.

*2. Government to governance:* As demonstrated in the literature review the contemporary literatures on policy, governance and the state place a great emphasis on "de-centred" understandings of governance (Rhodes, 1997), heterogeneous governance networks (Laffin et al, 2013) and devolution via 'localism' (Evans et al, 2013), in which the policy making role of non-state actors, and the diminished capacity of the central state itself, are emphasised (Raco, 2013; Marinetto, 2003). This may lead to a tendency to focus on smaller territorial scales than the nation-level (and with it, the central state), and to provide national policy only as context against which lower levels of government, and associated actors, are studied.

This tendency is obviously despite the fact that central government continues to play a defining role in national planning systems, and particularly the highly centralised English planning system (Campbell & Marshall, 2005; Marshall, 2011; Alterman, 2001). It is worth noting here that the universality of the government-governance shift is something which I question in this thesis' analysis, and indeed, I do so through my analysis of trends in the central state.

*3. Research difficulties and expectations:* There are well-known practical, legal, and analytical associated with researching policy making practices associated with the central

state, particularly in the UK-setting. Many of these relate to much broader challenges associated with studying elites, that common across many different recent contexts. These are addressed in the method chapter. A second element of this is that, in a sense, this ‘gap’ is as simple as the fact that geographers and planners have rarely asked individuals involved with making national-level policy themselves why and how they make policy as they do, rather than interpreting this from secondary sources (such as policy documents, the media, and received wisdom). In the words of Pollitt (2013: 903):

...the authors of white papers have remained anonymous... These documents offer few clues as to who the ministers, top public service leaders and reform advocates actually behind them were – and equally no clue as to who was opposed to them...

The difficulties posed by researching the central state are a subject I will return to in the chapter concerning research design and methods.

*4. The bailiwick of British political science:* Relevant research areas such as the UK civil service, the core executive, parliament and the legislature, all broadly fall into the bailiwick of British political science. *British* political science is distinct approach to the discipline, differentiated from others by more than its research focus on the UK state. Though the discipline has evolved in recent years (Kavangh, 2009), it can still be said to possess a ‘Whiggish’ predisposition towards empirical research and away from theoretically-informed debate (Kavanagh, 2009; Kerr & Kettell, 2006), as well as an enduring focus on the ‘Westminster Model’ as both an object of study and conceptual framework (Kavanagh, 2009).

Writing in this field generally follows very different academic traditions to the spatial governance literature. Rationalist, modernist, empiricist, positivist, and institutionalist approaches predominate (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012: 28; Bevir & Rhodes, 2008), and there is still a vociferous ongoing debate about the merits of interpretivism (see; Marsh, 2011; Turnbull, 2011; Bevir & Rhodes, 2006a), which is embodied by the work of a very small pool of authors. By far and away the most prominent amongst these are Mark Bevir and Rod Rhodes (Bevir, 2010; Bevir & Rhodes, 2003; Bevir & Rhodes, 2006b; Bevir & Rhodes, 2010), who represent a very particular ‘take’ on interpretivist research. As a result, when there is debate in the political science literature about the value of interpretivism, it is often more about the positives and negatives of Bevir and Rhodes’ own specific brand of this extremely broad church, than the broader school of thought their work belongs to.

In contrast, planning and geography underwent their own ‘interpretive turn’ more than 30 years ago, and interpretive and post-positivist paradigms dominates the disciplines in various guises, from communicative schools of thought, to ethnographic and phenomenological. There are therefore quite fundamental epistemological differences

between planning/geography and the majority of research into the central state. This presents difficulties and raises academic transaction costs, not least in the form of 'language barriers', between the two disciplines.

#### *Interpretive British political science as a possible way forwards*

The last of these four observations is particularly significant; not only does it suggest an epistemological reason for the CSGP's lack of engagement with practice in the central state, but it points to a body of literature which could provide a valuable battery of concepts for a more developed conceptualisation. Indeed, within British political science, the sub-field of core executive studies literature focuses specifically on the practice of government. It also has a distinct academic tradition, which Dommitt & Flinder (2015: 4) describe as possessing '...a certain institutional breadth in the sense that it directs attention to the interplay between state and semi-state actors (between hub and spokes)'. Unusually for British political science, this literature has an interpretive ontology, an anthropological methodology, and the recent 'third wave' (James, 2009) of core executive studies possesses a focus on narrative and tradition. This makes it usually well placed for the CSGP literatures to draw on.

I will return to this subject in detail, and explore concepts drawn from this literature via the case narrative in detail, in the discussion and analysis chapter (see below).

#### **3.4.3 Consequences for the analysis: ejecting neoliberalism, post-politics and British political science from the case narrative**

Finally, though this thesis is well placed to test and develop post-politics, its critiques contain within them some important methodological and analytical implications about how this should be done. These feed into the following methods chapter and structure the case narrative and discussion chapters.

The core issue here concerns how to use post-politics as an analytical framework without it becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy, or 'flattening out' the heterogeneity of the research findings, as post-politics' critics accuse it of doing. Writing about how to preserve the value of post-politics as an analytical framework whilst resisting the captivating force of binarism, Bylund (2012) suggests that purposefully avoiding the use of vocabulary of the post-political literature when making diagnoses may be productive. Similarly, Beveridge & Koch (2017: 37, citing Larner, 2014) implore scholars not to 'presuppose' post-politics but to 'interrogate it as a matter of concern'. Storper's (2016) arguments cited above also call for scholars to resist the a-priori judgements which can reside in some uses of neoliberalism as a critical concept. My response is to not use post-politics (or

neoliberalism) as a lens for interpreting the practices/strategies/rationalities involved in the creation of the NPPF, but to eject it entirely from the analysis and the case narrative it produces. I then bring it 'back in' during the discussion. Drawing on principles of phronetic research, the idea here is to avoid theorisation, and let the case narrative 'speak for itself' in all its richness. By bringing in post-politics 'back in' after analysis, I am able to utilise it as an analytical framework without closing down the potential for difference, leaving open the possibility of assessing how well it actually accounts for the practices/strategies identified by reducing the chances of presupposition. Put in other words, in the conclusion and discussion I ask; 'how well does a post-political framework account for the practices, strategies, and rationalities, of actors during the development of the NPPF?', and; 'to what extent does my account of the Coalition's planning reform complement that of Raco, Allmendinger & Haughton, Haughton et al, and Allmendinger?', rather than; '...how did post-political operate in the case of the NPPF?'. This logic is reflected in the language of Objective 3.

I perform a similar analytical move with the core executive studies British political science literature, which I have briefly positioned here as a potential route towards a more advanced understanding of spatial governance practice within the central state. I will more fully engage with this literature in the analysis, after the conclusion of the case narrative, and draw from it concepts which emerged as valuable for understanding the central state through observations of practice.

To an extent, fully ejecting post-politics - as well as prior knowledge of the political science literature - from the case narrative was impossible; their position in this literature review and my own interpretive outlook was always going to prefigure the analysis and case narrative. However, practice theory is useful here; its warnings not to develop epistemic theory, its emphasis on maintaining the 'conditions for surprise' (Wagenaar, 2011: 251), and focus on and develop ultra-rich case studies, provided a powerful disciplining force.

# 4. Research design, methods, and approach to writing

## 4.1 Case study as ‘phronetic’ research strategy

### 4.1.1 Introduction

Having selected OSP and the NPPF as case studies, and positioned my research at the intersection of two different literatures, in this chapter I move on to discuss my overall research strategy, data collection and analysis methods, and approach to writing. I give particular attention to the challenges associated with interviewing elite participants in the Westminster setting, and the various research strategies I developed in response. The final section concerns my considerations regarding the process of writing the thesis, including the ways in which I made efforts to infuse key principles of POR and phronetic research into the writing style I adopted.

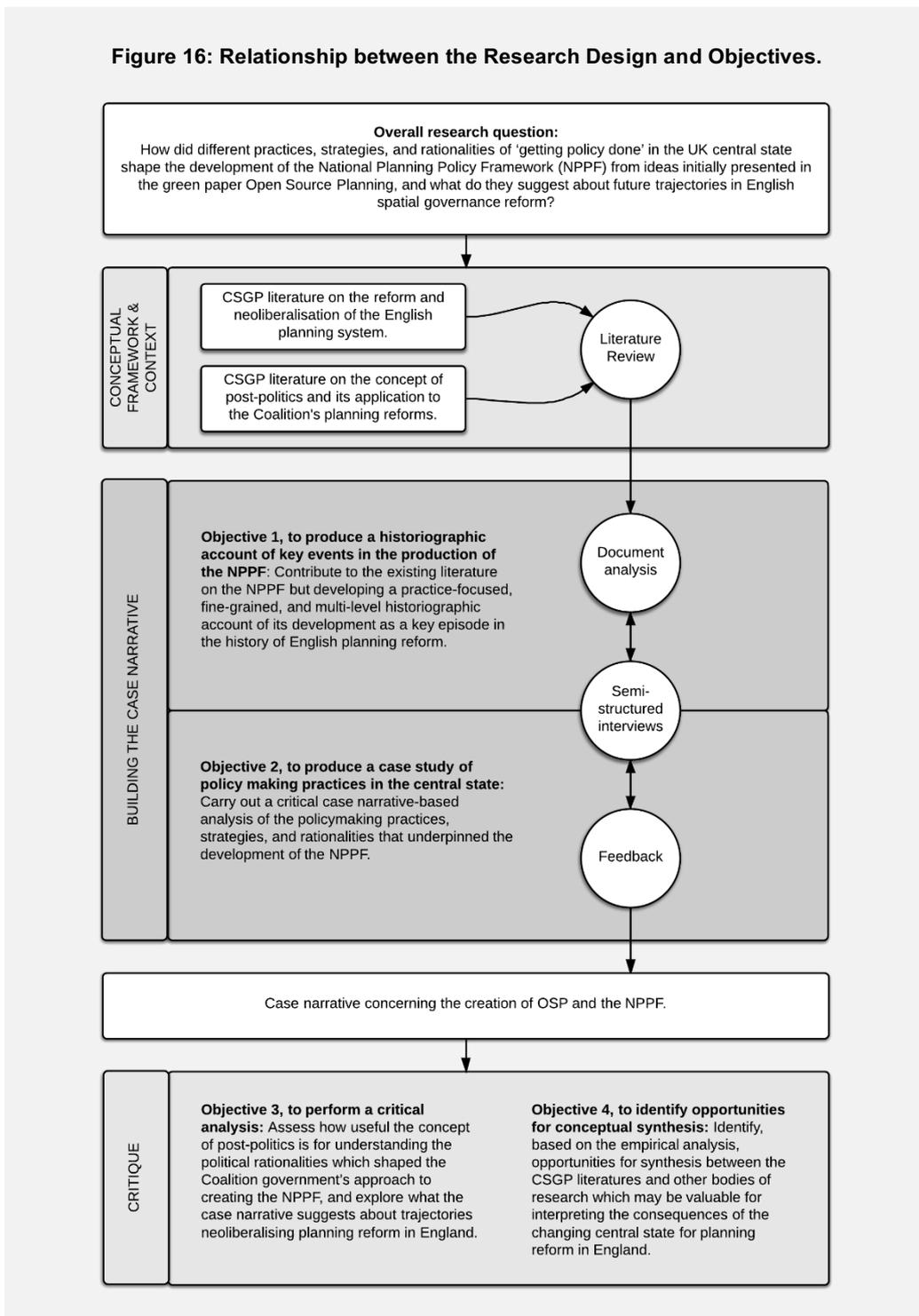
#### *Case study as over-arching research strategy*

Case-based study is central to the phronetic methodology, and as previously established, it was around this which I built my research strategy and design. Indeed, for several principal authors on the use of case-study-based methods, perhaps most notably Robert Yin (1993) and Robert Stake (1995), the case-study approach is itself an overarching research strategy and method. It encompasses data collection and data analysis, as well as the overall logic of research design (Potter, 2012). One of the defining features of case-study as a research strategy is the use of multiple methods and sources of data. Indeed, Yin (1993) goes as far as to argue that ‘a good case-study will use as many sources of data as possible’. These different sources of data act as tributaries which feed into ‘a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility’ within qualitative research’ (Bowen, 2009, p28, citing Eisner, 1991, p110), and builds towards what Clifford Geertz (1973) famously termed ‘thick description’. For phronetic research and its genealogical-phenomenological foundations and aspirations this is particularly important; I needed as many sources as possible in order to capture, as far as possible, the ‘rich ambiguity’ and ‘little things’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006), that shaped policy making practices during the episodes studied. These could then be drawn into a narrative account of events, the aim of which is to convince the reader. With this in mind I drew on four sources/sets of data;

- a. Personal records from my time working in DCLG and Parliament and open-ended discussions with informants and scoping interviews

- b. In-depth document analysis and archival research
- c. Semi-structured interviews
- d. Participant feedback and correspondence

I address each of these below with regards to the role they played in the overall research design and structure, and the techniques I deployed in each case. The overall research design, and how this threads together each of the research objectives, is described in Figure 16, below.



## 4.2 Data collection and analysis methods

### 4.2.1 Personal experience, informants and scoping

From my earliest conceptualisation of the research question right through to conducting formal interviews I met and/or interviewed individuals from wide range of backgrounds, including civil servants, think tank employees, parliamentary clerks and politicians. This process was ad hoc, informal, and unstructured, but nonetheless harvested vital information about planning and policy making (broadly defined) in the central state. Indeed, a more formal approach may have limited participant's openness during these initial stages, and reduced rapport. The information collected was partly of academic value. For example, I:

1. Tested the potential theoretical and analytical scope of the thesis. A particularly important example of this having an effect on thesis concerns the legislative process and the impact of parliamentary scrutiny. I considered making this a central theme of the thesis, but decided not to following scoping interviews with researchers from a range of academic and non-academic backgrounds.
2. Identified potential documentary sources which were valuably did not immediately seem relevant. A good example of this is the 2014 Hansard Society report *The Devil is in the Detail: Parliament and Delegated Legislation* (Fox & Blackwell, 2014) which contained valuable information about tensions between ministers and their civil servants in the early days of the Coalition government.
3. Explored the relevance of academic fields I was unfamiliar with.
4. Staying sensitive to emerging trends in practice which may not have been picked up yet by academia.

But it was also pragmatic. I took advantage of my time in the field, during work for DCLG and POST, to:

1. Maintain some degree of an 'insider' status (in discuss this in more detail later with regards to the challenges of interviewing 'elite' participants).
2. Maintain or building networks of potential research participants.
3. Test the viability of research ideas in a practical sense - most significantly whether I would be able to gain the level of research access to civil servants required for in-depth analysis.

## 4.2.2 Initial document analysis

### *Collecting documents*

...document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies – intensive studies producing rich descriptions of a single phenomenon, event, organisation or program.” (Bowen, 2009, p29).

Initial document analysis began directly after case/episode selection, ran alongside the scoping interviews discussed above, and involved the collection of a wide range documents relating to;

1. Official announcements
2. Policy making and legislative work during each of the policy episodes studied
3. Civil service reform during the period 2010-2015 (particularly relating to DCLG)
4. Related contextual information.

This process started with a comprehensive online archival search, utilising a range of academic databases, Google, and browsing official archives stored on the UK Government’s online portals gov.uk and the National Archive. Collection continued throughout the research process, as particular documents ‘snowballed’ to others and participants flagged up primary or secondary texts they deemed to be particularly significant (or insignificant in some cases) to their work or understanding of events. Some of the most important documents in the study were obtained in this manner<sup>22</sup>.

At this stage I also considered the use of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests (see Government Digital Service, 2014; Bourke et al, 2012), given their utility as a novel way of collecting unpublished data relating bureaucratic processes and state practices (Lee, 2005). However, this was deemed unsuitable for three reasons. Firstly, it was likely to produce administrative data of limited critical value, as information is exempt from FOI where it concerns ‘the formulation of government of policy’ or ‘the economy and the environment’ (see Lee, 2005; Bourke et al, 2012) (this notwithstanding the fact that, in my experience important/contentious decisions were rarely made ‘on the record’). Secondly, from personal experience, the amount of work involved in processing such a large request was likely to frustrate civil servant who may have later been important

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<sup>22</sup> For instance; at one point a parliamentary clerk provided me with a photocopy of a report by the Hansard Society on parliamentary scrutiny of delegated legislation during a scoping interview (Fox & Blackwell, 2014). This was as part of an attempt to explain to me what delegated legislation was, but the document turned out to be a vital source of information about the early days of the Coalition, and the policy impact of culture clashes between civil servants and ministers in the run up to the parliamentary passage of the Localism Act 2011.

research participants. Indeed, early scoping conversations suggested that using an FOI request might additionally be seen as ‘underhand’, and damage my relationship with civil servants in DCLG – limiting my chances of research access for interviews. Thirdly and finally, despite an official ‘20-day turn-around’ FOI requests can take a long and unpredictable amount of time to bear fruit, presenting difficulties for project management (Lee, 2005; Bourke et al, 2012).

**Figure 17: Types of White, Grey, and Black Literature.**

<b>Published (white) literature</b>	<b>Grey literature produced by organisations</b>	<b>Others (black)</b>
Books	Reports	Emails and letters
Book chapters	Discussion papers	Personal notes
Journals	Briefings and guides	Minutes
Journal articles	Data-sets	Conversations
Magazines	Conference papers	Ephemera
Newspapers	Submissions	
	Evaluations	
	Working papers	
	Blogs	

The texts collected covered a wide range of sources, and relevant ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ sources were not initially discriminated between, as documents of all types were treated as potentially valuable sources of insight into each episode (Merriam, 1988). What Lawrence et al (2015) term, ‘grey’, ‘black’, and ‘white’ literatures were all included in the process (see Figure 17, above). This being said, I remained sensitive to the fact that no texts are ‘neutral’ - they are intrinsically bound up in and project particular power relations - and that this had to be considered during both collection and analysis (this was part of the motivation for using a mixture of official and unofficial sources). They are also produced and consumed (though these two actions can be difficult to discern) via material practices (Prior, 2004). As such these texts represented the temporal flow of different policy making practices, as well as different *narratives of* policy making practice during the period. Each possessed different perspectives, degrees of accuracy, and agendas – they were not ‘precise, accurate, or complete recordings of events’ (Bowen, 2009, p33). Even the wording of amendments proposed to bills as recorded in Hansard, which are widely regarded as verbatim, are heavily edited after-the-fact to in order to remove ‘interruptions’ and ensure that they are ‘proper’ (Crewe, 2010a).

Each of these types of literature performed important roles. For example; academic publications (white) and official policy documents (grey) played an important role in the literature/policy review and the identification of metanarratives relating to the government’s planning reform agenda - whilst a critical reading of blog entries from

individual commentators and pressure groups (grey) brought to light perspectives unlikely to be part of official accounts, but with questionable accuracy. Meanwhile, my own notes, organisational charts, and diary entries from my time in DCLG (black) were important for triangulating individual's accounts and identifying further documents for analysis. Overall, this data performed four main roles at this stage of the study:

**Figure 18: Topic Areas of Documents Collected, Sorted by Origin**

**Government and Parliament**

- Civil Service reform during the Coalition (official)
- Civil Service administrative records and organisational information
- Planning reform (official)
  - Policy review and consultation documents relating to Coalition Government planning reforms
  - Policy review documents relating to Labour Government (pre 2010) planning reforms
  - Press releases and policy statements
- Planning policy and guidance documents
- Parliamentary (Hansard) records
  - Select committee reports (including calls for evidence and reports)
  - Relevant parliamentary debates
- Departmental blog posts on various topics

**Non-government**

- Pre-2010 General Election Conservative and Liberal Democrat election green papers and party manifestos
- Pressure group, think tank and expert bodies' reports, briefings, presentations and blog posts relating to civil service reform, parliamentary reform, and planning reform.
- Clippings from mass media news website
- Clippings from the speciality and professional/sectoral media, including interviews

**Other**

- Various reports and memos supplied by participants
- My personal diary and notes from working in DCLG
- Bureaucratic data obtained via FOI requests submitted by other individuals

1. *Developing an overall historical understanding*: Firstly, in line with the phronetic approach<sup>23</sup>, the overall intention behind collecting such a wide range of grey, white and black literature was not to begin to develop theory that accounted for observed

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<sup>23</sup> Which is based on the Foucauldian/Nietzsche (genealogical) principle of patiently accumulating a vast quantity of source material, not 'skipping minutiae', and beginning with the 'little questions' about the case(s) studied (Flyvbjerg, 2004, citing Foucault, 1984:76).

phenomena, per se (as it might be with a grounded theory approach, for example). Rather, it was to develop through triangulation and corroboration an intimate near-historical account of different agent's perspectives regarding the agents, processes, contexts, rationalities, chronologies, and most importantly practices, at play in each policy episodes. This included the official account as embodied in policy announcements and government blogs, and unofficial accounts as documented in the professional media, etc. This was a first step towards developing a 'thick description' of the period and each episode.

*2. Policy documents as artefacts of practice:* In studying the outcomes of each policy episode I was, in a concrete sense, actually studying how the various physical and electronic policy documents which made up the various iterations of the NPPF and OSP came to be (or guided the behaviour which shaped their production), and the central state agents and policy work/practices which went into their construction. Analysis therefore pivoted around an intimate knowledge of each of these documents.

*3. Documents as structuring practice:* Just as documents are artefacts of practice, documents themselves structure practice; in a sense, they are both triggers and traces (Freeman & Maybin, 2011). This is an obvious quality of the planning policy documents mentioned above, such as the NPPF and Localism Act, which purposefully '...fix decisions and instructions, making them both stable and mobile [they are] the basic technology of government, of action both at distance and over time' (Freeman et al, 2011: 132) - but it is also the case for organisational documents, such as DCLG's organograms, choreographic documents such as calls for evidence, and less formal documents such as green papers. A pertinent example of this less direct shaping of action is the Conservative Party's 2010 green paper Open Source Planning (The Conservative Party, 2010a). This document was written by the conservatives before the 2010 election in order to outline their policy agenda for the planning system, and was largely intended for public consumption. But it was a key reference point for civil servants in their preparatory work for what was a likely to be a Conservative-led government, and had a significant impact on the way in which civil servants went about developing both the Localism Act and the NPPF. Decisions made on this basis had important consequences for the whole period. Overall, because civil servants and other (sometimes non-government) agents respond to and use documents (or often a combinations of documents) to justify, rationalise, and guide future action, they play an important role in interpreting different practical rationalities at play during each episode. Before the full thematic analysis I later carried out, it was important to have a detail grasp of these documents' content so I could better understand agent's motivations when discussing them in interviews. Indeed, given the often highly technical nature of planning, it was not rare for participants to refer to specific parts of legislation,

specific paragraphs of planning guidance, even specific legal cases, as justifications for their actions at different moments.

*4. Non-reactive sources of information for identifying key individuals:* Finally, beginning the empirical portion of my thesis with document analysis aided the identification of the key agents (whether individuals or organisations) involved in each episode. These interviews could later be contacted for interview. Similarly, analysis at this stage opened up new lines of enquiry, prompts, and questions for interviewees (Bowen, 2009). On both accounts documents' statuses as 'non-reactive' and 'stable' sources of data were important; because documents are unaffected by the research process they are not prone to issues related to reflexivity (as FOI requests or interviews are) (Bowen, 2009). This meant I could begin to build up an understanding of each of the episodes, as well as develop an effective interview strategy, without influencing the more in-depth, practice-orientated, data I would collect in the future.

#### *Initial analysis*

At this stage collected texts were subjected to a simple historical document analysis. This entailed a 'first-pass' close reading and cross-comparison of each of the texts collected. Pertinent information relating to each of the above categories (i.e. accounts of key events and agents within each episode, the document's overall final form, and the 'active' elements of each document), and more generally the research questions, was noted and recorded in the form of prompts. Deductive and deductive thematic analyses of the data set as a whole (including both interview data and that drawn from documents) followed later, as discussed later in this chapter.

### **4.2.3 Semi-structured interviews and the challenges of researching elites**

#### *Sampling techniques*

Because of their ability to (co)produce rich and detailed data about individuals' understandings of themselves and other phenomena, deep qualitative interviews are the 'core business' of interpretive approaches to policy-related research (Wagenaar, 2011: 251). Indeed, they are particularly valuable to practice-orientated researchers intending to reconstruct historic events, as participation-observation-type methods – widely regarded by the literature as the best way to capture the dynamics of action and practice in context - are unavailable for use (e.g. Beuger, 2014; Nicolini, 2009; 2012; de Souza Bispo, 2015).

I took a 'generic purposive' approach to my sampling strategy for interviewees, basing my selection criteria on my research questions. Drawing on Bryman (2012) and Houston (2016), this process involved first establishing the range of individuals I wanted to interview, then identifying suitable individuals from within this set, and then sampling from those identified. Organisations and individuals directly involved with each policy episode were first identified through the desk-based methods and my own personal experience, as previously described. These individuals were then listed and coded according to their roles at the time, institutional/political backgrounds, and proximity to the key events each of the policy episodes (i.e. to what extent they could be said to have an 'insider' knowledge of the policy processes that unfolded). I then contacted individuals from this list who were likely to represent a balanced range of perspectives according to these backgrounds. Participants with experience in a range of relevant roles were prioritised. These different perspectives make up the headings in the first column of the table in Appendices 1, which lists all the interviews carried out as a part of this thesis, and the anonymised named of participants (where anonymisation was required).

*The challenges and ethics of researching Westminster elites: 'filthy huns' and 'splendid fellows'*

The approaches to interview recruitment and technique which I describe below were largely geared towards combatting the research challenges associated with interviewing bureaucratic and political 'elites' in the Westminster setting. This label could be applied to the majority of individuals in my sample – particularly senior civil servants, MPs, and lobbyists (e.g. Ball, 1994). Though the methodological literature is awash with writing on the practical challenges researchers face when studying this group, authors define and categorise 'elite' status in quite different ways, and the term can 'mean many different things in different contexts' (Harvey, 2011). These differences have important results for one's approach to data collection and reflexivity (Harvey, 2011). Indeed, as well as those authors who deploy a fixed definition of the term, some choose not to explicitly define the term at all (Mikecz, 2012), while some define the concept in relational terms - as being a fluid product of the relationship between themselves and the interviewee (Theusen, 2011; Rice, 2009). Yet others choose an openly pragmatic route, deploying a 'working definition' based on their own specific research interests (Darbi & Hall, 2014). For Darbi & Hall (2014, p837), however;

...the fact that a consensus definition of elite is unavailable does not mean that elites do not exist. Indeed, the manner in which the term is used reflects broader issues of investigative power in that the use of such a concept is inextricably linked to its methodological and philosophical foundations.

One's conceptualisation of power is clearly central to one's definition of 'elite'. The hyper-dynamic, relational, and Foucauldian conceptualisation of power phronetic research endorses thus places my understanding closest to that espoused by Frederik Theusen (2011) and Gareth Rice (2010), above. I therefore use the term relationally, to individuals whose skills, experience, and social/political/organisational position placed them in a powerful position relative to my own as a middle-class, white, Northern English, PhD researcher.

By definition, elite individuals are difficult to access (Richards, 1996) and can be difficult to gain rapport with (Mikecz, 2012). They are also adept at protecting themselves from criticism, and using their rhetorical skills to control enquiry, evade questions, drop into monologues, and weave powerful narratives (Mikecz, 2012; Batteson & Ball, 1995). Elites also challenge the researcher usual position as the in-control 'expert' in interview situations, because they are often highly knowledgeable about the subject at hand and used to being asked questions about their opinions (Mikecz, 2012). However, the relational and dynamic understanding of power reveals that the dynamics at play in the interview situation are far from one-sided; whilst the interviewee may be an 'elite' - and therefore by no means part of a vulnerable social group<sup>24</sup> - it is the interviewer who has time to carefully prepare for the interview, develop strategies, and selectively choose outputs (Morris, 2009). Considering this, Morris (2009) sees the strategies many researchers deploy/endorse in order to close down such perceived power imbalances, such as withholding important information, or placing them in uncomfortable situations, as problematic and potentially unethical. Morris goes on to call this 'duplicitous', given such researchers' concerns about elite interviewees doing the same to researchers. Morris (2009, p213) goes on to write;

This is reminiscent of Blackadder's General Melchett describing German spies as 'Filthy Hun weasels fighting their dirty underhand war!' and 'our' spies as 'Splendid fellows, brave heroes, risking life and limb for Blighty' (Lloyd, 1989).

### *The importance of the Westminster research setting*

The Westminster setting, understood as both a mixture of institutions and places, also presented a series of challenges relating to power and reflexivity. From an institutional

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<sup>24</sup> This being said, I remained mindful of that fact that, for civil servants especially, there was always the chance of reputational damage occurring as a result of my research, for example, should they reveal malpractice or violate a code of conduct in the process of speaking to me. I was therefore careful not to push civil servants into revealing information 'on the record' which they did not want to. Generally, however, and as Houston (2016) also found in the course of her doctoral research into civil servant's policy practices, my participants were quite aware of what they wanted reveal or not.

perspective, several researchers point to the UK civil service and part political system being particularly risk-adverse (Hallsworth et al, 2011), difficult to gain research access to (Pollitt et al, 1990), and even culturally secretive (Maybin, 2013)<sup>25</sup>. This is compounded by the propensity for senior parliamentarians and civil servants to be extremely busy, and receive extremely large amounts of correspondence. These were all issues flagged up doing scoping interviews, from my own experiences, and in the literature (Crewe 2010a; 2016, Batterson & Ball, 1995). Westminster as a place and research site also played an active role in shaping the interview process, through their micro-geographies and power relations. Despite their significance (Elwood & Martin, 2000), these research site/place-interview dynamics are rarely discussed in the methodological literature, and such they are worth reflecting on here.

The older government offices, parliamentary offices, and the Palace of Westminster make for imposing research settings. Even the newer government offices (such as DCLG's) can be imposing in an intensely corporate way. To an extent this is purposefully so; the ornate limestone facades of Whitehall, the grand entrances and hallways of the parliamentary offices on Millbank, the Palace of Westminster, even the areas' spatial organisation, were all purposefully designed to project imperial influence and particular elite-public-state relationships (Minkenberg, 2014). Even navigating Westminster tube station - a cavernous and futuristic structure of exposed concrete and steel - is an emotive experience. And, as you then leave the station you emerge under the shadow of 'Big Ben', surrounded by thousands of international tourists, and closer to the Palace, police with machineguns. These are globally recognised symbols of a particularly explicit type of dominance, and one cannot help but feel awed by the symbolism and feeling of being close to a *centre of power*.

Beyond these monumental projections of power, the Palace of Westminster also has more directly exclusionary elements to its micro-geographies and architecture (Puwar, 2010). In her ethnographies of parliament Emma Crewe (2005; 2010, 2010a; 2012; 2016) describes the Palace as a somewhere between gilded gothic palace, a private members club, and a public school; it is designed to be comfortable for the sections of society who frequent these kinds of environment (Crewe, 2010b). I certainly am not one of these people. Indeed, the very architecture of the building exerts and highlights class privilege in a range of ways (see Puwar, 2010). I was lucky enough to have worked in Westminster

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<sup>25</sup> This is something which may well help to explain how little interpretive or practice-orientated research there has been into the institutional settings of parliament, central government and the core state.

for several months<sup>26</sup>, and knew it and the Palace well, and yet I still felt this force acutely. The power relations wrapped up in the micro-geographies of these places all feed into the interview process, sometimes subtly and sometimes blatantly shaping the dynamics at play between the researcher and participant (Elwood & Martin, 2000).

**Figure 19: Images of the Westminster Research Setting**



**Above:** The austere interior of Westminster Tube Station. Both by Write (2013) Retrieved from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/danielwright/sets/72157635651080396> on 23/12/2016.

**Left:** An imposing view of Elizabeth Tower, from the main exit of Westminster Tube station. By McBryde (2013). Retrieved from [https://www.flickr.com/photos/alan\\_mcbryde/8624117277/](https://www.flickr.com/photos/alan_mcbryde/8624117277/) on 23/12/2016.

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<sup>26</sup> As well as working in DCLG I was lucky enough to work in the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology on a three-month placement during 2015, where I wrote a briefing for parliamentarians on the subject of ‘trends in political participation (Slade & Hobbs, 2015). This experience also fed into my research in as much as it familiarised me with the legislative process and further emphasised my ‘insider’ status.

Overall, and bearing Morris' (2009) comments regarding the fluid balance of power in elite interviews in mind, the methods I deployed regarding recruitment and interviewing were not necessarily geared towards 'overcoming' these issues of power and positionality, but to reflexively taking them into account as part of the research process. After all, these elements played an important role within the narratives of policy making work/practice in the central state. The way in which they shaped my approach to recruitment, and then interview strategy, are outlined below.

### *Recruitment techniques*

Gaining access is one of the more pressing challenges researchers face when their research concerns elites (Mikecz, 2012), or indeed the UK central government (Pollitt et al, 1990). My approach to recruitment was 'phased', and began with research invites being email to individuals who I knew personally, or who I thought it might be easier to gain access to. I then worked 'inwards' towards individuals I had identified as being particularly senior and/or central to the policy episodes studied. These phases consisted of sending invites in rounds of five or six at a time, and the next phase began after I had established the degree of success of the previous phase. This approach was used for four broad reasons:

- *Snowballing and utilising personal connections*: At the conclusion of each interview I asked individuals if; a) there were as anyone they recommend I talk to, and b) if they minded me mentioning their name to these individuals. In this way I utilised personal connections and recommendations as a way of improving research access to harder-to-reach individuals in later phases. These personal connections are something highlighted in the literature as being particularly valuable for establishing elite interviews (Herod, 1999; Darbi & Hall, 2014).
- *Phronesis and experimentation*: The art of interviewing is a fundamentally practical and applied one, learned through practice and dependent upon context and emotion. It therefore relies, or should rely, on *phronetic* reasoning (Theusen, 2011). Phasing the recruitment process enabled me to build up confidence and hands-on experience as I worked towards more 'elite' participants, whose time was more limited. As I became more confident I found it easier to build rapport and converse confidently with participants (something which helps to overcome power dynamics in elite interviews (Goldstein, 2002; Harvey, 2011). And, though my questioning regime remained the same throughout the process (for the sake of comparability and consistency), this provided scope for experimenting with different presentational styles, developing more effective approaches prompting, etc, early on in the process, during interviews in which there was more room for mistake. I could then reflect on these approaches, and adapt them accordingly.

- *Place*: An important dimension of building experience in this way was spatial; over time I grew more acclimatised to the Westminster research settings in which I found myself.
- *Politics*: My likelihood of gaining access to many of the individuals I hoped to recruit depended to a great extent on the current state of national politics. For example, during periods of great political uncertainty and activity, like the period of the 2016 EU referendum, individuals were generally more difficult to recruit. Equally, particular individuals became easier to contact if they had recently moved away from the political ‘front line’, for example, after leaving a department or the civil service altogether.

Before sending invites to each potential research I carried out in-depth online research into their professional backgrounds. This online biographical information provided useful (if terrifyingly detailed) contextual information about interviewees, which was useful for demonstrating my own knowledge, tailoring prompts and questions to interviewee’s specific experiences (this is identified by Laurila (1997) as a particularly important step for establishing rapport elite interviews), and interpreting interviewee’s responses.

In total, I sent out 44 invites, with 25 individuals agreeing to be interviewed (two more than once). At slightly over half, this was a much better rate of response than I originally expected, and it suggests that the phased approach worked well. The majority of these invites were via email, though one successful invite was sent via the social network Twitter, and another two were made via written letter. These invites briefly explained the project, why the recipient had been selected, and what was required of them if they chose to take part. I was careful here to tailor each invite to each recipient, making it clear that I would value their opinion and that I was aware of their particular roles within each policy episode (which, again, I had gleaned through in-depth research into each participant’s political and professional background). I also made efforts to emphasise my ‘insider’ and professional/business-like credentials in these invites by, for example, mentioning the names of colleagues and past interviewees (strictly only where this was appropriate and didn’t conflict with ethical guidelines or arrangements regarding anonymity), my previous roles in DCLG and parliament, that I was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and various ‘titbits’ of insider knowledge. Presentation also played a role in this. For example, I used a corporate-style email signature that included the University of Liverpool logo, my position in the University, and my various social media details, in a similar way to that which I had observed civil servants in DCLG using email signatures. Emphasising one’s ‘insider’ position in this way has been identified by several authors as being more effective for gaining access to elites than the more

traditional approach of emphasising one's position as an unthreatening, 'objective', and external researcher (Yeung, 1995; Welch et al, 2002; Rice, 2010).

These overviews were accompanied by a longer, formal, explanation of the project and what participant's involvement would entail, in line with the ethical approval process at the University of Liverpool. This made clear that interview data would be securely stored on University of Liverpool computers and that participants had a right to opt out of the research at any point, amongst other procedures in line with the University's ethical guidelines (see Appendices 2).

One of my overall strategies was to be flexible as possible for interviewee's requirements - something highlighted as extremely important in the elite interview literature (Richards, 1996). As part of this, participants were given the choice of interview location - though it was expected that for most central London would be the preferred location. This was the case; of the 25 interviews I carried out face-to-face, only two occurred outside of this area, one in Milton Keynes and one in Catford. The central London interviews took place in DCLG and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) main offices; Parliamentary offices, MP's offices in Portcullis house; the various offices of private, charitable, and professional bodies across central London; coffee shops, bars, and cafés in Westminster; and the Palace of Westminster itself. Though face-to-face interviews were preferred for consistency and the greater awareness of non-verbal and 'cultural' cues (Harvey, 2011), I also carried out two interviews by phone, where this was easier for participants. In contrast to Sturges & Hanrahan (2004) I found the data I collected from these interviews to be as in-depth as other interviews I conducted.

'Saturation' was achieved once I had; a) adequate data to answer the research questions and account for the phenomena studied (O' Reilly & Parker, 2012)<sup>27</sup>, and; b) once the practical constraints associated with writing the thesis meant I had to stop data collection. This combination of indicators was necessary because the phronetic/genealogical methodology's emphasis on collecting as rich a deep a pool of data as possible, and the sheer number of individuals involved in each of the policy episodes studied, meant that data collection could have gone on almost indefinitely with little repetition of results and a low chance of snowballing becoming exhausted.

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<sup>27</sup> This is rather than theoretical saturation, which is generally used in grounded theory to mean the point at which analytical categories and the variances between them are fully accounted for (O' Reilly & Parker, 2012), or thematic/data saturation, the normative point at which 'nothing new is generated' (O' Reilly & Parker, 2012, p192).

### *Interview questioning strategy and technique*

The overall approach I took to interviewing participants was semi-structured. This, on one hand, was flexible enough to allow for the pursuit of new lines of enquiry as they emerged or closed down (Berry, 2002), and helped foster an informal and comfortable atmosphere that increased rapport with participants. On the other, it provided enough structure to ensure that I collected data relevant to the research questions. I developed a questioning guide to ensure a degree of comparability between interviews. This opened with an introductory section ensuring that I;

- a. reminded the participant of the overall intention of my research, and describe its 'origin story' - this was to ensure that conversations stayed on-topic, and to increase rapport at the beginning of the interview
- b. confirmed the participant's preferences regarding anonymity, and whether or not they were happy for the conversation to be audio-recorded
- c. checked how long the participant had for the interview

It also had a concluding section which ensured that I:

- a. discussed participant consent forms with participants, and confirmed their preferences regarding anonymity following the conversation
- b. asked them permission for follow-up enquiries in person or via email, and for recommendations regarding further interviewees (as part of the snowballing approach to recruitment)
- c. asked them for comments or criticisms regarding my work

The main questioning protocol was divided into two parts (as illustrated in Appendices 3). One half was concerned with exploring participants' understandings of how each policy episode unfolded in practice. Focusing on the particular policy episodes in which the participant was personally involved, I asked participants to 'walk me through' what they saw as the important processes, individuals, work, etc., involved, and what their role was within this. This strategy was useful for developing a practice-orientated historiographic understanding of each episode, and reduced the chances of participants feeling cornered and reeling off the 'party line' (Aderback & Rockman, 2002). It is also highlighted in the elite interview literature as a particularly effective way of broaching sensitive topics, or topics for which participants' recollections maybe hazy (Berry, 2002). Data collected in this manner could also be easily compared and corroborated across interviews.

The other half of the guide was geared towards exploring what participants saw as the key rationalities, 'big ideas', or contexts were that cross-cut and underpinned the policy making practices comprising each episode. This was built around concepts drawn from

the literature review (for example; deregulation, marketization, or the 'Westminster culture'), and supplemented with prompts as new themes came to light during data collection. Both halves of the protocol were thus quite open-ended, but the historiographic element tended more towards a 'focused interview' approach, in which interviews;

...may still remain open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but you are more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol. For example, a major purpose of such an interview might simply be to corroborate certain facts that you already think have been established... In this situation, the specific questions must be carefully worded, so that you appear genuinely naive about the topic and allow the respondent to provide a fresh commentary about it... (Yin, 2003, p90)

The key idea behind this approach was ensure that I collect information regarding both structure and agency, which could then be effectively threaded into an account which stylistically balanced both. To return to the quote from Flyvbjerg (2001: 138) on this subject I was; '...deliberately [seeking] out information for answering questions about what structural factors influence individual actions, how those actions are constructed, and their structural consequences'.

There was an inevitable degree of flexibility to this format, and I often oscillated between each half of the protocol where this simply suited discussion, time drew short, or it was especially productive to directly link broad themes to specific actions. None the less, I ideally aimed to begin discussions with the account-focused half of the protocol, as I judged that doing so would operate as useful memory aid, as well as platform from which to discuss more abstract and perhaps hard-to-grasp concepts. I also figured that concluding with a more open-ended discussion would present an opportunity to check the completeness of the information I had collected (Mikecz, 2012). Indeed, for some participants, I found discussing broad themes/generalities and then focusing on concrete examples was more conducive to the conversation.

As new lines of enquiry emerged throughout data collection I fed these back into the protocol in the form of prompts and what Berry (2002) calls 'probe notes'. I also tested/corroborated individuals' views against one another where they differed, being careful to balance confrontation and dialogue (see Theusen (2011) for a detailed exposition of how this balancing act related to phronesis). These techniques complemented the more rigid protocol and fed into the overall semi-structured approach.

Maybin (2013) argues that one of the key challenges researchers interested in practice and routine face is that individuals are often not predisposed to talk about their day-to-day work during interviews. In her words;

How can individuals report on the activities that are so common to their daily activities they have forgotten that things might be otherwise? Even if they can recall them, they appear to make for a dull conversation and inappropriate interview material. And how can they describe the logics which organise these activities when the very definition of this tacit knowledge suggests it is not amenable to reflection and articulation? (Maybin, 2013: 72)

This was something I encountered in my own research. My technique of encouraging participants to 'walk me through' their policy work was useful in countering this, but I also drew on Maybin's (2013) strategy of using what she calls (drawing on Holsetin & Gubrium (1995)) an 'active approach' to interviewing. Starting from the standpoint that in interviews meaning is generated jointly by *both* the interviewer and the interviewee in a dynamic and interactive process, this involves the interviewer consciously deploying techniques which may help the interviewee reflect on and interpret their own experiences. I largely did this in two ways. Firstly, also following Maybin (2013), I posed counterfactuals regarding the way each episode unfolded. In doing so I encouraged participant to question why events unfolded as they did. Secondly, I purposefully reflected on my own experiences of working in DCLG during interviews. Though I had to be careful not to overly steer or prejudice responses in doing so, this was a useful way of encouraging interviewees to question and probe differences in perspective or experience between myself and themselves regarding particular topics. This opened up conversation in more critical and reflexive, and less descriptive, ways. I also found it to be a useful strategy for shifting conversation onto the subject of practice and everyday experience where participants were more prone to talking in the abstract, or in generalisations.

#### *Audio recording, anonymity, and informed consent*

The means of recording interviews was another aspect of interview procedure carefully I considered. Both scoping interviews and some of the literature on elite interviews suggested that the presence of a recording device may reduce some participants' willingness to be forthcoming (Richards, 1996; Byron, 1993; Aberback & Rockman, 2002), which obviously negates audio recordings' usefulness as a way of ensuring accurate transcription. I thus gave participants the option to be recorded or not, and fully expected either many to refuse, or the recorder's presence to adversely effect the quality of data collected. However, much like Mikecz (2012) and Maybin (2013), I found that neither was the case; most participants appeared to speak openly, and all but one participant was happy to be recorded.

I was similarly surprised by participants' choices regarding anonymity; I offered participants full anonymity where this was possible, and I expected the vast majority of participants to want this. Many participants, however, were quite happy to be identified. As the table of participants in Appendices 1 and 2 indicate, these tended to be more senior

participants, who were not civil servants. This may well have been because some of these individuals actively wanted to get their side of the story ‘on the record’, and emphasise their degree of influence. Civil servants, for obvious reasons, were much more likely to request anonymity.

Full anonymity, however, was not always possible, and had to be carefully negotiated for two reasons. Firstly, the civil service is extremely tightly networked and close-knit (Houston, 2016). Work tends to proceed through personal networks, and as one participant pointed out (Interview: SCS2, 2016), the ‘fast stream’ recruitment system tends to mean that senior managerial staff keep in close contact with the cohorts in which they entered the civil service throughout their careers. Secondly, the civil service’s is, by some measures, very hierarchic. This meant that there were often few people ‘in the room’ during pivotal moments in each policy episode. Both of these factors meant that comments made by certain individuals about certain situations would be easily attributable. I made this clear to participants where it was the case, but it was quite obvious that several participants were aware this was the situation. There was thus a balance to be struck between removing enough information so as to render participants safely anonymous when they wished to be, and not losing contextual information which was important to the value of the data (Houston, 2016).

My response was firstly to err on the side of ethical caution and remove enough details to make absolutely sure those who wanted to remain anonymous could do so, even if running the risk of reducing the quality of the data. And, secondly, to agree with several participants that if I were to cite them in a way which was attributable, I would first send them the citation I wished to use, along with any accompanying text. To give as much flexibility as possible in different cases, these agreements were bespoke, and written by hand into the ethical approval forms. They were signed, at the conclusion of interviews. I was also careful to take note when participants wished to speak ‘off the record’, as frequently occurred. Transcripts and audio files were treated confidentially, and stored on password protected university computers, and in a locked filing cabinet in physical form, in line with the Data Protection Act (1998).

#### **4.2.4 Analysis, coding, and feedback**

*Overall approach: Inductive-deductive thematic analysis*

My approach to interpreting, sorting, and coding my data set as a whole, and systematically producing case narratives, was loosely based on Fereday & Muir-Cochrane’s (2006) ‘inductive-deductive’ approach to thematic analysis. As its name

suggests, this approach includes both inductive and deductive elements. The deductive, template-based, portion of analysis began with the development of a loose codebook prior to the in-depth analysis of data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This codebook served as a data management tool, assisted in my initial interpretation of the data, and left an important 'trail of evidence' which improved the credibility of my findings (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It was based on the literature review, research question and objectives I had set, and most importantly, the initial document analysis described above. Most significantly, it sensitised me to important trends in the data. The inductive portion, on the other hand, was data-driven, and therefore involved recognising important historical information and themes in the data itself, such as particular understandings of key moments which were shared by particular groups of participants, and then encoding them accordingly (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I took interview transcripts as my starting point, but also roamed through documentary sources (such as policy documents and press announcement) as they emerged as from analysis, and where they provided relevant to the developing narrative.

