**Neighbourhood Planning – Developing a Data-Driven Evidence Base**

**Background**

One of the common problems faced by communities developing neighbourhood plans is how to collect the evidence base they require in order to establish coherent policy at the neighbourhood level. The number of groups who have talked to Locality’s Neighbourhood Planning team about this appears, anecdotally, to be significant. What all groups need is a methodology and data collection that is proportionate to their plan, with data that is easy to manipulate, understand and draw conclusions from. There is recognition that local authorities and developers have access to, or are often able to access, the data required whereas local people do not. Or more accurately, they probably do, but communities don’t know where to look for it and struggle to manipulate what they do find. As a result, there are a number of agencies (both third sector and private sector) that are developing tools to help provide the evidence base for particular neighbourhoods; there are at least two tools now in existence to facilitate the purchasing of support in this regard.

**Concerns**

1. What these tools have in common is that they require a fee/licence to use the tool. Some also require the organisation that has developed the tool to provide the analysis of the results. They are, for the most part, using freely available data sets, so they are in effect manipulating the data to enable its presentation at the neighbourhood level on behalf of communities, when communities might readily undertake this work themselves.
2. Whilst tools that help to gather the evidence base are obviously welcome, we are concerned that many communities will end up paying for an evidence base that either exceeds their data requirement (i.e. it is not proportionate to the level of detail called for in terms of the specific plan they are developing) and/or will experience the data requirement underpinning neighbourhood planning as prohibitively expensive.
3. The impact of this may be that it effectively excludes some neighbourhoods who lack the resources to pay for freely available data and/or its ‘expert’ manipulation.

**Understanding the Situation**

In order to fully understand