The benefit of this hybrid approach was that it provided a balance between structured, systematic, analysis, and grounded, open-ended, enquiry. The deductive portion of the analysis provided a starting point for the 'to-and-fro process between coding the data and making sense' (Houston, 2016, p68), and ensured that the narrative account I developed engaged with key themes in the literature. It also sensitised me to particular events, themes (for example, regarding 'post-bureaucratic' critiques of the 'Whitehall model', and how they fed into the policy making process used to create the NPPF), and concepts of note, and ensured that I was aware of what the mainstream, 'received', narrative of the events during the 2010 election and development of the NPPF were. Knowing how this diverged from my own developing account helped me to remain aware of the contribution I was making to the literature, and thus helped me to guide my analysis towards productive ends. Meanwhile, the latter, inductive, stage of analysis provided the space for agents' practices to 'speak for themselves' - something Flyvbjerg (2006) argues is a key feature of a good case narrative; and the 'conditions for surprise' (Wagenaar, 2011).

One of my key concerns in the coding process was to preserve the contextual information which, according to my phronetic methodology, was absolutely central to enquiry into practical rational(ities), but which in Houston's (2016, p69) words is vulnerable to being lost through the 'the de-contextualisation that happens through the data sorting and coding process'. Flyvbjerg is surprisingly quiet on how to respond to this issue, given the utmost importance he places on preserving contextual information in social enquiry; How does one preserve such contextual links during analysis, whilst also ensuring that key narrative themes and strands are systematically discovered and surfaced? I responded by ensuring that every code I developed remained temporally anchored in a particular

moment. For example, I did not code for *'views on the role of civil servants in policy formulation'*, but rather; *'views on the role of civil servants in policy formulation – expressed in relation to development of policy making strategy for first draft of NPPF'*. This ensured that analytical themes didn't lose their position in the flow of events and practices, and that I remained aware of their contingency. The approach I took to actually writing the case narratives was also a key part of preserving this contextual information. This is detailed in the final part of this chapter.

#### *Key stages of analysis and the value of the writing process*

Again building on Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006), the overall process of inductive-deductive analysis was iterative, reflexive, and fed back into itself; as I moved from text to text new interpretations opened up new themes and these fed into new codes. These were then built back into the process until no new codes emerged, and I felt I had developed a sufficiently convincing and 'deep' understanding and account of the key events, practices and agents' interpretations. The coding and recoding process began in the early stages of data collection (in the form of loose memos and prompts), and continued throughout the research process, including during writing. Indeed, I found, as other authors have (St. Pierre, 2000; Richardson, 1998), that the writing process entwined itself deeply with analysis. As I structured and wrote my own narrative of events I was forced to reengage with the data in ways in which I previously had not, and was made to continually question the extent to which the account I was writing accurately represented my own interpretations of other's interpretations; What language should I use to describe these events? How can I describe, in a logically written way, the chaotic and vast complexity of these situations and this story? In the process, to quote St. Pierre (2000, p970), I 'used writing to think' and;

...wrote my way into particular spaces I could not have occupied by sorting data with a computer program or by analytical deduction... ...I made accidental and fortuitous connections I could not foresee or control.

In this sense, the writing process itself became an additional stage of data analysis (St. Pierre, 2000). This was a process of data analysis characterised by creativity, improvised sorting and ordering - the logic of which was quite different to the formal inductive or deductive coding which drove the main analysis.

#### *Ongoing feedback and phronetic dialogue*

Throughout the development of the thesis I made sure I received various forms of feedback as a way of buttressing the validity of my results. Several of the mechanisms I used are well established; I presented my evolving work at a range of national and international, planning and non-planning conferences; regularly discussed my work with

supervisors; asked participants for general feedback at the end of interviews. I also sent anonymised drafts of some chapters to some participants for comment. I also used follow-up interviews in two cases where doing so appeared valuable and the interviewee was happy to oblige.

#### **4.2.5 Key limits to the research**

Before concluding this chapter with an outline of the approach I took to writing, it is important to outline two important limits to this thesis' findings. These are closely linked, and relate to sampling and the range of interview data drawn upon in the case narrative.

##### *Small sample numbers*

Firstly, participants were initially selected on the basis that they were deeply and personally involved with one or more of the policy episodes *originally* of interest - the Localism Act 2011, NPPF, and the National Planning Practice Guidance Review (OSP was added following analysis). When the decision was taken to focus exclusively on the NPPF, data from interviews which had mainly concerned the other episodes became of less value for constructing the case narrative (though they did provide valuable context). This resulted in a relatively small pool of interviewees who had consistent and deep involvement with the NPPF. This outcome is, partly, unavoidable due to the relatively small number of people 'in the room' at key moments during the process. For example, by interviewing one member of the PAG, I effectively had a sample comprising 25% of those involved with drafting the PAG version of the NPPF. It could also be mitigated by the use of secondary sources. Furthermore, data collected on the other policy episodes has been retained, and as discussed above, could form a valuable basis for future research and publications.

##### *The limits resulting from trying to get a 'representative' sample*

Secondly, the sampling strategy aimed to get a balance of senior/elite and less senior/elite participants. The intention was to produce a more 'representative' sample, which contained a range of groups which may have different interpretations of the events of interest. However, it became apparent that because of the tightly hierarchical nature of the UK civil service, less senior civil servants often had very limited knowledge of the actual practices/strategies/rationalities underlying many important decisions. In fact, in many cases influential non-government agents were more aware of the details of important decision-making moments than less-senior civil servants. It became apparent whilst writing up the case narrative that such an approach placed a premium on this kind of information. This observation is valuable for future research of this nature: if conducting research which aims to construct a narrative around key decision-making

processes in the central state, a purposive strategy with a focus on senior decision-makers may be valuable.

## 4.3 Approach to writing

### 4.3.1 Writing history and capturing phronesis

#### *General principles*

The phronetic methodology also informed the way in which I wrote the following account. I, for example, ‘emphasise the little things’ (Flyvbjerg, 2004: 296), rolling into the wider narrative the minutiae and apparently mundane (for example, the internal dynamics and working practices of the group which drafted an early version of the NPPF), and highlight ambiguities and contradictions where they emerge (Flyvbjerg, 2004). I also try to oscillate between structural factors and agency when recounting explanations for why particular policy making practices were carried out as they were. This is part of a phronetic process of ‘joining structure and agency’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

Perhaps most importantly, in the following account I focus on the policy making *practices* and rationalities which drove the development of OSP and the NPPF. I discuss different policy ideas, discourses, and policy substance where it is necessary to understand why the policy making work in these episodes unfolded as it did, but these features are of secondary interest to agents’ practices (not least because, as discussed in the literature review, there is plenty of high-quality research concerned with these aspects of the OSP and the NPPF).

#### *Specific techniques: Networks and names, long quotes and footnotes*

I also used more specific writing techniques to preserve valuable contextual information. Some of these were planned, whilst others emerged ‘naturally’ as ways of expressing the data during the writing process. For example, at times the narrative flow thickens and slows with the names of agents involved and their backgrounds, legacies, or links to different groups and organisations, and make extensive use of footnotes to relay this information where it is not central to the story. Though there isn’t the scope to explore these biographical details in great depth, they are useful in a critical and contextual sense, and reflects the genealogical ambitions of phronetic social science (see Flyvbjerg, 2004: 294; Foucault, 1998: 80). They give valuable insights into the wider policy networks in

which these episodes sit, and associated actors, materials, documents, ideas and institutions. To return to Flyvbjerg's (2006: 238) words, they help foster in the reader 'sensitivity to the issues at hand that cannot be obtained from theory', or pithy summarisations of main results. To give just two examples; it is interesting to note the dense network of individuals linked with the think tank Localis (alongside the more high-profile think-tank Policy Exchange) immediately prior to the 2010 election who went on to play directly important roles in the NPPF's development. Similarly, it is interesting that a large number of individuals either directly or indirectly involved in the story worked for, or went on to work for, public relations and communications firms specialising in contentious development (I will return to these themes in Chapter 9). Another approach I use is to regularly quote interviewees at length. Following Wagenaar (2004) the intention here is to let participants 'speak for themselves', tell the story in their own words, and to preserve the links they make between different phenomena/practices during the course of conversation. Where possible, I wanted to leave in the curious little details and nuances of individuals' stories which built empathy with the reader.

Overall, by presenting information in these ways I hope to contribute to what Flyvbjerg (2001; 2004) calls the 'irreducible quality' of rich, fine-grained, and open-ended case studies. The account which follows is just one of many potential 'cuts' through the complex case of OSP and the NPPF; one transection, one pulled thread, and one potential 'line of flight'. In writing the case narrative in this way I hope readers will be able to 'explore' the narrative on their own terms and draw from it understanding that theory cannot capture (Flyvbjerg, 2006), are beyond the scope of my research questions, and also beyond my own knowledge.

# 5. Introduction to the case narrative, the development of Open Source Planning, and the formation of the Coalition

## 5.1 Preface

### 5.1.1 Introduction

#### *Open Source Planning (OSP) and the NPPF*

Before data collection began this first third of the case narrative, which runs from late 2009 through to late 2010, was not originally planned as a central part of the thesis. It focuses on the Conservative Party's pre-2010 General Election production of the green paper *Open Source Planning* (The Conservative Party, 2010a), the transition phase between the Labour and Coalition administrations, and subsequent discussions about key elements of their reform programme. However, interviews quickly established that events during this period provided some important insights into the policy making rationalities, strategies, and practices involved in the creation of the NPPF. Though OSP is highlighted in the literature as making many of the proposals which would go on to 'dominate' the Coalition's planning reforms (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2014), this period has also received very little academic attention to date. [Furthermore, it offers](#) an interesting opportunity to study how broad planning policy ideas formed in opposition are reshaped into workable policy solutions in government, and what processes shape this difficult transition.

As such, some of the events described below provide important contextual information for interpreting policymaking practices during [the rest of the case narrative](#). For example, the roles/backgrounds of important individuals and organisations, or civil servants' response to the contents of Open Source Planning (OSP). Other events are significant to the development narrative in their own right, such as the impact of the Coalition negotiations on the make-up of DCLG's ministerial team. Yet others point to underlying policy making rationalities that link to much wider political discourse, and shaped policy-making across the [whole of the Coalition era](#). Examples here include the Conservative's Localism/Big Society critique of the role of the civil servants in the policy process as they perceived it to function under the New Labour, or the Party's purposeful use of language

alluding to the emancipatory promises of new technology. In this part of the thesis these themes and practices are explored through five events;

1. The Conservative's development of planning policy in opposition, the political and practical rationalities underpinning the process developed, and the role the personal experience of the authors played in this
2. The publication of Open Source Planning and its reception from civil servants, as well as the wider policy community
3. The Civil Service's pre-election preparation and development of a 'rough cut' version of the NPPF
4. The Coalition negotiations and their influence on the ministerial team responsible for the planning policy in DCLG
5. The emergence of ministerial-civil servant tensions in DCLG and the debate concerning the abolition of the plan-led system

Underpinning each of these steps is an interest in how policy ideas relating to spatial governance are assembled when a political party are in opposition, how they are shaped by the realities of governance and 'getting policy done' once a party is in power (this is explored in the policy episode, in relation to the NPPF), and what (in the Westminster context) these strategies might tell us about the ways in which policy making practices in the central state shape planning reform.

#### *Some notes on data and compromises*

It is important to point out that this episode draws on only a small number of all the interviews carried out, and focuses heavily on interviews with John Howell (the principal author of Open Source Planning), Bob Neill (the Conservative spokesperson on planning for much of OSP's development), and one or two senior civil servants. For example, the section covering ministers' debates about the potential abolition of the plan led system draws largely on the testimony of one senior civil servant, with some corroboration with Bob Neill's comments. These views were given credence because they fit within the broader pattern of interviewee response, for example regarding the character of key individuals or particular networks of actors.

This reliance on a relatively small number of interviewees is partly because of the relatively small numbers of individuals who were intimately involved with the development of Conservative/Coalition planning policy immediately before and after the 2010 general election, and partly because the information upon which the following account is based was drawn from interviews with individuals who were selected because of their involvement in other policy making episodes. As a result, it draws much more heavily on secondary sources than the following accounts of policy episodes do. This was

considered a reasonable trade-off, given how important this policy episode was for understanding subsequent events, and the fact that it has not previously been subject to in-depth academic enquiry.

### *The following chapters*

The following case narrative chapters, six and seven, draw on a much wider range of sources. Six broadly concerns the operation of the Practitioners Advisory Group, whilst seven concerns the national campaign against the NPPF and the government's response. The time period these two chapters cover is illustrated in Figure 21 at the beginning of Chapter 6.

## 5.2 The Conservative Party's approach to forming planning policy in opposition

### 5.2.1 The Conservative's Party's approach to developing OSP

#### *The Conservative Party's broad approach to developing policy in opposition*

The Conservative Party's – and therefore the Coalition's – substantive policy position on planning reform first began to crystallise in 2007, with David Cameron's decision to undertake a comprehensive party policy review (following Gordon Brown's decision not to call an early election that year) (Riddell & Haddon, 2011; Ricketts & Field, 2012). This review was led by Oliver Letwin, and ran parallel to another led by Francis Maude and Nick Boles<sup>28</sup> which focused on the approach the party would take to translating their policies into practice, should they gain power (Riddell & Haddon, 2011; Ricketts & Field, 2012).

Letwin's policy review drew on several existing high-profile publications, notably MP Greg Clark's<sup>29</sup> *Total Politics: Labour's Command State*, published in 2003 by the Conservative Party (Clark, 2003), and journalist Simon Jenkins<sup>30</sup> *Big Bang Localism*, published by the

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<sup>28</sup> **Nick Boles** succeeded Greg Clark as planning minister, and was in this position 2012-2014.

<sup>29</sup> **Greg Clark** became the Minister with responsibilities for planning from the beginning of the Coalition through to 2012.

<sup>30</sup> **Simon Jenkins** was Chair of the National Trust from 2008 – 2014, within which time the organisation would lead an uncharacteristically aggressive campaign against the NPPF. This campaign

Policy Exchange think-tank<sup>31</sup> in 2004 (Jenkins, 2004) (Ricketts & Field, 2012; Allmendinger, 2016). Both were critiques of what the party regarded as New Labour's overly centralised and bureaucratic approach to governance. Also illustrative of the development of the Party's thinking was *Better Homes, Greener Cities*, joint-published by the Policy Exchange, and another think-tank, Localis, in 2006 (Evans & Hartwich, 2006). This paper largely refined existing critiques of the role of the state and bureaucracy in society into recommendations for reform of the planning system, along deregulatory and localising lines. Amongst the first outputs of the policy review was the paper *Voluntary Action in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (The Conservative Party, 2008). Published in 2008, this laid the conceptual foundations for the 'Big Society' (Ricketts & Field, 2012). As the following excerpt shows, the notion of 'post-bureaucracy' and an emphasis on advancing structural change to government policymaking and bureaucratic processes were a central theme in this document;

In the post-bureaucratic age, the people who will first perceive the new problems to be solved and discover the best ways to solve them will not be ministers holed up in Whitehall, but the legions of committed individual, voluntary organisations, social enterprises, commercial companies, communities defined by geography or by shared interest as well as democratic government from neighbourhood councils to Westminster. (The Conservative Party, 2008: 6)

Bureaucratic reform, 'system change, and internal issues within departments and Whitehall' were also of great central concern to Maude and Boles' implementation review, in contrast to the Party's preparations for previous general elections (Riddell & Haddon, 2011: 17). The implementation team (comprising about six people in 2008, including secondees from major management consultancy firms) worked with policy leads, respective shadow spokespersons, advisors and the Conservative Research Department to develop implementation plans, firstly for specific policies, and then for government departments as a whole (Riddell & Haddon, 2011). There was an across-the-board emphasis in these plans on moving to implement policy as fast as possible, should the Conservative party find itself in Government (Riddell & Haddon, 2011). This was partly because it was felt that resistance to change would be less in the wake of the election, and partly because it was felt in the Party that both Thatcher and Blair had been too slow to implement their own public service reforms (Riddell & Haddon, 2011). Moving at such

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is discussed in detail in the following chapter, but it is curious to note that the NPPF drew heavily on ideas first expressed in OSP, which itself had drawn on ideas expressed in Jenkins' work.

<sup>31</sup> The Policy Exchange was founded by **Nick Boles**, alongside Francis Maude and Michael Gove, in 2002 (Policy Exchange, 2012).

pace placed a premium on the Party's pre-election preparations, and this was partly why they prepared in such depth (Riddell & Haddon, 2011).

### *The establishment and composition of the Planning Sounding Board*

Following *Voluntary Action in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the Conservative's policy review bore two more green papers which touched more directly on planning reform; *Control Shift: Returning Power to Local Communities*, in February 2009 (Conservative Party, 2009a), and *Strong Foundations: Building Homes and Communities*, in April 2009 (Conservative Party, 2009b)<sup>32</sup>. The former proposed a range of decentralising measures broadly relating to the theme of 'Localism', while the latter argued for a generally deregulated and market-led approach to housing provision<sup>33</sup>. Between them they presented a series of draft policies relating to planning. These included the abolition of regional planning structures, housing targets, and the Infrastructure Commission, the introduction of compulsory pre-application consultation, and most significantly for this story, the rationalisation of policy guidance provided by national-level government (see Goodchild, 2010). However, how these various proposals linked to the operation of the planning system as a whole, and how the system would deliver them in practice, remained largely unconsidered. Dr John Howell OBE, Conservative MP for Henley, thus proposed to fill this gap. In his words:

Well what we had done is we had already produced two green papers that had partly touched the planning system, and it hadn't looked at the planning system as a whole, and to be frank with you it had rather left the planning system a bit of a mess, what they proposed hasn't filled in the gaps, so I said 'look, I approve of what the other papers have, but I'd like to put together the rest and try to influence it', so give me the chance to do so. (Interview: Howell, 2016)

In response to this, the then Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Caroline Spelman, (see Figure 20, below) established a 'Planning Sounding Board', to be chaired by Howell. The Board comprised a range of representatives from different stakeholder groups, including a fluid mixture of representatives from the housing and development industries, lawyers, environmentalists, campaign groups, 'consultation specialists', representatives of community groups and local government, and

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<sup>32</sup> Alongside these two green papers and OSP a third was proposed, but never saw the light of day. This would have been an over-arching paper concerned with fleshing out the idea of 'Localism' itself (Interview: Neill, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> It is perhaps telling that these two themes - decentralisation and housing - later became the official ministerial titles of the senior ministers sitting under Eric Pickles in DCLG. Responsibilities for planning were that of the minister for Decentralisation and Cities, Greg Clark.

private sector planners (Howell, 2011; Neill, 2016; Howell, 2016). Bob Neill, at the time the Shadow Minister for Planning, described its composition in the following terms:

**Bob Neill:** ...we had a number of professionals as a sounding board... There are a number of other people on the list that we had. John [Rhodes]<sup>34</sup> was quite prominent about it, but by no means on his own. We had guys from the RSPB, from the environmental lobby.

**Author:** Simon Marsh<sup>35</sup>

**Bob Neill:** Indeed, Simon Marsh. As well as people from some of the major developers. So that was to give us the practitioners' insights. And, of course, at the same time we were talking to local government, people in local government. Obviously, in those days, people like Simon Milton<sup>36</sup>, Merrick Cockell<sup>37</sup>, and others were quite important in that side of things. (Interview: Neill, 2016)

There were, however, concerns from some of the few commentators aware of the Sounding Board's existence that its outlook and composition was heavily development industry and private sector-orientated (e.g. Lainton, 2011). These concerns were exacerbated by work Howell had previously done for a communications and consultation firm that specialised in gaining public support for contentious land and property developments, alongside lobbying work for the large-scale developer Savills<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, a

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<sup>34</sup> **John Rhodes** at this time was Planning Director at the development and management consultancy RPS' London offices. He opened the planning consultancy Quod two months before the 2010 general election (Branson, 2011), and registered a London business address the same month. He also represented the Major Developers Group on DCLG's own, unofficial, policy sounding board, and went on to serve on the NPPF Practitioners Advisory Group; National Planning Practice Guidance Review Group; CIL Review Group, and the Local Plans Expert Group as Chair, which is due to publish this year. He received an OBE in 2015 for services to 'the economy, planning and communities'.

<sup>35</sup> **Simon Marsh** was Acting Head of Sustainable Development at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), and Chair of the environmental and conservation lobbying umbrella organisation Wildlife and Countryside Link. He went on to be a member of the NPPF Practitioners Advice Group, and a member of the Guidance Review Group (see part #).

<sup>36</sup> **Simon Milton** was a Conservative ex-councillor and ex-Leader of Westminster City Council. After 2008, London Mayor Boris Johnson's Senior Advisor on Planning. (The Telegraph, 2011; Travers, 2011). He also served as Director of the well-known lobbying firm Ian Greer Associates.

<sup>37</sup> **Merrick Cockell** was, and is, a Conservative councillor. He was Leader of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea until 2013. He has been the Chairman of **Localis** think-tank since 2008, and of the LGA from 2011-2015. He was knighted in 2010 for 'services to local government' [refs] and joined Cratus Communications, a PR and lobbying firm specialising in local service delivery, as Executive Chairman in 2014. This was alongside **Bob Neill**, who joined the firm as a non-executive director.

<sup>38</sup> These links were played on two years previously by the Liberal Democrats during their contestation of the Henley by-election, in which Dr Howell was a candidate and the proposed development of the Oxfordshire greenbelt was a key campaigning issue (Hencke, 2008; Pack, 2008). According to the Guardian newspaper, the official response from the Conservative Party was: 'John Howell has not worked

first-hand account of involvement with the Sounding Board, shared anonymously by an individual representing an extremely large not-for-profit organisation with interests in planning (on the condition of anonymity), describes the Sounding Board as ‘consisting largely of development professionals’ (this source is referred to from hereon as Anonymous, 2011). And, as commentators at the time noted, the Conservatives’ own website described the Sounding Board as ‘...a means of engaging the development industry with planning reform.’ (The Conservative Party, 2011). Whether or not there was actually a *purposeful* and in-built bias towards the interests of private developers, John Howell viewed the membership of the Sounding Board as;

...largely self-selecting actually - there are a number of key players in the market who would see themselves as key players, and we just picked them all up” (Howell, 2016).

**Figure 20: Key Individuals Involved in the Development of Conservative Planning Policy before 2010**

Individual	Role
Alex Thompson	Chief Executive, <b>Localis</b> Think-Tank, and ex-DCLG Policy Advisor
Bob Neill MP	Shadow Minister for Planning and Caroline Spelman’s deputy
Caroline Spelman MP	Shadow Secretary for Communities and Local Government
Eric Pickles	Party chair, replaced Spelman as Shadow Secretary of State before the general election
John Howell MP	Chair of the Planning Sounding Board
Lloyd Milton	Chief of Staff to Bob Neill
Oliver <a href="#">Letwin</a> MP	Minister of State for Conservative Policy
Sheridan Westlake	Deputy Director of the Conservative Research Department and local councillor
Tim Jobbers	Party researcher under Bob Neill and quantity surveyor

Source interviews: Neill (2016); Howell (2016); SCS4 (2016); SCS2 (2016)

This ‘common sense’ approach is reflected in the language interviewees used when describing the main groups involved with the Sounding Board, and why they were selected. On one hand were ‘professionals’ and ‘practitioners’, who possessed hands-on

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on any projects that involve development on the green belt because he is a campaigner against such developments. These desperate smears are nothing more than a classic case of dirty tricks and do nothing to deflect away from John's fantastic record as champion of the green belt. Let's be clear about who stands for what on the green belt. The Labour government wants to build thousands of homes here. The local Liberal Democrats support them. Only the Conservatives oppose building on the South Oxfordshire green belt.’ (Hencke, 2008)

*experience* and *expert* knowledge of the planning system and how it functioned in *practice* (Howell 2016; Neill, 2016). This practical and action-orientated knowledge was, in Howell's view, largely to be found in the private sector (Howell, 2016). On the other hand, as Neill's above quote alludes to, were the political representatives of local communities. For the work connected with the Sounding Board and the development OSP, these were largely senior Conservative councillors. In an earlier quote Bob Neill mentions the then leaders of Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Simon Milton and Merrick Cockell. But also prominent within (or closely linked to) this group were individuals such as Gary Porter, then Leader of South Holland Council and Chair of the Local Government Association's (LGA) Environment and Housing Programme Board<sup>39</sup>; Baron Hanningfield (Paul White), leader of Essex County Council<sup>40</sup>, and Margaret Eaton, Chair of the LGA and former Leader of the City of Bradford Metropolitan Council. Overall, the individuals involved represented powerful interest groups who could be regarded as key delivery partners.

*The rationale behind the Sounding Board; discursive dualisms, the role of personal experience, and critiques of the civil service*

Together these two groups were to help find a practical solution to the balance between what interviewees framed as; a) the *rational* and overriding *rational* need for more housing development - to be supplied by the private sector (Interviews: Howell, 2016; Neill, 2016), and; b) a *local*, inherently *political*, need for communities to be able to decide where (and to some extent in what form) this housing was to be distributed (Interview: Howell, 2016; Neill, 2016). In the words of John Howell:

...the balance was essentially about balancing out the ambition of developers to get on and produce as many houses as they could, against the need to accommodate the wishes of local people for houses, and actually we weren't too fussed about who we upset in that. (Interview: Howell, 2016)

This dualistic discursive framing of national/rational versus local/political appears to sit neatly within the much broader and more widely explored set of liberal and neoliberal discourses that pivoted around the rhetorical devices 'Localism', the 'Big Society', and the castigation of the planning system as bureaucratic, 'negative and adversarial' (The Conservative Party, 2010a) - which to a great extent defined the Coalition's planning reform programme (Raco, 2013; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2013). It also goes some way to explaining the composition of the Sounding Board. However, it's also instructive to consider how individuals in the Conservative planning policy team drew on personal

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<sup>39</sup> **Gary Porter** went on to serve on the NPPF PAG, and received his peerage in 2015. He also became Chairman of the LGA that year.

<sup>40</sup> Baron Hanningfield founded Localis think-tank.

experiences in developing this framing, and how these experiences subsequently shaped the policy developed, alongside these powerful policy discourses. Eric Pickles, Sheridan Westlake, and John Howell had all held notable or prominent positions in local government (Interviews: Neill, 2016; Howell, 2016), and each drew heavily on their own experiences when explaining the approach they took to framing the policy issues with which they were concerned (Interview: Neill, 2016)<sup>41</sup>. This was particularly true for John Howell, the prime author of *Open Source Planning* (The Conservative Party, 2010a), who had extensive past experience as an Oxfordshire County and Parish Councillor at a time when New Labour's Regional Spatial Strategies were being rolled out:

Let's just go back to the aims of it. It started off because of my personal experience as a Parish Councillor, I was a Councillor many years ago. And you filled in the form on an application that was totally ignored, and that seemed to be me to be a disastrous way of dealing with local opinions, however you need to offset that against the tendency for local opinions to be largely dictated by small, probably unrepresentative, nimby groups. (Interview: Howell, 2016)

Well what we were trying to do was to take away from ministers the responsibility to set planning numbers, which had previously been set under the South East Plan, by Westminster bureaucrats, who clearly knew nothing about the situation locally. When the South East Plan came to Oxfordshire I was County Councillor there, and I was quite an influential County Councillor, and I had to fight for a set at the South East Plan seminar. I mean it was absolutely scandalous. (Interview: Howell, 2016)

There are clear echoes here of the national/rational local/political dualism which characterised interviewees' framing of the issues they faced in developing policy in opposition. Bob Neil, who had previously chaired the London Assembly's Economic and Social Development scrutiny committee, also cited his own and others' experiences as central to the development of policy in opposition. He related this to the Sounding Board's technical function, as follows:

**Bob Neill:** ...So all of us had a sense at first hand the sort of things that officers would say to us sometimes and where that sometimes caused friction with our constituents. So that was the idea to talk it through.

**Author:** Okay. So starting from the perspective of personal experience and then building up, bouncing ideas off the Sounding Board...?

**Bob Neill:** That's right, yeah.

Expanding on the role of personal experience, he outlined the overall policy process the Sounding Board fed into, and how it related to the work of Conservative policy team itself:

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<sup>41</sup> A point raised as significant by several interviewees from different backgrounds.

So we would come up with the ideas and we would have a bit of an iterative process between us and the Sounding Board. And then, of course, it would go back, pulled together, written up generally by Alex [Thompson], and then into submissions, which Oliver [Letwin] and, when necessary, Caroline [Spelman] or Eric [Pickles] and I could take to the policy board, which was the party's organisation at that time for signing off the policy. (Interview: Neill, 2016)

This policy-making process, in its use of a project board, consultation process, and sign-off system, bares some interesting similarities to those generally used by the civil service. Indeed, Neill's use of the term 'submission' (as an abbreviation of 'written submissions') evokes its usage within the civil service - where it is used to mean part of institutionalised process in which civil servants submit formalised advice, or requests approvals or authorisations, to ministers by way of a written letter. The role of the Sounding Board's members was seen, therefore, as primarily one of providing technical advice, insights, and ideas - much like civil servants would to the government - as to how the Conservative party could resolve the two halves of the national/rational versus local/political discourse, grounded as it was in the experiences of the Conservative politicians involved (Howell, 2016; Neill, 2016). Neill also argued that the Sounding Board had an additional function as a means of achieving 'buy-in' from the sector for Conservative policy proposals (Neill, 2016)<sup>42</sup>.

That the Conservative party would want to create relatively fixed, implementable, policy ideas, and perhaps also gain the 'buy-in' of influential political-economic agents, is not remarkable in itself. In many ways, it is simply best practice when making policy in opposition and wanting to be able to deliver it as quickly as possible once in power (Haddon, 2012; Riddell & Haddon, 2009). The important (though perhaps obvious) question is; what did the interviewees themselves see as the reason for taking this approach to policy-making, whilst in opposition?<sup>43</sup> For both Neill and Howell, the answer to this question was a desire in the party to minimise the influence of the civil service on the party's programme for planning reform:

I think we just had a sense that others had picked up, you know, before John [Howell] or I perhaps, Eric [Pickles] certainly was conscious of the fact that very often, governments lost time when they came in because they weren't terribly prepared. We didn't want the civil service, if you like, to dust off the departmental agenda, so we thought we'd better have our own. (Interview: Neill, 2016)

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<sup>42</sup> Simon Marsh (2016) recollected that the Sounding Board and Conservative policy team also 'had an early stab at the structure of an NPPF in autumn in 2010'.

<sup>43</sup> By all accounts, the Conservatives generally came into the Coalition with more fully-formed policy proposals than to previous governments had, across a range of policy areas. This also appears true in comparison to the Liberal Democrats, at least with regards to planning policy (Interview: PB2, 2016).

So we said, well, either you allow them to sort of dictate the agenda or we go in with something that's fairly specific, for a raft of reasons. So that was why we were keen to have this sort of tested thing, so if they came back almost we don't think that's a good idea, we said, look, we've spoken to people outside who do it. (Interview: Neill, 2016)

In part, this motivation sprung from an awareness of the extreme time constraints new administrations face in the British political system which were alluded to earlier; new governments often have just a few days to prepare for the announcement of a detailed legislative programme in the Queen's speech (Riddell & Haddon, 2009; Interview: Neill, 2016), and their simply not wanting to be slowed down by the civil service's agenda or protocols. There was also an understandable desire to implement their manifesto commitments as quickly as possible, after having spent 13 years in opposition (Howell, 2016; Neill, 2016), and a significant amount of time developing their policy position on planning and governance reform through key think-tanks, most notably Localis and Policy Exchange. This was certainly how one senior Liberal Democrat Peer, closely involved in planning reform since, read the situation;

...the Tories had been in opposition for a long time, they had quite a lot of positive think-tanks, they were raring to go with ideas, they thought they knew what they wanted to do... (Interview: Peer 1, 2016)

Indeed, several interviewees cited the fact that the Conservative team were keenly aware of the very public frustrations the Blair's New Labour administration, alongside many other administrations since 1979 (Scott & Williams, 2016), felt regarding the civil service's speed of policy-making, adaption to new modes of working, and reform in the months after they had come to power (Sylvester, 1999; Blair, 2010; Balls, 2016). This was reflected in the views of two senior civil servant who had worked in the service since the early days of New Labour:

I think it's simply a product that the Labour administration was in power for so long, and I was...I'm actually old enough to have been in the Civil Service in 1997, when the Labour administration came in. And it was exactly the same then. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

...they thought, and had some reason to believe, that the civil servants who had been working for the Labour Government for the last X years would not understand the Tory way of doing things quick enough. And it was a pretty Tory department, Pickles and Clark and Shapps were all quite big Tory beasts, whereas Andrew Stunell [who was a Liberal Democrat Peer] was not. And Andrew Stunell was not a very influential force in policymaking at DCLG. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

However, as Neill's above comments hint, the language several interviewees used suggested that the approach the party took to policy making in opposition was underpinned by a deeper-lying set of implicit and explicit political critiques and rationalities. These concerned the role of civil servants and public-sector planning

professionals within the policymaking process and Westminster Model, centre-local relations, the role of formalised consultation processes and the concept of democracy/the political in policy-making, and a variety of similarly overlapping themes. Though they are each closely interlinked, for the sake of clarity they can be unpicked and divided into three broad themes:

1. A highly critical stance towards the *effectiveness, efficiency, and ability* of the civil service, DCLG, ‘planners’, and the public sector, both generally and in terms of their ability to ‘get’ the particular style of policy-making the Conservatives desired.
2. A critique of the *legitimacy*, and to some extent the political orientation, of civil servants, ‘planners’, and established civil service modes of operating (with special criticism reserved for public sector ‘planners’), within the planning system and established Westminster policy-making processes.
3. A much broader democratic critique of the role of the state, national government, and bureaucracy in spatial governance and the provision of public goods.

These three broad-brush themes together painted an image of civil servants in DCLG (and especially ‘planners’) as fundamentally ‘part of the problem’, as will become even more apparent later. They combined and recombined throughout this episode, the NPPF, Localism Act, and the Guidance Review, to fundamentally shape the approaches used in each case (though in very different ways), and thus policy outcomes, and thus the landscape of spatial governance in England.

## 5.3 The contents of and responses to Open Source Planning

### 5.3.1 The contents and language of Open Source Planning

#### *The publication and substance of Open Source Planning*

The fruit of Howell and the team’s labours was *Open Source Planning* (OSP) (The Conservative Party, 2010a), published in February 2010 after several months of delays, and four months before the general election (Goodman et al, 2010; Wilding, 2009). The proposals outlined in OSP have been discussed elsewhere (particularly in relation to the concept of ‘Localism’, see Allmendinger, 2016; Rozee, 2014; Raco, 2014; Allmendinger & Haughton 2013 Allmendinger, 2016), but in brief and drawing on Allmendinger (2016)

it put forward three sets of proposals, relating to localism and neighbourhood planning, the dismantlement of Labour's spatial planning project, and the growth agenda. These are outlined below because of their significance for understanding how policy making practices later evolved.

*Localism and neighbourhood planning:* These proposals focused on allowing neighbourhood groups to specify what kind of development they want in their area, but with planning for increased local development incentivised by the government (by matching the increase in council tax and business rates an area would experience as a result of development) (Allmendinger, 2016). This echoes the national/rational local/political framing of the authors, and it leaves what comprises a neighbourhood 'deliberately open to interpretation', much like the Conservatives' concepts of 'Localism' and the 'Big Society' (Allmendinger, 2016).

Something that has received very little commentary in academia, and which plays an important part in the Tory's later development of planning policy, is that at no point does OSP actually use the term 'neighbourhood plan'. Rather, under the heading 'Local Plans' it describes the development of neighbourhood '*modules*'. As this word implies, neighbourhood modules are put forwards as the constituent parts of proposed Local Plans. These neighbourhood-level modules are presented as the starting point for making Local Plans, and are indivisible from them – rather than being explicitly positioned as 'above', 'below', or separate to them within the planning hierarchy. This is suggested by the wording of the document, which states that, at a minimum, it 'expects to see';

the evolution of the plan starting at 'ground level' in neighbourhoods with every single resident of the neighbourhood approached to take part;

the full involvement of democratic representatives at all levels (parish and town councils, ward councillors, accountable residents' associations and other elected representatives)

a presumption that the '*modules*' of the local plan provided by each neighbourhood will be incorporated in the final plan unless there are strong grounds for modifying them;

a role for the planning authority itself in helping neighbourhoods to develop their visions and in brokering a rational and coherent plan for the area as a whole, on the basis of negotiation with each of the neighbourhoods and with all the relevant public agencies responsible for infrastructure and the environment. (The Conservative Party, 2010: 8)

The critical question of the exact relationship between the proposed Local Plans and 'neighbourhood modules' (i.e. Neighbourhood Plans), as well as extant Local Development Frameworks, would therefore be answered and negotiated later, after the Conservatives came to power.

*Dismantling spatial planning:* Secondly, it puts forward a collection of measures which dismantle Labour's spatial planning project (Allmendinger, 2016). These include the abolition of Labour's 'undemocratic' and 'unaccountable' regional-level planning architecture (in the form of the Regional Development Agencies and their Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs)) and the Infrastructure Planning Commission, as well as the introduction of a 'duty to cooperate'. This measure required local authorities to coordinate with adjacent authorities in the preparation of their Local Plans, and was intended to assuage fears that the loss of RSSs would lead to a strategic vacuum, creating tensions between local authorities which had quite different locally-determined requirements (Allmendinger, 2016). Following on from *Strong Foundations: Building Homes and Communities* (Conservative Party, 2009b), OSP also proposed a reduction of national-level planning guidance and policy, and its 'reorientation towards the localism agenda' (Allmendinger, 2016).

*Deregulation and the growth agenda:* The third group of policy proposals linked to the Conservatives' pro-growth agenda, and were deregulatory (Allmendinger, 2016). These would be underpinned by the introduced a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', which would make it illegal for local authorities to refuse planning applications that conformed with the Local Plan. In the words of OSP there would be an 'inbuilt bias' towards the creation of appropriate new houses, offices, schools, shops and other development (The Conservative Party, 2010a). For Allmendinger (2016), the knock-on effect of the presumption operating in this way would be that:

Spatial planning – that productive, coordinating and integrating approach that sought to facilitate development through a combination of targets and broad reassurances about the nature and benefits of growth – was truly 'dead' under the Conservatives' proposals. Local plans would now become negative, land use control documents ruling out developments that the new presumption in favour of development<sup>44</sup> would otherwise permit.

#### *What was 'open source' about Open Source Planning?*

As Allmendinger & Haughton (2013) observe, OSP explicitly presents these proposals for planning reform as analogous to open source software development - a transparent, broadly collaborative, approach to software development in which source code is made freely available for others to use and/or modify, and is thus suggestive of a more democratic, grassroots, approach to planning. Interestingly, OSP is also keen to emphasise the perceived economic benefits of the approach;

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<sup>44</sup> How new this presumption actually was is debatable, and this question became very significant during the campaign against the government's draft of the NPPF, as I discuss later.

[Open source software development's] values of transparency and free access have held out the chance of opening up the software industry to better quality software at a lower cost than before. We believe this is just the approach our planning system also requires. (The Conservative Party, 2010: 1)

Language evoking the emancipatory potential of new technology, or language loosely linking policy proposals to technology, peppers the conservative's pre-election literature. For example, the title of *Control Shift* - the Conservative's (2009a) green paper on decentralisation – alludes to the computer keyboard shortcut key combination 'ctrl' + 'shift'. This a modifier commonly used in conjunction with other keys as a shortcut to switch program windows, open task managers, and create new folders, amongst other functions. And, more directly, the Conservative's party manifesto equates the rise of networked technology to a democratising force, empowering individuals, flattening hierarchies, making efficiency savings and directly challenging notions of centralised, bureaucratic, government control:

We now live in an age when technology can put information that was previously held by a few into the hands of the many. This is an age of personal freedom and choice, when culture and debate are shaped by a multitude of voices, but politics has not caught up with this new age. Instead of giving people more power over their lives, we have a government intent on taking it away. (The Conservative Party, 2010b: 63)

Positioning their policies within this technological frame makes them seem both necessary and transformative; on one hand Labour's configuration of the state and bureaucracy are destabilised as being fundamentally out of step with the world as it naturally is (because of the relentless march of technology), on the other hand, the transformative potentials of the Conservatives' own policies are emphasised, and they are positioned as being more in-step with the society as it is, and *should* be. Underlying all of this are notions of consumer choice and individual responsibility, as well a suggestion that policy making reform is a technical matter; that rational, scientific, changes in government and society would 'answer the questions currently mired in politics' (Hallsworth et al, 2011: 80). So, to what extent did 'open source' principles actually go on to influence the development of Coalition's policy programme? Or, was the use of the term largely a 'fuzzy' rhetorical move, open to interpretation in a similar manner to the 'Big Society' and 'Localism' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015)? Interviewees' responses pointed to the latter:

I'm not sure that there was a specific link to any starting point in that [title]. It came - the idea of open source in this is of course a term that's used in computer science, and it just seemed to be an appropriate way of looking at planning. (Interview: Howell, 2016)

I think maybe Sheridan came up with the idea of ‘open source’. Sheridan, I think, had the idea of the title. (Interview: Neill, 2016)

...‘Open Source’ planning it turned out was a concept that I don’t think they really understood. Certainly not as I understood it. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

So, at this stage the use of the term was largely a rhetorical move intended to get across notions associated with Localism and the Big Society, whilst capturing the ideational cache associated with new information technology. Associated ideas would, however, remerge later with rather more substance and impact on policy and policy making. As becomes apparent later in the case narrative, the process used to create the NPPF would itself be cited as a very early experiment in ‘open’ (rather than ‘open source’) policy making by ministers, and ‘open policy making’ itself would go on to become a central plank in the Coalition’s wider civil service reforms.

### **5.3.2 The response to Open Source Planning**

#### *The wider policy community’s response to Open Source Planning*

In Allmendinger’s (2016) words, the response to OSP was ‘at best, mixed’, and opinions largely fractured along predictable partisan lines. Representatives of the development industry supported the principle of the presumption, but voiced concerns about OSP’s Localism-orientated measures such as the proposed abolition of regional house-building targets and introduction of a third party right of appeal. Indeed, the *Financial Times*, in an article titled ‘Localism in planning is a risk, Tories told’, cited a ‘property figure’ as describing OSP as ‘a piece of political dogma that everyone knows won’t work’ (Pickard, 2010). Bodies representing development industry-related professions were cautiously optimistic, and reacted positively to the overall tone of the document, but held concerns about how well various elements of it would work in practice<sup>45</sup>. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), for instance, welcomed its proposals for the creation of a National Planning Policy Framework in place of the current suite of PPGs and PPSs, and some ‘interesting material’ the document contained, but condemned the abolition of regional planning as short-sighted (Walker, 2010). Similarly, the Royal Institute of British Architects applauded OSP’s intent to streamline the planning system, localist tone, and a ‘simplified presumption’, but was concerned about the potential for its proposals to

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<sup>45</sup> These concerns are interesting, considering the emphasis John Howell’s team placed on building ‘workable’ policy proposals.

become a ‘nimby charter’ (RIBA, 2010). The President of the Planning Officers Society (POS), meanwhile, described many of the proposals in OSP as;

...frankly, poorly thought through, and I have my fingers crossed that at least some of those will be dropped or modified. But, in principle, there is a lot that is positive about planning and localism, and your Society has been as positive as it can in its responses about how to make a new system work... (Tapper, 2010)

Environmental and conservation groups responded similarly predictably, with Simon Marsh, who had been previously directly involved in the Conservative’s sounding board, writing to Bob Neill on behalf of the environmental and conservation lobbying umbrella organisation Wildlife and Countryside Link<sup>46</sup> to cautiously express agreement with the Conservative’s concerns about the ‘legitimacy’ of current planning structures (Marsh, 2010). He did, however, hold reservations about how the presumption, financial incentives for development, the precise definition of *sustainable* development, and the duty to cooperate would work in practice.

#### *Civil servants’ response to OSP*

The senior civil servants in DCLG’s Planning Directorate preparing for a potential Conservative-led government studied OSP in detail. Read alongside *Control Shift* and *Fixing the Foundations*, senior civil servants in both DCLG and No. 10 saw it as providing a ‘very clear view’ of the Conservative’s policy priorities and overall objectives regarding planning reform (Interviews: SCS4, 2016; SCS2, 2016; SCS1; 2016; SCS3, 2016). When one individual based in the Planning Directorate was asked if OSP suggested the Conservatives had a well-established idea of the reforms they wanted to introduce before they entered government, they responded:

Oh yeah. And Open Source Planning was the document that you read as a civil servant beforehand to understand what they wanted to achieve. And it was quite a new document, it only came out if I remember, in February 2010. And there hasn't really been much from them before that. So actually, it was good, because civil servants had something to read that said ‘oh yes, we kind of get where this lot are coming from if they get elected’. (Interview: SCS2: 2016)

None the less, while they saw OSP as providing a strong overview of the Conservative’s policy agenda, the civil servants interviewed were generally much more critical of the extent to

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<sup>46</sup> Whose membership ranges from more explicitly partisan and less environmentally-orientated groups, such as The Campaign to Protect Rural England, to more purely environmental and ecologically-orientated campaign groups, such as the WWF, Friends of the Earth, and RSPB – for whom Simon Marsh worked.

which it had considered the implementation of the proposals it put forward, and how this related to the planning system as it operated at the time:

What the manifesto said, it said, we're going to do Open Source Planning. We're going to deliver Open Source Planning, full stop... ..I don't think they necessarily had a clear idea of the nitty gritty they wanted to get involved with, but I think in broad terms, that was really what they wanted to do. They wanted to change the planning system to something quite different, they were set on Open Source Planning... ..from memory I think it missed a lot out. So it missed a lot of what the current system is, out, and it wasn't clear exactly what should happen with the current system. (Interview: CS6, 2016)

I'm not sure they had a completely fixed idea about how they were going to approach things, far from it really. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

...it's worth saying that the Open Source Planning felt like a very bitty document. And so whilst they knew what they wanted to do on those particular aspects that were mentioned, including neighbourhood planning, which was the big thing, it said they wanted to abolish CIL for example... ..It wasn't clear to me whether they'd stepped back enough to work out what they thought of a system as a whole, except in very high level terms. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

One civil servant who was based in the Planning Directorate related this 'bittiness' to what he saw as the ad hoc and improvised nature of the policymaking process itself. Policy needed a starting point and anchor, and for him, despite (or perhaps because of) its heterogeneous ideological lineage and origins as a pragmatic attempt to 'fill in' a gap in the Conservatives' policy programme, OSP just happened to provide this:

[The Conservative Party manifesto was] predicated by "Open Source Planning", which was a green paper that was, at the time it was a relatively, you know, minor document really... ..But it was what they had - that was the thinking that they'd done - so that was the starting point. So, there were lots of ideas in there and when it comes to government putting together a programme, a legislative programme or a policy programme, it has to be rooted in something, and that was what was there. There are elements of neoliberalism there, there are also elements of traditional conservative thinking, so there are elements of different types of conservative thinking in it. ...It was just something that was really put together by people [related to a particular think-tank]... and that was the extent of the thought that had really gone into planning. (Interview: CS5, 2016)

There is, perhaps, a certain degree of irony in these impressions given the emphasis the authors of OSP had placed on developing practical, workable, proposals. And, significantly for the way planning policy was to develop over the coming months, it meant that there were still vitally important negotiations to come between the civil service and ministers as to how exactly its principles would be operationalised (something which the authors of OSP were clearly keen to avoid from the outset).

With the exception of the participant cited above, the Policy Advisor-level civil servants interviewed did not expressed strong views regarding the contents of OSP. This was

mainly because very few of these interviewees were working in the civil service in 2010 (a result of ongoing 'churn' in staff, and the deep cuts DCLG underwent in 2011 and 2010). This being said, a senior civil servant from outside of DCLG, who worked very closely with the Coalition ministers, interpreted there being a simmering and deep level of ideological opposition to OSP's proposals, particularly regarding the reactive (rather than proactive) role it proposed for Local Plans:

...during the kind of election in the run up to an election we'll do a whole load of work looking at what the opposition parties are thinking about doing and try to think about how you would actually deliver that... Which means interpreting in the best possible way and the most sensible way, often not necessarily thought-through-slash-sometimes-foolish policy... ...I think when they Read Open Source planning, they got...they sort of had a sense of what they were trying to achieve but I guess their big objection was the model that they were trying to move away from - so we have a planning system as you know - moving from that to the kind of model they wanted was basically tearing up the planning system and the directorate was dominated by planners who believed that the plan in existence serves a particular function. That was, if you like, philosophically problematic. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

They proffered these views while reflecting on the later breakdown in civil servant-ministerial relationships. This view should be interpreted as representing the view from the ministerial-level, so to speak; though the mid-ranking civil servants interviewed did express reservations about the ideological underpinnings of the Coalition's planning reforms (for example, the ministers' view that the planning system was to blame for slow economic growth and house building rates), and sometimes possessed strong views about the correct role of the planning system within the development process, ideological opposition to OSP was not hinted at (explicitly or implicitly) by any of mid-ranking civil servants interviewed.

#### *Civil servants begin developing a 'rough cut' of the NPPF*

The Conservatives' pre-election pledges to cut back national-level planning policy only contributed to civil servants' impression that there was a clear appetite across the sector for a new, condensed, national-level planning policy framework. Indeed, since the late 1980s national-level planning policy in England had grown incrementally to become extremely complex. Planning Policy Guidance notes (PPGs), hybrids of policy and guidance introduced in 1988 to help 'pin down policy within an increasingly over-legalised planning system' (Brownhill et al, 2010), and their successors Planning Policy Statements (PPS), introduced in 2004 as simplified and more clearly policy-orientated documents, together ran to around 6,000 pages of text. This level of complexity (of which the Conservative party were not the only critics), a strong sense within the civil service itself that it should take a less prescriptive role in shaping local policy (Interviews: CS1, 2016; CS2: 2016), the work to replace PPGs with PPSs, and the devolved administrations' own

successful streamlining projects (Wales in 2002 and Scotland in 2004) led to civil servants in DCLG feeling there was a clear appetite across the sector for the rationalisation of DCLG-produced planning policy (Interviews: CS1, 2016; CS4, 2016, CS6, 2016). In the words of one interviewed senior civil servant in the planning directorate; ‘...everyone saw this as an obvious thing to do. People knew it was coming.’ (Interview: CS1, 2016). Indeed, senior civil servants in the planning directorate were suggesting that existing PPS be consolidated into one, short, document as early as 2008 (Senior Civil Servant D, 2016), and the Government Response to the Treasury-driven Killian Pretty Review, published in 2009, agreed to ‘produce a more strategically and clearly focused national planning policy framework’ (DCLG & BERR, 2009).

As a result, late in Brown’s Labour administration, and independently of ministers, civil servants in the Planning Directorate set up a programme board and independently began to work towards the production of a streamlined, one-document, national policy framework themselves (Rutter, 2013; Interviews: SCS1, 2016; SCS2, 2016; SCS4, 2016; SCS3, 2016). Taking the initiative in this way is not that unusual in itself. Writing as long ago as 1974, the political scientist Richard Rose described ‘divining’ party policy ‘even when these intentions are matters of considerable controversy within a party’ as a regular feature of civil service work before an election (Rose, 1974: 418). One interviewee described it as;

...‘civil servants just taking their normal approach... It was just; ‘alright. This is what you want to do, let’s get on with it!’ So I don’t think anyone asked us to do it. I think it was just, alright, we know you want to do this, here it is. (Interview: CS6, 2016)

They began by rewriting PPS 6 (‘Planning for Town Centres’) and PPS 4 (‘Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth’) in the style they imagined would be suitable for a new NPPF, as a senior civil servant recalled:

Actually the [NPPF] process challenges were already well in train by the time of the general election. So the big challenge was how do you take the best out of 1,000 pages of policy and guidance and commentary and junk frankly, which had grown up over a long period of time, and been negotiated and mediated to death by the Whitehall machine, and balance large numbers of stakeholder interests and weigh them? The whole thing was just fudge and very difficult to understand and get that down to a reasonable length.

So one of the things that [we were] very keen on, [was] clarity, real clarity and the vocabulary that you were using to describe planning policy... And so even before the election we re-wrote PPS 6 and PPS 4 in what we thought were the style that we would use for the NPPF. Because the NPPF was publically the Tory’s idea, but we as civil servants have said why don’t we just produce a single document under Labour. It’s just that we didn’t get to that point.

So the plan on the part of the civil servants to propose a single document to ministers was already in existence before the coalition government arrived. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

Foreshadowing events to come, work on this document was far from straight forward. One civil servant in the Planning Directorate recalled:

...I do remember that it was a case of farming out sections, and [Miles Gibson] having great difficulty getting people to stick to the style, the word limit, and actually really get to the heart of what things should say. And he had to spend an awful lot of time rewriting stuff himself. (Interview: 6, 2016)

This view was echoed by a senior civil servant, who put much of this difficulty down to the heavily mediated, consulted, and negotiated nature of existing New Labour policy. In the words of one senior civil servants, its attempts to balance the interests of so many different stakeholders (to use 'New Labour' parlance):

...the big challenge was how do you take the best out of 1,000 pages of policy and guidance and commentary and junk frankly, which had grown up over a long period of time, and been negotiated and mediated to death by the Whitehall machine, and balance large numbers of stakeholder interests and weigh them? The whole thing was just fudge and very difficult to understand and get that down to a reasonable length. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

This difficult process ended up in the production of 200-or-so page 'rough cut' of the NPPF (Interviews: SCS2, 2016; SCS4, 2016). The document did not see the light of day during the Labour administration, and it was never signed-off by Coalition ministers who, it was already becoming clear, wanted the drafting to be led not by civil servants, but non-government agents (Interview: SCS4, 2016).

## **5.4 The significance of the Coalition negotiations, and the near-abolition of the planned system**

### **5.4.1 The Early Days of the Coalition**

#### *Election results and negotiations*

The May 2010 UK General Election resulted in the first hung parliament since 1974, and five days after the results had been called the leader of the Conservative Party (who had won the largest number of seats), David Cameron, announced that he wished to form a Coalition with the Liberal Democrats (See Quinn et al 2011; Harvey, 2015; Seldon & Finn, 2015 for details on these negotiations). So followed the Coalition negotiations.

The negotiations took place in the three parts, the first of which was focused on policy (Harvey, 2015). Two teams, the Conservatives led by William Hague with the assistance of Oliver Letwin; the Liberal Democrat led by Danny Alexander with David Laws' assistance (Harvey, 2015), established what became the *Coalition Agreement* (see Cabinet Office, 2010). This document laid out the Coalition's joint policy programme, and amongst other planning-related measures (almost entirely drawn from the Conservative side of the Coalition) directly referenced *Open Source Planning* as being providing the basis for the introduction of neighbourhood planning. The second part of the negotiation focused on the institutional machinery of the Coalition, and how disputes between both parties would be resolved when they surely would (Harvey, 2015). This led to the creation of a 'Coalition Committee' for this purpose, though in practice this role was carried out by the informal 'Quod' of David Cameron (as Prime Minister), Nick Clegg (Deputy Prime Minister), George Osborne (Chancellor) and Danny Alexander (Chief Secretary to the Treasury) over the next five years (Harvey, 2015). The third and final part of the negotiations concerned 'bums on seats' (Harvey, 2015) - deciding which parties would fill which government posts. It was this part of the negotiations which would go on to most obviously influence the development of planning policy and reform in DCLG. This discussion occurred between David Cameron and Nick Clegg alone (Harvey, 2015), and two leaders decided to allot ministerial positions according to the number of seats, rather than votes, won by each party (Yong, 2012). This is standard practice for coalition governments across Europe, but it did mean that the Liberal Democrats had considerably less government positions than they could have (Seldon & Finn, 2015). The Liberal Democrats opted for a strategy that combined 'cross-cutting' (whereby junior ministers are given portfolios that cut across multiple departments) with 'twinning' (whereby junior ministers were intended to act as representatives of the party in departments with a Conservative Cabinet minister), spreading their ministers thinly but relatively evenly across departments (Finn, 2015). This was rather than a strategy focusing on 'depth' (i.e. focusing their firepower in specific departments that were of particular interest) (Yong, 2012; Finn, 2015).

Analyses of who 'won' this stage of the Coalition negotiations vary widely in their conclusions (see Quinn et al, 2011; Finn, 2015; Harvey, 2015). None the less, at the end of negotiations the Liberal Democrats held none of the major spending departments, five of 23 Cabinet positions, and 12 of 71 junior minister positions. They headed up just two departments; Business, Industry and Skills (BIS – which they had actually proposed to abolish whilst in opposition (Harvey, 2015)) and Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

(Harvey, 2015)<sup>47</sup>, and there was some surprise from international commentators as to the terms of the deal the Liberal Democrats had brokered (Maer & Gay, 2015).

*The team responsible for planning and its significance*

Following the negotiations, the Conservative ministerial team responsible for planning reform was largely the same as that which had worked on the subject in opposition. Eric Pickles, whose stock was high in the Party following a successful campaign, took the position of Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government,:

...at the beginning of the parliament Eric's political stock was pretty high, because he'd been a successful Party Chairman, you know, he was able to call in a few favours, if you know. Because we generally thought, although we didn't get an overall majority, coming from where we had, there was a general goodwill towards Eric as having fought a good and a vigorous campaign as party chairman. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

Oliver Letwin became Minister of State for Government Policy (operating out of the Cabinet Office, but with a wide-ranging remit) but remained closely involved in DCLG's planning reforms when they concerned key strategic decisions. As a result of his long-standing work on planning reform John Howell took the non-ministerial role of Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Decentralisation and Cities (Greg Clark - who also had responsibility for planning – see below). Sheridan Westlake entered the department as a special political advisor to Eric Pickles (or 'SpAd'), and went on to have an influential, but low-key, role in the department for the duration of the Coalition (Interviews: CS6, 2016; CS3, 2016). Meanwhile, Baroness Hanham and Grant Shapps, both less involved in the development of planning policy whilst in opposition, took formal ministerial positions in DCLG, as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Communities and Local Government Minister in the House of Lords, and as Housing Minister, respectively. However, it appears that neither of these two individuals went on to play a particularly significant role in the development of planning policy.

Coalition politics did, however, have an important impact on the Conservative ministerial team responsible for planning policy in a key way. The Liberal Democrats' decision to concentrate their ministerial power in DECC led to Chris Huhne (who was part of the negotiating team that brokered the agreement for the party to go into coalition with the Conservatives) taking the position of Secretary of State in that department. This displaced the then Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for Climate Change, Greg Clark, who was subsequently given as position in DCLG as Minister for Decentralisation and Cities with responsibilities for planning. This in turn led Bob Neill, who had previously held the

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<sup>47</sup> The Liberal Democrats also held the two most senior positions in the Scotland Office.

shadow planning brief and worked on OSP and so was well-placed to become the next planning minister, to take the role of Parliamentary Under Secretary of State within the department.

Thus, Clark came to be the minister with responsibility for planning as the only member of the Conservative group with responsibility for planning reform who had not been directly involved with the creation of OSP. This is not to say that Clark lacked experience in this overall area of policy. Indeed, it's telling that his formal title was not 'Planning Minister', but 'Decentralisation Minister', as he had previously co-edited the book *Total Politics* (Clark & Mathers; 2003), which argued against managerialism and for the devolution, marketization, and deregulation of local services<sup>48</sup>. Several interviewed civil servants painted Clark as a long-term and deeply committed localist, with one very senior civil servant going as far as to describe him as an 'uber-localist' (Interview: SCS3, 2016).

Furthermore, running counter to what one might stereotypically assume from the planning literature about the ideological standpoint of a Tory minister, authored a 1993 PhD thesis titled *The Effectiveness of Incentive Payment Systems: An Empirical Test of Individualism as a Boundary Condition*. This work argued that, in contrast to the economic and sociological theoretical assumptions based on the notion of 'rational economic man' and calculative individualism, incentive-based pay models such as those widely deployed by companies in the 1980s have greater predictive power amongst individualistic employees than among those with collectivistic value sets (Clark, 1993). It was therefore important, Clark concludes in his thesis, to take into account individuals' value sets in the deployment of incentive payment models.

#### *The degree of Liberal Democrat input*

Along with DECC, DCLG was a negotiating priority for the Liberal Democrats. Indeed, one interviewee from the party described holding the Secretary of State position there as a 'red line';

DCLG and DEC were the area that we wanted the Secretary of State... so that was one which was a non-negotiable for us... DCLG from the very beginning was a priority because we saw that as something that Liberal Democrats fundamentally believed in, shaping planning and driving it down to the lowest level. (Interview: Peer 1, 2016)

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<sup>48</sup> This work makes reference to the planning system twice, once with regards to the 'extremely bureaucratic' role of 'regional planning bodies' in the conduct of multi-modal transport studies carried out as part of the Labour governments *Ten Year Plan for Transport* (2000) (Kelly, 2003, 62), and once in relation to the trunk road improvements promised as part of the plan falling behind schedule 'largely because of planning delays (Kelly, 2003, 63).

None the less, following Clegg's 'twinning' approach to distributing ministerial positions within his party, the Liberal Democrats were represented in the department by the sole figure of Andrew Stunell, who took the position of Parliamentary Under Secretary of State. Stunell was close to the central Coalition negotiating 'Quod', but despite his relative seniority within the Coalition, was only peripherally involved in shaping the substance of planning policy (Interviews: SCS2, 2016; SCS3, 2016). Instead, he largely worked to gather support for proposals within his party that had originated in the Conservative camp (Interview: Howell, 2016). To an extent, this was because of the high level of convergence between the Liberal Democrat and Conservative manifestos (Allmendinger, 2016). John Howell explained:

**John Howell:** Yeah, I remember a conversation with Andrew Stunnell, who came up to me and said 'I've just had a conversation with my colleagues about Open Source Planning, and they all groaned', and he said to them; 'no, I think you should read it, because is, this document is actually quite good, and it's something that we can all support'.

**Author:** I suppose that's the overlap point between conservative and liberal ideology - is the idea of more local control and...

**John Howell:** Yeah, I mean it came out of our camp, but they could take things that they wanted out of it.

The end result of these chaotic few days was that the major decisions taken regarding the fleshing-out and implementation of the planning reforms suggested in OSP and carried out throughout the Coalition period were Conservative.

#### **5.4.2 Establishing an initial policy position**

##### *The near abolition of the plan-led system*

OSP's lack of detail meant that some key decisions remained to be made about how its commitments were to be operationalised, or even what exactly ministers wanted to achieve through their planning reforms (Interview: SCS3, 2016). The process and debate which ensued would go on to determine the fundamental principles of the Coalition's planning reforms in several different ways, and as such it is important piece of the puzzle for understanding why the NPPF later unfolded as it did (Interview: SCS3, 2016). The most fundamental question at this point was whether to maintain the plan-led system or not - this was an issue on which OSP has actually been, in retrospect, curiously vague, and the idea of 'neighbourhood modules' left a great deal of room for interpretation.

With Eric Pickles taking a relatively hands-off role as Secretary of State (but using his influence to resist on influence from the centre of government), Greg Clark was in a key

decision-making position on this matter (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Not having been part of the Conservative team that worked on OSP, he brought something of an outsider's perspective to an issue on which there were several different and well-established schools of thought within the team who had worked on the green paper:

Yeah, so, but for the Coalition, the guys that had been working all of this stuff in opposition would have been the ones driving it... So what that meant was you suddenly had a Minister whose very smart, very thoughtful that inherited this thing and actually had to then put his own imprint in it, which you wouldn't have had if there hadn't been a Coalition government, and so I think the issues you had was the different architects of this... ... had a slightly different interpretation of what the policy was. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

With the policy team in No. 10 initially holding an agnostic stance on the issue, the key voice at the centre of government at the start of discussions was Oliver Letwin (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Having been critical of OSP, Letwin's stance was the most radical and stood at one extreme of the debate. His agenda focused on community empowerment (Interview: SCS3, 2016), and he advocated a model whereby the plan-led system as it stood would be abolished. Instead, at the core of the planning system would be two elements: loose-fitting national-level policy, in the form of the NPPF, and community-driven neighbourhood plans. The NPPF would provide strategic direction and policy where there were no neighbourhood plans (these would be optional and community-driven, much like they are at present), whilst neighbourhood plans themselves would be the centrepiece of the planning system, giving colour to the loose policy in the NPPF:

So the logic behind Open Source Planning was actually if you give communities the power to shape the planning system so neighbourhood plans under that model will become the ultimate plan... ...planning by Local Authorities suddenly disappears from the equation. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

...all local plans would have gone. Local Authorities if you like would only be vehicles for delivering what the community wanted rather than the arbiter of the planning system, and Neighbourhood Plans - with only God knows who these people were going to be that we're going to spend loads of time doing actual plan making - would suddenly become the base of the planning system, and I think...I can't remember what country it was based on so it definitely operates in another country. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

... what it does is that actually once the community have created the plan the process of consent suddenly becomes accelerated because as long as it's in that plan that the community have already consented to, they actually don't have to go through this really painful laborious process. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

This approach, characterised by one interviewee as 'completely tearing up the system and then starting again', had significant support from some quarters of the party, including Sheridan Westlake. In the words of Bob Neill it tended, however 'to be more people from some of the right of centre 'neoliberal think tanks' that wanted to move away from the

plan-led model', such as the Policy Exchange (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016), which had extremely close ties with Letwin's Cabinet Office policy unit<sup>49</sup>. Given these dynamics one senior civil servant summarised the situation, essentially, as 'whether or not Oliver [Letwin's] view would be delivered' (Interview: SCS3, 2016).

Similarly focused on the neighbourhood-level, but with more of an emphasis on development and growth, was John Howell (Interview: SCS3, 2016; Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). He drew on his background working in a professional services consultancy, and for the Thatcher government's 'Know How Fund', a project which leveraged a mixture of private and public sector knowledge and expertise to aid Eastern European states' transitions to free-market economies after the collapse of Communism (Interviews: SCS3, 2016; Bob Neill, 2016). Bob Neill, meanwhile, was much more cautious and more comfortable with devolving power to the Local Authority-level, rather than beyond (Interview: SCS3, 2016). This was a view largely shared by Liberal Democrat ministers (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). Greg Clark's perspective was less fixed, but characterised as being more pro-Local Authority than some of those involved in the design and creation of OSP, who;

...had an inherent distrust-slash-disregard for local government - which you see running through all the stuff that was coming out on Localism which was like; 'devolved to anyone but local government!'. I don't think Greg was of that mind set and actually he probably had more interest in local government than some of his other colleagues, so the first challenge was how you got from different competing views of what the actual objective you were trying to achieve. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

The sense within the team around Greg Clark was that the sector/planning community (including Local Authorities, developers and professional bodies) were comfortable with the idea of reform 'but not at the expense of killing the system or choking the system', as they could little afford a hiatus in development (Interview: SCS3, 2016). The view from civil servants advising Clark was the model supported by Oliver Letwin would do exactly this, and take 'at least a decade to bed in' (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Greg Clark's task was therefore essentially to balance the demands of different ministers, the sector, and the principles outlined in OSP, without disrupting the system and introducing a level of uncertainty which may well halt development. Clark and the ministerial team concluded that retaining the plan-led system was vital for preventing this upheaval (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). A civil servant explained that the intention was to then make the existing system more permissive:

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<sup>49</sup> **Sheridan Westlake** had also worked under Oliver Letwin in the Conservative Party research team whilst the party was in opposition.

...you needed a plan led system and the point was you put rocket boosters under it so that it becomes a permissive plan-led system rather than an obstructive one, and so once we came to that conclusion then actually the task began how do you then take the principles of open source planning and build it within that. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

After having decided to keep Local Plans, the next question was whether Neighbourhood Plans should override or be subservient to them. This was another controversial question within the Conservative ministerial team:

...there were those that wanted that and the decision he made and he got, you know, a fair bit of flack and had to kind of make his case with his colleagues and in the end win the argument was in the end the local plan remained supreme, so primacy was with the local plan and actually then what the neighbourhood plan did was give it colour and shape. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

In this way considerations for, and pressure from, the development industry to prevent system-wide upheaval and uncertainty actually resulted in less extreme, less radically deregulatory, reform of the planning system.

#### *The resulting backlash against civil servants*

In providing their advice to ministers on such a key issue, and at such an early stage in the Coalition, civil servants faced a massive challenge; they viewed the 'Letwin model' as potentially damaging to the government's growth agenda, but dropping it also compromised a core plank of the government's Localism reform agenda in the eyes of some ministers. In the words of one interviewee; 'their challenge was; how you communicate that to ministers in a way that didn't completely alienate them?' (Interview: SCS3, 2016). This was an especially difficult task given that there is always tension between ministers and civil servants after a change of government, particularly after there's been one party in power for so long, and as previously discussed ministers were suspicious that the civil service was dominated by 'Labour people'. They explained:

...the trust and the confidence that you have to have as a member of the civil service and the minister of the day hadn't developed in time for those kinds of challenging reforms... (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

This meant that when civil servants advised strongly against the more radical approach to reform demanded by some senior ministers - on the basis that it would result in a massive decline in development for a long period of time - there were further fractures in the relationship between both groups:

...that sort of [challenged] a bit of reform that was fundamental, and it basically led to a very quick erosion of confidence in the [civil] service's ability to deliver big reform agendas, and I think that Tory ministers came in with a kind of view that, you know, the service was a little bit kind of 'status quo', conservative ironically, and, you know, they had some big things that they wanted to do. They

were already hampered by the Coalition and the Lib Dems and there was a sense that the service was kind of holding them back as well... (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

Part of the reason for this tension was a serious clash of cultures between ministers and civil servants in the Planning Directorate, who struggled to adapt to new ways of working and thinking about policy:

...and for whatever reason the planners did not manage that relationship - so because there wasn't that trust they also kind of failed to understand and interpret what it is the ministers were asking them to do, and, you know, it wasn't a conspiracy, it was just, you know, ministers don't necessarily 'get it' and to be fair these guys came with some very different views about how you do things. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

...not believing they could quite understand what ministers were asking of them meant that sometimes their kind of policy advice was like just off the mark - emotional intelligence lacked quite frankly, and they would be asked to draft stuff and wouldn't quite draft it in the right way, so if you had the trust there I think, you know, your ministers give you the benefit of the doubt and say; 'well no, no what I meant is this', but when you don't have the trust there, and you have started off being a little bit obstructive, it's then difficult'... (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

I think they were probably deliberately trying to shock the civil service into behaving a different way. And that did work. And we did have some problems. I had problems in my team, people who couldn't turn on a sixpence when a new set of political masters came along and really struggled with some of the concepts that we knew that the coalition wanted to deliver on. So there was probably a bit of shove the system as fast as you can and see what comes out. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

Though there was still a significant amount of negotiations and debate to be done, these early decisions set the stage for the planning reform project which was to unfold over the next couple of years, beginning with the flagship Localism Act 2011's torturous passage through parliament, and ending with the Infrastructure Act gaining Royal Assent a few months before the 2015 General Election. This was both in terms of policy, and in terms of the relationship between civil servants and ministers. The second of these was especially important for the genesis of the NPPF and its development into a unique policy episode in the history of English planning. This is the focus of the next chapter. The time period

# 6. The Practitioners Advisory Group in Practice

## 6.1 The design of the Practitioners Advisory Group

### 6.1.1 Situating the Practitioners Advisory Group model

#### *Existing policy and 'Localist' critiques of the role of civil servants*

As Coalition ministers finished drafting the Localism Bill in October 2010 (see Figure 21, below), they turned their attention to the how they were streamline English national planning policy, and gear it towards a more market-supportive and less prescriptive role. Though this had been proposed in OSP and was effectively a manifesto commitment which has received widespread in-principle support, it was clear from the outset that this process would be extremely contentious, and as the civil servants who had attempted to draft their own version of a national framework had realised, very difficult. New Labour had spent several years incrementally and iteratively building tightly prescribed and consensus-based government positions around different policy areas of planning policy, through large-scale consultations, negotiation with 'stakeholders', and the provision of large amounts of often complex and highly technical guidance (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015; Interview: CS5, 2016). Changing or relaxing these positions was highly likely to cause conflict, both with the civil servants who had cultivated their own specific policy areas over a long period of time (Interview: CS5, 2016), and stakeholders:

...every single one of those wretched policies were borne out of very painful process of negotiation and consensus and issues that had emerged and responses to issues. So the process of trying to slash and burn that was always going to...if you don't like political conflict that right there was a way that you were going to walk straight into political conflict. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

Not only was shifting from such tightly-bound policy positions likely to be contentious, but so was the manner in which ministers were keen to do so - perhaps more so than they realised - Ministers were keen to avoid their predecessors' heavily negotiated, heavily consulted, consensus-based, approach to policymaking:

**Figure 21: Timeline of Key Events in Chapters Six and Seven**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Key Events</b>
October	Ministers develop the idea of using the 'PAG' format whilst finalising the Localism Bill
November	The Localism Bill presented to parliament
December	Four individuals are secretly invited to join the PAG, meanwhile the Government announces its first formal call for evidence regarding the NPPF
<b>January 2011</b>	The PAG begins work drafting their version of the NPPF
February	The first formal consultation ends having received in excess of 3,000 responses, and the Cala homes judgement is handed down
March	The PAG completes its initial draft of the NPPF. Meanwhile, the Government formally acknowledges the PAG's existence for the first time, and presents its budget, the white paper <i>The Plan for Growth</i> , and Written Ministerial Statement <i>Planning for Growth</i>
April	
May	<b>The PAG publishes its draft of the NPPF</b> and the identities of the PAG members formally acknowledged by the Government
June	A government draft of the NPPF is leaked and the government publishes its draft 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'
July	<b>The Government formally publishes its first draft of the NPPF</b> , the second formal consultation ('call for evidence') period begins, and the National Trust and <i>The Telegraph</i> , amongst others, begin their campaigns against the draft
August	
September	The government publishes its 'NPPF Myth-Buster'
October	The second formal consultation period ends having received more than 16,000 responses
November	The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee publishes a critical report on the Government's definition of sustainable development, and the Localism Act 2011 receives royal assent
December	The House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee also publishes a critical report on the NPPF, and the Government responds the same day, accepting the vast majority of its recommendations
<b>January 2012</b>	
February	
March	<b>The Government publishes its final draft of the NPPF</b> , which is well received by most groups
April	The final parliamentary debate on the NPPF takes place in the House of Lords

Author: ...there was this perception of the New Labour government they'd spend a long time putting things together, getting things finely tuned, and civil servants quite liked it because it meant they could speak to all the different stakeholder groups and develop something which was quite complex, but which sort of kept everyone happy, and was very heavily consulted on – so was that the impression you got as well? And were you trying to not do that?

John Howell: Well exactly, exactly, what we weren't trying to do. This was not about keeping everyone happy, this was about finding \*the\* answer to the problems and getting on with implementing it as quickly as possible. (Interview: John Howell, 2016)

As well as reflecting the determination of ministers to implement policies which they felt they had mandate to implement as quickly as possible following the general election, Howell's comments link to a wider critique regarding New Labour's approach to policy making. This is of the typical role of consultation in policy making as, on one hand, not participatory enough, and on the other as encouraging an antagonistic and oppositional environment, in which local communities would respond negatively to development which they felt they had not helped to lead. Indeed, elsewhere Howell is cited as stating that 'the concept of consultation will become extinct', and that 'as far as I am concerned, consultation is dead. Taking a plan, and saying "take it or leave it" is over. Instead, engagement is what it's about. Local people will be encouraged to bring forward their ideas' (Morgan, 2011: 2).

The existence of powerful and well organised lobbies, on both the pro- and anti-development sides of campaigning spectrum, only made the situation even more challenging for policymakers (Interview: SCS3, 2016). And, alongside these issues relating to the wider policy field and community, Coalition ministers harboured another set of concerns. These related to the willingness and ability of civil servants themselves to both deliver the massive reductions in policy ministers wanted and, equally importantly, adopt a much less prescriptive style of policy drafting (Fox & Blackwell, 2014). To an extent, these concerns sprung from their own pre-held beliefs and about the role of the state and bureaucrats in the 'Big Society', policymaking, and public service provision (explored in detail in the analysis and discussion). Viewed through this lens, the proliferation of very technical government policy and guidance during the New Labour years was partially symptomatic of a self-interested and proceduralist civil service maintaining a powerful position for themselves as arbiters of policy advice and procedure within an overly complex system, wedded with a cultural incapacity to think beyond established procedure (Interview: Howell, 2016). This was seen in contrast to the private sector:

**Author:** So does that produce a culture clash, kind of with the professions within the civil service? So the idea of 'you got to university, you do your masters in planning, you might work in a local authority, the private sector, and the idea is you become an expert in planning, and you then join the civil service, and the idea is that you want to use your skills there...

**John Howell:** ...what one must argue is; is joining the civil service the right thing in that situation? I would think you were actually better off joining the private sector... ..and actually what we want are people with an agile mind, able to solve problems, not to be able to simply implement what was there - and that principally lies in the private sector. (Interview: John Howell, 2016)

*Tension in the department and Greg Clark's response the Planning Directorate's version of the NPPF*

It is also important to interpret these concerns in the light of the working environment during the period. Against a backdrop of a generally difficult relationships between ministers and civil servants in the department, CALA Home's High Court initially successful challenge to the revocation of regional planning had further undermined minister's faith in the quality of the legal/policy advice they were receiving from DCLG civil servants (Interviews: Bob Neill, 2016; SCS1, 2016). Outside of DCLG, ministers at one point grew so frustrated with Parliamentary Counsel's approach to drafting the Localism Bill - in terms of their use of complex language, as well what they saw as a determination to write an 'enabling bill' that made extensive use of Henry VIII clauses - that they threatened them with taking the unprecedented step of hiring the law firm Bircham Dyson Bell to do it instead (Fox & Blackwell, 2014). Ministers put Counsel's lack of understanding down to a centrist culture of drafting which had become deeply ingrained during the New Labour government (Interviews: Neill, 2016; Howell, 2016). This was a culture which both senior officials and ministers felt had become deeply embedded across government since 1997 (Riddell & Haddon, 2011), and which also harboured what they saw as tendencies towards policy-specific working and a lack of strategic, 'big picture', thinking. Riddell & Haddon in a 2011 analysis of the challenges the civil service and ministers faced during the transition from New Labour to the Coalition recount:

Some senior officials wondered whether there had been a fundamental shift in the nature of the Civil Service since 1997. The increased emphasis by Sir Gus O'Donnell on 'passion' highlighted this. The Civil Service had come to attract people, and encourage them, with increased enthusiasm for specific roles and policy areas. Civil servants, who had spent years basing their work on a particular approach, and their thinking on certain types of evidence, might now have to reverse their positions... ..What seemed part of the furniture was actually the furniture of a specific administration. The Conservatives identified a New Labour ideology, rather than a departmental culture, which was technocratic, centrist, with a statist approach to command and control government. Therefore, what was simply considered good practice could now be called into question, and some of these changes have taken many months to trickle down through, and beyond, departments. This would prove a particular challenge around the ideas of decentralisation and the Big Society... (Riddell & Haddon, 2011: 29)

However, perhaps most critically for the narrative unfolding here, Ministers were extremely unimpressed with the reworked version of the 200-page NPPF which the

Planning Directorate had begun drafting during the previous administration. Greg Clark viewed it as too long, too prescriptive, and a product typical of institutionalised civil service approaches to policy making:

...as I am aware, the Ministers did not want to run with whatever it was that they had cooked up. That, I never saw actually. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

...the civil servants, again, did another draft for Greg Clarke. And actually maybe this coloured his judgement, because I think he really was not a fan of it at all. (Interview: CS6, 2016)

...the advice [a senior civil servant in DCLG] was giving about this process was, like, [ministers] literally wanted a 30-page document - which obviously the civil couldn't understand, and they were like; 'oh, we can rationalise it from however many, 2000 pages, to 300'. [senior civil servants working with ministers] were like; 'no'. And the process for doing it was very old school, very 'the service does the work of doing the drafting, then we consult and then we go back', and that sort of process would have left you with a document of 500, easily. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

They drafted [the 200-page NPPF] in the year before Greg [Clark] started working on it... My worry is that when you do something like that there's always going to be someone that's cross, and if it's felt as a process that's purely centrally driven by a set of planners who, quite frankly, were the ones that were responsible for the crazy 2000-or-whatever page state of planning policy they'd got to, and herein lies the root to some sort of political angst at the end of it. And then you add to the fact that there weren't huge amounts of confidence in what they would do, the idea of them trying an alternative model then became quite attractive [to ministers]. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

These tensions added to ministers' sense that in order to deliver the kind of 'radical' planning policy form they wished to achieve, they would have to depart from the civil service's traditional approaches to policy making. Senior ministers came up with a novel solution. They decided to begin the process of creating the NPPF by inviting a small group of 'practitioners' with different specialist backgrounds, and from key interest groups, to produce a first draft of the NPPF. This would be done with as little input as possible from civil servants, with the aim of 'thrashing through the necessary choices' without their influence (Rutter, 2012: 8). The product of this 'Practitioners Advisory Group's'<sup>50</sup> travails could then feed into a more 'typical' civil service policy making process. This could be

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<sup>50</sup> This name is an unintentional echo of the last great 'PAG' – the Planning Advisory Group -formed in 1964 by Harold Wilson's Labour Government. This was tasked with 'assisting in a general review of the planning system' and the creation of a Mark II development plan system (Planning Advisory Group, 1965; Hall, 2014), Wilson's PAG published its final report in 1967. Poignantly, this was the peak year of housing completions in the UK (Hall, 2014); a year in which regional plans were being produced across England while a 'vast phalanx' of professional planners worked in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (a predecessor to DCLG) (Hall, 2014). This was a year which Peter Hall, summoning Wordsworth, describes as: "Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven. It was in retrospect, [the] high-water mark of a belief in such a total, centralised, top-down, expertly based and also benign planning." (Hall, 2014: 200)

either as the starting point for an official version, or as ‘one of many’ inputs into the process as a whole, should the PAG produce a draft which was not practically workable or politically palatable (Interview: SCS3, 2016).

### **6.1.2 The design of the Practitioners Advisory Group**

#### *The PAG’s membership*

The PAG was to consist of just four individuals - Simon Marsh, John Rhodes, Gary Porter, and Peter Andrew. These individuals were seen to have expertise as users of the planning system, with Greg Clark telling the House in a November 2011 Written Response that they ‘were invited to advise the Government based on their experience and expertise of local government, business and the environmental movement’ (Hansard col 227w, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2011). Each had in some way been involved with Planning Sounding Board, or had otherwise ‘been talking to [the Conservative Party] for a number of years when [they] were in Opposition’ (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). This was with the exception for Peter Andrew, who was recommended by someone on the Sounding Board (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Their appointment was extremely ad hoc, and there was ‘no hint of using Nolan Processes for public appointments<sup>51</sup>’ (Rutter, 2012: 9). The four individuals joined the PAG in an individual capacity, not as representatives of their various organisations, but they were none the less expected to discuss their work on the PAG with colleagues (Rutter, 2012), and each chose to partake in the exercise partly because of the potential they saw for influencing (or indeed *writing!*) important government policy (Anonymous, 2011; Rutter, 2012). It is therefore useful to consider their respective professional backgrounds:

*Peter Andrew:* As Director of Land and Planning at Taylor Wimpey UK – one of the biggest house building companies in the UK, Peter Andrew represented the housing development industry.

*John Rhodes:* Offering a similarly pro-development perspective to Peter Andrew was John Rhodes (Interviews: CS6, 2016; CG 1, 2016; Whittaker, 2016; Marsh, 2016), who founded the planning consultancy Quod. As outlined earlier, Rhodes was also a member of the John Howell’s Planning Sounding Board, and advised the Conservatives whilst they were in opposition (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). He founded Quod two months prior to the 2010 general election (Branson, 2011), officially registering Quod to a London-based

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<sup>51</sup> **The Nolan Principles** are part of the Ministerial Code. Published by the Cabinet Office in September 2010, this document sets out ‘the standards of conduct expected of ministers and how they discharge their duties’ (Cabinet Office, 2015).

address in the same month (Companies House, 2016). An interviewee who represented a conservation/environmental lobbying organisation characterised Quod as being a particularly ‘gung-ho’ consultancy, more willing than others to support big developments, and less inclined towards environmental work (Interview: CG 1, 2016). They pointed to Quod’s work providing the firm Sirius Materials with ‘strategic planning advice and to prepare the socio-economic case’ (Quod, 2014) for the extremely controversial development of a large potash mine in the North York Moors National Park to support this view (see Quod, 2014; Campaign for National Parks, 2015; Pidd, 2015; Interview: CG 1, 2016).

*Gary Porter:* The third member of the group, Gary Porter, came to the group with experience as a local politician. As was also detailed earlier, Porter was a rural Lincolnshire Conservative council leader and Chair of the LGA’s Environment and Housing Programme Board. He was also well known for chairing the Board of the Community Interest Company (CIC) ‘South Holland Local Housing’, set up and wholly owned by that district council in order to provide affordable housing in the area (Loakes, 2011). Given these connections Gary Porter’s selection was described as a ‘no-brainer’ by one civil senior servant (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Bob Neill (Interview: 2016) described Gary Porter as someone who was ‘sensible’, and represented a Conservative local councillor’s perspective, but without being overly anti-development:

...he was there as somebody we regarded as a sensible, you know, fairly pragmatic local government leader who would accept that you couldn't be as purist as some Tories wanted to be, which was almost; ‘we can have a veto on anything, and if it's in the Local Plan, that's it, minimal national interference’. Gary was willing to see that there had to be a bigger picture. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

*Simon Marsh:* Finally, Simon Marsh was the RSPB Acting Head of Sustainable Development, and Chair of the large environmental/conservation lobbying umbrella organisation Wildlife and Countryside Link. He was a well-established, *de facto*, point of contact between environmental/conservation NGOs and the government at the time (Interviews: CS3, 2016; Neill, 2016), as well as the Planning Sounding Board, which he attended.

This range of individuals were purposefully selected for their quite ‘extreme’ diversity of views, according to John Howell (Interview: 2016) and Bob Neill (Interview: 2016). And, to an *extent*, they did have diverse views. Simon Marsh himself was keen to emphasise the extent to which their views on fundamentally important issues - such as the role of the planning system, or even the existence of climate change - differed:

**Simon Marsh:** ...the way they did [set up the PAG] was to deliberately select people to contain a diversity of views, or even extremes of opinion, and so there were only four people on it. There was me, representing the environment, there was John Rhodes, from a consultancy, there was Peter Andrew from the Home Builders Federation, and there was Gary [Porter]... Representing politicians and local government, and they really were extreme views. I mean Gary Porter... to be fair, in his first meeting he said he 'hated planners'.

**Author:** [laughs]

**Simon Marsh:** And he was also a climate change sceptic.

**Author:** Blimey!

**Simon Marsh:** So, he was kind of in one corner, with me in the other. Peter Andrews, he's really just largely about making things easier for house builders in the system. And John Rhodes, he's a bit more balanced to be honest. He was from the development sector, so there was a degree of like-mindedness with Peter [Andrew]... (Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016)

From this quote alone, there were clearly some strong differences of opinion within the group. But this is not to say that the organisations present were by any means representative of wider society; some voices were purposefully excluded from the PAG. Most notably, some established and high-profile planning-related campaign groups (such as the TCPA and Campaign to Protect Rural England, who would later go on to play key roles in the campaign against the government's first draft of the NPPF), professional organisations (such as the Royal Town Planning Institute RTPI) and Planning Officers Society (POS)), and civil servants themselves were purposefully not given a place on, or direct contact point with, the PAG. In fact, these groups were cast quite explicitly as 'part of the problem' by ministers (Anonymous, 2011; Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016) - something which both civil servants and individuals from campaign groups picked up on<sup>52</sup> (Interview: PB1, 2016). For example, Simon Marsh, who was of course a member of the PAG itself, proffered that the government...

...maybe avoided inviting obvious organisations like the RTPI or CPRE because I think there was a perception they were 'part of the problem'... one of the things that really was different from the NPPF process to the Guidance Review was the way also that civil servants were excluded, and quite deliberately so, because I think in ministers minds they saw civil servants in DCLG as part of the problem. (Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016)

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<sup>52</sup> Whilst civil servants and lobbying groups argued that this was the case, some interviewees associated with or represented professional bodies were keen to emphasise their level of influence on government (Interview: LPA1, 2016; PB1, 2016), and understandably downplayed any suggestion of their exclusion from policy making processes.

An interviewee who had worked for one of the major planning-related professional bodies also felt this was the case. In his words:

...from [our organisational] point of view we didn't feel we had a huge amount of access to [the NPPF process]. I mean we did have meetings with the [PAG], I attended a couple of them and we had our say. But it felt much more that the review group had the ear of the ministers. And it was much more difficult to break through. That's certainly my view anyway... ...it felt fairly exclusive in terms of ability to influence it... (Interview: PB1, 2016)

This was a view mirrored by Andrew Whittaker, Planning Director for the Home Builders' Federation (HBF) - an industry body for private sector house builders in England and Wales<sup>53</sup>. He went to contrast the exclusion of professional organisations at this stage to the position of housebuilding industry, which he felt was well represented in the group by John Rhodes and Peter Andrew, and which he implied remained in contact with the industry during the process<sup>54</sup> (Interview: Andrew Whittaker, 2016). He linked these dynamics to the view that the PAG was surprisingly light in actual 'practitioners' (suggesting an understanding of practitioners as being professional town planners), and the idea that different members' sources of practical experience influenced degree to which different interest groups felt connected to the process, it is thus worth relaying these comment at length:

**Andrew Whittaker:** ...we saw it very much as a closed group, but we weren't too worried about it, because Pete Andrew from Taylor Wimpey was part of the group, and John Rhodes was part of the group... Both of whom we knew were aligned to what we wanted to deliver.

**Author:** Okay, so it's sort of representation by proxy, in a way.

**Andrew Whittaker:** Absolutely right. Whereas I can see that if you were Hugh Ellis, from the TCPA, or you were the RTPI, you might be slightly more concerned that, as their name implied, it was practitioners that were running this - and they were a little bit light on actual practitioners. So, you know, I really like Gary Porter, but, you know, how much experience did he have of planning around the country, given that he represented an area that was a low area for development? Lincolnshire is not a hotbed of development, and doesn't suffer the same problems as various other places. So, you know... I suppose the reason he was appointed, was he was chair of the LGA Environmental Planning Group, so, you assume that he had enough experience of other places, and people were feeding into him their experiences. In the same way as you might imagine, you know, we were talking to Pete and John, because we saw them as our representatives on that

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<sup>53</sup> **Andrew Whittaker** would go on to be a member of the National Planning Practice Guidance Review Group, which carried out a large-scale and high-profile review of the government-authored national-level planning guidance in 2013.

<sup>54</sup> It is interesting to contrast this opinion to that expressed by PAG group members, that one of the benefits of the approach was that they were less exposed to the lobbying activities of different groups (see Part 6.2.1).

board. And I assume that many of the environmental lobbyists used Simon... as their conduit... So I'm not sure that anyone was dis-communicated from it, or felt dis-communicated from it. Because they could see that there was a champion. (Interview: Andrew Whittaker, 2016)

This purposeful avoidance of groups which were seen to be 'part of the problem' is certainly reminiscent of the rationalities that underpinned the composition of the Conservatives' Sounding Board (which still existed at this point, and would continue to exist throughout the Coalition Government). But here, these circumscriptive logics arguably go further. For instance, there was a notable *absence* of organisations/individuals who might directly challenge the pro-growth and private sector-led development narrative that framed the exercise as a whole (though the Wildlife and Countryside Link, of which Marsh was the Chairman did have within its number the CPRE and National Trust<sup>55</sup>. This perceived orientation was something which, much like with the development of *OSP*, critical sections of the media were keen to draw attention to, *The Sunday Times* running the somewhat sensationalised headline; 'Wimpey director wrote Tories' new planning law' (Gillespie, 2011) over its reporting of the group's membership. Environmental and conservation lobbying organisations also perceived there to be a bias towards development in the group, despite the inclusion of Simon Marsh, with one interviewee from such a background arguing that from their perspective 'you could say that it certainly had a pro-development bent to it, I think that's certainly something you could say quite clearly' (Interview: CG 1, 2016).

Also mirroring the Sounding Board, the PAG members were selected on the basis that they were very much the 'key players in the market, who would see themselves as key players' (Interview: John Howell, 2016). Together they represented one of the largest housebuilders in England; a local politician and chair of the LGA's planning-concerned committee whose selection was a 'no-brainer' (Interview: SCS3, 2016); a planning consultant with a rapidly growing profile (Branson, 2011); and finally the largest conservation charity in Europe by number of members (RSPB, 2016)<sup>56</sup>. They were primarily given a place on the group not because they represented affected groups, but because they, in a clear echo of both Clark and Howell's origin stories, were seen as representing the key agents (or 'players') who would deliver the government's reforms on

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<sup>55</sup> While it may be fair to assume *prima facie* that, as John Rhodes phrased it in a parliamentary evidence session, members of the group were 'for growth or for the environment' (Rhodes, 2011), this is harder to judge for Porter, who was a local councillor.

<sup>56</sup> The RSPB was also estimated in 2010 to be the seventh largest landowner in the UK (Countrylife, 2010).

the ground. Their 'buy-in' was therefore required. A civil servant in the planning department described this thinking thusly:

I think it was done to try to get some buy-in to the changes that were being made. And encourage those in the industry to be part of the process because... everybody always thinks planning is about what [Local Planning Authorities] do but it's not, it's as much about what the industry does, because a Local Authority can have the bestest plan, the most forward-thinking plan, about what it wanted to achieve, what it wants to do - real permissive policies that allow development to happen - and if developers don't want to move there it doesn't matter how good your plan is, you know? It's not going to happen. It's not going to be delivered. So, you need to get that buy-in and I think what the idea was that they would try to use groups like that... (Interview: CS2, 2016)

This applied to Simon Marsh as much as the more obviously development-orientated members of the group. He was at the time seen as the *de facto* contact-point between the government and the environmental lobby by several interviewees. This was a view expressed by both a senior civil servant, as well as the representative of a prominent conservation/environmental NGO;

...anything to do with anything planning and environment it's, like, Simon! Like, who else is there? So yes, I think he'd gone to a couple of the meetings. But if you'd gone to the environmental lobby and asked for someone they would have chosen Simon. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

I don't think it's true to say [ministers] was entirely distrustful of established groups because Simon Marsh from the RSPB was one of the PAG and he was already quite well known and established as someone within the NGO community. Because at the time, he was...given that just before he was involved in this group he was the chair of the planning group at Wildlife and Countryside Link, which is an NGO umbrella organisation... ..So he was someone who was genuinely recognised and known within the environmental NGO sector... ..I think he was chosen as someone who would be able to put across the NGO point of view. (Interview: CG 1, 2016)

Overall, the PAG's membership comprised individuals who could be fairly described as 'obvious' candidates to be figureheads for several key interest groups, who the government saw as 'key players' and delivery partners. They did represent a diversity of views to an extent (as a house builder, planning consultant, local councillor, and environmental/conservation NGO), but much like the Sounding Board this diversity was circumscribed to ensure that it did not diverge too far from the Conservatives' Big Society critique of the planning system and public sector. This circumscription operated both in terms of whose expert or political knowledge would contribute to the development of the NPPF, and who was seen as 'part of the problem' and therefore had their input into the process purposefully restricted.

### *The PAG's lack of a terms of reference and of form political direction*

At the time of their appointment the PAG's members were not given a formal terms of reference, brief, or instructions (Rutter, 2012). Nor were they explicitly given any political direction from ministers regarding how they should approach streamlining policy, or how their work would feed into the broader process of drafting the NPPF (Rutter, 2012), but rather were provided with a 'general invitation to prepare a draft of the NPPF' (Rhodes, 2011). The PAG were also given explicit instructions that their work should be seen as non-political, and as a largely technical exercise in streamlining existing policy according to their own expertise (Interview: SCS2, 2016). As discussed in more detail later, John Rhodes (2011) reported to the Communities and Local Government Committee's (CLG Committee's) enquiry into the NPPF that the PAG were instructed 'not be significantly influenced by any pronouncements of Government policy, views of civil servants or other factors'. In the view of one senior civil servant, closely involved with the process, this was inherently problematic:

...Greg Clark had said; 'well, the Government has no interest. I'm just synthesising and bringing together the revealed preferences of the people who are going to operate this system'. So in a sense, the PAG had an impossible task to do because they were told; 'there's not got to be any politics in this'. Or; 'there is no political direction to give', which is a mad thing to propose when the document is inherently very political. That is the point of policy, is to be political, and to make choices. So to be told; 'I, Greg Clark, don't have any choices to make', was really a bit of a difficult starting point. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

For this interviewee, the government's stance here was problematic in two ways. Firstly, policy is *intrinsicly* about making highly political choices – to claim otherwise can only be false. The limits of what are technically possible are always going to be politically defined. Secondly, it was problematic for the government in a strategic sense, because it meant that 'nobody was representing the government's interests' in these initial discussions about the policy substance of the NPPF (Interview: SCS2, 2016). This would have repercussions when it came to the government producing its first official draft of the NPPF, when such interests would surely have to be presented. Furthermore, the Treasury would later intervene in the development of the document, with explicitly political intentions that clashed with the PAG's own intentions for the document.

In fact, PAG members were keenly aware at the time that the decisions they were making were indeed intensely political, and that there were implicit political parameters within which their work would take place. John Rhodes understood that the NPPF needed to be pro-growth and not 'looking to change policy on the greenbelt' (Rutter, 2012: 10), while Simon Marsh's attempts, on behalf of the RSPB, to advocate a spatial approach to national policy were curtailed by ministers' overriding wish for role of the PAG to be one of streamlining national policy (Anonymous, 2011; Rutter, 2012). And, as discussed later,

the PAG's approach to writing their draft of the NPPF began with discussing key 'matters of principle' regarding planning policy.

### *The PAG's informal and unofficial status*

As well as lacking a terms of reference and *explicit* political direction, ministers initially neither announced nor acknowledged the PAG's existence. 'Insiders' to the process suggested that there were three reasons for this move. Firstly, the PAG was seen by Clark as a risky policy experiment. He didn't want to draw attention to the project in case it failed to 'actually deliver the outcomes that they wanted' (Interview: SCS3, 2016). But, 'as the validity of the process, of doing it, became clear then you can kind of make more of a thing about it' (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Secondly, ministers felt that formalising and announcing the PAG would have given the opportunity for a nervous civil service to bureaucratised and seize control of a process they regarded as extremely high-risk. Bureaucratisation and a more conventional 'civil service' approach to policy making, were of course, something which ministers were keen to avoid:

I think the other part of it was if you had formalised... ..you would then have had all the layers and the processes that the service like to put around stuff, for good reason, because in the end contentious policy requires painful and deep and collective consultation, and it's a process of arbitration and working with others. But I think there was maybe a bit of a worry that if you suddenly formalised it you would then have to have a sounding board of the planners, a thing of the developers... ..the service was very nervous about this process, rightly so, because it was risky and they could see the risk, and if it was left to them, their main thing was that they just wanted control of it, and the fact that they didn't have control of it was driving them completely nuts. I think had it been too open and formal they would have found a way to try to hold it, grip it, change it and create it into the sort of creature that the civil service likes, for good reasons. There's a reason why policy makers do the things that they do, but if you're not wholly convinced that that leads to the right outcomes and you're trying to test something different you're going to have a bit of a tension there. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

Thirdly, keeping the existence of the PAG quiet was intended to prevent groups from heavily lobbying the PAG, and 'distorting' its deliberations (Interview: SCS3, 2016). PAG members later told Rutter (2012) that freedom from lobbying was one of the things about its format which they appreciated most. This point is complicated somewhat, however, by Andrew Whittaker's earlier discussed comments which suggest that the development and environmental/conservation lobbies felt that they significant influence and/or representation by proxy within the PAG.

## 6.2 The Practitioners Advisory Group in practice

### 6.2.1 The PAG in practice and at work (January 2011)

#### *The PAG begins work*

Though Oliver Letwin originally proposed that the PAG's work would begin after the Localism Bill gained royal assent, it actually started in late January 2011, as the bill began its passage through the House of Commons committee stage (Anonymous, 2011). Meanwhile, at the same time as establishing the PAG (but without mentioning its existence (Rutter, 2012)) Greg Clark announced that DCLG was carrying out a formal review of national planning policy. In a Written Ministerial Statement, he invited individuals and organisations, 'in advance of a formal consultation on the draft', to submit their suggestions as to 'what priorities and policies we might adopt to produce a shorter, more decentralised and less bureaucratic national policy framework' (Hansard col 145ws, 2010) with a deadline of 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

#### *The working process of the PAG in practice*

Greg Clark wanted the PAG to have minimal interaction with the civil service (Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016), which was under strict instruction to provide the group with nothing more than arms-length support (Interview: SCS2, 2016), the basic logic being that the civil service should be at hand to 'provide the PAG with the support it needed, without taking a view' (Interview: SCS2, 2016). The institutional structure set up to achieve this was unusual and quite complex. The PAG officially sat outside of DCLG's Planning Directorate, with a Deputy Director, Miatta Fahnbulleh, who had been seconded from the Cabinet Office to act as Greg Clark's advisor on planning and decentralisation, providing the group with secretarial support<sup>57</sup> (Interview: SCS2, 2016; Rutter, 2012). Miatta Fahnbulleh was brought in by Greg Clark because of his frustration with the 'narrowness' of policy/legal advice he was getting from within DCLG, and the feeling that someone from the Cabinet Office would offer a broader, higher-quality policy advice (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). While working with the group she also worked closely with Greg Clark. This put her in a uniquely powerful position with regards to the early development of the NPPF (as well as Coalition planning policy more widely). In Bob Neill's (2016) words;

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<sup>57</sup> **Miatta Fahnbulleh**, who had previously been Deputy Director responsible for the Communities and Local Government brief in the Policy Unit, which was dissolved in the first year of the Coalition.

‘...probably there were things that passed between him and her that I wasn't even necessarily party to. She was helping with a lot of that re-drafting and that day to day changing.’

The PAG was then linked to the Planning Directorate by a civil servant who operated out of the Economic and Social Planning Policy team (later to become the Planning and Development Plans team), whose role was to provide the PAG with policy material and advice (Interview: SCS2, 2016). He was then line-managed by Miles Gibson<sup>58</sup>, Deputy Director of Economic and Social Planning Policy team, who also had the role of providing the official government ‘bureaucratic’ view during the process (Interview: SCS2, 2016). At this stage of the PAG’s work, a kind of ‘Chinese wall’ operated between the group and the rest of the Planning Directorate, with the single civil servant acting a vector between them:

...there was a Chinese wall between what [the civil servant] was doing, and [the civil servant] was under instructions from [Miles Gibson] not to tell [him] what the PAG were doing. And [the civil servant] was going around sourcing bits of the NPPF from [the PAG], but also from [the civil service]<sup>59</sup> (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

This ambiguous and quite complex setup meant that the single civil servant acting as a vector between the group and the wider civil service had a significant degree of autonomy in how they went about sourcing material and prompting the PAG’s work (the significance of this seemingly innocuous point emerges later in the story):

...working out how much support to give the PAG was quite difficult, and I think [the civil servant] felt a bit at sea sometimes, because of what Greg [Clark] had asked for that we give the PAG arm's length support. So [the civil servant] was basically left to [their] own devices to construct something with Miatta which kind of worked. So I was pleased about that. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

The workload for PAG members was, by all accounts, huge (Rutter, 2012; Anonymous, 2011; Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016). Alongside large amount of paperwork requiring a fast turn-around, the PAG itself met at least once a week (Rutter, 2012; Anonymous, 2011). During these meetings specialists from the Planning Directorate provided short policy briefings on specific areas of policy, often based on what the Directorate had already produced as part of its 200-page ‘rough cut’ before the general election (Rutter, 2012;

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<sup>58</sup> **Miles Gibson** left DCLG to become the Prime Minister’s advisor on planning-related policy towards the end of the NPPF process (a position in which he succeeded by Alex Morton, who entered Downing Street from the **Policy Exchange** think-tank). Miles Gibson was unusual in this role in that that he was a qualified town planner. He is also another example of an individual who had a high level of personal influence on national policy during this period, for example regarding the government’s decision not to abolish the Community Infrastructure Levy (as OSP had promised to do), and the drafting of large parts of the NPPF, as discussed earlier.

<sup>59</sup> This quote has been heavily edited to preserve the anonymity of participants.

Anonymous, 2011; Senior Civil Servant C, 2016). These kick-started discussions, and were designed to ensure that it didn't become 'a completely renegade process' (Interview: SCS3, 2016). These regular meetings with civil servants ran adjacent to fortnightly meetings with Greg Clark and John Howell and occasional meetings with Oliver Letwin. These were intended to 'prompt [the PAG] in certain directions' Rutter (2012: 10). However, this should be considered in the light of the fact that (as earlier discussed), John Rhodes later told the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, ministers simultaneously emphasised that the PAG should not be overly influenced by these conversations, nor by government policy announcements:

We reported to Greg Clark and John Howell on a regular basis and they expressed some views to us as we reported our progress but it was emphasised to us that the draft should be our own work and our own opinion and that we should not be significantly influenced by any pronouncements of Government policy, views of civil servants or other factors. (Rhodes, 2011)

Within the four-member group itself there was no chairman and no formal voting structure – issues were resolved as they arose, either in person or through circulating drafts. As Simon Marsh pointed out, this was all quite a departure from the civil service's 'usual way of doing things' (Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016), not least because at the heart of the process, these non-government individuals seemingly, literally, actually *wrote* their own draft of the NPPF themselves<sup>60</sup>.

In line with their perceived remit of streamlining government policy as part of a technical exercise, the group's approach to drafting was to 'begin with current policy and adapt, rather than come to issues completely afresh' (Rutter, 2012: 10). *Nonetheless*, the group did begin this process by discussing key issues of principle (Anonymous, 2011). Alongside the previously mentioned example of how 'spatial' the NPPF should be, Rutter (2012: 11) reports that these early discussions included key topics such as: 'The presumption in favour of sustainable development; issues such as flood protection; the viability of development, and; whether there should be local or national standards for sustainably'. Quite clearly, in practice the line between whether the PAG was actually changing policy, and whether the changes its draft proposed were technical refinements and clarificatory,

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<sup>60</sup> In March 2012 Simon Marsh described the process as; '...pick four people with entirely contrary views, set them the task of streamlining all existing planning policy, give them a small secretariat of civil servants and shut them in a room for five months until they've either murdered each other or come up with something useful.'

was extremely blurred from the outset of the project<sup>61</sup>. The extent to which the final version of the NPPF actually changed the substance of national planning policy would become a recurring and extremely important theme throughout the process, erupting with great significance in the following year during the campaign against the NPPF.

### *The dynamics of individual influence in the PAG*

Because of informality and small size of the PAG, it appears that these discussions and their conclusions were shaped to a great extent by the personal relationships between the group's members. Many of the PAG's meetings were long, gruelling, and heated, with members having strong and contrasting views on certain topics (Anonymous, 2011), and, in the words of Simon Marsh:

...we basically had to write it ourselves, rather than having civil servants to draft it and for us to comment on, and a lot of the drafting was done by John Rhodes. I kind of, this is mainly not entirely fair, but I kind of characterise it in this way; John Rhodes would draft something, I would comment on it, Peter Andrews would say; 'there's nothing about viability', and Gary Porter would say; 'it's too long!' (Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016)

These intra-group dynamics and individual personalities may have shaped the overall approach the PAG took as much as the overall approach shaped its internal dynamics. For example, one civil servant from the Planning Directorate mused as to whether the invisible barrier in place between civil servants and the PAG was as much a result of John Rhodes' approach to working, as it was purposefully designed by ministers:

I wonder if the whole 'Chinese wall' and what have you, is partly down to, again, the personalities of the group, because if it was John Rhodes, when he was doing the LPEG [Local Plans Expert Group<sup>62</sup>] he would take an awful lot on himself to do... ...he would actually take real authorship of the LPEG reports. He was the one who would sit there, well into his nights and weekends, actually writing it up, putting a lot of pen to paper, writing papers for the group to discuss, and really taking the lead in chairing that group, and being hands on in the work. (Interview: CS7, 2016)

Interestingly, the same civil servant suggested that far from the PAG providing an external means of influence and challenge to the government machine as a whole (including

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<sup>61</sup> This is a distinction complicated and made more significant by the fact that, because of the English planning system's legal framework, different expressions of policy may actually heavily influence the substance of the policy when it comes into play in concrete situations.

<sup>62</sup> The **Local Plan Expert Group** was an independent review group, charged by **Greg Clark** and **Brandon Lewis** during the current Conservative administration, with reviewing the Local Plan making process and assessing how it could be made more efficient and effective. It was chaired by **John Rhodes**, with **John Howell** amongst its members (Local Plans Expert Group, 2016). Its role within the policy making process was that of a conventional review group.

ministers), the informality, small size, and heightened importance of interpersonal relationships within the group may have led to them having a closer relationship with the minister himself. This, in fact, provided a more direct channel for ministerial – and therefore *explicitly political* - influence over policy as it developed, even if it was not being explicitly applied. They discussed this specifically in relation to Greg Clark and John Rhodes' working relationship:

‘...then [Greg Clark] got [John Rhodes] in, somebody that he knew very well, to actually do the work, and chair the group to do the work, and it sounds like he was somebody that could literally phone Greg on the weekend, and go, how does this kind of thing sound? And actually have a lot closer engagement with politicians that you would have when the civil service writes a policy document, and then sends it up, and you know; ‘we’ll find out what they want, to start with, then write the document, send it up, see if this is what they want’ – [the standard civil service approach to policy making] is a much more formalised process. And like I say, [John Rhodes] was able to phone up the minister, any time over the weekend, and say; ‘Hey what are your civil servants doing here? They’re annoying me.’ I don’t know if he ever actually said that, but you know? (Interview: CS7, 2016)

Greg was really clear about who he wanted on the panel, and what he wanted them to do. And really drove that process much more politically that he could have driven it with civil servants. (Interview: CS7, 2016)

These views were supported by a backbench Peer, who also tied this close ministerial involvement to Greg Clark’s own personality and way of working. They explained; ‘I think Greg was very direct. He had a very clear view and was then involved in the detail of the words...’ (Interview: Peer 1, 2016)

#### *The PAG’s working process and how they engaged with external agents*

This informality, small size and controlled level of civil service involvement had two further consequences for the way the group worked and the form their eventual draft took. Firstly, from the ‘outside looking in’, group members were less exposed to lobbying than they might have otherwise have been (Rutter, 2012; Anonymous, 2012). Where there was lobbying from those ‘in the know’ – for example, from other government departments with particular interests in national planning policy - it was applied to PAG members themselves, rather than departmental policy leads as would usually have been the case (Anonymous, 2012). This changed the balance of power between DCLG, other government departments, and the PAG itself (Anonymous, 2012), with other departments who informally lobbied for their interests via the PAG, rather than via official or departmental channels (Anonymous, 2012). Secondly, from the ‘inside looking out’ there was extremely limited, input from outside of the group at this stage in terms of expert consultation and representation from communities potentially affected by the streamlining of policy, but were not ‘key players’. Some of the 3,426 responses to Greg

Clark's initial call for evidence were shared with the group, but these largely concerned the overall direction and purpose of the planning system. Rutter (2012) reports that as a result of this they had little impact on the group's drafting. Rather, participants largely drew on their personal expertise and knowledge when making decisions. When asked whether this made up for the lack of external input in the group's policy decisions, Simon Marsh (Interview: 2016) responded that the group's role was to find ways of expressing *existing* policy in a more efficient manner – and as such, this kind of input was not really necessary. Reflecting on the first official draft of the NPPF, produced by the government a few months later, he was, however, surprised that it was so similar to the PAG's, considering this lack of outside expert and stakeholder input:

**Author:** So, during the process of the NPPF, where did you draw on expert knowledge and expertise? For instance, if you were looking at how you could simplify something, how did you gauge what the sort of on-the-ground impact of that consolidation/simplification might be? Because if civil servants were doing it they'd consult extremely widely, they'd speak to the more specialised members of the civil service - what was your parallel for that?

**Simon Marsh:** Well the short answer is that we didn't do that. I mean the process was meant to be streamlining and simplifying rather than changing policy. So in a sense it was, a lot of it was more about how things were expressed rather than the actual content of the policy, but you're right, this is really different from the traditional civil service approach to things, that we didn't consult or seek external advice, I mean we were all experts in our own fields, so it was, it was very much a draft owned by us personally, and that I think is partially explained why we were surprised that the official version wasn't more different. (Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016)

As Simon Marsh suggests here, it is the fact that the government's first official draft of the NPPF later appears to have been based on the PAG's which makes the practitioners' working practices so important to understand.

### *Tension with civil servants*

For many civil servants in the Planning Directorate the way the PAG was set up, the extent to which it was a departure from established modes of working, and the anti-civil servant rhetoric which surrounded it, presented a challenge to their sense of professionalism, their established role within the policy process, and the nature of their relationships with the ministers as the primary source of policy advice and expertise. This understandably caused high levels of tension in the department. Referring to the Planning Directorate's creation of the original 200-page version of the NPPF, one senior civil servant recounted:

[Greg Clark] didn't want the civil servants to write it, which was a bit of a struggle for us, because we thought we knew what we were doing. But the minister is the minister. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

Another explained:

...it was all set up in a very, I don't know what the right adjective is, it wasn't a collegiate and collaborative atmosphere. It was, right, Head of Department's not working on this. The Department is staying away from this and is providing only technical advice via Miatta [Fahnbulleh]. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

Civil servants were also wedded to the policy areas in which they worked, which, to a great extent, was a function of the approach to planning policy making which had prevailed in the Planning Directorate under New Labour. This added to the difficult atmosphere in the department during this period:

**CS5:** Yeah they got, like, four people on the drafting team, and they literally just did it... So it's quite remarkable really. Lots of people who were really wedded to these very, very, technical, very carefully negotiation pieces of policy and guidance, which they'd spent years negotiating with other departments, with the sector, you know, with the... They'd gone through the processes and came up with these things that they saw as really robust, detailed, effective, solid, evidenced policy. That's what... And it was just torn up, and they just re-drafted it... lots of people around about that point - they were running a voluntary redundancy programme - so lots of people were just... quitting!

**Author:** Because they saw the process?

CS5: Well because they'd spent years in these areas... (Interview: CS5, 2016)

#### *To what extent did civil servants actually write the PAG draft?*

The unusually high degree of influence which non-government agents had during the initial stages of the NPPF is probably the fundamental plot-point of the overall, widely-accepted, narrative of its development. Indeed, it is this radical 'opening up' of the policy process to outside interests which, in the eyes of a diverse mixture of groups, including Coalition ministers, and commentators such as the Institute for Government (Rutter, 2012) makes the NPPF such an interesting, perhaps successful, and perhaps troubling policy making experiment (Rutter, 2012). It is therefore surprising that one of the more significant themes to emerge from interviews directly challenged this 'dominant' narrative; by several accounts civil servants played a far more influential role in shaping policy during this stage of the NPPF than informed commentators, or even ministers at the time, realised. In the words of one senior civil servant; '...the PAG were more reliant on the civil servants than the politicians knew about or wanted' (Interview: SCS2, 2016). This view was articulated independently and in detail by two senior civil servants, alluded to (without prompting) by Bob Neill, and supported (again without prompting) by a representative of environmental/conservation lobbying organisation and a Backbench Peer. These latter two individuals claimed:

...civil servants were influential behind the scenes and probably more influential than perhaps people realised. (Interview: CG 1, 2016)

... [Greg Clark] saw the NPPF as having been successful because the officials hadn't been allowed to control it. Actually, they'd had more input than he thought they had. (Interview: Peer 2, 2016)

It is worth unpacking the comments of the two civil servants. If civil servants did indeed have much more influence over the drafting the NPPF than ministers realised, and the PAG had a much lesser role, this raises some critical questions<sup>63</sup>. These concern the extent to which ministers and civil servants ('the government') actually shared a coherent set of policy making rationalities; why the 'open policy making' narrative dominated the business-as-usual narrative; to what extent the use of the PAG really influenced the substance of the NPPF (and therefore also precipitated or limited the vociferous public campaign which later emerged), and; what this suggests about the *interaction* of *different* strategies for foreclosing of the political, for example. The subjects are revisiting in detail in the discussion.

The two civil servants' argument goes back to the 200-page draft of the NPPF which civil servants had begun producing under the Labour government, in anticipation of an upcoming reform of national-level planning policy. As was discussed in the previous chapter, this document never obtained sign-off from Coalition ministers - but it *was* used as a basis for the arms-length support and policy guidance which civil servants supplied to the PAG. This support was provided via the presentation of briefings from Planning Directorate policy leads but also, crucially, in a less formal and more direct way. This was via the civil servant acting as a vector between the PAG and the wider Planning Directorate. This civil servant had considerable flexibility to act, and fed text from the 200-page NPPF and redrafted PPSs to the group for drafting. This was because these documents offered a practical and structured starting point for the PAG's drafting work, in what was an improvised and rather fraught process (Interview: SCS2, 2016). One interviewee outlined the way in which this worked in practice, and emphasised the extent to which large chunks of the PAG's draft of the NPPF was written by a particular senior civil servant, as follows:

...I don't think the PAG have ever been told that quite substantial proportions of the NPPF were actually written by [a senior civil servant]. But via very circuitous routes, because [the senior civil servant] wrote something, chucked it into the mix... [they] said; 'how about this for the front page of the document or whatever?', it went to [...] colleagues not on the PAG side of the Chinese wall, it got discussed. And then it found its way to [the civil servant acting as the go-between], who was like a magpie trying to pick up bits of text and interesting ideas from around the place. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

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<sup>63</sup> Not coincidentally, some of the quotes used in the following section have been heavily edited to ensure that anonymity is preserved for what is clearly a politically-sensitive subject.

This interviewee was keen to emphasise that there was nothing malicious about this approach – it wasn't an effort to undermine the PAG – but that given the extent of the challenge at hand [the civil servant concerned] found that if [they were] to do an honourable job and an efficient job [they] had to source ideas from wherever [they] could get them' (Interview: SCS2, 2016). The 200-page NPPF happened to provide such a resource. This civil servant went on to argue that this mode of working also meant that the Planning Directorate heavily influenced the language, tone, and overall drafting style of the PAG's draft of the NPPF. This is a significant point beyond the fact that the government was aiming to streamline national policy in the name of simplification, though this was obviously an important semi-deregulatory end in itself. In the English planning system, the consistent use of particular language is integral to the socio-legal construction of such concepts as the 'local', 'community', and even 'localism' (Layard, 2010)<sup>64</sup>. As a result of their work on the 200-page NPPF and the PPSs, the senior civil servant recounted;

...we already had the vocabulary to use to write policy without all of the guff. And we thought very carefully about specific words that should be used in order to describe what the policy was. And the word 'should' was the word. That was the word off which everything hung... ...And the reason for the distinction was because 'should' was something that you *should* do, and 'may' was something that you *didn't have* to do, and that this was legally important. Greg [Clark] never understood any of this, and we didn't try very hard to explain it to him because we knew he wasn't listening at the time. But we think that the example of PPS 4 and PPS 6 were crucial in influencing how the NPPF was written, because it was written in the same style. And the drafts that [a senior civil servant] did, or bits of the NPPF, were written in that style - in a purist way. So getting all of that tight enough to stop people from unravelling it, to stop the rest of Whitehall unravelling it, to stop the endless qualifications, on the one hand, on the other, that make policy difficult to interpret - we were trying very hard to get out of that kind of way of writing it and into something else. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

This obviously runs counter to the idea that the tone and language of the NPPF were a significant departure from previous incarnations of national policy specifically because the process was 'opened up' to more sources of non-civil service input and influence. The other interviewee who spoke in-depth about this topic presented a slightly different, but not quite incompatible, perspective on the civil service's motivations for taking this approach. They characterised the process described above as one of the Planning Directorate purposefully using the PAG's working process as an alternative outlet for their

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<sup>64</sup> Indeed, difficulties relating to doing this are partly what led to ministers to consider hiring a private legal firm to write the Localism Bill, rather than Parliamentary Counsel.

work on the 200-page NPPF<sup>65</sup>. Referring to the frustration some civil servants evidently felt about ministers not letting them take the lead on developing this original version into government policy (Interviews: SCS2, 2016; CS5, 2016), they stressed the extent to which civil servants actually *wrote* the PAG draft, and recounted:

...by the time ministers wanted us to [streamline and redraft national planning policy], it had to go through John Rhodes's group, and John Rhodes's group had to report back. And in the end, and what was lost in that was actually, [the civil service] probably wrote most of that – John took the pen to it - but most of it was building upon stuff that had already been written by the civil service. So, I don't think I'll ever persuade Greg [Clark], Bob Neill, or John Howell, that this was something that wasn't done externally, and was better for it. But the truth is, that it wasn't. (Interview: SCS4, 2016)

...the reality is that that external source was fed by the civil service machine, with proposals and drafting that we'd already prepared [for the 200-page version], but that we couldn't get ministers to sign off before. And so the ministers wouldn't let us do this before... The civil service is very good at this, but sometimes we need to feed it through a different way. (Interview: SCS4, 2016)

Finally, Bob Neill's comments painted a much more nuanced picture of the level of civil servant involvement in drafting the PAG draft. His views can be placed somewhere between the mainstream perspective and the two civil servants' perspectives. He described a much higher level of dialogue than the other interviewees did, downplaying the idea put forward by Simon Marsh (2011) that the PAG were four individuals 'locked in a room' to get on with it:

**Author:** ...so then the next stage is, you bring the PAG in and then you sort of lock them in a room, or...

**Bob Neill:** That sort of thing, yeah, that's right. I mean, obviously civil servants would come up with drafts. Greg, in particular, had some thoughts, but then there's a bit of kicking around. They'd come up with some ideas that we'd take back and run past the civil servants.

**Author:** Okay, yeah. Because the picture I built up previously was a little bit more 'they were locked in rooms, did it on their own'. But actually, there was an interplay between yourselves, them, civil servants as well during that process?

He also emphasised the degree to which Greg Clark himself wrote sections of the draft – a view which aligns neatly with other interviewee's previously discussed comments about the extent to which the minister's personality shaped the process:

Bob Neill: There was a bit more interplay, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, that's right. And as I say, Greg himself, we used to have weekly meetings going through a particular section of it with him, myself,

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<sup>65</sup> Which, it should be remembered, was emphatically rejected by Greg Clark and seen as being symptomatic of 'typical' civil service policy making.

[Baroness] Joan [Hanham], because she was going to have to make sure that anything like that was sellable upstairs [i.e. acceptable to the House of Lords] ... ..But Greg would quite often actually say; 'right, I want to think about this and come back a couple of days later'. And he would have changed it himself, you know, manuscript amendments sort of thing. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

These statements reveal just how difficult it is to assess different groups' level of political/policy influence<sup>66</sup> without burrowing down to the level of actual practice, as it unfold 'on the ground'. And, once this has been done, quite how complex these power relations actually are, even within a very small group who were taking part in a process of which the researcher knows many of the procedural and structural details. These statements also make some interesting claims about both the civil services' established planning policy making practices; the civil service's correct position within the policy process and Westminster Model; its institutional resilience in the face of political change and changing demands on its expertise, and; the level of knowledge ministers actually had about the policy practices of their civil servants.

Who actually wrote the words on the NPPF's pages and in what style may be neither here nor there in terms of the policy substance of the document. Indeed, assessing the extent to which different authors actually influenced the document would probably be an impossible task; so far in this account John Rhodes, Greg Clark, and senior civil servants have all been credited with writing the vast majority of the NPPF. In the words of one Peer: '... ironically, if you talk to John Rhodes, John Rhodes claims to have written every word and if you talk to Greg Clark, Greg Clark claims to have written every word. And I've had both of them say that to me...' (Interview: Peer 1, 2016). What certainly is significant is the way in which these interpretations challenge the very premise of the NPPF as being a fundamentally different way of doing policy; one which relied more than anything else on the knowledge of practitioners, delivery partners, and the sector, and one which was held up by Oliver Letwin and others as an example of how policy could be made in the future. It also complicates the question of assessing to what extent the rationalities driving the development of the NPPF were 'neoliberal' or 'post-political' with the adjunct; whose rationalities?

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<sup>66</sup> It is, however, important to bear in mind that the 200-page document the civil service was drawing on was only a *consolidation* of policy as it was expressed in PPSs (Interview: SCS2, 2016). I.e. by feeding chunks of the 200-page NPPF into the drafting process, civil servants were not producing any *new* policy.

## 6.3 The ‘Treasury view’ and the publication of the PAG’s draft

### 6.3.1 The March 2011 Budget, Planning for Growth, and the Plan for Growth

#### *Planning for Growth and the March 2011 budget*

Policy announcements associated with the Coalitions’ 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2011 budget had a crucial influence on the eventual form of the NPPF and the policy making practices which produced it. Economic forecasts and reports from the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), which was created by Osborne directly after the 2010 election to enhance the Coalition’s economic credibility<sup>67</sup>, made concerning reading for ministers. Amongst other indicators, the OBR pointed to ‘unexpectedly weak’ estimates of GDP for the final quarter of 2010 (falling by 0.6% during this period) (OBR, 2011), and external forecasts reduced estimates for growth in 2010 and 2011 (OBR, 2011). Economic growth and credibility had been a central pillars of the Conservatives’ electoral platform, as well as a vital part of the Coalition’s planning reform agenda, as laid out in OSP. Interviewees from inside and outside the government characterised the government as beginning to panic at this stage (Interviews: SCS3, 2016; LPA1, 2016). The Treasury identified the construction and housebuilding sectors as being key to drivers of potential economic growth, and looked to ways of increasing productivity in these parts of the economy (Interviews: CS1, 2016; CS2; 2016). As such the Budget and related policy announcements contained some measures which directly related to national planning policy and its reform. There were laid out in *The Plan for Growth* (HM Treasury & BIS, 2011) – a white paper jointly published by the Treasury and the BIS on 20<sup>th</sup> March, under the auspices of George Osborne as and Vince Cable (both members of the Coalition’s leading ‘Quod’). It explicitly identifies the planning system as being a ‘part of the problem’, and at one point claims that ‘delays in processing [planning] applications cost the economy £3 billion a year’ (Treasury & BIS, 2011: 13). Section 1.34 of the document present the Coalition’s intended changes to the planning system, which included proposals to:

- introduce a powerful new presumption in favour of sustainable development, so that the default answer to development is ‘yes’

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<sup>67</sup> The OBR is a non-departmental public body which was founded by the Conservatives whilst in opposition, and was formally created the same month as the 2010 general election. Of the OBR George Osborne declared; ‘...they will also have a role, over the coming months, in exposing all the hidden liabilities and long-term pressures facing us as a country.’ (Osborne, 2011)...

- localise choice about the use of previously developed land, removing nationally imposed targets while retaining existing controls on greenbelt land
- produce a shorter, more focused and *inherently pro-growth* National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to deliver more development in suitable and viable locations
- set clear expectations that with immediate effect local planning authorities and other bodies involved in *granting development consents should prioritise growth and jobs*, through a Written Ministerial Statement by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 23 March 2011 (Treasury & BIS, 2011: 23) (emphasis added)

The Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) from Greg Clark which followed<sup>68</sup> and was fittingly titled *Planning for Growth* laid out the Treasury and BIS's priorities in no uncertain terms (see Annex A of Quatermain, 2011):

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has today issued a call to action on growth, publishing an ambitious set of proposals to help rebuild Britain's economy. The planning system has a key role to play in this...We will work quickly to reform the planning system to achieve this, but the Government recognises that many of these actions will take some months to deliver, and that there is a pressing need to ensure that the planning system does everything it can to help secure a swift return to economic growth. This statement therefore sets out the steps the Government expects local planning authorities to take with immediate effect.

The Government's top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs. Government's clear expectation is that the answer to development and growth should wherever possible be 'yes', except where this would compromise the key sustainable development principles set out in national planning policy.

#### *The (re)emergence of the Treasury view*

Other authors have analysed the *Plan for Growth* and *Planning for Growth's* policy substance and discursive content in detail (see Allmendinger, 2017; Ricketts & Field, 2012). However, it is the unfurling policy *making* narrative which is of interest to us here, and these documents are significant to its development in three closely-linked ways. These concern; a) how the re-emergence of what Allmendinger terms the 'Treasury view' prefigured the work of the PAG and DCLG in terms of policy options, and; b) how the tone of these documents clashed with the sensitive and consensual tone ministers associated with the NPPF were broadcasting, and; c) how both of the preceding points led environmental/conservation lobbying groups to regard the coming reforms as a battle over the fundamental role of the planning system in society.

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<sup>68</sup> This was then followed by a Chief Planners Letter, dated the 31<sup>st</sup> March, which informed Local Planning Authorities that they should take into account the WMS (including the above quoted text) as a material planning consideration (Quatermain, 2011).

The first of these points concerns the fact that these documents provided the first signs of a public re-emergence of the long-standing ‘Treasury view’ of planning (Allmendinger, 2016), as a foil to the ‘Localist’ narrative being presented to the public by ministers in DCLG. Built around the concepts of ‘supply, demand and price signals’, the ‘Treasury view’ sees ‘planning controls as thwarting competitiveness and growth’ and a ‘burden on business’ (Allmendinger, 2016). The Treasury view’s emergence at this point closely resembles its manifestation during the late 2000s. Under the New Labour government of that period, rather than interacting with Localism, it represented a counter-narrative to the ethos of ‘spatial planning’, which emerged from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, a predecessor to DCLG. Though the two views were not necessarily ‘at war’, this led to confusion about the Labour government’s intentions for planning (Allmendinger, 2016). Also similarly, the ‘Treasury view’ of the New Labour era drew on the Treasury’s own suite of policy reviews and commissioned reports. Amongst other examples, Allmendinger (2016) points to *Driving Productivity and Growth in the UK Economy* (McKinsey Global Institute, 1998), *Tackling the Impact of Increasing Regulation: A Case Study of Hotels and Restaurants* (Better Regulation Task Force, 2000), and the Barker Reviews of land use planning and housing supply (Barker, 2003; 2004; 2006) as being important. Meanwhile, the Coalition ‘Treasury view’ drew on a body of information publically anchored in the Killian Pretty (2008) and Penfold (BIS, 2010) Reviews, which concerned streamlining the planning application process and identifying ‘opportunities to deregulate, as a means of supporting business investment in development’ (BIS, 2010: i) respectively. There are direct links between these two ‘evidence’ bases, in that *Planning for Growth* directly (but in the view of the RTPI, incorrectly) cites figures in the Barker Review as evidence supporting its own reforms:

One of the things that we have been trying to understand is where the figure in *The Plan for Growth*, which said, in terms, that planning cost the economy £3 billion a year, came from. *The Plan for Growth* says that it comes from a Reading university report, so I read that report and, actually, it does not have evidence about £3 billion; that refers back to the *Barker Report* in 2006, where Kate Barker looked at these issues. In that report, she said that there is very little evidence about the costs of planning to the economy... We think *The Plan for Growth* is wrong. We think that there is no evidence that planning costs the economy £3 billion. (Elliott, 2011: evidence 64)

The re-emergence of this ongoing ‘turf war’ (Allmendinger, 2016) over the key objectives of planning reform to some extent pre-figured the work of the PAG; how would whatever the PAG produced, given that they had purposefully been instructed that there was ‘no political direction to give’, be reconciled with the demands of the Treasury and BIS, who clearly had political objectives for the reform of the planning system (even if they were couched in terms of a rational imperative for increasing growth)? The second point listed refers to the fact that in *Planning for Growth* and the *Plan for Growth* BIS and the Treasury broadcast a very different policymaking *tone* to that which ministers in DCLG

were projecting. There was no sign of the deliberately deliberative, sensitive, balanced, and consensual register which Clark and other DCLG Ministers were clearly trying to transmit via press releases and speeches in parliament during the passage of the Localism Bill (E.g. Baroness Hanham, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011, Hansard col 148) <sup>69</sup>. This split in tone between DCLG and the Treasury/BIS is reminiscent of the way in which those working on the Conservatives' Planning Sound Board in opposition had framed and rationalised the issues they were contending with in terms of; a) a national/rational/technical need for growth, and; b) the overtly political/local challenges of providing housing and amenities. It would also re-emerge later to great effect during the Treasury and DCLG's negotiations over the NPPF. The final point of the three is that, though they had been relatively quiet about government announcements so far, several environmental, conservation, and professional NGOs, lobbying organisations, and professional bodies reacted in dismay to this (re)emerging 'Treasury view' on planning reform, and the authoritarian tone in which it was enveloped (in contrast to the reassuring tone they were picking up from DCLG). The National Trust, who would go on to be a key player in the story of the NPPF, declared in response to *Planning for Growth*;

One of our major concerns is that the Government appears to be fundamentally changing the purpose of the planning system. We are particularly concerned that in doing this the fundamental principle of maintaining a balanced planning system whereby no public benefit is given weight over another is under threat (The National Trust, 2011: ev108).

The significance of this response for the development of the NPPF story becomes apparent in the light of two well-placed interviewees' views that the National Trust began gearing up for its campaign against the government's first draft of the NPPF well before its publication (Interviews: CG1, 2016; SCS1, 2016). This suggests that the government's overall approach to the NPPF, and harsh tone coming from *Planning for Growth*, played a more significant role in the mobilisation of political opposition than the actual policy content of the first draft. At the time, the key upshot of these three points was that the government, in whatever was to follow the PAG's draft of the NPPF, would have to resolve or reconcile serious and deep-lying tensions in policy content *and* the way it was publically framed. This was as well as facing down an environmental/conservation lobby which was already gearing up for what it regarded, rightly or wrongly, as a battle for soul of the planning system itself.

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<sup>69</sup> Whilst the case in terms of tone, there were concerns that Ministers guillotined and closed down debate in Parliament by severely limited debating time. ('Dave', 2011)

### 6.3.2 The PAG publishes its draft of the NPPF (February – March 2011)

#### *The PAG publishes its draft of the NPPF*

The PAG's work went on most of February 2011 with only a small group of insiders outside of government being aware of the PAG's existence, and the processes' opacity being a source of increasing consternation within (Rutter, 2012; Interview: Simon Marsh, 2016). By March 2011 it had completed its first draft of the NPPF. The next stage of the process involved inviting different 'stakeholders', including professional bodies like POS, environmental/conservation groups such as CPRE, developers (Rutter, 2012; Interview: SCS3, 2016), and interestingly, other government departments (Greg Clark in Hansard Col 16W, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2011), into DCLG to discuss this iteration with the PAG. The intention was not for these groups to directly shape the PAG's draft, but for them to challenge the PAG and help them to refine it themselves. Indeed, the PAG did not share their draft NPPF with any other groups at this stage (Interview: SCS3, 2016). One interviewee described this process as building upon principles associated with the idea of 'deliberative' policy making:

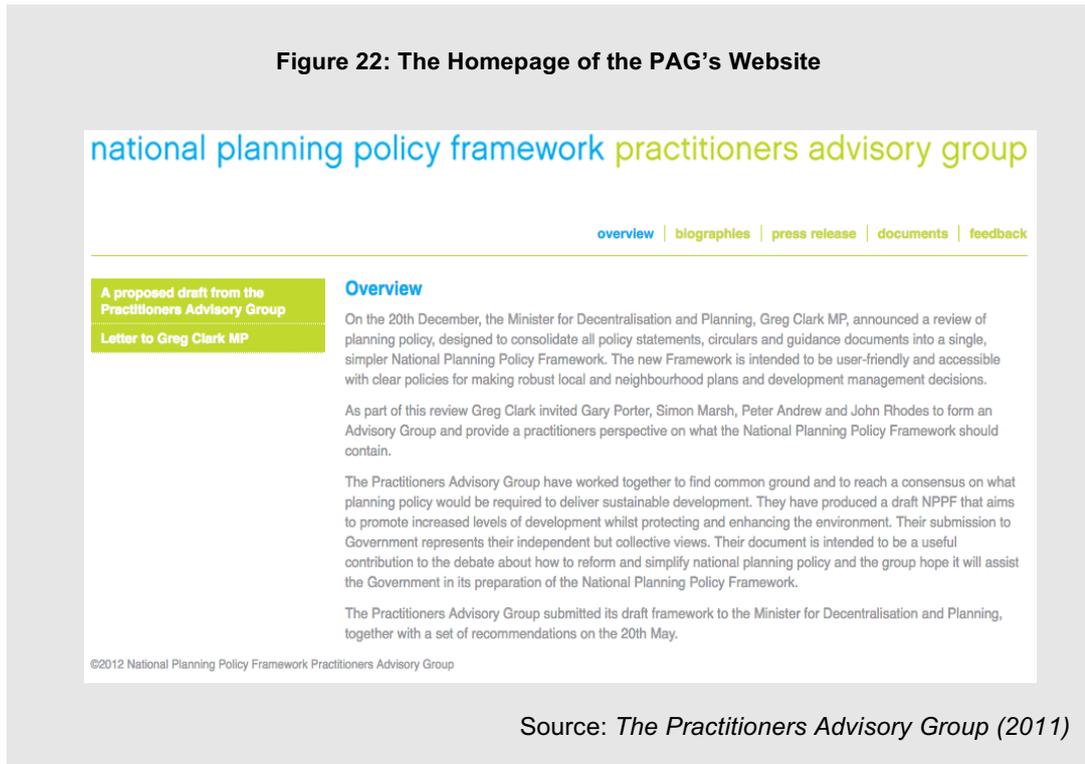
So, at that point they'd got through an initial draft that we didn't share, but it was to sit down with developers and say; 'For you in PPS X what does this mean? What if you did it like this?' Just to have a bit of a conversation. So they didn't do it out with any other external influence, but it was managed in a way that... The best way to think about it is almost like these deliberative processes that are becoming very current now, where you basically bring a load of randoms - except these weren't randoms because they actually were leading people in their field - but you then give them expert academic advice... Then you input others' advice and then you just let them come to a view about an outcome or policy. That's how a lot of the conversations worked. It was sort of that model. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

This iterative process went on for three or four weeks, before an unfinished draft leaked and began to circulate outside of government. Groups of people 'in the know' became increasingly aware of the PAG's work (Interview: SCS3, 2016). The government's hand was forced<sup>70</sup>. In the words of one interviewee it 'panicked', decided to begin a process of making the group public, and rushed out the PAG draft (Interview: SCS3, 2016).

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<sup>70</sup> Rutter (2012: 10) interpreted this part of the story slightly differently. In her telling of the story: "The PAG had been asked to go out and engage with their colleagues about the merits of their draft. This was clearly happening informally throughout the process. They held one workshop with a stakeholder group – but that process was derailed when a legal firm for one of the developers shared information about the draft framework. This in turn accelerated the move to publication."

Figure 22: The Homepage of the PAG's Website



Source: *The Practitioners Advisory Group (2011)*

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2011 the PAG published its 55-page draft at a release event hosted by the Institute for Government, chosen because it represented a suitably 'neutral' location (Rutter, 2012). DCLG was keen to suggest that this represented just one input into the process, and the PAG built a unofficial website for its hosting at short notice (Rutter, 2012) (see Figure 22, above). And, in the words of Rutter (2012: 12); 'there was a feeling by some that the department tried to distance itself from the draft', and that at the time; 'there was inevitably some tension with DCLG officials who traditionally would have been asked to draft the new policy framework themselves'. Both of these observations are curious, considering the role civil servants did actually play in its creation, and that it go on to provide the firm foundations of the government's own draft.

#### *The sector's response to the PAG's draft and work*

Considering the media firestorm that would erupt later in the process, the publication of the PAG's draft NPPF hardly registered in the professional media, with *Planning Resource* running three short articles on the topic in the week following (see Marrs, 2011a; Marrs 2011b, Carpenter, 2011), and the mainstream press not picking it up at all. Rutter (2012) reports that the reception at the Institute for Government event (which was attended by a wide range of different groups) was positive, both to the draft and the PAG process. Meanwhile, the wider response from interest groups was mixed - perhaps cautiously optimistic in many ways (particularly about the document's brevity and localising intentions) - but otherwise split along expected partisan lines, much like the

reception which met OSP. The TCPA and RTPI both criticised what they perceived to be its weakened definition of ‘sustainable development’ in the draft (Marrs, 2011a), while RIBA focused on the lack of requirement for plans to undergo design review (Marrs, 2011a), and the Home Builders Federation (under the headline ‘Planning Policy Must Reflect Scale of Crisis’) applauded the document overall, but cautioned of the need for a strong ‘duty to cooperate’ in order to ensure that ‘planning authorities fully accept their housing responsibilities’ (HBF, 2011). Alex Morton<sup>71</sup> of the Policy Exchange criticised the document for retaining a system that ‘substitutes planning for market demand’ (Morton, 2011). And the CPRE, in a particularly critical response, pointed to the document’s ‘complete absence of any reference to the brownfield-first’ approach to providing housing, or ‘the protection of the wider countryside for its own sake’ (CPRE, 2011), but welcomed its commitment to preserving green belt policy. In fact, one interviewee argued that the CPRE, having learned about the work of the PAG via various different communication channels, regarded the draft as containing ‘serious problems’ well before it came to publication (Interview: CG1, 2016). Ominously, this was of course even before the Treasury intervened to produce a more pro-growth government draft.

Despite the PAG’s website (see Figure 22), the rush to publication caused a good deal of confusion about the exact status of the draft and the PAG itself. At one extreme, many organisations and individuals seemed to regard the PAG’s draft as almost explicitly endorsed by the government (Rutter, 2012), with the consultancy King & Wood Mallesons advising that ‘it may well have been a soft launch for the real thing’ (Ricketts, 2011). At the other, some organisations appeared unaware that its production had received a significant and unique degree of government support, and it was not ‘just another submission’ to DCLG from an interest group, as part of a more or less formal process. The consultancy Pegasus Planning’s perspective was fairly typical of this:

...this is one of what have, no doubt, been a wide range of submissions received by DCLG, ranging from those seeking to implement the growth aspirations set out in the Ministerial Statement of 23 March to those who want the NPPF to provide complete local autonomy and freedom from any national policy restrictions. (Humber, 2011: 6)

From one perspective, this was not what ministers had originally intended. They had planned a much more clear-cut process:

Now, what went wrong with that was for some reason a version of the document got leaked. Anyway, there was panic about it, which meant that the final version got rushed out, and so they then ended up just publishing this thing and it wasn’t ever clear about whether it was them doing

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<sup>71</sup> Alex Morton would later go on to replace Miles Gibson as the Prime Minister’s advisor on planning-related policy in No. 10.

it, endorsed by the government, what the status of it was. Had it worked out the way that it was planned to which is they launch it and say; 'look, we as practitioners think this is what the government should do, it is now for the government to consult with the wider sector and come to its conclusions'. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

For several 'insider' interviewees the key source of tension between the government and the wider sector at this point was the overall opacity of the process, and how much it diverged from the government's standard way of 'doing things'. It was less about the legitimacy of the actual approach to policy making which the government had undertaken, or the legitimacy of the specific individuals involved in the PAG - who, it has been established, represented most of the 'key players' and could in a sense be seen as obvious candidates. For one interviewee, the ongoing existence of John Howell's Planning Sounding Board at this point only served to confuse an already opaque process:

**SCS3:** ...to be honest, I think the sector themselves would have been quite comfortable with the people that had been chosen, but, for whatever reason, it kind of felt like these randoms had been chosen behind closed doors, so the transparency issue... ...with a little bit of work [the civil service] could have modified their model to create a process that's a little bit more transparent, and where the sector had a better understanding of the rationale of it.

**Author:** Yeah. People weren't aware of what was even going on at the start, so is that part of it as well?

**SCS3:** Yeah. And then also I think John Howell had like a planning group that was very...

**Author:** Oh, the Sounding Board!

**SCS3:** Yeah, Sounding Board. Which people were like; 'who are these randoms, how were they chosen, what the hell are they doing, how do they interact with the policy process?'. So all of that became a little bit confused I think. And the two were distinct. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

The government's closed-doors approach so far had the effect of 'freezing' out professional interest groups who had been seen as 'part of the problem'. These influential groups, most significantly the professional bodies and the National Trust, may have ordinarily expected to have been able to exert a high degree of policy impact early on in the process, either directly or indirectly. It was no coincidence that these were also the groups who were most concerned by the policies put forward *Planning for Growth* (see Annex A of Quatermain, 2011) and the *Plan for Growth* (HM Treasury & BIS, 2011), and would be amongst the most vocal in the campaign against the Government's first draft of the NPPF.

# 7. The Treasury's intervention, the national campaign, and the production of the 'planning version' of the NPPF

## 7.1 The policy process continues and the Treasury intervenes

### 7.1.1 The policy process continues (May – July 2011)

*The 'cobweb' civil service reasserts itself*

Whilst in Parliament the Localism Bill passed the House of Lords report stage, opposition Peers and MPs grew increasingly restless for information about the government's intentions regarding the NPPF<sup>72</sup> (Hansard col 148, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011; Hansard col 277, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011), and DCLG set about producing the government's first official draft, with the public aim of finishing it by July. Ministers decided that the PAG's draft would provide the starting point for the government's own version, a decision which puts to rest any suggestion that it was just 'one input amongst many'.

The drafting process began with the Planning Directorate presenting to Greg Clark, Bob Neil, and John Howell each of the areas of the document which it felt the government would be unable to accept (Interview: SCS1, 2016; SC6, 2016). In an atmosphere one

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<sup>72</sup> Jack Domey, Labour MP for Birmingham Erdington summed up the mood in the opposition when he exclaimed;

"On... ..many of the other issues raised today, I expect the Minister might tell us, "Don't worry, it'll be in national planning policy framework." Frankly, however, I would not be surprised if Ministers told us next that we could look forward to reading about the meaning of life in the NPPF. The NPPF has been trailed by the Government as a document that will streamline national planning policy guidance, but at every turn the Government have committed that something additional will be in the NPPF. The NPPF is clearly a document of vital importance to the proposed planning changes, but do we have a copy of it to read in draft alongside the Bill? No... There is considerable uncertainty about what the NPPF will be, what it will look like, its status within the planning system and the process for its development and adoption. Promises from the Government that it will all be okay when the NPPF is published simply will not wash. It is wrong that such a major document, so relevant to the radical changes in the Bill, has not been published alongside it." (Hansard col 277, 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011)

senior civil servant described as being ‘characterised by high levels of mistrust from the ministerial team’ (Interview: SCS1, 2016), any deviation – to the level of individual words and paragraphs - from the PAG’s draft required detailed justification, and personal clearance from Greg Clark (Interview: SCS1, 2016). In the words of Bob Neill (2016); ‘where we departed from what [the PAG] were doing, it was largely because of a political compromise being needed’. Overall, there an unusually high level of ministerial involvement. One civil servant who worked in the Planning Directorate recounted:

...I remember when we did get the John Rhodes [i.e. the PAG’s] draft, it was then a case of being actually on tip toes really, trying to go through it and not make too many changes to it. I got the feeling that Greg would basically ask why we’re changing, x, y and z. We had to have very clear justification why we were changing anything in it. And that’s why, when Ruth [Stanier<sup>73</sup>] was in charge of it, after Miles [Gibson] had gone, I had to go and talk to her about the things which we needed adding in because we’d got it in the ear from [a particular government agency], who’d been saying; ‘this is a requirement and new legislation’, we had to have very clear justification, and very tight wording, which went into it. (Interview: CS 7, 2016)

The Planning Directorate did not naturally and easily step back into the policy making space that had been inhabited by the PAG and Miatta Fahnbulleh for the proceeding few months (Interview: SCS1, 2016). In fact, one senior civil servant saw the appointment of Ruth Stanier (in place of Miles Gibson) as part of a move to ‘reintegrate, ‘wrestle’, or ‘elbow’, the department ‘back in’ to its position as the primary source of policy advice to ministers (Interview: SCS1, 2016). An important part of this was regaining the trust of Greg Clark and the rest of the ministerial team (Interview: SCS1, 2016). An ongoing problem was the apparent language barrier between planning specialists and ministers. They felt that Ruth Stanier was appointed to this role specifically because she wasn’t a ‘planner’, and was therefore seen to be able to manage and ‘translate’ planning policy specialists’ advice into a form Clark was willing to listen to (Interview: SCS1, 2016):

**SCS1:** ...the role [Ruth Stanier] was really performing, was being the sponge that took in all the advice from the planners and made sure that it met his quality threshold. Pressing people to really turn stuff into English. And during that time, [Ruth Stanier] spent lots of time one to one, with the individual planners on different areas. And they’d say; ‘well, we think this paragraph should say that’. And I’d say; ‘well, it can’t say that, but it could say this’. They’d say; ‘well, maybe it could say this, but let’s change this’.

**Author:** Yeah, kind of like a filter between the two? Between the sort of ‘planning culture’ and the culture of the Ministers?

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<sup>73</sup> **Ruth Stanier** was successor to **Miles Gibson**’s position in DCLG, after he moved to No. 10 to be the Prime Minister’s policy advisor on (amongst other topics) communities and local government.

**SCS1:** Exactly, exactly... ...And [she] used to bring them into meetings on particular topics with [Greg Clark], but only to the extent that he could bear it. So I would be watching him and seeing how frustrated or not, he was getting... ...And there were some who he tolerated for longer than others. No, it was all very difficult. (*Interview: SCS1, 2016*)

From this interviewee's perspective, 'winning the mainstream [policy] work back into the department' and a return to a more traditional role for the Planning Directorate and DCLG was far from a foregone conclusion (*Interview: SCS1, 2016*). In their words it was 'a kind of cobweb civil service... it was a bit of kind of last chance saloon' (*Interview: SCS1, 2016*).

#### *A return to more traditional modes of policy-making*

As the process proceeded, however, institutionalised Whitehall policy making and clearance procedures clicked back into gear (Rutter, 2012). This included the Cabinet Office collective agreement process - more commonly referred to as the 'write-round' process - which provides the formal mechanism in Whitehall whereby policies or other measures effecting more than one department are negotiated between ministers. At a formal level, this involves the circulation of a clearance letter and draft document by one department around the relevant Cabinet Office committees and Sub-Committees<sup>74</sup>, and any ministers with a special interest in that policy area (Cabinet Office, 2013). The write-round letter informs these groups of any proposals, their purpose, timing, some context, regulatory impact, and the territorial extent of any proposed policies (Cabinet Office, 2013). If a department is unconcerned by proposed measures a 'nil return' is given. If they are concerned, the negotiation of the conditions upon which clearance will be given is undertaken. On the NPPF, there were several high-profile interventions from other government departments during this process. In fact, most of the domestic departments weighed in, in addition to those one would assume to have a close interest in planning reform, such as Defra, the Department for Transport, and DECC (*Interview: Bob Neill, 2016*). Negotiations were extremely complex (*Interviews: SCS1, 2016; Bob Neill, 2016*). Several parties refused signoff unless the document closely aligned with their own agendas, for example, the Department for Education, whose minister, Michael Gove, 'didn't want too many constraints on education planning' (*Interview: Bob Neill, 2016*), and whom Bob Neill described as less of a 'localist' (*Interview: Bob Neill, 2016*). One

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<sup>74</sup> **Cabinet Office Committees** are made up of ministers with interests in a particular, broadly- defined policy area. Sometimes they concern specific policy issues of national significance. For example, at the present time there is a sub-committee on 'Economy and Industrial Strategy', chaired by the Chancellor, but there is also an 'Economy and Industrial Strategy (Reducing Regulation) sub-committee, chaired by **Greg Clark**, who is currently the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy. There is also a 'Economy and Industrial Strategy (Airports) sub-committee, chaired by the Prime Minister. Ministers may sit on more than one committee.

interviewee, who cannot be cited here for reasons of political sensitivity, mentioned interventions from the Department for Health and Ministry of Defence as being particularly ‘annoying’. They put the latter’s involvement down to the then Minister for Defence, Philip Hammond’s, experience as a director of the developer Castlemead Ltd<sup>75</sup>, and former’s down to the personality of the certain individuals involved. However, as is well established in the mainstream account of the NPPF, the most obviously significant interventions came from the Treasury and No.10 (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016; SCS2, 2016, SC4, 2016; PB2, 2016; Peer 2, 2016) who until this point had very little involvement in proceedings (Interview: SCS3, 2016).

### *The Treasury’s intervention and the popular narrative*

In the *Plan for Growth* (Treasury & BIS, 2011) the Treasury and BIS had already promised to; ‘introduce a powerful new presumption in favour of sustainable development, so that the default answer to development is ‘yes’, and to ‘prioritise growth and jobs’ in the NPPF (Treasury & BIS, 2011: 23). Whilst the ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ (referred to from hereon as ‘the presumption’) had originally been proposed in *OSP* (The Conservative Party, 2010a) - where it had been met with some consternation by environmental/conservation organisations, the *Plan for Growth* was the first time the default had appeared. There were several smaller or more nuanced changes pressed for by the Treasury, but these were two most commonly highlighted by participants as being significant to the progression of the narrative, and which drove the environmental/conservation lobbying group and media backlash to which the government had to respond.

The popular narrative of events during this period is the Treasury and DCLG, if not at loggerheads over how or whether to introduce these changes to the PAG’s draft, were at least had very different views as to the balance and tone of the document. On one hand was the ‘Treasury view’, with its emphasis on economic growth as any cost and less interest in the principles of Localism, on the other was DCLG, more concerned with ‘localism’ and more comfortable with tighter planning controls. The popular narrative concludes with the Treasury effectively ‘pulling rank’ to drive through the changes it wanted to make to this draft. The views of one observer, who largely had an informed-outsider’s perspective on this process, was fairly typical when they described the narrative as follows:

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<sup>75</sup> According to the Financial Times, **Philip Hammond** remained the ‘predominant financial interest’ in Castlemead after becoming a minister in 2010. After 2010 his stake in the company was controlled by an onshore discretionary trust (Allen & Haddou, 2016).

...in the NPPF you could see the debate on issues going between DLG and the Treasury position. From the outside you could see that. The emphasis was shifting, if you take the definition of sustainable development, their version came down more on the Treasury side I think, than the more balanced DCLG side. Having said that, I do agree that if you are dealing with planning reform, and the economy is buggered, your chances of dealing with the other things is pretty much buggered. (Interview: LPA1, 2016)

Overall, this account was more or less supported by all interviewees who were personally involved in the process. This was the case whether they were 'insiders' or 'outsiders'. Indeed, it is also a conclusion tentatively put forward by the Institute for Government's report on the NPPF, which concludes with reference to the *Plan for Growth's* (Treasury & BIS, 2011) proposals; 'the pass may have been sold on [the shape of national planning policy] while the PAG were still working through their draft' (Rutter, 2012: 14). The only exception to the rule was John Howell. He argued that the key proposals for pro-development changes to the PAG's draft came from 'one of the more left-wing of the think tanks' (Interview: John Howell, 2016).

That the Treasury is a powerful force within central government, that its interventions in planning policy are framed by the 'Treasury view', and that the Treasury had a great influence on the Government's first draft of the NPPF are all well and long established points. Given this thesis' aims and objectives, two questions are therefore interesting in an account of policy making practices during this period: How did the Treasury exert its influence *in practice* in this case? And, what did interviewees perceive to be the key practical rationalities which shaped the Treasury to intervene in such a way? These questions are considered below.

#### *The Treasury's intervention in practice*

Officials from the Treasury and No. 10 were instructed to work extremely closely and in the words of a civil servant who worked at the centre of this process, stay 'totally aligned' on the NPPF (Interview: SCS2, 2016). To a great extent, this was because of the close relationship between David Cameron and George Osborne (Interview: SCS2, 2016). The team of civil servants working on this had an unusual and note-worthy feature in that No. 10's work was led by a qualified town planner; Miles Gibson. Miles Gibson was Ruth Stanier's predecessor in the Planning Directorate and, as it has been discussed, previously led work on the 200-page version of the NPPF, as well as liaisons with the PAG during its drafting. A quite counter-intuitive consequence of having this planning expertise in the core executive was that it enabled it to more effectively challenge DCLG's positions and usual (official) monopoly on planning policy knowledge), strengthening the hand of the Treasury and No. 10 in negotiations over the contents of the NPPF. In the view of one civil servant who had experience working in the Treasury, this upended the usual dynamics

that operate between the core executive and other government departments, whereby the former galvanises the latter for change, but the latter holds power in terms of its policy expertise and detailed knowledge of the regulatory regime:

**SCS2:** ...No. 10 gets its knowledge from the department. There is a listening exercise that goes on, there's a negotiation that goes on in which the centre is under-experienced and has little expertise in the technicalities, and the modus operandi of the centre versus DCLG is that the centre proposes and says; 'you're rubbish, what are you going to do about all of these complaints that we hear?' on whatever. The department says; 'here's some proposals', and then the centre says; 'those are weak and ineffective, not radical enough and the Prime Minister doesn't want to announce that kind of nonsense, it's not big enough! Give us something bigger.' And then there's a back and forth where the Treasury tends to propose long lists of radical reforms, not really knowing very much about them, and DCLG reacts to those.

**Author:** I didn't realise that was actually the way the knowledge sort of flowed between it in terms of it moving from departments and then into the centre...

**SCS2:** Yeah, and of course the centre is also talking externally to stakeholders. So No. 10 is a revolving door; in comes the British Property Federation and the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the housebuilders and the people with small business who are moaning about regulations, the environmental lobby, everyone. And you get an external view as to what's really going on, because you want different sources of advice. You take advice from the department, but you also take advice from lobbying groups and players in the game and people who are actually having to use the system. And then you say; 'oh well, that sounds like a problem, let's go and ask the department - is this a real problem? Is there any evidence on this? Do we need to change the policy? Do we need to change the law?' So it's a conversation between the centre and the department, and the extent to which the department is open to change depends on the personalities involved... (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

The closeness of No. 10 to the Treasury, and the provision of planning expertise within No. 10, thus served to increase the core executive's bargaining power over DCLG when it came to negotiations over the introduction of development-by-default and how to phrase the presumption. In their depiction of core executive-departmental relationships the above comments provide a useful entry-point for interpreting what other interviewees described as being more broadly important for understanding the relationship between DCLG and the core executive during these negotiations. Interviews focused on quite long-standing systemic and institutional features of the civil service and Westminster Model as playing a significant role in systematically structuring policy negotiations in favour of perspectives that favour deregulation and pro-market policy readings and solutions. For example, Bob Neill (2016) pointed to the existence of No. 10 and the Treasury's small 'shadow' policy teams, which cover certain policy areas in the portfolio of other departments, and which in his view have played an important role in coordinating government policy since Gordon Brown's premiership. This was a view supported by a senior civil servant from the planning directorate, who expressed their frustration at the

fact that the head of the Treasury policy team concerned with planning (amongst other policy areas) has more power than the Director of Planning in DCLG, despite the fact that they would technically be their junior:

Yeah, so it's an interesting question actually... ..the way the Treasury works, is that on an issue like Planning, there will be somebody at Grade Seven level<sup>76</sup>, who's allocated onto that work. I think generally, they would be working on Planning and something else. And that person would end up having disproportionate power because they'd have more power than the Planning Director, which is always very annoying. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

Interestingly, given Neill's (2016) perspective at the time as a Conservative minister in DCLG, he saw the Policy Unit in No.10 as being heavily influenced by Policy Exchange, in which several of its senior staff had previously worked. Neill postulated that this may have shaped the way it thought about issues around the NPPF, in contrast to DCLG, which he regarded as having a more broadly-based conceptualisation of the issues at hand<sup>77</sup>; as being more 'political' and less market-economic. Similarly, on the subject of non-government influence, Neill also felt that the development industry also had more traction with the Treasury and No. 10 than DCLG during this period; they would simultaneously lobby both No. 10 and ministers in DCLG, meaning that, in his words they 'had two bites of the cherry... that was the pressure we were getting all the time' (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). Andrew Whittaker (2016), the head of planning at the Home Builders Federations supported this, arguing from his perspective as a lobbyist that:

Certainly, we've seen, over the last few years, DCLG become less favourable in the eyes of No. 10 and the Treasury... ..we frequently, if we are talking to people at No. 10, they will say; 'oh well, leave it to us, we'll get that through DCLG'. And we'll say; 'well, DCLG don't seem very keen on that', and they go; 'oh don't worry, we'll sort that out!'

### *The Treasury's intervention: practical and political rationalities*

The influence of the Treasury and the Treasury view over planning policy during the Coalition as a whole (but especially regarding this stage of the NPPF) was a topic which emerged without direct prompting during every interview. This was during the portion of interviews that focused on discussing participants' personal experiences of policy making, as well as that focusing on discussing wider trends and structural. That the 'Treasury view' was predominant in the Treasury and influenced its relationship with DCLG, and that the Treasury had a very different perspective on the role of the planning system (which was

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<sup>76</sup> In the civil service Grade 7 roughly equates to roles such as deputy director, team leader, policy manager, etc.

<sup>77</sup> This was perhaps, because as Bob Neill previously suggested, ministers in DCLG were more influenced by the work of the think tank **Localis**.

more pro-growth and less interested in Localism), was more or less universally accepted by interviewees, whether they were civil servants or not. For example:

I think there's a very long held view within the Treasury that comes down from a very senior level, around a particular perception of market economics and where planning fits within that, as part of the overall constraint on housing supply. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

I think the Treasury, whatever government is in, is broadly a centralising department... .. it's the very nature of finance ministries. And they were seeing things much, much more as an imperative around growth, around planning as a growth tool, as opposed to a community tool for the resolution of, if you like, the conflict potentially, about the shape and the nature of the built environment, and all that goes with it, perhaps we were paying more attention to. And I think, in the end, that's something that became quite fierce, from time to time... ..certainly, the Treasury saw planning as, essentially, a process issue, a transactional thing. And I think we [ministers in DCLG] were seeing it as a piece of political outworking... (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)<sup>78</sup>

When prompted to explore *why* and *how* they felt the Treasury intervened in this way specifically, beyond the existence of a broad 'Treasury view', and the very obvious point that it has an interest in economic growth, conversations often opened up in interesting ways. There was a general consensus that the treasury behaved in a perfectly legitimate and 'logical' way over the NPPF, within the realms of its remit and role within central government (Interview: SCS1, 2016). However, it characteristically pushed for the most extreme reform possible, and was often 'blunderbussy' in its interventions (Interview: Jill Rutter, 2016). This is to say, it was accused of (understandably) not always understanding or being aware of the finer details of complex and overlapping policy areas (Interviews: Jill Rutter, 2016; SCS2, 2016). On the subject of planning, interviewees pointed to the difference between policy and guidance, the concept of materiality, the concept of greenbelt, and the planning system's role in housing delivery, as examples (Interviews: CS6, 2016; SCS4, 2016; SCS3, 2016). This was seen as partly a result of the institutional characteristics previously described, partly because of the influence of non-government agents, and partly a result of how deeply embedded the Treasury view is within the department's hierarchy. Picking up these themes and relating them to their own experience during the NPPF saga, whilst echoing SCS2 (quoted on pages 173 and 174), a senior civil servant based in the Planning Directorate described the Treasury as pushing for the most 'red-blooded' version of the NPPF it could. They gave the Treasury's push for

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<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, Bob Neill (2016) suggested that these tensions within the Conservative Party between centralising pro-growth policy and decentralising, Localist, policy pre-existed the Coalition: "Now that had happened before in opposition, Mark Prisk and I had quite a lot of dealing when he was in BIS, when Ken Clarke was shadowing there, if you remember. Because Ken had a somewhat different, not as localist a view as we did. So we'd had arguments within the shadow team, and so we weren't surprised that that was going to happen [when they were in government]."

the inclusion of text suggesting ‘development-by-default’ as an example of this, and mentioned how this was reflective of the terms of the debate within Whitehall:

One was the Treasury version of the default answer must be yes... I think with the benefit of hindsight, that was a misjudgement on our part, not to have identified that as the red rag that it was going to turn out to be. I think, to our mind, the Treasury, as is their role, were pushing for the most red-blooded version of this document they could get. That was one thing that had particular political attraction. It was the phrase that had been used internally across Whitehall. It was one of their top asks. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

They went on to describe how DCLG accepted the inclusion of text suggesting development-by-default because it was a priority for the Treasury. Furthermore, at the time, civil servants in DCLG misjudged the level of backlash it would receive from the public and across the policy community, thinking that it was just ‘rhetoric’:

...I can’t remember the detail of the negotiation that we had with a number of departments on the final text, but I remember it was complex. There were lots of issues in play. I may be slightly not recalling this accurately, because we went through another round of clearance on the final version, but as I recall it, that was one we decided to accept because it was very high up there, asking us. And we didn’t think it made much difference in planning terms. We thought it was a bit of rhetoric. As it turned out, it was one of the things that I think, the ‘antis’ particularly latched onto. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

In these ways the Treasury was seen as ‘naturally’ and ‘legitimately’ pro-growth, centralising, and aggressive in its approach to planning policy (Interview: SCS1, 2016; Interview: SCS3, 2016). This role was compared to that of Defra, which one would assume would have an ecological and environmental perspective on most policy issues. The write-round, as part the wider Westminster system, provided a carefully choreographed, argued, and rationalistic series of arenas and processes for the resolution of these disputes. In this narrative, the Planning Directorate plays an interesting role with regards to its expertise, the planning system, and place within the Westminster system. It is one of providing a counter-weight to the Treasury’s blunderbuss-like and broad-brush approach, by providing sectoral, technical, expertise, as well as preserving what could almost be described as a ‘folk-knowledge’ of the value of the planning system’s more abstract features. For example:

...the culture of the Directorate was enough to sustain an understanding of the things that really mattered most of the time. That is to say the material considerations, the primacy of the development plan, or fiction around the primacy of the development plan, the absolutely key fundamental pillars of the planning system which had to be defended at all costs, because the system would descend into incoherence if they were not, were beautiful designed when they were originally designed. And so we...and I still think the fundamentals of the planning system are incredibly elegantly designed... ...So what you didn't want was an annoying Treasury person or a

No. 10 person coming along and saying; ‘what’s this material considerations thing? Can we not get rid of that?’ Of which you would roll your eyes and think; ‘oh god, here we go again! We’ve got to educate this guy about how this system works and why it works!’ (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

### *Reflections on the outcome of negotiations with the Treasury*

The outcome is widely known: after long and complex negotiations, No. 10 and the Treasury (in the words of one senior civil servant) ‘got their way’ (Interview: SCS2, 2016). A raft of more pro-growth phrasings and additions were added to the text. Interviewees highlighted the default, and the stronger language on the role of the economy in supporting sustainable development, as being particularly important amongst these changes<sup>79</sup> (Interview: SCS4, 2016). Quite how much the document actually deviated from the *substance* of existing national planning policy (as it was expressed in PPSs, etc) or the PAG’s draft is an open question, and one discussed later with regards to the public backlash these changes instigated. Even if the changes were indeed largely rhetorical, as the civil servant quoted above had felt, they seriously regretted not ‘pushing back’ (to use civil service parlance) more on the Treasury’s demands, particularly regarding the default:

Yeah. So I think that throughout, Treasury have behaved in an entirely logical way really. And I think one of the reasons why I kick myself around the ‘default answer’ thing, is that I think throughout, Treasury will always push for the most brash and deregulated solution. And I think the longer I worked on planning... ..I came to see that I could really hold a line with them and make the argument that actually, to get the best possible outcome, reaching for the most brash solution won’t always get you to where you want to be, as quickly as possible. And I increasingly learnt how to deploy that argument, but I singularly failed to do so at that most... ..that is the epitome of when that kind of approach would have been appropriate. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

It is interesting that Bob Neill, as a minister in DCLG, agreed with the civil servant quoted above, and concluded that, overall:

I think probably we might have been tougher on the definitions of sustainable development in some ways, we might have made more emphasis of that, had it been left to our own devices. In opposition, we had been talking much, much more in terms of sustainability, a rather greener sort of approach to things than David [Cameron] had when he was actually leader. I suppose the recession changed a lot of that. That strengthened, in a sense, the hand of the Treasury because, you know, getting the finances right was even more of an imperative. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

These accounts highlight the complex, contingent, and highly personal network of relationships from which actually constitute macro-level and institutional phenomena

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<sup>79</sup> It should also be noted, however, that civil servants departed from the PAG’s definition of sustainable development because they felt that it would be technically unfeasible, as well as result of any pressure from the Treasury (SCS1, 2016).

and power-structures – such as the Treasury’s influence over planning reform. The different practical rationalities at play here reflected different agents’ negotiating positions, power, and approaches to navigate this complexity, as well as different ideas about, and rationalisations of, the ‘correct’ role of the Planning Directorate (and Treasury) within the Westminster system. Quietly underpinning all of this was the Westminster system plays in defining and mediating these roles.

*The draft presumption and the leak (June 2011)*

The backlash against the government’s first official draft of NPPF began before the government officially published it. About a month before publication, a draft of the NPPF dated 13<sup>th</sup> June leaked and began to circulate on the internet (Ricketts & Field, 2012: 42). This was subsequently picked up by *Planning Magazine* and *The Times*, the latter of which ran the headline; ‘Planning rules pave the way for a green belt housing bonanza’ (Webster, 2011). In hindsight this alarming headline was a taste of the media backlash to come<sup>80</sup>. It certainly had an impact on DCLG, galvanising Greg Clark to take the unusual step of responding four days later with an open letter to the paper. It described *The Times* article as inaccurate, and stated in strong terms that:

...the Coalition Government has no intention of weakening its commitment to the Green Belt...  
...Reform of the planning system is essential, but it won’t be at the expense of the environment.  
(Clark, 2011)

Before this, as promised in the *Plan for Growth* (Treasury & BIS, 2011), DCLG had also published a draft presumption in favour of sustainable development as ‘an early indication of the government’s intentions’ regarding the NPPF (DCLG, 2011). The accompanying statement described the ‘new’ presumption as ‘keeping vital environmental protections’, whilst getting development underway (DCLG, 2011). It also positioned the planning regime ‘one of the biggest barriers to providing the homes people want and the businesses local economies need’ (DCLG, 2011), and quoted representatives from both the Home Builders Federation and British Property Federation in support. Loosely based on the ‘Bruntland’ definition of sustainable development (Clark cited in Donnelly, 2011), it read:

There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development at the heart of the planning system, which should be central to the approach taken to both plan-making and decision-taking. Local

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<sup>80</sup> An alternative interpretation came from a local planner associated with one of the major professional bodies, who felt that the government had likely leaked the draft purposefully, in order to give the sector a ‘run in’ on the government’s draft, and hopefully diffuse tensions in the process (Interview: LPA1, 2016).

planning authorities should plan positively for new development, and approve all individual proposals wherever possible.

Local planning authorities should:

- Prepare local plans on the basis that development needs should be met, with sufficient flexibility to respond to rapid shifts in demand or other economic changes.
- Approve development plan proposals that accord with statutory plans without delay.
- Grant planning permission where the plan is absent, silent, indeterminate or where relevant policies are out of date.

Coalition ministers had resisted calls during the passage of the Localism Bill to include such a definition on the face of the Bill, Baroness Hanham arguing that doing so would limit Local Planning Authorities' ability to interpret the concept in the light of local conditions:

The expectation and understanding is that local people will be best placed to understand what is right for sustainable development locally, and noble Lords may have become aware of the definitions that have appeared in the consultation on presumption in favour of sustainable development that has just been published. (Baroness Hanham, Hansard col 1076, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2011)

The Government argued that any attempt to define such a complex and abstract concept in legislation would result in 'endless judicial review' and a 'lawyers' paradise' (Lord Newton of Braintree, Hansard col 1073, 20<sup>th</sup> June 2011). Interestingly, one senior civil servant actually credited the PAG and its deliberative, practitioner-orientated, policy making model with formulating this eventual definition of sustainable development, in the process 'solving' what had been until then an intractable and extremely politically-sensitive policy issue, which neither ministers nor civil servants wanted to confront:

**SCS 3:** I think where they had got to was; 'well, let's see if we can get to something'... ...it was interesting, particularly the conversation about the presumption in favour of sustainable development, which is really hard, and actually the advice that the service were [providing] around how you would [establish it in practice] that never really got to where it is [today]. And neither John [Howell] nor Oliver [Letwin] nor Greg [Clark] nor Bob [Neill] actually wanted to get to it. And, to be fair, and I remember there were about two conversations in which the group kind of like hashed through this issue and in the end came to the view that...because it was so difficult - like how do you define 'sustainable development'? It's painful - And in the end they came to the view that sustainable development was defined by the content of the NPPF. So actually in essence you can develop as long as it's in line with everything that's in this 50-page document.

**Author:** But then it's almost like a circular logic there.

**SCS 3:** There is. But there was always going to be, because it's such a bizarre concept and very hard to actually pin down, and I think that was a point in which certainly ministers thought; 'oh, actually, this is quite an interesting process because I'm not sure we would have got to this, sort of circular but actually, in planning terms, quite elegant solution'. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

From this perspective, the self-referential fuzziness of policy terms in the Coalition's programme like 'sustainable development' were 'elegant solutions' from the PAG to the problem of gaining consensus between different groups within the government for particular renderings of abstract concepts.

Unlike the leaked NPPF, the publication of the draft presumption hardly made a ripple outside of the specialist press and niche planning and law-focused blogs. This is a curious point, considering the fact that presumption in favour of sustainable development as it stood here was later heavily challenged by campaign groups. This is not to say that there were not strong feelings within these niches, however; one blogger labelled the day of its publication as 'black Wednesday for planning' and argued that the presumption was reductive and 'neigh-on equivalent to all development' (Lainton, 2011).

## 7.2 The publication of the first official draft, and the national campaign against it

### 7.2.1 The government publishes its first official draft of the NPPF (July 2011)

*The government publishes its first official draft*

On the 25<sup>th</sup> July 2011 the government published its first draft of the NPPF, alongside the announcement of a 12-week consultation, and a series of six 'consultation workshops' on the document (DCLG, 2011b). Greg Clark took the unusual step of directly inviting the House of Commons' Communities and Local Government Select Committee (referred to from hereon as the CLG Committee) to review and make suggestions on the draft's contents (but not overall rationale) as part of the consultation process (CLG Committee, 2011). This was accompanied by a smaller review by the Commons' Environmental Audit Committee, concerning whether the NPPF 'reflected sustainable development principles' (EA Committee, 2011). This proceeded in parallel to the CLG Committee, with which it was to share evidence (EA Committee, 2011).

The initial response from the sector was one of shock at the degree of similarity between the government's draft and the PAG's draft (Rutter, 2012). Many of those who took the government at their word that the PAG's draft was one input amongst many felt they had been misled (Interview: Rutter, 2016). Andrew Whittaker recalled:

...certainly, as I say, at the initial stages, a lot of people thought [the PAG] were doing was giving their views about what should be in the NPPF. So the fact that they then published a draft, and the

fact that it wasn't altered very much when it became the real thing, I think, kind of caught a few people on the hop... ...I think it was probably, that was always going to be the plan. (Interview: Andrew Whittaker, 2016)

### *The campaign against the NPPF*

If the intention of the announcements regarding the select committee's involvement and the 'consultation workshops' was to head off a potentially adversarial and aggressive public debate, they failed. In formal meetings with the government before it published its draft, the National Trust gave no indication as to the extent of their concerns about its contents, nor that they were gearing up for a huge and uncharacteristically aggressive campaign (Interview: SCS1, 2016). There was in fact a sense of betrayal in the Planning Directorate, with one senior civil servant describing how they felt that the Trust were 'not straight' with civil servants in failing to declare a campaign which it had apparently been gearing up for since the existence of the PAG became known to insiders (Interview: SCS1, 2016). Nonetheless, within a couple of days the National Trust and CPRE, alongside several other high-profile environmental/conservation campaign group including the RSPB, Friends of the Earth, WWF, and umbrella groups such as The Heritage Alliance and Wildlife and Countryside Link, produced scathing responses to the draft, attacking a range of measures (Johnston, 2011). The advent of *The Telegraph's 'Hands Off Our Land'* campaign, which targeted what the paper saw as; 'planning laws which risk undermining the safeguards that have protected the countryside for almost 70 years' (The Telegraph, 2011b) marked a significant escalation in the backlash - especially given that paper's usually staunch pro-Tory stance. As the campaign grew public figures such as the poet laureate, members of the clergy, and prominent authors joined. Eventually, backbench Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs waded into the fray, culminating with 45 of them signing a private letter to the Prime Minister by the (then) Conservative MP Zac Goldsmith, which expressed concern for the 'intrinsic value of the countryside' and the framework's apparent privileging of 'short-term economic interests' (Hope, 2011; Hope, 2012b; Goldsmith, 2012). Significantly, 45 dissenting MPs was enough for the government to lose a Commons vote.

Even Simon Marsh, previously a member of the PAG (but also Chair of the Wildlife and Countryside Link, and head of planning at the RSPB, both of which campaigned vociferously against the government's draft) expressed serious concern regarding the weighting that the document gave to economic growth within sustainable development, arguing that:

Ideally the presumption in favour of sustainable development would be just that – a presumption that unless development can prove it is sustainable, against a robust series of tests, it should not go ahead. This version, however, reads more like a presumption in favour of development, with

the 'sustainable' tacked on to please the greens. This profoundly misses the point. Unless our much-needed economic growth is truly sustainable, we will be setting up problems for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. The draft establishes a reasonable (if not fantastic) definition of sustainable development at the outset, but then the presumption clearly places one 'pillar' of sustainability – economic growth – higher than the others as an objective for the planning system. This inconsistency is carried through the entire draft, and is a shift away from the current approach of the planning system which seeks to give equal weight to environmental, social and economic needs in decision-making. (Marsh, 2011)

It is difficult to overstate the scale of the campaign against the NPPF, which by most accounts was unprecedented in the history of English planning reform (Allmendinger, 2016). A blogger on a popular Liberal Democrat online forum summed up this perspective in strong terms:

That bleak, destructive draft was slipped out as MPs went for their summer break. Within hours, campaigns had been launched by the National Trust, the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Daily Telegraph. Hundreds of environmental and community groups large and small joined in. The biggest campaign in the history of planning succeeded in getting hundreds of thousands of people angry about scrapping tedious planning rules that they had never read. The dry as dust world of planning policy gained banner headlines in the national press. The NPPF even trended on Twitter on the day of its publication. (Boddington, 2012)

The alarming headlines which had appeared in the press during the run up to the NPPF's publication were just a small taste of what was to come. Between the 27<sup>th</sup> July and the 21<sup>st</sup> December 2011, *The Telegraph* alone published more than 100 stories on the reforms and related phenomena as part of *Hands Off Our Land*<sup>81</sup>, and the NPPF regularly appeared on the front pages of other national newspapers (including *The Times* and *The Guardian*) (Allmendinger, 2016). A National Trust petition against the government's draft of the NPPF eventually attracted more than 228,000 signatures (Seales, 2011; Carpenter, 2011b; DCLG, 2012), whilst a similar petition from the campaign group and petitioning website 38 Degrees eventually reached more than 126,500 (38 Degrees, 2011). According to DCLG the consultation itself attracted more than 16,000 responses (DCLG, 2012). 7,662 of these were individual responses from NGOs, private individuals, representative/professional bodies, and business, while in excess of 6,000 were campaign responses from the CPRE and RSPB (DCLG, 2012),

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<sup>81</sup> This is not an exact figure because as the campaign wore on the newspaper published a series of stories as part of *Hands Off Our Land* which were only tangentially related to the actual NPPF. These concerned topics including the Prime Minister's purchase of a plot of land adjacent to his house, and the planting of a new woodland by the Woodland Trust.

The RTPI, whilst being mesmerised by the spectacle of the National Trust/*The Telegraph* campaign (Fyson, 2011), and more or less sympathetic to its concerns, appealed for ‘reasoned debate and clear thinking’<sup>82</sup> - pointing out, for example, that there had been a ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ in the planning system since 1947 (Donnelly, 2011c). It apportioned much of the blame to what it saw as the document’s poor and inconsistent drafting (RTPI, 2011). The RTPI highlighted a narrative/introductory section at the front of the document as being particularly problematic in this respect. This is interesting, because one interviewee highlighted this as one of the key changes the Treasury pushed for (Interview: SCS3, 2016). Indeed, Rutter (2011: 13) cites the RTPI as calling the draft ‘a Treasury document which has been sloppily drafted’. The RPTI also criticised the limited positive role the document prescribed for planning beyond development control, and its lack of a spatial element (RTPI, 2011). POS largely supported these views, and also focused on the lack of clarity in the document – for example, arguing that language around the presumption should be more ‘proportional and nuanced’ (POS, 2011: 2).

**Figure 23: The Leaked Internal Email from the British Property Federation**

*Dear Planning Committee,*

*As the row in the media over the Government’s proposed NPPF and the presumption in favour of sustainable development rages on, we have been working to dispel the inaccuracies portrayed by the main opposition – the National Trust, supported by the Council for the Protection of Rural England...*

*Greg Clark and his officials are, however, deeply concerned at the level of opposition that has been provoked by the National Trust and are worried that Number 10 might be spooked by this mobilisation of middle England and do the sort of U turn that they did on the forestry sell-off.*

*We have been firing off letters to the press, and have sent a letter to No 10 supported by the leading developers in the commercial property industry...*

*The upshot of all this is that Minister Greg Clark is delighted with the BPF and hugely grateful for our efforts.*

*He is of the opinion that the Chancellor will stand firm in the face of opposition from National Trust members in the shires – but he doesn’t believe we can afford to let up and should seize every opportunity to press the case for planning reform. We are not, of course, a mouthpiece for CLG ministers but on this occasion their objectives definitely align with ours – so we can afford to be enthusiastic in our support, with the advantage that we have now earned more brownie points than we could ever imagine!*

*Best,*

*Ghislaine*

**Source: Porter (2011)**

As one might expect, the house building industry, commercial groups, and sympathetic media outlets such as the *Financial Times* strongly and publicly maintained their support

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<sup>82</sup> The RTPI 23 past-presidents of the RTPI signed a letter to the *Telegraph* asking for ‘reasoned debate and clear thinking’ (Donnelly, 2011c).

for the draft document and the government's position (Donnelly, 2011b; Marcus, 2011). Indeed, a leaked internal email from a British Property Federation policy officer (Figure 23, above) revealed the close support the organisation was providing to DCLG, as well as Greg Clark's concerns that No. 10 might be forced into a U-turn by the campaign.

As one might also expect, both the environmental/conservation and development lobbies accused the other of relying on hyperbole and misleading or inaccurate information to bolster their cases (e.g. HBF, 2011b; Donnelly, 2011b). On reflection, it is fair to say that many of the claims made by the National Trust and *The Telegraph* were indeed exaggerated, especially regarding the greenbelt. As a House of Commons Library report concluded; 'the publicity campaign was misleading and the draft NPPF contained more safeguards than the critics allowed' (Barclay, 2012). Sir Peter Hall similarly argued:

[Simon Jenkins] suggests we'll see bungalows on the White Cliffs of Dover. Well, not quite. The "presumption in favour of development" was enshrined in the 1947 act and the regulations that followed it. This has been the position for more than 60 years - the new framework simply reiterates it more emphatically. Indeed, the NPPF's most striking feature is its consistency with old policies, including the repeated attempts of previous Labour governments to implement the key recommendation of economist Kate Barker. (Hall, 2011)

But equally, many of the National Trust and *The Telegraph's* overarching concerns about the NPPF were legitimate, and it's hard to argue against the fact that the government wished to liberalise the planning system, with economic growth being its primary objective (at least after the Treasury's intervention during the drafting process). It was also hard to argue against the fact that the *tone* of the document was considerably more pro-development than it had been in previous iterations. As one senior civil servant who worked closely with the PAG recalled:

...the tone of the document shifted from this kind of balance of; 'yes, we must have development but it must be sustainable', which was a thing that Simon Marsh's really keen on, to this like... And the PAG themselves were a bit frustrated because they were like; 'well, why have you changed the tone? Because it doesn't reflect where we've got to on the policy'. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

### **7.2.2 The government's response (July – December 2010)**

*The public ministerial response: from 'bollocks, frankly' to 'getting down to the detail'*

During the initial few weeks and months of the campaign, ministers responded with incredulity, openly feeling that the NPPF has been misrepresented by the CPRE, National Trust, and *The Telegraph*. Bob Neill initially, reportedly, branded the backlash 'a carefully choreographed smear campaign by Left-wingers based within the headquarters of pressure groups' (*The Telegraph*, 2011b). This was an interesting perspective, given that

the campaign was mainly led by *The Telegraph*. Oliver Letwin declared; ‘the pretence that this is a document that pledges to ‘let rip’ is not actually possible to sustain when you read it’, while Francis Maude, when asked if he had sympathy for the campaigns against the NPPF, responded bluntly; ‘I think this idea that creating a presumption in favour of sustainable development is somehow a massive erosion of the ability to conserve is bollocks, frankly.’ (Maude, in; *The Telegraph*, 2011c). Official responses followed a similar tone to those made in a more off-the-cuff manner by ministers. In an announcement titled ‘response to incorrect claims by the National Trust that planning reforms will lead to unchecked and damaging development’ DCLG branded the National Trust’s claims:

...plain wrong. The draft policy framework fulfils the commitment in the coalition agreement to protect the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are similarly strong protections for the historic environment, which have been welcomed by heritage bodies. These protections are crystal clear in the document. (DCLG, 2011c)

The department then followed this with the unusual step of publishing an ‘NPPF Myth-Buster’ (DCLG, 2011d) in September 2011, which is no longer available on the department’s website. This odd document was intended to challenge what ministers saw as the campaign’s more disingenuous claims. Its arguments range from the controversial but substantive (for example: ‘from the birth of modern planning in 1947 there was a presumption in favour of development’; ‘...the new framework re-affirms the Government’s commitment to maintaining Green Belt protections’ (DCLG, 2011d)) - to controversial and unsubstantiated (‘planning is acting as a serious brake on the growth’; ‘the Framework puts local people in the driving seat’ (DCLG, 2011d)). Eric Pickles and George Osborne, whose departments had so keenly pushed for such a strongly pro-growth document, took a particularly strong stance in an article in the *Financial Times*, declaring that; ‘no one should underestimate our determination to win this battle’ (Gillman, 2011).

However, over time, and in the face of such a long and aggressive campaign which threatened to undermine their core support, the Government appeared to adopt a more reconciliatory tone. In a switch of rhetorical strategy, ministers stressed that there had been a misunderstanding about their intentions in the NPPF (Allmendinger, 2016). Greg Clark eventually agreed to meet the National Trust, while David Cameron wrote a letter to them, and stressed their commitment to protecting the environment and built heritage. By October ministers were making it clear that they were open to revising elements of the NPPF, with Bob Neill conceding that though some criticism was ‘well wide of the mark’, ‘serious points’ had been raised and the government was willing to ‘reword’ sections (Neill cited in Townsend, 2011). Similar comments were made by Oliver Letwin and Greg Clark, the second of whom was keen to emphasise his openness to changing the NPPF during his oral evidence session with the CLG Select Committee. Striking a similar stance, DCLG

declared that it welcomed ‘the opportunity to begin a forensic examination... ..now is the time to get down to the detail’ (DCLG cited in Townsend, 2011).

### *The civil service responds*

As Autumn slipped into winter civil servants in the Planning Directorate worked to respond to the campaign and balance the demands of different interests and perspectives within the government (Interview: SCS1, 2016). This occurred within an extremely tight timescale, with Eric Pickles, for example, requesting a full report on the more than 16,000 consultation responses within a fortnight (the civil service received special clearance to hire a ‘crack team’ to process them) (Interview: SCS1, 2016). The whole process was absolutely fraught, and on the brink of collapse throughout the latter months of 2011 as the Planning Directorate and Greg Clark sought to resolve the often contradictory demands of the environmental/conservationist campaign, and the Treasury and pro-development lobby:

...at that stage, it all got quite heated at some point and Greg was having to hold the ring, if you like, between very specific pressure from Treasury, and the National Trust, the Countryside Alliance, CPRE and others on the other hand, particularly around things like Greenbelt and so on. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

To get a sense of how tense the situation was from the perspective of the civil servants involved, it is most effective at this point to let the words of one highly experienced civil servant speak for themselves in describing how difficult the situation was:

No, seriously. I mean, I cannot tell you, I mean, I still have flashbacks, no, seriously, to the autumn of 2011... ..It was a massive project that we did in an incredibly compressed amount of time and the stakes were massive, both in terms of legal risk, political risk, everything. So it was incredibly difficult... (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

I think the whole thing was very high risk and frankly... The personal effort [we] put in, to holding that together... I think we were operating very close to the edge of the cliff at all times... .. I remember in late 2011, I remember I used to walk home from work. I just couldn’t see how we could align it in the...I just couldn’t see how we could satisfy all of the asks. I really, I just, I kept believing and I kept working away on each individual issue, but I just couldn’t see how we could get it all together and land it in the way that people would be happy with... ..It was probably the most difficult year of my life and I’m not exaggerating. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

### *The select committees publish their reports*

On the 21<sup>st</sup> December the CLG Committee published its report. This, in many ways, represented the high-water mark of pressure on the government to substantially revise its draft. It welcomed the overall intention of the NPPF, but was highly critical of it with regards to several key areas (CLG Committee, 2011). Many of these were relatively technical, but some were quite fundamental, and reflected the concerns of both

professional groups and the environmental/conservation lobby. Given the comments of interviewees regarding the Treasury's interventions, the CLG Committee's recommendation that the default be removed from the document, and that the wording of the Presumption be toned down, were particularly significant. Other important arguments the CLG Committee (CLG Committee, 2011) made included:

- That the government conflated its definition of 'sustainable development' with that of 'sustainable economic growth', and that a more precise definition of 'sustainable development' was required
- That the document was inconsistently drafted and lacked clarity, in part due to its brevity
- That text concerning the existing 'town centres first' policy should be instated
- That the NPPF should more explicitly lay out the supremacy of Local Plans

The committee also pressed the government to undertake another consultation on the NPPF, so that practitioners would be able to make technical comments on any changes the government made in their next draft - this was a suggestion first put forward by the EA Committee (EA Committee, 2011), and was rejected by Greg Clark at the time. Perhaps most significantly, given the wider public debate still raging (which the CLG Committee acknowledged in its report), the CLG Committee concluded that the overall tone of the document was indeed too pro-development:

We agree with those who have detected in the draft NPPF a weighting towards the aim of economic growth. The exhortation to adopt a 'default yes' to development proposals, the way the concept of viability is framed, and the 'significantly and demonstrably' test for evidence against development, all seek to tip the balance of decision-making too obviously towards development that may be unsustainable. These elements of the Framework chip away at reassurances of protection for the environment, and have the potential to undermine the primacy of local decision-making. Changes to policy on transport, brownfield development, identification of land supply and Town Centre First further unbalance the NPPF, as the amended policies are more likely to tend towards unsustainable development. (CLG Committee, 2011: 63)

This was a view supported by the EA Committee (EA Committee, 2011), who had published their report on the 1<sup>st</sup> December. In line with minister's new reconciliatory tone, Greg Clark welcomed the report, and praised its 'constructive' and 'measured' recommendations (Clark cited in Donnelly, 2011c).

### 7.2.3 How interviewees interpreted the campaign

#### *Interviewees' interpretations of the political uproar*

The majority of interviewees supported the claims, publically made by ministers during the first few months of anti-NPPF campaign, that the government's draft was not a significant departure from the PAG's draft, or national planning policy as it then stood. They accounted for *The Telegraph*, National Trust, and CPRE's campaign as being more of a response to the pro-development tone and narrative presented by the document than its actual policy substance. There were two closely-linked component parts to this interpretation and argument; Firstly, that key changes the document brought about between were technical in nature, rather than substantial (i.e. they did not change policy). Secondly, any perceived differences between existing policy and the government's draft of the NPPF were actually a result of its clarity bringing to light the reality of existing policy, and ironing out contradictions and complexities which had previously caused confusion. These claims are important, and worth exploring briefly here, because together they indicate how civil servants and ministers interpreted and rationalised the *political* nature of the debate over the NPPF. As such they are discussed separately below.

#### *Technical change or policy change?*

Several of the interviewees who had been most closely involved in the development of the NPPF argued that the government's draft introduced very little, or no, change in policy. For example;

Well, the NPPF contains nothing new, except for the word 'sustainable'. (Interview: John Howell, 2016)

...to my mind, the difference between the Practitioners version and the version we went out to consult on, if you look at it, is actually fairly insubstantial, I would argue. In Planning terms, I would argue, there were very few differences. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

...if you looked at the two versions they were pretty much identical... So what was interesting is when the PAG published theirs people quite liked it and they were quite positive about it. When the government published pretty much an identical thing... ...The irony is, and I remember talking to [someone working for CPRE], and I'd shared a version of the PAG document with him and he was actually quite happy. I remember he said; 'oh actually I think you've come to quite a balanced position'. So again policy substance never changed... (SCS2, 2016)

According to these participants, the key way the document had changed between iterations was in terms of narrative and tone, with the introductory portion of the document being particularly problematic in this regard:

Up front in the narrative [of the document] is a story about planning. So if you look at the draft that went out for consultation there was no policy substance that was different...it was all narrative.

So it talked about rapid development, it talked about... and so the tone of the document shifted from this kind of balance of 'yes, we must have development but it must be sustainable', which was a thing that Simon Marshall's really keen on, to this like... And the PAG themselves were a bit frustrated because they were like; 'well, why have you changed the tone? Because it doesn't reflect where we've got to on the policy.'. (Interview: SCS3, 2016)

When pressed, most interviewees acknowledged that this introductory narrative could change how decision makers interpreted the policy presented later in the document - a point with the RTPI made in their consultation response to the document (RTPI, 2011). None the less, the argument that the government's draft of the NPPF represented no policy change recalls ministers' original framing of the PAG's work as purely technical, and as such, that there was no political direction to give to the members of the PAG. It is also reminiscent of the approach the Conservatives took to developing OSP, and the idea that national-level policy was a technical, non-political, question to which they had the answer. The dialogic impact of this argument is to close down the political claims of the campaigners; there is no policy change, they have therefore misunderstood or misrepresented the *true* state of affairs, so there is no political argument for them to make. In fact, the campaigner's claims often operated on a much more abstract level, regarding the role the planning system should take in society (or perhaps, particular rural societies), and the overall tone of the NPPF. The media keyed into and focused on these political claims, rather than more technical arguments.

A commonly cited example in defence of the NPPF being 'nothing new' was the presumption in favour of (sustainable) development, and that it had existed as a core principle of the English planning system since 1947. Whether or not this claim is accurate<sup>83</sup>, it unearths a contradiction in the way the presumption was presented from 2010; before *The Telegraph* and the National Trust's campaign erupted the Conservative Party and then the Coalition Government repeatedly suggested that the presumption *was* new. *OSP* called this 'inbuilt bias towards the creation of appropriate' developments a 'radical shift' (The Conservative Party, 2010a: 11), whilst the *Plan for Growth* had promised to 'introduce a powerful new presumption in favour of sustainable development' (HM Treasury & BIS 2011: 23). There was a clear shift in strategy towards downplaying these claims once the NPPF campaign began in earnest. And, by the Autumn of 2011 this public strategy was dropped in the favour of a more reconciliatory tone, but only when it clear that it was not winning the public argument.

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<sup>83</sup> The academic consensus is that a 'presumption in favour of development' has indeed existed since 1947, to the extent that it accords with other material considerations (e.g. Ricketts & Field, 2012). Over time, up until 2010 at least, this more or less shifted to a presumption in favour of development where it conforms with the development plan (Cullingworth & Nadin, 2002: 130).

### *The complexification or simplification of national planning policy?*

Several interviewees claimed that not only was the NPPF adding nothing of great significance to national policy, but the source of conflict was that in streamlining and simplifying New Labour's PPSs/PPGs (characterised as consensus-driven, heavily negotiated, and technocratic) the 'real', undistorted, nature of existing planning policy was coming to the fore. John Howell's views were particularly trenchant:

The rest of it was the distillation of what was there into something that was much more condensed and much more readable, and what it has done, by doing that, is to highlight certain things because all the verbiage has been stripped away, and I think that that was - everything that was in the NPPF was already there. (Interview: John Howell, 2016)

Well I think they did interpret it as a bit of a change - but *I am telling you* it wasn't a change. And what it is illustrative of, is that when you strip away all the crap around it, you are actually left with something that is quite stark and on which people can have different views. (Interview: John Howell, 2016) (emphasis in original speech)

This is not to say that there were not contradictions between different parts of the PPSs, or that they were not overly complex - this was widely agreed, even by environmental/campaign groups (indeed, it was this wide agreement which provided the consensus for reform in the first place) - but as a rhetorical move it had an important double-effect. Firstly, it positioned New Labour's planning policy as overly prescriptive, negotiated, technocratic, consensus-seeking, and complex (all long-standing Conservative critiques of New Labour approaches to governance), and thereby being responsible for obscuring the 'truth' about the role of the planning system. Secondly, it depicted the Coalition's efforts to reduce national policy as bringing out the 'true' nature of the national-level planning system, and what its correct role was within society and the market was (i.e. to support development where possible).

However, this understanding of the NPPF as increasing the clarity of national policy is at odds with the way many commentators interpreted the changes at the time. For others it *increased* the complexity of the policy framework through ambiguity and a lack of specificity. Indeed, concerns that the draft NPPF would bring about a return to Thatcher-era 'planning via judicial review' as a result were widespread, and DCLG's own impact assessment for the draft NPPF suggested that it may well have led to an increase in its use (DCLG, 2012b). As Allmendinger & Haughton (2015: 48) put it, the NPPF 'simplified the system whilst increasing scope for both discretion *and* ambiguity'. National policy grew simultaneously more complex and simpler.

Another way to think how these dynamics operated in *practice* is to take Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) argument a step further. This is to ask, bearing in mind that the key rationale behind the NPPF was to simplify and liberalise national policy; 'for whom did

the system become for ambiguous (in practice), and for whom did it become more complex (in practice)? Answering these questions suggests that complexity within the system was, in a sense, shifted 'downwards', out of central government. The NPPF was indeed much less complex - but from the perspective of central government and the ministers who led the reforms. The evidence for this can be found in the way in which policy making practices in the Planning Directorate deliberately changed after the NPPF; they shifted from a model whereby there were relatively large standing teams of civil servants responsible for managing the complexities and stakeholder networks of individual policy areas (each of which had previously been covered by a PPSs), to a more dynamic one which was more in line with the direction of civil service reform at the time. Indeed, DCLG was one of the first major central government departments to begin moving towards this model in earnest (Hallsworth et al, 2011: 10). This model required significantly fewer individuals, was built around the use of floating, less specialised, project teams, and utilised more external expertise. For example;

On cuts and capacity, we were a bit worried about having the number of staff necessary in the planning directorate for example to push through all of the stuff that we were having to do, and that just meant some very long hours for some people. But we I think also were happy with the idea that if the NPPF was shorter we would need less people to service it... And there was a little industry of, you could count the person who was responsible for greenbelt and housing, the person who was responsible for four and six, for twelve, for all of the PPGs. And when you burnt those there was no industry of people needed to service that, because there was nothing to interpret anymore. So we were pretty sure that that would result in a saving/redeployment of staff who didn't need to be in that space anymore, and it was just all a bit simpler. (Interview: SCS2, 2016)

I don't think we could have got from A to B on any of them, could we, by taking a completely standard approach, because we didn't have the resource level that we would have needed to have done, in an old-fashioned way. And that was what we wanted, and wanted as the outcome. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

This fit neatly with the Coalition government's 'post-bureaucratic' policy making reforms in central government, as outlined in the *Civil Service Reform Plan* (HM Government, 2012), and planned cuts to central government staff levels<sup>84</sup>. Thought about in this way complexity and 'fuzziness' (a level of which is fundamentally necessary within such a complex and overlapping policy area) shifted from the realm of *national*-level policy making and the civil service, to that of the local. Complexity had been *localised* alongside some decision-making responsibility, with the onus on local decision-makers and the courts to interpret national policy (some of which remained prescriptive) according to local contexts. This shifted systematic complexity 'down' to the diverse local actors

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<sup>84</sup>Between 2010 and 2015 the overall number of managed staff in DCLG was reduced by slightly over 35% (see Bouchal, 2014).

regarded as most able to interpret and respond to it efficiently, and as such it was directly in line with the core tenets of the Coalition's brand of Localism (as expressed in the Conservative Party's pre-election green papers, including OSP).

Equally, this complexity is extremely valuable – shifting it away from central government opened it up to a whole ecosystem of professional services, public relations, consultation, and legal firms, who gained the opportunity to provide their services to community groups lacking expertise (for example, neighbourhood planning forums), and local authorities lacking resources. This is something John Howell alluded to in a 2011 speech to the Oxford Planning Conference, whilst espousing the benefits of Neighbourhood Planning and the role professional services firms could play in aiding their development (Howell, 2011). And, whilst not wishing to suggest by any means that they stood to personally benefit from these policy changes, it is clear from the account developed here that a significant number of the politicians and non-government agents involved in the creation of OSP and the NPPF had personal experience of working in such organisations.

#### *Simplification and enabling consensus*

A final point on the NPPF and complexity/simplicity is worth making. As stated above, there was widespread support for the simplification of national policy, particularly from planning practitioners and development professionals. Indeed, the majority of negative organisational response to the consultation on the draft NPPF began with words to the effect of 'whilst we applaud the government's attempts to simplify national planning policy...'. The political legitimacy of the reform of national planning policy as a whole was thus fundamentally anchored in the consensus around an apparently overriding *practical* need for reform. This was also the case for the Coalition's later planning reforms, including the streamlining of national planning policy guidance (via the National Planning Practice Guidance Review (DCLG, 2011b), and planning regulations (via the Red Tape Challenge (Cabinet Office, 2015b)), at quite a fundamental level:

...the reforms that we were doing, they were really substantive. I mean, we were basically taking the whole system, weren't we, bit by bit, first with policy, then the guidance, also the regulations over time. And just doing these massive whole-systems reviews. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

Whilst each of these reforms were *technically* technical - i.e. Ministers claimed that they did not introduce new policy or guidance but streamlined that which already existed - the architecture of national planning policy *was* reformed in the Coalition's image in various ways, and this obviously shapes the way that policy is made and deployed. The very fact that there was less of it is one obvious example, but others include the fact that in reforming national planning guidance it was expected that non-government agents would increasingly step into the gap provided by reductions in government-issue guidance to

produce their own, and that it was not government's role to provide best-practice style guidance, or that the Red Tape Challenge was run through a process of nomination from the sector (Cabinet Office, 2015b). Such assumptions clearly have long-term consequences for the policy substance. From this we can draw two interesting conclusions; that the Coalitions' national-level reforms of planning focused on reforming the architecture/format through which planning policy making practice is made and will be made in the future (rather than policy substance, for which the changes it introduced were not actually particularly significantly (Allmendinger, 2016)), and that arguments to do so provided the enabling consensus and pretext for a 'whole-system' recalibration of the policy architecture at this level. Shifting focus from policy substance to policy practice opened up the possibility of much wider 'whole-system' reform.

## 7.3 The production of the final draft and the influence of parliamentary scrutiny

### 7.3.1 The government's response and the final draft of the NPPF (March 2012)

#### *The 'planning version'*

Following the response to the government's consultation draft civil servants reassessed their approach to developing the final version of the NPPF. There was a feeling in the Planning Directorate that, on one hand, they had been too focused on satisfying ministers' wishes, and on the other, they needed a stronger lead from the department's planning experts in the final version:

It was interesting that once we'd lived through the summer of 2011, one of the things that Shona [Dunn] asked for, was for [the Chief Planner] Steve Quartermain to be much more directly involved, because I think we'd got through that first bit, but I think there was a worry that we hadn't been getting the balance quite right. We'd been too focused on the Ministers... And so, to kind of further complicate the final process of finalising the text as well as me working through it all with Greg [Clark], I also had to work through each chapter with a group of all of the relevant planners convened by [The Chief Planner] Steve [Quartermain]. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

One senior civil servant who was closely involved with this work actually referred to this draft as the 'planning' version, in implicit contrast to the previous draft, which had been widely called the 'Treasury' version (and was widely criticised and politically contentious)

and the original 'PAG' version (which in this individual's eyes was actually heavily influenced by the civil service):

...[the government's first draft] frightened the horses, and got Little England on its campaigns, to say; 'well this isn't what we want'. And we then ended up having to go back and write the planning version, which is what we now have. (Interview: SCS4, 2016)

### *Response to the select committees*

Of the CLG Committee's 35 recommendations the government accepted 18 in full, 12 in part, and rejected five. As Rutter (2012) points out, an 86% rate of acceptance in part or in full is an extremely high rate of acceptance for select committee recommendations generally<sup>85</sup>, let alone in a report as critical as this. Indeed, several of the fully accepted recommendations were quite substantial, and proposed changes to key planks of the NPPF as it then stood. The most notable recommendation was the removal of the infamous 'default yes' to development, on which the government conceded; 'this language has given rise to *unwarranted* concerns that development should be allowed to proceed at all costs, which was never the intention of government policy' (DCLG, 2012b) (emphasis added). Other changes the select committee recommended and which the government accepted included the introduction of a definition of sustainable development that was grounded in the classic 'Bruntland' definition; an explicit endorsement of a town-centre-first approach to urban development, and; that it should be made clear than Local Plans should be the starting point for decision making in the planning system.

In this policy episode, the CLG select committee certainly appears to have been a prominent policy actor. So, what was minister's motivation for accepting 86% of them in this case? The factors that generally shape the level of influence of individual select committees are too many and complex to discuss in detail here (see Benton & Russell, 2013; Brazier & Fox, 2011), but conversations with interviewees pointed to several factors which appeared particularly influential in this case. These each relate to political dynamics within parliament at the time, and are particularly interesting in that they hint at backbench MPs and Peers (two groups of policy actors whose involvement is rarely discussed in the planning and geography literature) as having a significant influence over the policy substance of the document.

*Carrying backbench support:* Bob Neill explained that DCLG ministers felt it was important to be receptive to the Committee's recommendations because the reforms they

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<sup>85</sup> It is a rather crude measure, but for context Benton & Russell found in a 2013 study of select committee recommendations made to government by seven select committees between May 1997 and May 2010, that 40% were accepted either partially or fully (Benton & Russell, 2013).

were pushing required the support of backbench MPs if they were to be successful. Alluding to the letter backbench Tory MPs, when asked how much the CLG select committee's report influenced the final form of the NPPF, he replied:

Well, it did to some extent. I mean, we knew where it was coming from in the sense that Clive [Betts, chair of the CLG Committee] was going to have a different political agenda, but we had to be conscious of the fact there were Tory and Lib Dem backbenchers on [the committee] who we were going to need to take with us. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

It is important to interpret these comments in light of the 45 Conservative and Liberal Democrat backbench MPs' letter to the Prime Minister, in that it argued; 'there are a number of changes to the draft NPPF that are needed to address these problems, some of which have been promoted by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee' (Goldsmith, 2012). Therefore, if the government had reacted negatively to the committee's recommendations, there was a chance of their wider planning reform project being derailed. Bob Neill went on to also highlight that Ministers also saw taking a sympathetic stance towards the Committee as important for keeping several Liberal Democrat Peers 'on side' (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016).

*Legislative strategy:* Throughout the passage of the Localism Bill ministers had struck a collaboratory tone, and appeared more willing than most administrations are to accept modifications to the Bill, Baroness Hanham (7<sup>th</sup> June 2011, Hansard col 148) declaring in the Lords:

Already in response to concerns raised in the other place, the Government have brought forward a number of amendments-in particular, to strengthen strategic planning by bolstering the duty to co-operate and to widen provisions on neighbourhood planning to make neighbourhood forums more inclusive of both local people and local businesses. As we start our considerations, I can assure noble Lords that the Government will continue to listen and, where possible, make amendments that are justified and supported across the House...

This is also evidenced by the sheer number of substantive amendments it underwent which had their origin in amendments originally tabled by the Opposition and backbenchers, as pointed out by interviewee SCS3 (2016), and as an amendment analysis of the Localism Act I carried suggested (see Part 9.1.3 for details of this). The Liberal Democrats themselves were keen to emphasise the number of changes to Bill made through parliamentary scrutiny (The Liberal Democrat Voice, 2011). Bob Neill (2016) suggested that the government was more open to making concessions in this way because it was both keen to the push the Bill and the NPPF through the legislative/policy process as fast as possible, and because the Coalition possessed only a slim majority in the commons, making it keen to maintain backbench support;

...we didn't have an overall majority, even with the Coalition. Well, we could just about, but you had to keep people on side. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)

*The status and approach of the CLG select committee:* Since the 2010 reforms of select committees, most select committee chairs have been selected by blind ballot across all MPs (rather than by party whips, as was previously the case), and select committee membership has been by convention roughly proportionate to each party's number of seats in the Commons (White, 2015). This increased the influence and strengthened the cross-party support for select committees and their Chairs. According one interviewee Clive Betts, the Chair of the CLG committee, was quite influential in this way:

Well, I think it's partly due to their chair, Clive Betts, who's a very widely respected politician. And I think things he did, like oppose the [Infrastructure Planning Commission], for example, under the last Labour Government... I think that boosted his standing with a lot of Tory MPs. (Interview: CG 1, 2016)

Yeah. So, I certainly think [the CLG Committee have] been influential. You also see it in Parliament as well, when Clive Betts intervenes DCLG debates, Brandon Lewis, Greg Clark will grant the way and say; 'yeah, this man's very influential and he's well respected'. (Interview: CG 1, 2016)

In the eyes of this interviewee, this Clive Betts' status thus increased the Committee's clout when it came to influencing the government on the NPPF<sup>86</sup>. In a mirror image of this argument, Clive Betts himself in part put down the influence of his committee down to Greg Clark's personality, and the fact that 'he does listen' (Interview: Clive Betts, 2016). It is also interesting, given that civil servants in the planning directorate saw the draft they produced after the select committee's input as a 'planning version', that Betts felt that his proposals had significant support from civil servants in the Planning Directorate:

I think that, without being too indiscreet, I think many civil servants were pleased at the recommendations we made, and pleased that Greg Clark accepted them. (Interview: Betts, 2016)

Finally, a significant factor may have been that the government did not necessarily accept the select committee's recommendations because the committee itself was making them, but because the National Trust and other powerful campaign groups were. Many of these groups all gave evidence to committee, and the committee thus based many of its recommendations on their testimonies. It is interesting that in the quote from Hope

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<sup>86</sup> However, it should also be noted that the same interviewee offered something of a counter-balance to this view of the committee being influential, and suggested that there was a perception that a high number of the recommendations were accepted by the government because the committee 'pulled their punches a bit, because of the need to get a cross party consensus' (Interview: CG 1, 2016).

(2012), below, Clive Betts suggests that the committee purposefully acted as a mouthpiece for these groups, including *The Telegraph*.

*The publication of the final draft, its reception from the sector, and the reflections of civil servants*

The final, 52-page, version of the NPPF was almost universally welcomed. *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Independent*, and the *Financial Times* all ran favourable stories (Planning Resource, 2012). The CPRE, while retaining concerns about the economic emphasis of the document (and several other aspects), felt that ‘Ministers have made significant progress towards meeting the concerns raised by rural campaigners... we are pleased with the direction of travel’ (CPRE, 2012) – a view broadly supported by the National Trust, whose director general described it as having ‘better tone and balance’ (Hope, 2012; Litton, 2012). The housebuilding and development lobby, meanwhile, raised very few concerns (Litton, 2012). Clive Betts, chair of the CLG Select Committee also welcomed the final version. He took the unusual step of aligning itself with the campaign against the draft NPPF and *The Telegraph* in the process:

The select committee listened to the campaigners, and the Government listened to the select committee. Great credit should go to everyone who has campaigned to get this change. Huge credit too to The Daily Telegraph for maintaining focus on these important matters. The draft NPPF would have reshaped England very differently if the initial plans had gone through. (Betts cited in Hope, 2012)

Even POS and the RTPI viewed it - cautiously - as a success. As one might expect, ministers too hailed it and the use of the PAG as a success, Bob Neill declaring that he felt the process would have been ‘longer and less radical’ without it (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016). But what of the civil servants who had worked through the episode? All interviewees felt that, more or less, the final version of the NPPF was a success, with some actually putting this down to the increased influence ‘planners’ had over its final form, and how this had resulted in a more balanced document (Interviews: SCS1, 2016; CS6, 2016; SCS 4, 2016). Whether the PAG model and process had actually helped the process was a more complex question for those senior civil servants who were aware of the degree of influence the civil service had over the PAG’s work during January 2011. A couple of senior civil servants felt that, regardless of this influence, the PAG had provided a valuable challenge to the civil service, which had indeed resulted in stronger policy than they would have otherwise produced (Interview: SCS2, 2016; Interview: SCS3; 2016). However, another felt that the PAG had improved the NPPF for quite different reasons. For them, the PAG producing a draft which was controversial and unpopular made ministers more likely to accept civil servants’ final version of the document. which they might not have accepted otherwise. One interviewee’s thoughts on this matter provide a neat conclusion to the case narrative as a whole:

...I suppose, if I'm honest, there's a bit of me that thinks, well if we'd written that first version the first time, and given it to ministers, and said; 'this is the version that you should have', they probably wouldn't have accepted it. They probably would have said; 'no, no, it needs to be something different'. Whereas, allowing John [Rhode's] group to come up with something that was a little bit more controversial meant that when the flag went up the mast, and everyone started going on about it, we were able to say; 'Well actually, you might like this one? And they said; 'Yeah, that's fine.'. And so, again, that's why I say; 'Do I mind the process?' No. Because we ended up with a document which I think was a good, strong, planning document. So, I think that, you could argue that, therefore, someone outside the civil service helped us... ..But the civil service is not about taking credit for anything. (Interview: SCS4, 2016)

# 8. Discussion and analysis

## 8.1 The case narrative's historiographic contribution

It is also absurd for [the previous Labour government] to complain that this document contains obscure language, when it is responsible for the 1,000 pages and obscure and impenetrable language, which only people with PhDs in planning can understand, of the planning policy guidance document... I could talk at length, but I have run out of time. I look forward to hearing what Members' queries I need to follow up on.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of the National Planning Policy Framework.

(Lord Stunnell to the House of Lords; Hansard col 1207., 26<sup>th</sup> April 2012)

### 8.1.1 Assessing the thesis' historiographic contribution

With the comments above, Lord Stunnell brought the extraordinary tale of the NPPF's creation to a close, three years after the Conservative Party had committed to its creation in *Strong Foundations* (The Conservative Party, 2009b), and following what was arguably the most high-profile planning-related political campaign in living memory. By burrowing down to the level of practice and 'emphasising the little things' (Flyvbjerg, 2004), the case narrative provides an in-depth and fine-grained historical account of this saga from the perspective of various agents working in and with the central state. Going 'beyond' the institutional and/or discursive level brought to light phenomena which have not yet been subject to academic enquiry. These details alter how one interprets the events the development of the NPPF as a historic event and juncture, and what it might therefore mean for future trajectories in English planning reform. This brings us to the first of the thesis' research objectives:

#### Figure 24: Relevant Objective: 1

**To produce a historiographic account of key events in the production of the NPPF:** To contribute to existing literature on the NPPF, and to help build a more practice-focused, fine-grained, and multi-level historiographic account of its development as a key episode in the history of English planning reform.

Several attributes of the case narrative stand out as being particularly interesting contributions to the present academic and historical understandings of the NPPF's creation. Prime amongst these is the Coalition's use of the PAG as a policy making and political strategy, its internal dynamics, and the impacts it had on the NPPF's development. However, the case narrative expanded the literature's existing understanding of the NPPF in several other ways. These include, in roughly chronological order, that:

- The Sounding Board the Conservatives formed in opposition crystallised a network of policy actors which would go on to be influential throughout the Coalition Government, and that the way in which the authors of OSP framed the policy issues they faced would go on to shape both the NPPF and the campaigns against it.
- OSP was developed to fill a 'gap' in the Conservative Party's policy programme; planning reform itself was not originally a central part this. A mixture of existing ideas such as Localism and the Big Society, and broad proposals for planning such as a stripped-back national policy framework and the abolition of RSSs, had to be reconciled. Much of the conceptual 'fuzziness' which resulted and complicated negotiations can be seen to stem from this initial situation.
- An equivalent of the NPPF was always likely to be a policy priority for the 2010 Government, whatever its political persuasion. The civil service prepared a draft of a new national policy framework before the Coalition government came to power. This would go on to heavily influence the substance and style of the eventual NPPF, and form its basis.
- The Liberal Democrat's approach to the Coalition negotiations had important consequences for the distribution of its ministers across Whitehall. In focusing its political 'firepower' in DECC, it displaced Greg Clark to DCLG, who had not previously been part of the team developing OSP. This is likely to have reduced how radical the Coalition Government's planning reforms subsequently were.
- Coalition Ministers considered abolishing the plan-led system in early 2010. Greg Clark decided not to pursue this course of action because he did not want to slow down economic growth, and there was little appetite for such reform in the development sector.
- Tensions between civil servants and Ministers in DCLG and across central government played an important part in the latter's decision to use the PAG. It was not inevitable that civil servants would reoccupy their traditional, privileged, position in the policy making process after the PAG finished work. These tensions stemmed from a mixture of anti-bureaucratic ideology and practical difficulties in developing the Coalition's early policy programme.

- Coalition ministers were extremely frustrated with what they saw as the overly centralising approach that Parliamentary Counsel were taking to drafting the Localism Bill they very nearly the unprecedented step of hiring the law firm Bircham Dyson Bell to do it instead.
- Civil servants in the Planning Directorate influenced the PAG's work much more than ministers realised or 'wanted to know', and fed text from the rejected draft they had prepared during Gordon Brown's premiership. This contradicts the government and Institute for Government's narrative that the NPPF was, in part, a 'success' because of the novel 'open' approach taken to its creation.
- The National Trust's national campaign against the NPPF was gearing up before the Government finished its own first draft of the NPPF, which suggests that they were concerned about the overall thrust of the document and the way it framed policy issues, rather than specific policy concerns.
- There were indeed deep disagreements between the Treasury and DCLG about how pro-growth the tone of the NPPF should be. This produced significant turmoil within the Government whilst it was producing the final version of the document.

On their own, these observations offer an original contribution to the research literature, providing for the first time a detailed and accurate historical account of one of the most important junctures in the recent history of English planning reform. Though this thesis does not afford to space to analyse all of them - I hope that future scholars may build and expand on them in their own research - I submit several of them to critical analysis below, according to the remaining objectives.

## **8.2 Open policy making, the neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model, and the rise of the 'hub model' of governance in the central state**

### **8.2.1 Introduction to the remainder of Chapter 8**

Whilst being wary of the impulse to 'sum up' and in doing so 'close down' the value of the case narrative (Flyvbjerg, 1992; 2004), in what follows I carry out a critical analysis of what the particular events, practices, and strategies described above suggest about two things; first, the longer-term trajectories of spatial governance reform in England, and second; how useful post-politics is for explaining the political rationalities which drive

them. Together, these sections respond to objectives 2, 3, and 4 (repeated below for reference). Rather than solely unpacking the case narrative, in these analyses I purposefully cast forward and, drawing on the 'core executive studies' British political science literature, explore what the narrative reveals about ongoing trajectories in English spatial governance, and what their future consequences for policy making and the political economy of the English planning system may be. Doing so also illuminates how the CSGP literature might develop a more dynamic conceptualisation of the central state by engaging with key concepts from this body of research.

**Figure 26: Relevant Objectives: 2 and 4, and the Research Question**

**Research question:** How did different practices, strategies, and rationalities of 'getting policy done' in the UK central state shape the development of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) from ideas initially presented in the green paper Open Source Planning, and what do they suggest about future trajectories in English spatial governance reform?

**Objective 2 - To produce a case study of policy making practices in the central state:** To carry out a critical case narrative-based analysis of the policymaking practices, strategies, and rationalities that underpinned the development of the NPPF.

**Objective 4 - Identify opportunities for conceptual synthesis:** To identify, based on the empirical analysis, opportunities for synthesis between the CSGP literatures and other bodies of research which may be valuable for interpreting the consequences of the changing central state for planning reform.

## **8.2.2 Introduction and summary of arguments relating to objectives 2 and 4**

In what follows I respond to Objectives 2 and 4, and begin constructing a reply to the thesis' overarching research question (repeated above, in Figure 26, for reference). I begin this by situating changing policy-making practices and relationships in the UK central state as a key part of the Coalition's wider planning reforms. Indeed, whilst the extent to which the NPPF changed/neoliberalised planning policy debatable, the case narrative makes clear that these central state reforms - driven by the same Localism, Open Policy Making and Big Society critiques that drove planning reform - aimed to systematically reconfigure the relationships between particular groups of agents within the central state were.

By drawing on concepts from the field of interpretive British political science (and particularly its sub-field of core executive studies) I assess the likely impact of these changing relationships within the central state for future patterns of spatial governance. Unpacking the policymaking practices, strategies, and rationalities that underpinned the

way these relationships were reworked during and through the creation of the NPPF provides a critical 'way in' to tracing out the (neoliberalising) rationalities practices which shaped the development of the NPPF itself. In what follows I focus three such changing relationships:

- a. *Those between civil servants and their ministers:* From 2010, the general legitimacy of civil servant bureaucrats, and their traditional role within the Westminster Model, was increasingly attacked by ministers. Critical distance between civil servants and their ministers was accordingly reduced, and non-government agents took an increasingly prominent role in the policy process. The PAG itself, as an example of 'open' policy making and a 'soft space', was a symptom of Coalition critiques of the role of the bureaucrat within the policy making process.
- b. *Those between the central state and the wider policy community:* Under the aegis of 'open' policy making (which latterly mutated into the concept of 'Government as a Platform') the government's engagement with the wider policy community switched from a 'wide and shallow' model to one which was 'deep and narrow' during the case narrative. Under the 'wide and shallow' model of New Labour a broad range of policy actors (whether groups or individuals) were consulted and communicated with during policy development. Under the 'deep and narrow' model that emerged in the early days of the Coalition, some external policy actors had an extremely high degree of influence over spatial/urban policy, but they were very few in number. Unlike the model operating under New Labour, these privileged actors exerted great influence at the formative stages of policy development. The policy influence of less favoured groups and individuals, meanwhile, was diminished and was drawn upon much more selectively.
- c. *Those between central government departments (mainly DCLG) and the 'core executive' (mainly the Treasury):* The case narrative points to the pivotal role inter-departmental power relations play as a mechanism through which longer-term trajectories of neoliberalising planning reform are negotiated and structured at the national level, and within the central state. I draw on the core executive studies sub-field of British political science - highlighted in the literature review as having a particular interest in this area of research - to argue that the increasing uneven relationship between DCLG and the Treasury relates to the emergence in the early 2010s of a 'hub model' of governing in the UK central state (Dommett & Flinders, 2015).

Each of these changing relationships were closely linked, each was underpinned by the overlapping Localism, Big Society, and Open Policy Making/planning discourses, and each are likely to have had significant impacts on spatial governance reform in England.

However, it is the third of these which the remainder of the analysis then focuses on. Notwithstanding the influence of key individuals and other agents upon the working practices of the UK central state, in reshaping crucial inter-departmental dynamics the development of a 'hub model' may have a profound impact on future spatial governance policy trajectories. This is largely because it is likely to lock in the flat, 'anti-planning', 'Treasury view' of spatial governance which played such a crucial role in the case narrative. The emergence of the hub model – which Richardson (2017) characterises as a shift from *governance* to *government* (rather than the more commonly described reverse) in the central state sits uneasily with assumptions in the post-politics literature and elsewhere about the predominance of the government - governance shift.

### **8.2.3 Changing relationship one: Ministers and civil servants**

#### *Neoliberal localism in the central state*

Taking Deas' (2012: 65) description of the Coalition's Big Society local-level planning reform agenda as being...

...a desire to downsize the state but also by a related wish to begin a potentially more fundamental programme for the reform of the governance of local areas, in which civil society actors begin increasingly to inherit public policy-making and service delivery functions in the past exercised largely by government or (more recently) an array of quasi-public institutions...

...the development of the NPPF comes into focus as an example of the manifestation of this agenda within the central state. It is clear from the case narrative that ministers saw central state bureaucrats not only as 'part of the problem' in a broadly political sense, but also in a quite literal one; it was they, with their supposed reliance on procedure and self-interest, who had presided over and led the proliferation of national-level planning policy under Labour (Interviews: Neill, 2016; Howell, 2016). The PAG provided a way of reducing the state's reliance on civil servants as a source of policy knowledge, and of increasing the input of 'local' knowledge in a critical, early, stage of the policy making process. Significantly, the 'local' of Localism here is essentially Hayekian in that it flexibly refers not to geographical scales or levels of government, but to the deployment of 'decentralised' place and market-based *knowledge* (Rogers, 2014). Indeed, Greg Clark was described by interviewees as a 'true' and 'uber' localist because of his reliance on and belief in the value of (expert) external policy advice (Interviews: SCS2, 2016; SCS3, 2016; CS6, 2016), rather than the importance of *local* determination per se. This was a Localism focused not necessarily on putting power in communities' hands, but on removing it as far as possible from bureaucrats'.

### *Conceptualising the PAG as a soft space in the central state*

Though (and in some ways also because) the PAG's existence was fleeting and experimental, the second spatial governance concept which proves enlightening when applied to the case narrative are the 'soft' institutional/territorial spaces of spatial governance which later proliferated under the Coalition. These are phenomenon which has received a good deal of attention in the international CSGP literatures, and their links with wider neoliberalising discourse, post-politics and practice are also well established (see Searle & Bunker, 2010; Metzger & Schmitt, 2012; Haughton et al, 2013, and Part 3.3.3 of this thesis). Comparing the two is thus an especially valuable way of parsing the policy making and governmental rationalities that shaped the PAG, and how they link to broader patterns of changing spatial governance already documented in the CSGP literatures, including that concerned with post-politics. In the words of Haughton et al (2013: 219):

These new experimental spaces and extant politico-judicial spaces exist in symbiotic relationship to each other, such that they always need to be seen as coconstituted in pursuit of particular state strategies. This makes the key analytical challenge one of understanding how particular governance assemblages come to be formed, in relation to which types of state strategy and in pursuit of what kinds of politics.

To return to the definition supplied in Part 3.3.3 of the literature review, Haughton et al (2013: 217) define soft spaces of governance as the often experimental 'in-between spaces of governance that exist outside, alongside or in-between the formal statutory scales of government'. They diversify the actors involved in policy making, and blur traditional boundaries between state and non-state, whilst discretely curtailing the involvement of voices that might fundamentally challenge a market-led, growth-orientated, agenda (Haughton et al, 2013). They often undermine accountability and transparency by producing a lack of clarity, and rely on informal techniques of government (Haughton et al, 2013). The Coalition's spatial governance reforms saw these manifested in territorial form as Local Enterprise Partnerships, for example, but the PAG also bares these characteristics. The 'space' it occupied was 'in-between' and alongside the formalised institutional machinery of central government and statutory roles of civil servants and ministers. It challenged the legitimacy of civil servants as the traditional source of ministerial policy advice, and presented an unusual assemblage of (traditionally defined) state and non-state actors, working towards a particular state strategy through the development of consensus. In these ways, it diversified the range of actors centrally involved in the policy process, whilst subtly circumscribing the involvement of particular groups which might challenge the overall thrust of the reforms. An important and related point here is that the case narrative suggested that the PAG in some ways increased the level of influence of ministers in DCLG (most notably Greg Clark) because it bypassed the

formal mechanisms through which civil servants provide advice to them. This informality also blurred accountability mechanisms.

However, as Haughton et al (2013) suggest, territorial soft spaces are not necessarily negative, and arguably provide a better functional 'fit' to certain phenomena than traditionally fixed spaces. Certainly, with regards to the PAG several civil servants (as well as ministers) felt that this was the case. They argued that it produced a greater reduction in national policy than they would managed via established policy making procedures (Interviews: SC2, 2016; SCS1, 2016; SCS2, 2016), and that it produced some novel policy solutions, such as the circular definition of 'sustainable development' (Interview: SCS3, 2016). The PAG, therefore, arguably provided a pragmatic, flexible, space in the heart of government in which individuals were freed from the stupefying effect of bureaucratic and established procedure to efficiently creatively develop the NPPF.

One final comparison is worth making, and this regards the extent to which the PAG as a soft space within the central state was a new phenomenon. Though geographical soft spaces have been increasing in number across Europe, and are by no means a new technology of government, their deployment under the Coalition marked an important departure in as much as they are less likely to be embedded within a 'more hierarchical politics' in which the actual authority of national and local governments is unchallenged (Haughton et al, 2013). Haughton et al (2013: 221) argue:

The kinds of soft spaces we are witnessing now are more varied both in rationale and in function, but underlying this variety is a different kind of *politics*. In the literature on state spatial restructuring and neoliberalisation, this new kind of politics is characterised in terms of decreased confidence in government as arbiter and deliverer of improved lives.

Returning to the PAG there are, again, enlightening similarities in this respect. There has certainly been a long-term shift in central state policy making towards the greater involvement and influence of a range of non-state actors in the policy process. But the degree to which the PAG as a governmental technology challenged civil servants as ministers' primary source of policy knowledge was significant and new, and Coalition ministers' critiques of the legitimacy of the bureaucracy and civil servants as a source of policy knowledge in government was a quite radical departure from previous governments, including those of the Thatcher era and New Labour (Richards & Smith, 2016). Haughton et al (2013: 221) frame the proliferation of the spaces as relating to 'a decreased confidence in government as arbiter and deliverer and of improved lives', and but here we can be more specific; Coalition ministers were cynical about the ability of the *bureaucracy* to deliver the reforms they deemed necessary. Indeed, they framed their reform programme as 'post-bureaucratic' (Richards & Smith, 2016) and key parts of the government - for example, ministers and their advisors - were actually empowered during

this policy episode in several key ways<sup>87</sup>. In the language of the CSGP scholarship on soft spaces; the PAG was an informal space within the bureaucratic architecture of the central state and the established policy process, which coupled with formal ministerial policy space to open up and enable a state strategy which was manifestly neoliberalising. That the *bureaucracy* and not *government* that was targeted is an important distinction to make in order to capture these specific power dynamics; the PAG served to concentrate decision-making power in the hands of ministers, and with them a very specific group of non-government agents. The wider significance of these shifting power relations for both the central state and spatial governance in England are discussed in much more detail later.

### *Reflections and long-term consequences*

The PAG may have dissolved after only a few months, but there are clear links between it and the spatial soft spaces the Coalition would later introduce in terms of its formality, practical rationalities and underlying critiques. Indeed, it is clear from the case narrative that it was not inevitable that the space the PAG occupied was temporary, and that it was and was not going to ‘solidify’ (Metzger & Schmitt, 2012: 266) into something more permanent within the institutional and procedural architecture of the central state. It is also clear from the case narrative that civil servants felt they had to work their way back into their traditional policy-leading position after the PAG had finished work. Politicians have long attacked the civil service for being unfit and illegitimate (Page, 2010; Levitt & Solesbury, 2005; Richards & Smith, 2016), but the Coalition represents a watershed in terms of ministers’ efforts to challenge their policy power (Richards & Smith, 2016). Overall, these comparisons - between changing policy making practices in the central state, and; open source policy making, localism, the big society, and soft spaces – demonstrate how wider neoliberalising reforms of spatial governance hinged around, or were entwined with, the systematic reconfiguration of the relationship between different agents in the central state – and especially between minister and civil servants.

To relate these arguments to the case narrative and the NPPF more directly; whether or not the NPPF itself brought about significant, neoliberalising, changes in the *substance* of national planning policy is debated in academia and was not contested on both sides by interview - but it was certainly linked to very substantial changes in the *way* national planning policy was made. These changes were both a matter of formal policy, and the result of informal cultural changes. The debate in the case narrative about whether the

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<sup>87</sup> In the example of the PAG the minister was empowered informally, but the Coalition also introduced institutional arrangement which did so formally, such as ‘extended ministerial offices’ (see Cabinet Office, 2013c).

NPPF actually complexified or simplified the policy space is a good example of this; whilst the NPPF did create a more ambiguous policy space for local actors, from the perspective of the actors in Planning Directorate, it did indeed reduce complexity of national-level policy. The Planning Directorate was subsequently reformed to rely on smaller, more flexible, teams of policy experts, and be more directly supportive of ministers' wishes, (Richards & Smith, 2016) in line with the Coalition's civil service reform agenda.

In the next section I broaden out this analysis to trace out what this governmental shift looked like a higher level. Firstly, in terms of a change in the central state's 'culture of engagement' towards one in which the policy process is more open to external influence. This also shifts the focus from the changing relationships between bureaucrats and their ministers to, secondly, the relationship between government and external sources of policy knowledge, and, thirdly, to the relationships between different government departments.

From analysing the wider significant of the case narrative in this way it quickly becomes apparent, in the case narrative and in practice, open policy making is only truly open to particular agents, and that open policy making as a whole comprises another centralisation of decision-making power to ministers. By discussing the situation in these higher-level terms, we can get closer to pinning down what the consequences of these changing power relations in the central state are for spatial governance in England.

#### **8.2.4 Changing relationship two: Policy makers and the wider policy community**

##### *Changing cultures of engagement*

The language of 'open' policy making might suggest that the PAG is representative of much more pluralistic approach to the policy process, in which a wide range of actors exert greater influence across wide-ranging and tangled networks, and state actors possess a reduced role, as notion of a long-term, fundamental, and wide-ranging governance-government shift would imply (e.g. Metzger et al 2015; Raco 2013, 2015). But on a practical level, for the case narrative and interviewed civil servants and politicians, this does not necessarily ring true. This was the case in two particularly significant ways.

Firstly, the PAG may have been seen as an experiment in 'open' policy making, but whilst it did open formative stages of the policy process to new voices, the PAG also comparatively and systematically excluded other groups. The case narrative clearly suggests that developers and house builders felt well connected to the process in terms of influence over and awareness of the process (the PAG's existence was, of course,

unacknowledged by ministers until leaks forced them to do so), as did the environmental/heritage lobby. In contrast, planning professionals had no obvious point of representation or contact. This mirrors the situation with the Sounding Board, which provided the starting point for the PAG's membership. One civil servant described this as a shift in the Government's 'culture of engagement' (Interview: CS5, 2016) – a concept which most of the civil servants recognised when I put it to them.

By 'culture of engagement' the civil servant meant the way in which decision makers formally structured and filtered the external policy knowledge upon which they actively drew. For different policy making episodes in DCLG this commonly includes a quite fluid mixture of methods and structures, including sounding boards<sup>88</sup>, 'external' or 'expert' review groups<sup>89</sup>, and formal consultations and calls for evidence. New Labour's culture of engagement was generally characterised as 'broad and shallow'; there were extensive, though sometimes less impactful, flows of information across this range of mechanisms (Interviews: CS5, 2016, SCS2, 2016; CS1, 2016). The Coalition's approach to planning policy making was characterised rather differently by interviewees. Less emphasis was placed on wide-ranging, long, consultations and evidence collection, and more on in-depth input into the whole of the policy process (including, notably, its early and formative stages) from a select groups and individuals. These agents – whose names repeatedly arise in the case narrative – were often deeply involved across several different projects, and had often been involved with helping the Conservative Party develop policy in opposition. As one senior civil servant described it:

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<sup>88</sup> These are semi-formal panels made up of individuals from interest groups and practitioners who attend in a personal capacity, rather than officially representing the views of their organisations (though, of course, these can easily blur). Membership of this kind of board fluid, and can vary according to how in favour different groups are at different times. As the name implies, these are used to 'sound out' existing proposals – rather than generate new ones. During the Coalition alongside a main, Directorate-level Planning Sounding Board, different policy teams ran their own, even more fluid Boards, usually on a project-by-project basis. There were attempts in the early stage of the Coalition to close the Planning Sounding Board, which it was felt had grown too reactionary and negative towards the Government's proposals.

<sup>89</sup> These more formal arrangements are much more public-facing, and include varying mixtures of practitioners and representatives of professional bodies. High-profile examples of this type of arrangement the National Planning Practice Guidance Review (i.e. The 'Taylor Review') which streamlined official national-level planning policy guidance in England, or the recent Local Plans Expert Group. Though they often have secretariats of civil servants, they ostensibly provide *external* policy recommendations to government on a policy issue, which the Government then officially accepts or rejects.

**SCS1:** So, I think there's no doubt in my mind that, certainly around the time of the NPPF, our engagement [became] was much deeper, but narrower. So, there was a smaller number of external people in the tent, and the people who were in the tent, boy, were they in the tent.

**Author:** Yeah, well, I suppose they've been there since the sounding board, which the Conservatives set up before the election, yeah, and they followed all the way through. People like John Rhodes as well, still...

**SCS1:** Exactly, exactly. (Interview: SCS1, 2016)

Another civil servant tied this trend to an increasing focus on working to deliver, rather than objectively advising, minister wishes – dynamics touched on earlier in relation to the PAG. This is the second way in which open policy making served to close down policy input from particular groups. They explained:

...there was a real shift around about 2010 when there was a lot of coming out of the Cabinet Office; Francis Maude was someone that was really spearheading this as a minister... and yeah, so there's this shift really towards a different way of doing, working, which is more about proactively delivering minister's policies and projects, so ministers come up with the idea and they go and deliver it, this was the idea. (Interview: CS5, 2016)

Other interviewees supported this view, which links to a wider shift towards civil servants being viewed as “carriers” of ministerial ideas and deliverers of pre-set policy targets (Richardson, 2017). This is based on a conceptualisation, and subsequent restructuring, of minister-civil servant relationships into adversarial, principal-agent-based, terms since the 1980s (Richards & Smith, 2016; Page, 2010). It directly challenges the traditional ‘Westminster Model’ of civil servant-minister relationships, in which both are politically indivisible, and work within in a symbiotic relationship (Page, 2010), the result being that the ‘deliberative space for critical engagement over public policy has been diminished.’ (Richards & Smith, 2016: 501). The civil service reform literature also highlights the role these reforms and a ‘them and us’ (Richards & Smith, 2016: 506) conceptualisation have played in escalating tensions between ministers and their civil servants (Richardson, 2017; Pallett, 2015; Richards & Smith, 2016) – something quite apparent in the case narrative. Indeed, as the case narrative showed, these were tensions which themselves, perhaps ironically, also played a role in inspiring the use of the PAG.

#### *Neoliberalising the Westminster Model and the shift from governance to government*

Drawing on the British political science literatures, we can identify two key, closely related, broad consequences, of this shift. These relate to, firstly, accountability and democratic legitimacy, and secondly, policy failure and a shift from governance rather than government (rather than vice versa).

Firstly, whilst publically questioning the aptitude and role of civil servants, and introducing reforms challenging the Westminster Model, politicians have continued paying it lip service, and giving vague assurances that it will not be changed. This has produced a disconnect between increasingly ‘post-bureaucratic’ models of delivery (Richards & Smith, 2016), and a Westminster Model which in many ways now acts as ‘a legitimizing mythology for a way of governing that no longer exists’ (Richards & Smith, 2016). As with the specific example of the PAG as a ‘soft space’, this severs and strains lines of accountability (which remain attached to what appears a constitutional myth (Richards & Smith, 2016 citing; Rhodes, 2005)), whilst also reducing the potential for critical and ‘objective’ policy input from civil servants. A recent report from the National Audit Office (2016: 4) supports these claims, and points back to the previously cited civil servant’s concluding that these shifts may have serious consequences for accountability and policy decision-making:

[senior civil servants] now operate in an environment where ministers often perform a more ‘executive’ role in policy implementation and have sought greater involvement in top civil service appointments, while appointing increasingly influential special advisers to act on their behalf. This appears to have tilted the balance so that [senior civil servants] have greater pressures to give weight to political drivers rather than public value...

Secondly, Richardson (2017: early access) links these trends to a broad change in the way in British ‘policy style’. He links this to the ‘austerity turn’, which;

...changed the rules of the policy process itself in that it set new limits to the bargaining process in many policy sectors, shifting discussion from *what* should be done to *how* it should be done, the ‘it’ being expenditure constraint. This in turn constrained the agenda setting potential for all policy actors and, particularly, set tighter boundaries to what interest groups could achieve. Politicians have gained more power over the agenda setting process. (emphasis in the original)

Austerity also increased the power of the Treasury through the neoliberalising ‘financialisation’ of the global and British economies (Davis & Walsh, 2015; Pinson & Journal; 2016). As a result, policy is increasingly being made at a high level and then ‘trickling down’ to other actors, including departments (Richardson, 2017). At a high level, this increased agenda-setting power results in a hierarchical and ‘impositional’ policy making style in which ministers’ policy preferences are carried by civil servants and imposed on sectors, in the manner highlighted by interviewees. This is rather than the formation of policy through broad networks of government and non-government actors. Richardson (2017) therefore characterises this shift as one which entails a move *governance* to *government*. This makes policy failure more likely because it limits the space for critical deliberation and consultation between the sector and civil servants, and between civil servants and ministers (Richards & Smith, 2016). For Richardson (2017), this results in ‘constrained consultation’ – or in other words, a shift in culture of

engagement - which tends to become about the 'how' of policy, rather than the 'what'. This framing almost exactly mirrors the remit given to the PAG by ministers, and at least in part accounts for the ferocity of the debate over the NPPF, which was stoked up by a sense across the policy community that it had been frozen out of and misled about the process involved. Indeed, several interviewees from non-government backgrounds observed that their policy input had become increasingly about the 'how' rather than the 'what' of planning policy during the early years of the Coalition (Interviews: PB1, 2016; PB2, 2016; LPA1, 2016, LPA2, 2016; CG1, 2016).

### *Summary of changing relationship three*

To summarise my argument so far, the case narrative points to the ways in which neoliberal critiques of the bureaucrat's (not the government's per se) role in the central state policy process has - working through discourses related to 'open policy' which ran through the NPPF project - resulted in a centralisation of power to ministers and select interest groups. This has produced a model of policy making which is both less accountable and potentially more prone to massive policy failure. In what follows I relate these impacts directly to changing patterns of spatial governance in England. It is the second argument above, put forward by Richardson (2017) and alluding to the increasing policy power of the Treasury, which is central to my argument.

### **8.2.5 Changing relationship three: DCLG and the Treasury**

So far, overall, I have identified two closely-linked sets of shifting power relations in the central state, which are reflected in the case narrative; firstly, the shift in decision-making power away from civil servants and towards ministers as part of a wider, neoliberalising, challenge to the 'Westminster Model' (Richards & Smith, 2016). And secondly, a shift in 'culture of engagement', from one in which policy-influencing power being spread quite broadly through the spatial governance policy community, to one in which a small number of actors close to the minister have a great deal of power, and agenda-influencing power is limited elsewhere. This second dynamic is closely related to a move from *governance* to *government*. Both of these trends relate to neoliberal critiques of the public sector, and both tie directly to the use of the PAG.

However, there was a third, and intrinsically related, set and level of relationships which played a crucial role in one of the most pivotal moments of the case narrative. These were inter-departmental, and more specifically, between the Treasury and DCLG. Unpicking and extrapolating from what the case narrative tells us about the dynamics of this

relationship in the longer term reveals its close links to Richardson's governance - government shift.

*The significance of inter-departmental negotiations in the Westminster system and the burning platform thesis*

The case narrative illustrates how different parts of the government had quite different perspectives on the NPPF and its policy substance. Most significantly for the story told here, the Treasury and DCLG acted as distinct policy actors with different political rationalities/strategies, different degrees of bargaining power, and different reserves of policy knowledge on which to draw. To an extent, this is widely-reported received wisdom - but understanding the dynamics of this process is important for understanding the actual mechanisms through which neoliberalising policy discourse proliferate in English planning policy.

As one might expect, interviewees characterised the Treasury and DCLG/the Planning Directorate as drawing on very different wells of policy knowledge, having very different organisational cultures, and possessing very policy making rationalities. The Treasury drew on rational choice and classically market-economic policy knowledge, with Bob Neill, for example, felt that DCLG saw the planning system as a process of 'political outworking', whilst the Treasury interpreted in transactional and processual terms (Interview: Neill, 2016). The Treasury's approach to policy was regarded as more aggressively deregulatory, less 'Localist', and much more broad-brush than the junior departments' - partly because its central position gave it a more strategic outlook and made it 'naturally' less risk-averse (Interview: SCS2, 2016). DCLG's Planning Directorate was seen as providing a 'natural' counter-balance to these more gung-ho tendencies with regards to the planning system. This was expressed almost in the sense of providing a folk knowledge and cultural institutional memory about the value of the planning system's more abstract roles and features. Building on this idea of an inter-departmental 'balance', interviewees framed this relationship and the Treasury's perspective as perfectly 'rational and 'natural' within the context of the Westminster's systems mediating and rationalising systems of write-round and committees. For example:

I think you could run an argument that the mechanisms of collective cabinet agreement do have an impact on at least the clarity of the policy and the clarity of the law. And knocking the rough edges off the views of individual personalities, the machine is designed to come to a compromise... ..it's also a hugely rationalist system. It's designed to bring out the arguments and for those to be written down and for people to debate them. So DCLG write to the Treasury saying we'd like to propose the following, the Treasury write back saying; 'Well okay, but in paragraph three, point one, you say the following... Can you provide some evidence for that assertion?' So it is quite rationalist and academic... And it's probably I suppose due to the way in which the civil service was

originally constructed, by people who thought that some kind of meritocratic debate might help. (SCS2, 2016)

Though this thesis does not afford the space to discuss this point in detail, the important point here is that the relationship between departments is a systematic and negotiated one, certainly shaped by individual agency, but also by long-established protocols and traditions. Departments having different cultures and agendas, negotiations between departments, the strength of the core executive and the mediating role of the rationalist Westminster system, are all commonly associated with the UK central state. What is significant here is that these relationships are changing over time, and that they link to longer-term processes of neoliberalisation. One senior civil servant put forward might be termed the ‘burning platform’ thesis, which was supported in various ways by comments from other interviewees. This neatly summarises the argument, and runs as follows:

1. DCLG is a less senior department, so it generally attracts less politically influential ministers and civil servants. This means that it is less able to resist budget cuts and staff cuts (which are in turn driven by small-state ideology) or ‘push back’ on policy initiatives which clash with its own policy programmes<sup>90</sup>. Indeed, from 2010 to 2015 DCLG lost a higher percentage - almost 40 percent - of its staff than any other government department (Andrews, 2015).
2. This results a downwards spiral in DCLG’s bargaining power with the core executive, and it becomes an increasingly unattractive place for individuals with large amounts of political capital to move to.
3. DCLG is increasingly unable to contest the Treasury’s the more aggressive deregulatory measures (associated with the ‘Treasury view’ (Allmendinger, 2016)) through Whitehall’s formal and informal negotiating processes, and the policy knowledge and expertise the central state collectively draws on is increasingly skewed towards a foundation in the classical economics which generally dominates Treasury thinking. The ‘folk knowledge’ about the role of the planning

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<sup>90</sup> Of course, this relationship can cut both ways when conditions are right; more pro-planning reforms often coincide with moments when DCLG’s stock has been high. As the case narrative illustrates, part of the reason for the department successfully ‘pushing back’ on proposals to abolish the plan-led system was that Eric Pickles had accrued political capital following his successful role in the Tory’s election campaign (Interview: Neill, 2016; SCS1, 2016). Casting further back, it is also interesting to note that the concept of ‘spatial planning’, which repositioned, planning as playing an active role in supporting economic growth, emerged ‘in house’ from the Planning Directorate, rather than the Treasury (Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2014: 349). At the time, John Prescott – an influential figure within the Labour Party - was minister for Communities and Local Government.

system and its key principles, discussed in the case narrative, becomes increasingly difficult to apply.

4. Planning-related policy is increasingly influenced by the Treasury and the 'Treasury view'.

The interviewee who recounted the above scenario linked it to the inability of the government to produce an effective and coherent response to the 'housing crisis'. A significant side-effect of these departmental differences in perspective and agenda is that those pro-development organisations that are favoured within the 'deep and narrow' culture of engagement, and looking to lobby the government, separately target both the core executive (including the Treasury) and DCLG (Interviews: Whittaker, 2016; Neill, 2016; SCS2), leading them to have what then-minister Bob Neill (Interview: 2016) termed 'two bites of the cherry'. It is worth repeating Andrew Whittaker's (Interview: 2016) comments from the case narrative that this dynamic has become increasingly important for the Home Builders Federation's own lobbying efforts over the last few years:

Certainly, we've seen, over the last few years, DCLG become less favourable in the eyes of No. 10 and the Treasury... ...we frequently, if we are talking to people at No. 10, they will say; 'oh well, leave it to us, we'll get that through DCLG'. And we'll say; 'well, DCLG don't seem very keen on that', and they go; 'oh don't worry, we'll sort that out!'

#### *The rise of the hub model as a mode of meta-governance*

Whilst the above is only a rough sketch of just one of the ways in which interdepartmental relationships can shape spatial governance<sup>91</sup>, it does point to some of the critically important underlying dynamics which pattern and shape such processes. Indeed, the burning platform thesis points to the emergence of what is termed in the core executive studies literature a 'hub model' of governance in the UK (Christensen, 2013; Diamond, 2014; Verhoest et al, 2012).

The 'hub model' refers to an increase in the capacity of the core executive as part of an attempt to maintain some degree of policy control in the face of state hollowing-out, on one hand, and a corresponding decrease in the capacity of government departments in the face of cuts, the development of ever more complex policy networks, and the blurring of the public and private sectors (Dommitt & Flinders, 2015), on the other. This is something which Dommitt and Flinders (2015) argue has been particularly prominent in the UK since 2010 and the advent of the Coalition government, and it neatly reconciles

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<sup>91</sup> The case narrative demonstrates the role that particular individuals, leadership styles, the political orientations, court politics (Rhodes & Tiernan, 2016) and other very context-specific factors also play a huge role in shaping it, for example.

Richardson's (2017) observations regarding a shift from *governance-government* in the central state over this period, with the CSGP literatures' longstanding (and at first glance contradictory) observations of an international state-level shift from *government-governance* (Laffin, 2009; Jessop, 2015). The former is the central state's response to the latter.

Crucial to enabling the development of the hub model has been the core executive's increasing ability to process large amounts of information through platform and network technology (Esmark, 2016; Dommitt & Flinders, 2015). However, between 2010 and 2015 the deployment of such technologies noticeably increased the burden on departments by placing tighter controls and data requirements on them (Dommitt & Flinders, 2015). This overall increase in capacity in the centre and reduction in capacity in arms-length bodies and departments results in the '*hub model*' of governance. Using language which brings to mind the post-politics literature's concerns (and particularly Raco's (2013;2014), Dommitt & Flinders (2015: 1), looking beyond the central state per se, argue that the consequence of this hub model is a state architecture in which:

...a small strategic departmental core exists at the centre (or 'hub') of a vast range of arm's-length implementation mechanisms. Whilst often designed to create a leaner, smarter state, such reforms have, paradoxically, resulted in an increasingly complex and fragmented public sector that exists beyond the *direct* control of elected politicians.

In other words, the wider neoliberalisation of spatial governance, and the concomitant shift from government-governance so central to the post-politics literature, is intrinsically linked to the *governance - government* shift observable in the central state, and which clearly begins to emerge during the creation of the NPPF.

### **8.2.6 Summary and conclusions - the consequences of the 'neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model'**

#### *Possible consequences for future trajectories of spatial governance in England*

To summarise my argument so far, the systematic reworking of established policy making practices and power relations between different central state actors which first emerged during, and defined, the creation of the NPPF amounts to what could be described as the *neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model*. Indeed, in the preceding pages I have demonstrated that the way that relationships between ministers, civil servants, departments, and policy communities worked in practice were being reworked accordingly to neoliberal rationalities (through the governance-government shift and the emergence of the hub model)) are/were inseparable from the Coalition's more obviously

'spatial' spatial governance more generally associated with neoliberalisation of spatial governance in the CSGP literatures. These processes could have very real impacts on trajectories of spatial governance and planning reform in England. To summarise the preceding analysis, three seem particularly significant.

First, if the centralisation of policy power into the core executive continues as it is now, the 'Treasury view' (Allmendinger, 2017) is likely to become increasingly, or at least remain extremely, influential in planning and spatial governance reform. Second, if the capacity and policy power of DCLG and other closely planning-related government departments continues to diminish (i.e. that they remain 'burning platforms') it is likely that the Treasury, Cabinet Office, and other parts of the core executive will increasingly be forced take up strategy-level functions currently owned by DCLG, the Department for Transport, and other departments with a close interest in planning. It is worth noting on this point that recent events certainly appear to support this hypothesis, and that the core executive is indeed playing an increasingly influential role in *directly* shaping and delivering spatial governance policy. For example, the Treasury led and brokered the initial devolutionary 'City Deals' with combined authorities (Randall & Casebourne, 2016)<sup>92</sup>. More recently, in 2016 the Treasury formed the National Infrastructure Commission as an executive agency to itself. The Commission's broadest role is make recommendations for strategic infrastructure planning in the UK, but it has also recently made recommendations for and initiated regional planning in strategic corridors such as Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge (National Infrastructure Commission, 2017a; National Infrastructure Commission, 2017b), raising some fundamental questions about accountability in the process (Lock, 2017). Meanwhile, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) – a Treasury and Cabinet Office body originally set up to oversee the project management of the biggest government projects – is beginning to play a largely unnoticed, but increasingly central, role in urban development and regeneration projects. This includes the potential creation of new towns in the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor.

Thirdly, as discussed earlier, the policy making consequences of the *governance-government* shift in particular may provide dire. Richardson (2017) argues that it is likely to result in increasingly blurred lines of accountability, a greater occurrence of serious policy failure (which may be especially pronounced in the complex and contested policy-making world of planning reform in England), and represent an increasingly powerful

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<sup>92</sup> On which the Institute for Government aptly notes; 'Previous efforts to decentralise have foundered because their sponsoring department did not have the necessary clout to compel other departments to give up power.' (Randall & Casebourne, 2016)

countervailing force to the current drive to localise many spheres of spatial governance decision-making.

### *The neoliberalisation of the Westminster model*

Some of the process and impacts described above are typically associated with the process of neoliberalisation (e.g. the tendency towards ‘centralising decentralisation’<sup>93</sup>, increased path dependency, and recurring policy failure). Others point to the hybrid forms the processes takes depending on different, contingent and pre-existing practices, ideologies and institutions. From the perspective of *actually existing* and *variegated* conceptualisations of neoliberalisation, this contingency and hybridity is in itself typical of how neoliberalism unfolds in practice, and the practice-orientated perspective adopted here highlighted key aspects of how this occurred within the central state and during the creation of the NPPF. After all, the adoption of the PAG was driven by pragmatic responses to the situation at hand, alongside classically neoliberal critiques of the role of the bureaucrat in policy making and service delivery. This mixture of hybridity, pragmatism, contingency, and neoliberal ideology is something Bob Neill himself acknowledged – curiously, actually, using the term ‘neoliberal’ in the process:

‘...if you try and look at ‘Open Source Planning’ from an ideological point of view there are elements of neoliberalism there, there are also elements of traditional conservative thinking, so there are elements of different types of conservative thinking in it. So, there’s also elements of modernising thinking in it. It was just something that was really put together by people... and that was the extent of the thought that had really gone into planning. (Interview: Bob Neill, 2016)’

However, some of the impacts and processes associated with the neoliberalism of the Westminster model documented here are new, and certainly worthy of future investigation. The fact that Localism as expressed in relation to the NPPF was to a great extent about the role of the bureaucrat in central state policy making (rather than the relationships between different levels of government, or the role of the government as a whole), or that, closely related, in the central state it precipitated a shift towards more authoritarian and hierarchical modes governance more associated with ‘government’ than governance itself, may be particularly worthy of further exploration. More widely, the policy making practices/strategies/rationalities associated with creation of the NPPF and

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<sup>93</sup> Though there is surely not the space to discuss the subject in detail here, it is interesting to note that this, again, mirrors wider patterns of spatial governance under the Coalition, in logic and paradoxical outcome. Baker & Wong (2013: 95) identify a process of ‘centralised decentralisation’ which they identify as shaping the relationship between localising approaches to planning and the role of Whitehall: “The Coalition government’s fixation on a more localized approach to planning may, ironically, necessitate further centralization by Whitehall through more stringent guidance to bridge the growing institutional gap of coordinating major spatial development strategies...”

civil reform were clearly part of the wider neoliberalisation of spatial governance unfolding at the time. Localism, as part of this, manifested within the central state – as paradoxical as it seems - in the form of the PAG; an anti-bureaucratic and a ‘soft’ bureaucratic space.

*The central state as a valuable field of enquiry in the CSGP literatures, and the possible benefits of synthesis with the British political science literatures*

Overall, whilst the policy power of the Treasury and the core executive has long been alluded to in planning commentary and scholarship (though often through broad conceptual devices such as the ‘Treasury View’ (Allmendinger, 2016)), the mechanisms through which this has and is being exerted on national-level policy in *practice*, how this is contested, and how these relationships are being systematically being restructured within the central state, has not been explored in depth before. Though not without its limits (discussed below), the practice-orientated and phronetic perspective deployed here has proven to be a valuable as a first step towards ‘cracking open’ the central state and building deep, historiographically valuable, case narratives – which reveal the political-economic and spatial governance consequences of changes to policy making practices which comes to light during the creation of the NPPF.

Above all, the case narrative presented here demonstrates that this field of enquiry – the central state and the relationships between and practices of the agents that comprise it – could be a fertile avenue for further enquiry. In this endeavour CSGP literatures may benefit greatly from synthesising concepts from the core executive studies subfield of interpretive British political science, and in this exercise the concepts of the ‘hub model’ and the governance-government shift may be particularly valuable. I return to the potential next steps for CSGP research into the central state in more detail in Chapter 9, which concludes the thesis.

## 8.3 How useful is post-politics for interpreting the case narrative?

**Figure 28: Relevant Objectives: 3**

**Perform a critical analysis:** To assess how useful the concept of post-politics is to understanding the rationalities which shaped the approach the Coalition government took to creating the NPPF, and to reflect on what this suggest about current accounts of neoliberalising planning reform in England.

### 8.3.1 Introduction and summary of arguments relating to objective 3

So far, I have examined the creation of the NPPF as an instance of the neoliberalisation of the Westminster model and, drawing on the interpretive British political science literature, explored the potential consequences of this for future trajectories of spatial governance in England. In what follows I move on to respond to Objective 3, and assess how useful the lens of post-politics is for understanding the rationalities which shaped the approach the Coalition government took to creating the NPPF. As outlined in the conclusion of the literature review (part 3.4.3), I have so far ejected such a perspective, in order to avoid what Bylund (2012) terms ‘post-political correctness’ when making this assessment. Here I bring post-politics ‘back in’, and use the accounts of the NPPF’s creation and the shift in ‘post-political’ regimes from New Labour to the Coalition provided by Allmendinger & Haughton (2015) and Allmendinger (2016)<sup>94</sup> to make this assessment. Importantly, these studies also provide an empirical point of departure for critiquing the wider value of post-politics as a theoretical framework.

#### *Summary of arguments: From post-politics (back) to depoliticisation*

By examining the ways in which these post-political accounts do and do not capture the political dynamics of the practices described in the case narrative, and how these link to wider critiques of the post-politics literature, it becomes apparent that, while Allmendinger & Haughton’s (2015) account captures many of the political dynamics at play in the case narrative, Allmendinger’s (2016) struggles. In short, this is because it relies more heavily on recourse to post politics’ broad theoretical framework when attempting to explain the rationalities at play in different agents’ strategies, rather than the actual practices which comprised them. As a result, it fails to capture the dynamism

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<sup>94</sup> See Part 3.3.3 for a full summary and comparison of these accounts.

and inherent complexity of the politics of the NPPF, and of national planning policy making more generally, as they unfolded and continue to unfold in practice.

Responding to Swyngedouw (2017), Derickson (2017), and Dikec's (2017) replies to critiques of the post-politics CSGP literatures from Beveridge & Koch (2017a; 2017b) and others, I argue that a post-political framework is broadly useful for focusing critical attention on the politics of depoliticising spatial governance policy (Larner, 2014). However; if one brackets the literatures' post-foundational theoretical project from its critical-analytical focus on concrete processes of political action, it becomes unclear what exactly its theoretical project actually adds to critical enquiry - beyond encouraging an analytical focus on the political rationalities that underly particular governance practices, and their democratic consequences. Furthermore, the case narrative suggests that some of the key assumptions about policy making that underpin much of the post-politics work – most significantly the existence of a state-wide shift from government to governance, do not hold true in the central state.

The key problem with post-politics as a critical tool within CSGP research is not that it lacks integrity as a conceptual framework - as Dikec (2017) claims Beveridge & Koch (2017a) argue - but that almost the opposite is true. Its theoretical project and conceptual scaffolding is superfluous and overly-complex when, in practice, CSGP enquiry and post-politics' critical-analytical project may be better served by focusing on the more nimble and adaptable concepts. The concept of depoliticisation, in particular, may more effectively deal with multiple, competing, political rationalities and dynamics of policy episodes like the case narrative. Overall, post-politics fails to capture the nuance of the story and dynamics of the power relations at play in the case narrative. This is because, from the perspective offered by phronetic research, it neglects practice. I begin this comparative analysis with Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) account, below.

### **8.3.2 Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) account of 'post-political strategies'**

Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) account of national-level spatial governance policy making in the early days of the Coalition hinges around three 'post-political strategies' for variously 'deferring', 'displacing', or 'transferring' the political moment (described in detail in part 3.3.3, but reproduced in Figure 29, below, for reference, alongside examples provided by the authors). Allmendinger & Haughton (2015) deploy this scheme as a heuristic for tracing the ways in which the 'post-political debate' and associated national-level, neoliberalising, spatial governance policy making strategies shifted from New Labour to the Coalition, and as such, how they influenced the creation and substance of the NPPF.

**Figure 29: Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) depoliticising strategies, with a reproduction of Figure 12, which provides examples**

- a. **Deferring:** Strategies of putting off conflict to some future point in time
- b. **Displacing:** Shifting the political to other arenas and groups, such as planners
- c. **Transferring:** Taking conflict away from the immediate community and representative processes, and into 'fuzzy' communities of interest and democratic processes that may not align or map onto experiences of change 'on the ground'

	<b>Deferring the Political</b>	<b>Displacing the political</b>	<b>Transferring the political</b>
<b>Third Way</b>	Multi-sectoral and spatial coordination blurring responsibilities and locus of accountability and legitimacy. Planning as a fleet of foot process, difficult to tie down - no concrete forum for the political. Partnership-led consensus through consultation and 'front loading' involvement blurring issues of growth management. Heavily stage-managed consultations, often involving specialist consultants.	Technical, bureaucratic processes and procedures led by 'experts' and accountable to stakeholders as much as political representatives. Objective and 'scientific' identification and management of planning 'problems'.	Democratic processes around 'consensus' and partnership. 'Experts' and illusion of objectivity of quantitative-based processes and techniques in being objective. New systems of monitoring, audit and use of indicators introduced to drive forward policy implementation in pursuit of measurable, tangible outcomes.
<b>Big Society</b>	Encouraging 'local solutions' to planning 'problems' though definition of 'problem' is determined centrally around neoliberal growth. Those neighbourhoods and communities that are active and likely to resist growth engage in neighbourhood planning, sometimes unaware that important political issues are not considered 'legitimate' subjects for their work.	Growing use of financial incentives - commodification of political and appeal to individual and community self-interest.	New formulations of communities and neighbourhoods that are left to be self-selecting. Abandonment of universal coverage, for instance by neighbourhood plans, and acceptance of 'white spaces' on the policy map.

Below I examine moments of deferral, displacement, and transfer within the case narrative. This exercise demonstrates that Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) account provides valuable insights into the political strategies and rationalities of different central state actors during the creation of the NPPF, and the ways in which they sought to close down real debate about the role of the planning system, and the pro-market thrust of the NPPF. This is in contrast to Allmendinger's (2016) account (discussed in part 8.3.3). Unpacking why this contrast exists opens up important flaws in the 'post-political thesis'

which link to the critiques of post-politics discussed in the literature review – and particularly those levelled by Beveridge & Koch (2017a; 2017b) in the ‘*Urban Studies*’ debate. It also points to ways in which its critical project may be reinvigorated, particularly with regards to the study of the central state.

### *The PAG as a soft space – transferring the political*

The concept of *transfer* is particularly useful for understanding the reasons for the Coalition’s use of the PAG. Part of the logic underpinning the PAG’s use was that it would gain the ‘buy in’ of the ‘sector’ for the changes the government wanted to implement – something regarded as particularly important given the extent to which previous Labour administrations had ‘locked’ planning policy into tightly negotiated, mediated positions via its consensus-orientated approach to planning policy making<sup>95</sup>. The individuals involved were therefore selected on the basis that they were ‘key players’, or would in the future represent ‘delivery partners’. This can be interpreted as ministers attempting to partially *transfer* responsibility for the core political decisions within the NPPF to the PAG members (and therefore, vicariously, the groups which they represented), and in doing so make it seem less ‘imposed’ by the government<sup>96</sup>.

To expand, the PAG opened the policy process up in such a way that a select group of actors could be much more closely involved in policy making than would otherwise have been the case, but these actors were tightly circumscribed to excluded any voices which might seriously challenge the thrust of the intended reforms. Even civil servants were (ostensibly) excluded on the basis that they were ‘part of the problem’. I noted in Part 8.2.3 that many of the policy making rationalities and structures that shaped the PAG bore a close resemblance to the territorial soft spaces which have proliferated in the UK since the 1990s, and that the PAG could be usefully considered a type of ‘bureaucratic’ soft

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<sup>95</sup> It is worth noting that the criticisms John Howell, Bob Neill, and some senior civil servants levelled at New Labour’s approach to public engagement and consultation closely match Allmendinger & Haughton’s (2015) characterisation as described in Figure 29 (top left box), and the failings the authors see as resulting in a shift in political strategies of deferral with the transition to the Coalition. Interviewees described New Labour’s approach as ‘mediated to death’ (Interview: SCS2, 2016), ‘borne out of a very painful process of negotiation and consensus’ (Interview: SCS3, 2016), and John Howell, reflecting on the differences between the Coalition’s intended approach to engagement and New Labour’s, declared consultation to be ‘dead’ (Morgan, 2011: 2).

<sup>96</sup> Significantly, the case narrative suggests there though the public announcement of the PAG’s draft of the NPPF ended up being a confused affair, the government originally intended to keep the PAG’s work quiet, so that if the public response was critical, or it ‘didn’t deliver the outcomes they wanted’ it could distance itself from its contents, and treat them as one external suggestion amongst many (Rutter, 2012; Interview: SCS1, 2016; SCS3, 2016).

space. It is informative to draw this parallel again, here, as a way of understanding the political consequences of the way the PAG operated. Haughton et al (2013: 221) write of soft (territorial) spaces that they:

...to varying degrees, allow for particular demands to be voiced and negotiated, as long as they do not question and disrupt the overarching framework of market-led development. The collaborative and consensus-seeking stakeholder arrangements of soft spaces welcome, and even thrive on, the pluralisation of demands...

The parallels here with the PAG as an 'open' mode of policy making are clear. Critically, they go on to argue that soft spaces...

...work to turn these into particular demands that can be calculated and weighted against other particular demands, while at the same time preventing their translation into universalising demands that cannot be accommodated for in the current social order.

This again mirrors the PAG, and this perspective opens up the way in which it similarly worked to mould a range of supposedly representative views to a consensus, around a particular state strategy and with particular political outcomes, in an (in many ways unsuccessful) attempt to foreclose voices, through the transfer of the political, which may radically oppose a more pro-market role for the planning system.

#### *The shifting interface of the substantial and the technical – displacing the political*

At key moments in the case narrative ministers and other key decision makers claimed that the changes being made to national policy by the NPPF were largely 'technical', 'nothing new', and did not affect its 'substance'. These claims surfaced at various times during the creation of the NPPF - for example, when Greg Clark gave the PAG their remit, or in justifications from civil servants for their use of text from the draft they had prepared before the Coalition came to power. However, they appeared most publically in response to campaigners' claims about the likely impact of the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This represented a complete volte-face from the government's previous statements, made in the *Plan for Growth* (HM Treasury & BIS, 2011: 23), that the presumption was 'powerful' and 'new'. These claims about the NPPF's being nothing more than a technical change were therefore (at least partly) a rhetorical move to close down the political claims of campaigners, who saw the presumption as a threat to England's natural and environment and heritage, and Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) concept of *displacing* the political is valuable here for unpacking its political consequences.

To return to the language I used in the case narrative, the central argument of ministers in claiming that the NPPF did represent a significant departure in terms of the principle in favour of sustainable development from the PPSs was that; 'there is no policy change, [the campaigners] have therefore misunderstood or misrepresented the true state of

affairs, so there is no political argument for them to make'. But as I pointed out in the case narrative, the media and campaigner's claims often operated on a much more abstract level. They concerned the role the planning system should take in society, and what the overall tone of the NPPF suggested about the government's views on this issue (See Part 7.2.2).

In any case, the distinctions made by ministers between 'policy changes' and 'technical changes' is arguably a spurious one – in the English planning system changes in the tone of policy or practice can have a real impact on the way planning decisions are taken 'on the ground', and therefore their actual, material, consequences. Rather, interpreted through Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) schema, these claims amount to an effort to rhetorically *displace* the political into the realm of the apparently technical. Interpreting these claims as an exercise in displacement makes apparent that the shifting interface between the 'technical' and the 'substantial' were central to the political dynamics of the creation of the NPPF in other ways. For example, the government's claims that the changes to national policy were *only* technical acted to obscure the fact that some of the very changes the document set out to achieve (or at least enable), were indeed purposefully technical, and more about reconfiguring the way national planning policy was made, managed, and interpreted, (and the role different actors played within each of these processes) as part of the Coalition's 'post-bureaucratic' and 'open policy making' reforms (HM Government, 2012) than the substance of planning policy itself (but with no less significant consequences). This was the case, for instance, with regards to much diminished future role policy teams in DCLG were expected to play in managing national planning policy, and the greater role decision makers at the local level were supposed to play in interpreting it. The consequences of these changes were clearly, intensely, political, constituting as they did a particular, 'neoliberal' understanding of the role of the state bureaucracy in society.

Another example of the interface between the technical and substantive being used to close down dissent relates to closing down dissent at the origins, rather than outcomes, of the NPPF saga. This was the way in which the original consensus around the need for national-level planning reform rested on widely-held concerns that the existing policy suite (in the form of PPSs and associated guidance), was overly complex, in places contradictory, and difficult for decision makers to interpret. These concerns existed before the Coalition came to power, and by tapping into them the government opened up the possibility of what one civil servant described as 'whole-system' planning reforms (Interview: SCS2, 2016), which may otherwise have been hard to build the necessary political consensus for. It is interesting that so many groups who may have otherwise have been opposed to outwardly neoliberalising planning reform cautiously supported OSP's proposals for a new national framework, including the RTPI, RIBA and POS, reflects this.

Though not necessarily a *pretext* for reform - concerns about the extent to which national policy was becoming unmanageable were widespread and probably justified - foregrounding the creation of the NPPF as a technical exercise in improving usability opened up a space for action by relegating more substantial concerns about its ideological components to the background. Of course, on its flip side, this rhetorical move had the effect of casting those not supporting the reforms (especially bureaucrats) as vested interests, not in favour of a simplifying the complex system to which they were the stewards.

Though it is interesting to note that Allmendinger & Haughton (2015) associate displacement into the realm of the technical ('expert' consultants' reports and 'scientific management') more with New Labour than the Coalition, their schema helps to unpack how, in each of these ways, the 'technical' and 'substantial' were deployed in attempts to 'give the public less to react to' (Raco, 2014: 44), and therefore displace real debate about the role of the planning system and the actual impacts the document would have on spatial governance and different communities<sup>97</sup>.

#### *The civil service and ministers' competing post-political strategies*

Though there is certainly not the space here to discuss all the ways in which different sets of actors deployed strategies to defer, displace, or transfer the political, it is valuable to highlight one more way in which these concepts open up valuable perspectives on the political rationalities that underpinned the Coalition's creation of the NPPF. This differs from those previously highlighted because it concerns the extent to which different agents possessed different and, significantly, *clashing*, political strategies.

The civil service was quite aware of how contentious any attempt to change national policy would be, and (traditionally\_ apolitical within the Westminster model, they attempted to de-risk the process by moving elements of the NPPF's creation back it into the bureaucratic realm. There was thus a tug of war; ministers were attempting to *transfer* and *displace* the political through the soft, 'post-bureaucratic' space of the PAG, whilst civil servants in the Planning Directorate attempted to *displace* it by resorting to more traditional, bureaucratic, and technical processes (as, to an extent, their constitutional space bound them to do), as part of an 'honest' effort de-risk as process they saw as

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<sup>97</sup> Indeed, there is an increasing tendency in government to shape decision making in the planning system via public statements and guidance (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015), rather than formal policy change. Indeed, data I collected (but did not use – see Part 9.1.3 for details) regarding the National Planning Practice Guidance review suggests that this was part of the reason for that review being a ministerial priority at the time. Where substantial pro-market reform is possible without having to change *policy* substance, such routes may offer an increasingly tempting path of least resistance to governments.

seriously likely to result in major political backlash. Underlying the use PAG, then, was a dynamic in which bureaucrats were challenging the decisions of political representatives - but the former were generally working within well-established processes of accountability, and the latter wanted to move decision making into the opaque realm of the PAG (which, not coincidentally, the case narrative suggested also served to boost the power of the minister). Each set of actors had competing depoliticising strategies, but deployed them with similar objectives, and as I go on to argue below, it was this tension, rather than any emergence of the truly political, which defined the episode.

#### *The value of Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) analysis*

Overall, Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) schema is valuable because it sheds light on the way in which different policy making practices associated with the creation of the NPPF relate to underlying political strategies. Though, to a great extent, these were 'fudges' and 'fixes' to find enough consensus on particular points to get the NPPF to the 'finish line' of publication, each aimed to foreclose real political debate in different ways, with real democratic consequences in the form of particular groups' demands, and particular arguments, being excluded from the episode.

### **8.3.3 Allmendinger's (2016) account of the campaign against the NPPF**

I now move on to examine how useful Allmendinger's (2016) post-political account of the controversy over the NPPF is for interpreting the case narrative. As discussed in the literature review, this is a different style of analysis, carried out with slightly different goals in mind, but a comparison is, again, highly informative. Indeed, it reveals that Allmendinger's (2016) analysis poorly account for the political dynamics of the case narrative in several ways.

#### *It was not initially the Treasury and pro-growth lobby who deployed post-political strategies*

Firstly, Allmendinger does not mention the role of the PAG or its utilisation as a depoliticising strategy, nor the publication of the PAG's draft of the NPPF, all of which were central to the politics dynamics of the tale (as I discuss in more detail in part 8.3.2, below). He does, however, argue that the government's first draft (the 'Treasury version') 'read as though it had been written by different authors, each seeking to emphasize different roles for planning' (2016). This he ascribes to confusion about how to respond to the 2007/08 economic crisis, a deliberate political strategy to present different arguments to different groups and, critically, an attempt to 'mislead regarding the Coalition's true intentions' (2016). The case narrative supports this reading in as much as

there was clearly a strategy to depoliticise the NPPF, at the centre of which was the PAG. This aimed to minimise resistance to its reforms through, for example, gaining the ‘buy in’ from and building consensus amongst ‘key players’ early in the process. It also aimed to be everything to everyone. But the reason why the draft sounded like it had been written by different authors was, essentially, because it was; Firstly, the PAG (who drew heavily on the draft prepared by civil servants before the 2010 election, then the Planning Directorate (building directly on the PAG’s draft, with close oversight from Greg Clark), then the Treasury via the (‘write-round’ process), and then the Planning Directorate again. Amongst these groups, the Treasury had radically different views as to where the balance between Localist and pro-growth objectives should be struck, and this rested on a fundamentally different conceptualisation of the proper role of the planning system, anchored in the ‘Treasury view’ Allmendinger (2016) describes. Considering this, an alternative post-political reading to Allmendinger’s could frame DCLG and the PAG, in utilising a consensus-seeking approach which (ostensibly) aimed to balance the interests of the heritage/environment lobby with the pro-growth lobby, as the agents who actually deployed a classically post-political strategy. This approach did initially prove fruitful for the department; some groups expressed concerns over the PAG version and early leaked government drafts, but the policy community as a whole was cautiously optimistic. However, with the Plan for Growth (HM Treasury & BIS 2011) the Treasury torpedoed this spectacularly, with bold proclamations of a ‘powerful new presumption in favour of sustainable development’ and the idea of ‘development by default’, which went beyond previous proposals in tone if not substance (two categories which are extremely blurred in the English planning system in any case – see Part 8.3.2, below). The Treasury, and by extension the core executive, thus made its primary political objectives regarding the planning system plainly clear, at least in comparison to DCLG. The campaign groups and media responded then to this more openly political provocation, which provided clear room for argument.

*The final draft of the NPPF did not represent a ‘return of the political’*

As Allmendinger (2016) does argue, the initial response to the campaign against the ‘Treasury version’ from ministers, most notably George Osborne and David Cameron, was to hold the line that growth is paramount, and should take priority over local determination or concerns about preservation and the environment. However, ministers eventually conceded, and argued that their intentions had been misunderstood by the public and the media and that they were open to dialogue. In doing so they reverted to the more consensual tone which had been projected by DCLG. In the end, however, the ‘planning version’ of the NPPF largely retained, and to a great degree reinstated, its mixed messages. It also maintained its overall pro-growth tone - a point with which Allmendinger (2016) agrees. And yet, this reading contradicts a key part of Allmendinger’s

account - for whom the national campaign represented a challenge to purposeful ambiguity of the Government first draft (i.e. the 'Treasury version'). In his words:

The attempts to reform planning through the sleight of hand in the draft NPPF had clearly not worked to the point of being damaging to the government and forcing it to be clearer than it would have liked about its intentions. (Allmendinger, 2016)

Allmendinger goes on to argue that this 'need to clarify deliberate ambiguity' demonstrated 'a return of the political', which echoes 'the position of Rancière, amongst others, that the political is never permanently foreclosed and will always re-emerge (Allmendinger, 2016)', and that '... the debate over the draft NPPF forced some clarity' (Allmendinger, 2016). But the case narrative suggests that the Treasury-introduced language of 'development by default' and was rather clearer regarding the government's true intentions than the PAG draft, which was much more ambiguous as a result of its attempts to balance different interests and appear consensual. This was partly as a result of a wider political strategy, and partly a result of the structure of the group itself; it being made up of four individuals with different perspectives, but within a tightly prescribed range. The campaigns responded less to the Treasury version's post-political 'sleight of hand' and ambiguity, and more to the points in the draft at where it was actually more explicit about its pro-market, neoliberalising, intentions. This is, of course, multi-layered; as the case narrative showed, economic growth was positioned by the Government as being an unquestionable and objective need, alongside the culpability of the planning system in its restriction. The rebalancing of the planning system towards it *was* positioned as necessary - however, it was done so explicitly in the 'Treasury draft', and it was this which the policy community reacted to most uproariously.

Finally, and critically, in no way did the campaign against the NPPF represent the 'part of those that have no part' (to paraphrase Derickson's (2017: 45) description of the Rancierian properly political). Despite civil servants and ministers' various attempts close down debate through the strategies described by Allmendinger & Haughton (2015), it was the political 'voice' of the well-resourced, long-established, heritage and environmental campaign groups that echoed through well-established representative-democratic institutions and processes (select committees, consultations and petitions), and the mainstream media, to exert influence. Groups like the RSPB and CPRE have long-established track record of policy influence in Whitehall, and the debate was very much within the realms of politics. In fact, from this perspective, it is rather difficult to see where, or even whether, the 'properly political' actually emerged during the case narrative.

### *The PAG, governance-government, and accountability in the central state*

Given the above observation, Allmendinger's (2016) analysis misses what is arguably one of the most democratically concerning element of the case narrative, which I discussed in the first half of this chapter with reference to the British political science literature. This was the use of the PAG as a post-bureaucratic soft space, against a backdrop in which the civil service's ability to provide critical and 'objective' policy input has been increasingly undermined and attacked by ministers (Richards & Smith, 2016), and the Westminster model is increasingly becoming a 'legitimizing mythology' (Richards & Smith, 2016) or 'constitutional myth' (Rhodes, 2005) for a way of governing that no longer exists'. This disconnect between practice and rhetoric raising serious questions for accountability in central state policy making (National Audit Office, 2016). Yet the shift in much of the post-politics' literature on the government-governance shift - as opposed to the governance-government shift the British political science literature discussed here might suggest has occurred within the central state (Richardson, 2017) - alongside its often ambivalent stance towards representative democracy, complicates attempts to analyse the democratic consequences of such attempts to undermine accountability mechanisms within Whitehall. As Raco (2014) points out, these mechanisms may be deeply flawed and exclusionary, but are themselves often the ultimate result of real political contestation and struggle.

### *Summary of the limitations to Allmendinger's (2016) analysis, and reflections on the Urban Studies Debate and phronetic perspective*

Overall, the key problem with Allmendinger's account is that in seeking recourse to the post-political/post-foundational framework and the necessary emergence of a truly-political moment, the nuance of the case, which gives rise to a very different interpretation of events, is lost. By bringing post-politics 'back in' at this point I have revealed how it fails to capture the multifaceted and overlapping political dynamics present during the creation of the NPPF. Allmendinger's recourse to post-politics' conceptual framework serves to obscure, rather than illuminate, the actual mechanisms through different, and sometimes clashing, political agendas were pursued by different actors, and the critical consequences of this.

### **8.3.4 A critical comparison of the accounts**

Considering that both analyse the same events, and both (ostensibly) deploy post-political lenses, why does Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) schema prove so much more valuable as a way of interpreting the political strategies different actors deployed during the case narrative than Allmendinger's (2016) account? Quite simply, in contrast to the former,

the latter's 'post-political strategies' link together as constituent parts of a wider 'post-political regime' - *but they also* provide a flexible heuristic which aids the identification of separate, interlocking, processes of depoliticisation as part of a wider regime shift. It is this second aspect of their analysis which is key. The three 'political strategies' draw attention 'down' to the concrete *practices* and processes through which power relations operate in concrete form, rather than, in the case of Allmendinger's (2016) account 'up' to abstract frameworks and stark conceptual categories (the distinction between 'politics' and the 'political', the necessary re-emergence of the political after it is foreclosed, etc., etc...) that actually serve to obscure the complexities and 'messiness of actually existing urban politics' (Nicholls and Uitermark, 2016: 3).

Returning to the *Urban Studies* debate about the limits of post-politics, these findings support Beveridge & Koch's (2017a; 2017b) position that post-politics' conceptual framework and vocabulary, with its clearly demarked realms of 'politics' and the 'political', can actually obscure the complexity and heterogeneity of politics in practice when applied to empirical cases in CSGP research. The post-foundational theory underpinning this scholarship may be sound in itself, but fails when applied because as in the CSGP literatures because, from a phronetic perspective, starting from a theoretical standpoint rends the social from the context which makes it meaningful. Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) analysis was valuable because it began instead with the practices/strategies deployed and so avoided these epistemological pitfalls. The phronetic perspective supplied by the case narrative presented here was similarly valuable, for similar reasons.

### **8.3.5 A potential way forwards...**

#### *Bracketing post-politics' theoretical framework from its critical-analytical project*

From a normative perspective, post-politics' critical-analytical project is clearly a valuable one. As several of its critics have themselves noted, its focusing of scholarly attention on 'historical relationship between the city and the political' is 'timely and important' (Beveridge & Koch, 2017a: 43), and its aims to identify opportunities for radical, emancipatory, social change and 'mobilise political sympathies' (Larner, 2014: 2004), are certainly valuable. So, given this critique of the post-politics CSGP literatures, what should the next steps for this project be? How might its critical-analytical project be better served? Separating what the post-politics literature is trying to achieve, from the conceptual framework it deploys, is an important first step.

To expand; if one brackets, a) the post-politics literature's post-foundational theoretical framework, from; b) its overall 'critical-analytical project', focused on interrogating the

democratic consequences of state political strategies and practices, revealing the part of those that have no part' (Derickson, 2017), identifying 'orders of domination', and nurturing 'disruptions that have the potential for more democratic forms of urban life' (Dikeç, 2017: 52), it becomes unclear from a pragmatic perspective what the former adds to the latter.

Post-politics' post-foundational conceptual framework actually hinders its ability to capture the heterogeneity of the political in practice. Allmendinger & Haughton's (2015) analysis worked precisely because it did not, in its actual application, rely on recourse to this theory. Indeed, it is instructive to note that the scheme Allmendinger & Haughton (2015) successful deploy in their analysis could be completely severed from the post-political theory and language which gives rise to it, and in its analysis it actually focuses far more on the more nimble concept of 'depoliticisation'. There is no reason why their three-way scheme should necessarily be coupled to post-politics theoretical scaffolding. In fact, it worked well precisely because of this. This points to a potential way forwards for post-politics' critical-analytical project.

*From post-politics (back) to practices of depoliticisation in the central state*

Given these quite fundamental flaws outline above, how might its valuable critical-analytical project be served? Here it is again valuable to turn to the interpretive British political science literatures, and this time to the concept of *depoliticisation*.

Within the post-politics CSGP literature, depoliticisation is just one type of post-political strategy (Beveridge & Koch, 2017b; Swyngedouw, 2017), but this need not necessarily be the case. Wood & Flinders (2014), writing in the field of British political science, explore governmental, societal, and discursive 'faces' of depoliticisation<sup>98</sup>. They couple the work of the post-foundationalists Zizek (2002), Mouffe (2005) and Rancière (1995) to the third of these faces. Crucially, in doing so they do not position the post-foundational perspective 'above' the notion of depoliticisation, but rather 'below' it. Depoliticisation is presented here as an adaptable, nimble, concept through which the post-political may be explored, rather than other way around.

Uncoupling the strategies, subjects, and critically - practices - of *depoliticisation* from the post-political theoretical scaffolding in this way maintains a critical focus on the ways in which voices are marginalised and the truly-political displaced, but it also side-steps 'post-political correctness' (Bylund, 2012) and the 'post-political trap' (Beveridge & Koch,

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<sup>98</sup> By Wood & Flinders' (2014) reading most CSGP writing on the concept of depoliticisation has focused on the first of these governmental strategies, and crucially,

2017a). It reduces the dangers of binary distinctions between the post-political and the proper-political, and fatalistic assertions of a bleak 'post-political' historical condition which obscure opportunities for the emergence truly-political in spatial governance.

Indeed, thinking in terms of *practices* of depoliticisation themselves brings about and a more process- and action-orientated perspective which provides plenty of space for 'strange fits' (Bylund, 2012) and 'antagonisms and heterogeneities that run through neoliberal political projects' (Larner, 2014: 197). The phronetic approach, with its emphasis on letting case studies and practices 'speak for themselves' as a kind of 'virtual reality' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) may be uniquely well suited to this kind of research, and resonates strongly with the post-foundationalists core aims. Bylund (2012: 323), citing Latour (2005), makes this case in terms of the language and vocabulary of post-politics:

A proper political attitude could very well be to encourage many different languages, vocabularies, and practices of making diagnosis and propose possibilities who do not even use the words 'political' or 'politics' – just as there are ways to make a social analysis without really using the term 'the social' (cf. Latour, 2005)

Overall, and perhaps ironically, the CSGP post-politics literature's critical-analytical project might be best served by jettisoning the conceptual/philosophical framework that defines it as a distinct critical approach, and instead loosening up its conceptual apparatus to focus on practices of depoliticisation. Where central state spatial governance policy becomes depoliticised, increasingly unaccountable, prone to massive failure, or increasingly authoritarian, it may well be the kind of practice-orientated, flat, and empirical (Foucault, 1982) research presented here which most effectively provides 'ways in' for understanding how it works in practice and holding it to political account. The complex conceptual framework of post-politics in many ways obfuscates this project, even when from a theoretical perspective, a dynamic understanding of power in practice is exactly what it sets out to achieve.

# 9. Reflections and potential next steps

## 9.1 Potential next steps for CSGP research concerned with the central state

### 9.1.1 Introduction

Having responded to the research questions, in this concluding chapter I reflect on the research process and put forward some conceptual and methodological ‘next steps’ for future CSGP research concerned in some way with the central state. Given that an overarching goal of this thesis is to conceptually ‘flesh out’ and ‘open up’ the central state as an important area of research in the CSGP literatures in its own right, this is a particularly important task. I thus go into some detail here, and begin by sketching out three conceptual ‘principles’ which this research suggests may provide effective platforms for future CSGP research into the central state. I then reflect on other potential avenues for future research which emerge from this thesis – particularly those concerning unused case data and addressing methodological limitations, before bringing the thesis to a conclusion with Part 9.2. There, I bringing myself back into the ‘impressionistic research tale’ introduced at the outset of the thesis, to reflect on the effectiveness of the phronetic methodology and my own research journey.

### 9.1.2 Three principles for future CSGP enquiry into the central state

In the spirit of phronetic enquiry, the following ‘principles’ are not intended as models or theories, over-arching summaries, or ‘take-home points’ - to produce such theorisations would ‘close down’ the case narrative (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Rather, I put these principles forwards as potentially productive conceptual and methodological starting-points for further enquiry into the role of the UK central state as a policy making site and set of actors. They are drawn from the intersection of the thesis’ phronetic conceptual framework, the interpretive political science research into the central state discussed in the previous chapter, and most importantly, the case narrative. They may be valuable for future CSGP studies that concern the central state specifically, but could equally be of value for research in which the central state is just one important actor amongst a much wider cast. These ‘principles’ are;

- a. Disaggregating the central state in analyses of shifts in spatial governance

- b. Exploring the role of key individuals
- c. Developing an ‘ethnographic sympathy’ for the policy work of state agents in the central state

For each I discuss its significance for future CSGP research, present illustrative examples from the case narrative, and put forward literature from which future enquiries into this subject could productively draw.

*Disaggregating the central state and state power in critical analyses of spatial governance and planning reform*

This first principle is perhaps the most self-evident of the three; the UK central state is not a homogenous actor, and when writing of ‘the government’, one is actually discussing a quite heterogeneous set of policy actors. Each possess different and sometimes clashing spatial governance policy agendas, resources, ideologies and cultures, and it may be valuable for future CSGP researcher to more explicitly disaggregate in their analyses of the central state, and foreground these differences. The case narrative clearly illustrates as much - the creation of the NPPF was laced through with intersecting conflicts between the Coalition partners, between government departments and the core executive, between different ministers and other senior individuals, and civil servants and ministers. The shifting political dynamics of these relationships fundamentally shaped the NPPF’s form, and Ministers’ efforts to reconfigure key elements of these relationships (i.e. through the neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model) were a central part of their wider reform programme.

That central government is not one homogenous policy actor is not a new observation by any means; such a disaggregated perspective brings to mind Jessop’s (2015: 55) ‘strategic-relational’ conceptualisation of the state more widely not as a ‘thing’, but a set of changing power relations between different groups:

Instead of looking at the state as a substantial, unified thing or unitary subject, the [strategic relational approach] widens its focus, so as to capture not just the state apparatus but the exercise and effects of state or as a contingent expression of a changing balance of forces that seek to advance their respective interests inside, through, and against the state system.

And, looking to British political science literature drawn on in the analysis, similar observations have been directly applied to the central state as a whole. Bevir and Rhodes (2008; 2010), for example, conceptualise a ‘decentred’ and ‘stateless’ state through their work studying the core executive, and this has been a highly influential in that sphere of academia. Elsewhere, Hallsworth et al (2011) characterise policy making in the UK central state as being more like a court room than a laboratory, with the policy process being as much about finding consensus and winning arguments across central government, as it is

about actual policy *making*. In this vein, the ongoing importance of ‘court politics’ is a recurring theme within the British political science literature (e.g. Dommitt & Flinders, 2015; Bevir & Rhodes, 2008). Indeed, negotiation and conflict between various parts of the central state is an endemic and defining feature of the way in which the Westminster system operates (Moran, 2015; Wright, 1996), and, much of the formal institutional and procedural policy making architecture of the UK central state<sup>99</sup> is geared towards the ‘rational’ resolution of such conflicts over different groups’ ability to harness state power (Moran, 2015; Jessop, 2015). Critically, the case narrative revealed how these processes are systematically weighted – and reweighted or subverted - in favour of particular groups with particular interests in different models of spatial governance, and different types of policy knowledge.

Overall, explicitly disaggregating and foregrounding different elements of the central state in CSGP research would sensitise it to the ways in which national-level spatial governance policy is (at least in part) the product of the systematically mediated interplay of different central state actors, with different policy knowledges and different ideologies<sup>100</sup>. That the central state is a varied and sometimes chaotic collection of actors is something that may appear somewhat self-evident, but which hasn’t yet been subject to rigorous critical analysis in terms of its consequences for spatial governance.

#### *The role of key individuals and the potential value of biography as a research approach*

A disaggregated conceptualisation of the central state naturally opens up the second perspective which could be usefully emphasised in future CSGP studies of the subject; the role of key individuals, and what their biographies may tell us about the central state forces and relationships driving patterns of national-level spatial governance. The significance of individuals was something all interviewees highlighted as being vital in shaping the practices and strategies used in the development of OSP and the NPPF. For example, Greg Clark’s personality and own beliefs were highlighted as important to understanding how the PAG was designed and functioned. Similarly, Miles Gibson - a ‘planner’ - being in the Cabinet Office powerfully altered negotiating dynamics between

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<sup>99</sup> For example, the ‘write-round’ process, ‘written ministerial submissions’ and Cabinet committees

<sup>100</sup> A welcome by-product of a disaggregated perspective may well be improved conceptual and definitional precision in the CSGP literatures when discussing the role of the central state, and its different elements, in different governance processes. For example, the case narrative illuminated how features of the Coalition’s localism reforms were not a critique of government power per se, but of *bureaucratic* power as a specific aspect of this. In contrast, ministers explicitly worked to increase their power. Similarly, though there may be a state-level shift government-governance shift, the central state is experiencing the opposite, with real consequences for patterns of spatial governance reform.

DCLG and the core executive, and the personal experiences of planning housing at the local level of those involved in writing OSP are crucial for understanding why that document framed the politics of housing development and localism as it did.

Common sense would suggest that this applies beyond the policy episodes studied here. However, as Cocks (2013) argues with regards to the wider governance of urban regeneration literature, work which focuses on the role of key individuals in urban governance is 'few and far between' (Cocks, 2013: 581). This lacuna has important consequences for geography and planning literatures more widely:

...without an upfront consideration of the role of structurally defined agency in governance networks, a key empirical component of the process is remaining overlooked and under-theorized. Significant to generating a useful understanding of these relationships is identifying the positionalities and relationalities of individuals within structural settings and thus enabling an assessment of their specific contribution. (Cocks, 2013: 576)

Thus, an understanding of individuals within governance processes is, in turn, important for understanding how wider structural forces operate in practice. This may be particularly significant in the context of the Westminster system, which is systematically geared towards empowering key individuals in specific positions. The number of elite individuals involved in making high-level decisions within it is comparatively both small and insular (Wright, 1996). This results in tightly bunched policy networks one could hypothesise as being more open to the influence of key individuals. In sum; the acting space affording to individuals, and the role of interpersonal relationships are important structural features of the UK's national-level policy making architecture and culture.

Furthermore, the case narrative suggests that the political/critical consequences of these personal dynamics, and how they are being reconfigured (or neoliberalised as they were described here) may be increasingly important to pay attention to. The PAG, for example, was created as a 'soft' and 'open' bureaucratic space, and amplified the influence of individuals (including Greg Clark) by circumventing normal bureaucratic restraints. The governance-government shift is also likely to increasingly concentrate power into the hands of the Cabinet. If, with the advent of 'hub model', 'open policy making' and the wider neoliberalisation of the Westminster Model, these kinds of bureaucratic spaces proliferate, understanding the role of individuals in the policy process may become increasingly valuable.

On the face of it, individual personalities, connections, and careers might not be of obvious significance to systematically exploring wide patterns of spatial governance, but there are plenty of examples to suggest that they are. To illustrate this point, we find through the biographical details of those involved in developing OSP and the NPPF (captured in

footnotes throughout the case narrative) that particular individuals emerge with striking persistence throughout the story. Interviewees pointed out that the planning consultant John Rhodes (Director of the planning consultancy Quod), was intimately and centrally involved with no fewer than four high-profile policy making episodes over the last eight years. This apparent informal ‘Policy Tsarship’<sup>101</sup> brings with it important question of propriety and effectiveness (Levitt & Solesbury, 2013), is suggestive of a very direct form of the regulatory/policy capture Raco (2014), and illuminates the ways that non-government interests may influence planning policy at the point of implementation, as well as agenda-setting (i.e. Haughton & Allmendinger, 2016). Particular organisations also appear prominently. For example, alongside the more well-known think tank the Policy Exchange, many of the influential individuals involved in the creation of OSP and the early days of developing the NPPF were affiliated in various ways with the think tank Localis. While Policy Exchange generally focused on economic reform and the role of the market, the latter focused on devolution. In other words, each was doing different discursive work.

The policy transfer and mobilities literatures (see McCann & Ward, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2015) may provide an interesting ‘way in’ for thinking-through what these individuals and others tell us about particular governance processes in critical and geographically-sensitive way. This body of work emphasises that by tracing the movement of policies (often via the movement of individuals around the world one can gather critical insights into global circuits of knowledge, ideas, and policy models, and the mechanisms through which these travel (McCann, 2010). The movement of particular individuals can be central to these processes (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000). As demonstrated above and in the case narrative, a similar effect is observable here, but with regards to individuals’ career trajectories and biographical details<sup>102</sup>. Tracing the ways in which particular individuals become involved in specific situations or whole policy episodes illuminates the circuits of policy knowledge, ‘informational architectures’ (McCann, 2010: 114) institutions, path-dependencies (Booth, 2011; Couch et al, 2011), and geographies which inform or structure the decisions of key decision-makers in the central state.

There is thus a strong argument to be made for methodological value of explicitly and systematically studying the biographical details of individuals involved in specific policy

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<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, Levitt & Solesbury (2013) link policy Tsar appointments to the notion of ‘open policy making’, and note that the number of Tsarships increased markedly under the Coalition.

<sup>102</sup> The policy mobilities and transfer literature discusses the geographical mobility of different social groups, but not in a biographical sense (e.g. Urry, 2002; Hannam et al, 2006; Uteng & Cresswell, 2008; Larner, 2002; Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000)

episodes – especially in the central state - as a way of tracing wider power relations and flows of policy knowledge.

*‘Cast adrift in an ocean of storms’: developing an ethnographic sympathy for policy work in the central state*

Partly as a result of the competing agendas of different groups and individuals within the central state (Rhodes, 2014; Moran, 2015), a condition of near-constant crisis and crisis management pervades it. Rhodes (2014: 104) goes as far as to describe political administrators (senior civil servants and ministers) in the central state as being ‘cast adrift in an ocean of storms’. Theirs is a world defined by ‘coping and the appearance of rule, not strategic planning’ (Rhodes, 2014: 104). He explains:

...Their priority and their skills are about running a government and surviving in a world of rude surprises. The goal is willed ordinariness. They do not need more risk. They are adrift in an ocean of storms... Ministers and permanent secretaries have to juggle the contradictory demands posed by recurring dilemmas, and still appear in control. Policy emerges from routine and builds like a coral reef. It is not a matter of solving specific problems but of managing unfolding dilemmas and their inevitable unintended consequences. There is no solution but a succession of solutions to problems that are contested and redefined as they are “solved”...

This evokes Charles Lindblom’s famous conceptualisation of public administration and planning as being defined by ‘muddling through’ (Lindblom, 1959) via incremental steps, rather than any kind of truly strategic, scientific, process. But I don’t wish to put forward a policy and decision-making model here, as Lindblom does. Rather, the third principle I present is that what might be called an ‘ethnographic sympathy’ for, or sensitivity to, the everyday complexities state actors face in the central state policy making milieu may be valuable for interpreting how the political dynamics of policy episodes unfold in practice in the central state.

The case narrative and analysis vividly illustrates the extent to which the (post)political strategies deployed by different actors during the creation of the NPPF were about ‘coping’, and pragmatically finding enough consensus to navigate the central state’s mediating mechanisms to produce some sort of coherent, functional, policy. The sense that policy making in the central state is a barely possible, skin-of-your-teeth bureaucratic ballet bleeds right through the case narrative. The NPPF was a manifesto commitment developed against the backdrop of a global financial crisis which had left all of the major political parties’ policy programmes in disarray (Allmendinger, 2016). It concerned a multi-levelled ‘wicked’ policy problem in the form of the ‘housing crisis’ which was the subject of divisions within the Coalition, as well as within the Conservative Party. It received a good deal of (often alarmist) media attention, and was being delivered by a form of government – coalition – which hadn’t been seen in Westminster since World

War Two. There was even disagreement within the government about the actual status of the NPPF - was it technically policy, or technically guidance? The case narrative vividly illustrates quite how close the process of drafting the NPPF was to collapsing under the weight of competing/opposing interests inside the government whilst contending with technical complexity, limited resources, a parliamentary calendar that imposed severe time constraints (Hallsworth et al, 2011) and pressure from campaign groups sitting on both sides of the argument. At some points, all that seemed to keep the NPPF project from collapsing complete was the sweat and blood of civil servants in the Planning Directorate.

Viewed the light of this lived experience, the depoliticising strategies deployed by policy makers, and apparently post-political aspects of the NPPF itself (such as its purposeful definitional 'fuzziness' and drive to shift complexity from the central state to the local/neighbourhood levels) must be interpreted, at least in part, as a product of particular strategies and practices designed simply to *get policy done* in Westminster. In the language of post-politics, this represents the triumph of 'politics' over the 'political' simply as part of an attempt to produce anything at all. As I argued in the analysis, the failure of Allmendinger (2016) and Allmendinger and Haughton's (2015) accounts of the creation of the NPPF to capture this fact reflects the limits of post-politics as a critical lens for enquiry in the CSGP literatures.

This is not to say that this 'ethnographic sympathy' for policy work in the central state should displace a critical perspective. Rather, an awareness of the ways in which different discourses operate through these everyday challenges and emotive pressures to shape decision making in different ways would sharpen and complement existing critique. For sure, as the case narrative illustrated, the strained policy making environment caused by the Coalition's neoliberalising/localist approach to government and civil service reform programme influenced the way in which the NPPF was created. The 'ongoing business' (Cook & Wagenaar, 2012) of performing in this environment, and the always-emerging practices, strategies and rationalities of *getting policy done* in the central state, therefore need to be interpreted, critically, in the light of this lived environment, this bureaucratic struggle, and the power relations which shape it.

Examples of current research which possesses the required emotive sensibilities and applies them to critical issues of spatial governance can be found in fine-grained studies of local 'frontline' planning work, professionalism and organisational culture in the light of neoliberalism (e.g. Clifford, 2016; Inch, 2010; 2012; Abram, 2004). Meanwhile, the ethnographic diverse economies literatures that examine the social and informal economies provides a similarly valuable reservoir of work in this mould (it being no coincidence that some of the key critiques of post-politics covered in the literature sprung from this body of work (e.g. Larner, 2014).

### 9.1.3 Other avenues for future research

Having presented three potentially fruitful conceptual starting points for future CSGP research on the central state, below I identify two further potential avenues that relate to, firstly, case data I collected and partially analysed but did not use here, and secondly, opportunities for future CSGP research to overcome this thesis' methodological trade-offs relating to case selection. From a practical perspective, former offers the most immediate 'next step' for further enquiries into this research topic. As described in the research design, I initially collected a large amount of data on three different planning policy episodes. These were the creation of the Localism Act 2011, the creation of the NPPF (and with it, OSP), and the National Planning Practice Guidance Review (NPPGR) (2012-2013). However, in order to focus on producing a deep, phronetic, account of policy making practice in the central state, this thesis analysed only the second of these. This left a large amount of rich and interesting documentary and interview data on the creation of the Localism Act and the NPPGR unused, much of which directly concerns themes explored in this thesis.

#### *Unused case data 1 - the Localism Act and parliament as an urban policy actor*

The data on the Localism Act 2011 includes that drawn from a partially complete 'amendment analysis'<sup>103</sup> of the Localism Bill. The aims of this analysis were to assess the degree of impact the UK parliament had upon the Act's final form, what parts of the Act parliament targeted, who exerted this influence, its consequences for the creation of the NPPF and the NPPGR, and more broadly, how the legislature might shape spatial governance policy making in the central state. Though I did not complete the amendment analysis when it became apparent that it would be more productive to focus on the NPPF, its preliminary findings strongly suggested that the legislature exerted a far higher degree of influence over the Localism Act than is assumed (or that academia generally assumes parliament has over the executive). The case narrative also points to the impact of CLG Select Committee on the development of the NPPF, and more widely, interviewees often highlighted parliament as an influential force on day-to-day policy work and the form

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<sup>103</sup> Amendment analysis is a method for assessing the degree to which legislative scrutiny is able to influence government policy. Though it has evolved over time, it has been deployed for some time by British political scientists (Griffith, 1974; Shephard & Cairney, 2004; Cairney, 2006; Russell & Cowley, 2015; Russell et al, 2015, Russell et al, 2017), and entails tracing amendments to bills as they pass through the legislative process. The success rate and number of amendments tabled or instigated by non-government MPs is then recorded, alongside the parts of the bill altered, at what stage this occurred, and who was involved. A qualitative analysis of debate records and interviews with key participants then supplies contextual data. Very generally, the higher the number of substantive amendments successfully tabled or instigated by non-government MPs, the higher the impact of parliament on the bill studied.

spatial governance policy took. These are findings worthy of further examination in their own right, but they also beg a wider question; how does the changing type and degree of legislative influence which the UK legislature exerts over the executive shape trajectories of planning reform in England? Indeed, recent political events appear to suggest that parliament may have a high level of impact on urban and spatial policy. The Lords recently subjected the Government to high-profile defeats on planning-related Bills, doing so no fewer than 18 times on the Conservative Government's Housing and Planning Bill 2016 (The Constitution Unit, 2017), and six times on the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill 2016 (The Constitution Unit, 2017).

Exploring the *character* of this influence, as well as its extent, could also be of interest to the CSGP literatures. For example, much of the Lords' legitimacy derives from its claims to 'expertise' (Crewe, 2005), and there appears to be a large amount of this in the Upper House concerning planning-related subjects. Data collected by Russell & Benton (2010) suggests that in 2010 slightly under a tenth of its 699 Peers had some expertise in planning-related policy area (if roughly defined to include policy fields such as transport, local government, and property consultancy) and, as one might imagine, the current Register of Lords' Interests shows that significantly more have strong personal links to the property and development industries (UK Parliament, 2017). What does this mean for how it exerts policy influence on planning policy, and what does it mean for its legitimacy as an urban policy actor?

If the UK legislature is indeed a more influential (urban) policy actor than is often assumed - as recent research in the field of UK legislative studies strongly suggests is the case (Russell et al, 2015; 2017; Russell & Cowley, 2015; 2017) – and if it has particular characteristics which may shape its interests in planning and spatial governance, further investigation into the role of Parliament urban/spatial policy actor (or actors) may be of merit. Where the legislative process is of central interest to this enquiry, amendment analysis may present a valuable and innovative tool for CSGP literatures.

#### *Unused case data 2 - the National Planning Practice Guidance Review*

The other unused data relates to the National Planning Practice Guidance Review (2012-2013). Like the NPPF, this was another part of the Coalition Government's 'whole system' planning reform agenda (Interview: SCS1, 2016) and aimed to streamline the government's national-level planning guidance after the NPPF had done this for policy. Unlike the NPPF, there have been no academic analyses of the NPPGR, despite parliamentary evidence (Communities and Local Government Select Committee, 2013), media commentary (e.g. Hope, 2012c) and data collected during the course of this thesis (Interviews: CS1, 2016; CS2, 2016; CS3, 2016; CS5, 2016; Simon Marsh, 2016; CS6, 2016; SCS1, 2016; Andrew Whittaker, 2016; PB2, 2016; CS6, 2016; LPA1, 2016) pointing to its

potential impact on planning practice and future policy making, and concerns about the approach taken.

Further, preliminary findings on the NPPGR policy episode suggested that civil servants and ministers took a much more conventional approach to public engagement during the creation of the new guidance suite than which characterised the saga of the NPPF, but that the concepts underpinning both its form and creation were curiously techno-centric. Many of them echo those that framed *Open Source Planning* (The Conservative Party, 2010a) and *Control Shift* (The Conservative Party, 2009a) - 'open' policy making be a good example. The new guidance suite is now 'online-first' rather than static and paper-based, and DCLG is able to update planning guidance almost 'on the fly', with minimal external involvement.

Together, these observations raise important questions about the role of these technocratic concepts in shaping national policy making, and how they evolved/mutated following the publication of OSP; whether government 'learned' from the NPPF episode and deployed different depoliticising strategies to foreclose political debate around the NPPGR (much as Allmendinger & Haughton, 2015, describe in relation to shift in 'post-political regimes' from the New Labour to the Coalition government), and; the impact of the Coalitions civil service reforms (which were beginning to bite in earnest by early 2013) on spatial governance policy making.

#### *The potential for longitudinal research and a multiple case design*

Examined separately, the two unused data sets discussed above offer potentially valuable case studies of spatial governance reform and policy making in the central state in their own rights. However, as discussed in the research design, taken together as part of a multiple case design (Yin, 2009), they may provide an opportunity to build an empirically-grounded longitudinal picture of how policy making and spatial governance practices/strategies/rationalities in DCLG changed over the course of the Coalition government, how the (post)political strategies underlying these shifts related to one another, and how they relate to wider patterns of spatial governance.

Though this thesis did begin to get a sense of how shifts in the UK central state may be influencing patterns of spatial governance by deploying previously developed concepts, and the decision to focus on one case in thesis was one taken for methodological reasons, developing these case studies would give a firmer and more empirically-grounded sense of these trajectories across related cases, as well as an opportunity to rigorously test the value of the concepts this thesis drew on from interpretive political science.

## 9.2 Impressionistic reflections on a phronetic research journey

### 9.2.1 Final reflections on the phronetic approach

Because of its focus on values, praxis, and power, the experiences of the researcher themselves are central to the practice of phronetic social science research. Phronesis is something the researcher themselves should practice, as well as study – it is something to be cultivated by the researcher, as well as studied. Indeed, for Aristotle:

‘...phronesis as an intellectual virtue is not obtained by stepping back and contemplating reality from an objective distance, but comes from getting one’s hands dirty by actively confronting the problems of the day. (Flyvbjerg et al, 2012: 288)

I presented the research design and methodology as an ‘impressionistic research tale’ (Van Maanen, 1988) partly in order to capture this iterative, faltering, learning process. Here I bring myself back into the tale, and conclude this thesis by reflecting on the phronetic methodology and my own ‘research journey’.

#### *Fleshing out the spectral central state*

So how effective was the phronetic approach for responding to the research questions concerning the central state? The case narrative certainly supplies the most in-depth, critical, account of policy making in the central state that currently exists in the CSGP literatures - so in this respect it did what it was deployed to do. But whether or not a different conceptual framework would have been as or more successful is an impossible question to answer. It is true that the case narrative is, in some respects, a relatively conventional historical account – but on the other hand it was the phronetic framework which illuminated the research subject as being of academic importance in the first place. Indeed, the phronetic approach’s flexible framework, which was loose enough to provide the ‘conditions for surprise’ (Wagenaar, 2011) and allow the pursuit of themes as they emerged, was well suited to an exploratory study such as this. In future studies of the central state as a site and/or collection of spatial governance actors, an alternative framework may well be more productive - but it was a phronetic perspective which opened up this research area to me in the first place.

A similar and very closely related conundrum is whether I needed to take the ‘insider approach’ to collecting data that I did; would not doing so have produced the same results, but with more rigour? Would I really have had significantly less access research access with a more conventionally academic approach? I think the answer here is similar to the

response to the question posed above, regarding the phronetic framework - a conventional approach may well have been sufficient, but policy and governance practice within the central state is a new subject for CSGP research, and concerns about access to this field are well documented in other disciplines. Considering this, I may not have even conducted this research at all, for fear of it failing, without the comfort afforded by the blanket of my supposed 'insidership' – regardless of how much it actually, materially, enriched the data I collected. Overall, future research may well move on from on the phronetic perspective and 'insider' status I tried to cultivate during data collection, but in the time and the place in which this thesis took place, it provided an effective start point for inquiry into a field that's surely worth of future exploration.

### *Assessing and critiquing post politics*

This research's other central concern was to assess how useful the post-politics is for understanding the political strategies deployed by different agents during the NPPF's creation, and elsewhere. On this account, the phronetic approach is more easily judged to have been a powerful platform for critique; by ejecting post-politics from the case narrative and then bringing it 'back in' in the analysis, it provided an effective means of judging post-politics as a 'matter of concern', rather than 'pre-supposing' it, in the words of Beveridge & Koch (2017: 37). Indeed, part of the reason the phronetic approach was so valuable in this exercise was that it provided exactly what critics such as Larner (2014), Bylund (2012) and North et al (2017) have accused post-politics research of failing to: an account which focused on 'communities of practice', and which captured the complexity and heterogeneity of governance processes, without erasing valuable oddities and 'strange fits' by relying on a rigid analytical vocabulary (Beveridge & Koch, 2017).

### **9.2.2 Lyre players**

Almost five years after it started, my PhD research journey finally came to an end. Through being in the field, and navigating ethical, practical, and sometimes emotional challenges along the way, I developed a tacit, hands-on, understanding of the research process, Westminster, and how to do research in such a setting. This, from an Aristotelian perspective, is something impossible to truly glean from the textbooks, journals, and modules a student digests before sleeves are rolled up and research actually done. In a sense, on the journey I'd actually *become* a researcher. After-all, 'for things we have to learn before can do them', writes Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, 'we learn by doing them... men become builders by building, and lyre players by playing the lyre...'. (Aristotle, 2009: Book II, para 1)

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# Appendices

Appendices 1: Interview dates and codes

Role	Anon. name (where relevant)	Role at the time of the NPPF's creation	Date	Taped?	#
Civil servant	CS1	Planning specialist, Planning Directorate.	16/12/2015	No	1
			04/08/2016	Yes	2
	CS2	Planning specialist, Planning Directorate.	29/03/2016	Yes	3
	CS3	Planning specialist, Planning Directorate (after case narrative)	A 10/02/2016	Yes	4
			B 06/06/2016	Yes	5
	CS4	Generalist, Planning Directorate.	29/03/2016	Yes	6
	CS5	Planning specialist, Planning Directorate.	02/05/2016	Yes	7
CS6	Planning specialist, Planning Directorate.	20/04/2016	Yes	8	
	CS7	Generalist civil servant, Planning Directorate (after case narrative)	20/04/2016	Yes	9
Senior civil servant	SCS1	Planning Directorate.	26/05/2016	Yes	10
	SCS2	Planning Directorate.	25/05/2016	Yes	11
	SCS3	Core executive and DCLG.	09/06/2016	Yes	12
	SCS4	Core executive and DCLG.	30/06/2016	Yes	13
Professional, lobbying, or expert body	Jill Rutter	Programme Director, Institute for Government. Authored 'insider' report on creation of NPPF.	04/04/2016	Yes	14
	Simon Marsh	Acting Head of Sustainable Development at the RSPB. Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link, who campaigned on NPPF. Was on NPPF PAG.	12/04/2016	Yes	15
	Andrew Whittaker	Planning Director at Home Builders Federation. Was on the NPPF Practitioners Advisory Group.	11/05/2016	Yes	16
	PB 1	Senior role in planning and development-related professional body.	01/04/2016	No	17
	PB 2	Senior role in planning and development-related professional body.	A 30/05/2016	Yes	18
			B 04/08/2016	Yes	19
	LPA 1	Senior planner in local authority. Was on DCLG's Planning Sounding Board.	24/03/2016	Yes	20

Appendices 1: Continued...

	<b>LPA 2</b>	Senior planner in local authority. Was on DCLG's Planning Sounding Board.	04/05/2016	Yes	21
	<b>CG1</b>	Policy lead in prominent environment/conservation campaign group that campaigned on the NPPF.	03/06/2016	Yes	22
<b>Party political</b>	<b>John Howell</b>	Author of Open Source Planning, parliamentary private secretary, closely involved with Coalition's early planning reforms and passage of the Localism Act.	03/05/2016	Yes	23
	<b>Bob Neill</b>	Worked on Conservative planning policy in opposition, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, closely involved with the passage of the Localism Bill.	19/05/2016	Yes	24
	<b>Clive Betts</b>	Labour MP, Chair of Communities and Local Government Select Committee, which reviewed the NPPF and its process.	25/05/2016	Yes	25
	<b>Peer 1</b>	Liberal democrat Peer with interests in planning, development, and the built environment.	12/05/2016	Yes	26
	<b>Peer 2</b>	Liberal democrat Peer with interests in planning, development, and the built environment.	11/05/2016	Yes	27

**Appendices 2: Ethical Approval Forms.**



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**Optional Statements**

- The information you have submitted will be published as a report; please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy.
- I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.
- I understand that my anonymity may be limited, or cannot be guaranteed, and have discussed this with the researcher if it is the case.
- I would like my name used and I understand and agree that what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised.
- I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded, and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the purpose of interview transcription at a later date.
- I agree for the data collected from me to be used in relevant future research.



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**Committee on Research Ethics**

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**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Project:** *The Reform of Planning Practice and the Practice of Planning Reform: An Exploration into how National-Level Everyday Planning Policymaking Practices Shape Planning and Urban in England*

**Researcher(s):** *Daniel Slade*

**Please initial box**

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated 02/07/2017 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____ Participant Name	_____ Date	_____ Signature
<i>Daniel Slade</i>		
_____ Name of Person taking consent	_____ Date	_____ Signature
<i>Daniel Slade</i>		
_____ Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

<p><b>Principal Investigator:</b></p> <p>Name <i>Dr Olivier Sykes</i></p> <p>Work Address <i>Department of Geography &amp; Planning, University of Liverpool, Gordon Stephenson Building, Liverpool L69 7ZQ</i></p> <p>Work Telephone <i>0151 794 3766</i></p> <p>Work Email <i>olys@liverpool.ac.uk</i></p>	<p><b>Student Researcher:</b></p> <p>Name <i>Daniel Slade</i></p> <p>Work Address <i>Department of Geography &amp; Planning, University of Liverpool, Gordon Stephenson Building, Liverpool L69 7ZQ</i></p> <p>Work Telephone <i>07535 973 742</i></p> <p>Work Email <i>d.slade@liverpool.ac.uk</i></p>
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Version 1  
02/07/2015

## Appendices 3: Sample Question Guide

### The Guidance Review

- What was your involvement in this process?
  - *How did you work consultation and external views into the process?*
- Work
  - *The independence and impact of the review group*
- Different ideas of 'getting policy done' and their origins
  - *The way the needs of end-users were conceptualised*
  - *The use of technological concepts*
- Policy substance
  - *The idea that the changes were 'purely technical'*
  - *The difference between policy and guidance - concerns and outcomes*
  - *Long-term consequences*

### Broad and Cross-Cutting themes

- **The changing role and nature of planning, planning work and planners in central government:** Changing resource levels and expertise since you joined DCLG, relationships with generalists, varying policy 'clout' etc...
- **'Big ideas' about the role of government and the role of planning:** How Ministers saw the role of planning and the role of government, and what they mean for the way they wanted to go about doing planning reform...
- **Changing 'cultures of engagement' and different ways of drawing on internal and external expert knowledge:** What characterised the way the Coalition used consultations, how it drew on expertise within the Department differently, etc...
- **Civil Service reform and changing Civil Service working practices/culture:** How departmental cuts and changing working practices (for example increasing dynamism/churn) shaped policy work during the period
- **Changing parliamentary and legislative contexts:** If greater electoral uncertainty, parliament's increasing scrutinising powers, etc, are changing the way planning policymaking occurring in practice
- **New technologies and project management techniques:** Whether ideas like 'agile' policy development, 'open source', and 'government as a platform' are having an impact on your work now, or any of the case studies being explored here

*"Is there anything you feel played a particularly important role in shaping how planning policy work unfolded over the period which we haven't covered?"*

## Question & Topic Guide

Chris Poulton – 16<sup>th</sup> September 2016

### Case Studies

#### The Aftermath of the 2010 Election and Open Source Planning

- Drawing on your experience during and before your work in government, how clear do you think the Conservatives' ideas about how they wanted to go about doing their reform programme were?
- What were your impressions Open Source Planning? Did you get the impression that the Conservatives had a clear idea of what they wanted to do across the planning system? How did the Planning Directorate as a whole respond?
- Civil service preparation
  - The 200 page 'rough cut' version of the NPPF
- The relationship between ministers and the department in the early days of the Coalition, and the changing organisational context.

#### The Localism Act

- How involved were you in this work?
- Drafting
  - *Difficulties in the drafting process*
- Parliament
  - Strategies for navigating parliament and how this shaped the work
  - *Extent of changes made during passage, and how this linked to strategy*
  - *Impact of the house of lords*
  - *Impact of the select committee*
- Other
  - *The definition of sustainable development*

#### The NPPF and the Practitioners Advice Group (PAG)

- How were you involved with the development of the NPPF? Could you talk me through the processes involved?
- What are your understandings of the way 'the sector' received the different versions of the NPPF?
- The PAG
  - *What were your impression of Ministers' motivation for using the quite novel PAG approach?*
  - *How did the PAG process work in practice?*
- The National Trust's campaign
- What do you remember being the main changed between each of the versions? Why do you think the final version was well-received?
- Were the changes purely technical?

## Appendices 4: Example Invitation Letter and Email



Room 103  
Dept. of Geography and Planning  
Gordon Stephenson Building  
University of Liverpool  
Liverpool | L69 7ZQ

The Rt Hon. Lord Shutt of Greetland  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

*An Invitation to Take Part in Doctoral Town Planning Research - 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016*

Dear The Rt Hon. Lord Shutt of Greetland,

My name is Daniel Slade, I'm a Research Council funded town planning PhD student at the University of Liverpool. My thesis examines how changing ways of 'getting policy done' at the national-level have shaped the planning system in England since 2010. It studies this in relation to the strategies and practices that have shaped specific 'episodes' of planning reform (the National Planning Policy Framework, Guidance Review and Localism Act), but also how the role of the planning system as a whole has shifted over the longer-term.

The overall intention is to offer something of a corrective to 'mainstream' academic accounts of the change in the English planning system. These often rely on grand political theory, or focus on local/urban levels, and so don't take into account the practical work which goes into reform at the national-level.

The research draws on my own experiences of working in Parliament (the Office of Science and Technology) and Government (DCLG), as well as the views of a range of individuals with first-hand experience of the 'everyday' work which goes into planning reform. Something I'm particularly interested in investigating through these interviews is the way in which both Localism Act and NPPF, whilst introducing important changes to the planning system, were heavily shaped by parliamentary scrutiny and pressure, especially from the Liberal Democrats.

I'm sure you are extremely busy (and positively bombarded with research requests) but given your great experience of shaping, managing or scrutinising Government planning policy - especially as Government Deputy Chief Whip in the House of Lords during the Localism Bill - I'd be absolutely delighted if you were happy to share your views on these topics. The interview itself would be quite casual, take around thirty minutes, and can take place wherever and whenever is easiest for you. Anonymity and whether or not the interview is recorded is, of course, also up to you.

I've enclosed a short project summary, but if you'd like any more information about the project please feel free to ask.

Yours sincerely,

Inbox x University x

**Daniel Slade** <d.slade@liverpool.ac.uk> 14/04/2016

to howelljm

Dear Dr Howell OBE,

My name is Dan Slade, I'm a Research Council funded town planning PhD student at the University of Liverpool.

My research explores how changing strategies and practices of actually 'getting policy done' at the national level have shaped planning reforms in England. These relationships are examined in relation to the Coalition Government's key reforms (the Localism Act, NPPF and Guidance Review), but also how the role of planning has shifted over the longer-term. Overall, the intention is to challenge 'conventional' academic accounts of planning reform in England, which I'd argue often over-rely on broad-brush political theory when accounting for national-level change, and ignore the influence of the day-to-day realities of national-level policy work in Whitehall.

I'm gathering the views of a wide range of people with first-hand experience of doing or influencing national-level planning policy between 2010 and 2015 (including civil servants from DCLG and No.10, MPs, Lords, and expert groups) in order to get a balanced picture of how policy work unfolded over this period. Given the leading role you played in developing 'Open Source Planning', time as PPS to Greg Clark, and ongoing interest in planning reform, I'd be absolutely delighted if you were interested in being interviewed for my research.

Some of the topics I would greatly appreciate hearing your views on include;

- How the ideas contained in 'Open Source Planning' influenced the approach taken to the development of the Localism Act, NPPF, and the Planning Practice Guidance Review.
- How the day-to-day operation of the Civil Service shaped the policy substance of these reforms, and how efforts to modernise the Civil Service might change this going forwards.
- The benefits (or otherwise!) of increasing the use of external expertise in planning policymaking.

Should you be interested, the interview would be quite casual, take about 45 minutes, and take place wherever and whenever is easiest for you. Of course, anonymity and whether or not the interview was audio recorded would be completely up to you, too.

I've attached a brief outline of the project, but if you'd like any more information about it I'd be more than happy to send it on.

Many thanks and kind regards,

Dan

Daniel J. Slade | PhD Student | Town Planning  
Room 103 | Gordon Stephenson Building | University of Liverpool  
Mob: 07535 973 742 | Office: 0151 7943 126 | [Linkedin](#)

## Appendices 5: Project Outline for Participants

 <p style="text-align: right;">18/08/2016</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Working Title:</b> How the changing practices and strategies of 'getting policy done' in the UK central state have shaped English planning reform since 2010.</p> <p><b>Funding and sponsorship:</b></p> <p>This research is fully funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) via the North West Doctoral Training Centre (NWDTCT). It received full ethical approval from the University of Liverpool.</p> <p><b>Primary researcher:</b></p> <p>Daniel Slade - University of Liverpool</p> <p><b>Project supervisors:</b></p> <p>Dr Olivier Sykes - University of Liverpool Prof Graham Haughton - University of Manchester Dr David Dolowitz - University of Liverpool</p> <p><b>Project Summary</b></p> <p>To date, researchers studying planning reform in England have focused their attention on how different ideologies and ideas drive policy change, the practical realities of planning at the local and regional levels, or the experiences of affected communities.</p> <p>There has, however, been very little research into how changing everyday policymaking practices and technologies in national-level institutions have shaped planning reforms. Similarly, very few studies have taken into account the impact of different strategies for 'getting policy done' in Westminster on eventual substance of particular reform programmes. This has resulted in theories and accounts of planning reform which may be of little use to those actually doing the reforms.</p> <p>This study provides a first step towards filling the gap. It will do so in two ways; firstly, by exploring how different policy work shaped key elements of the Coalition programme (The Localism Act (2011), the National Planning Policy Framework (2012), the National Planning Practice Guidance Review (2013)). And, secondly, by exploring how different practices might tell us about longer-term changes in the public sector, and how planning reform is</p> <p style="text-align: right;">1 of 2</p>	
	<p style="text-align: right;">18/08/2016</p> <p>The study draws on in-depth desk-based research, interviews with civil servants and parliamentary clerks, MPs and Peers, consultants, and pressure groups from across the political spectrum. The researcher's own experiences of working in Westminster (the Department for Communities and Local Government) and Whitehall (the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology) also play an important part in the research.</p> <p><b>Some of the questions this project seeks to answer include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How did the use of new technologies or idea about policymaking shape the policymaking process for each of the reforms studied?</li><li>• How did the day-to-day experience of working in the civil service shape policymaking during the period?</li><li>• How have reforms of the civil service, and changes taking place in parliament, interacted with planning reform?</li><li>• How did each of the above case studies learn from previous episodes of planning reform?</li><li>• How did the government's approach taken to navigating the legislative process shape each of the case studies?</li><li>• How did different groups influence the substance of policy through the legislative process?</li><li>• What might be the longer-term consequences of the policy-making innovations introduced in each of the above case studies?</li></ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Contact: Daniel Slade</b> Email: <a href="mailto:D.slade@liverpool.ac.uk">D.slade@liverpool.ac.uk</a> Telephone: 07535 973 742 Online profile: <a href="http://goo.gl/ieftqe">goo.gl/ieftqe</a></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">2 of 2</p>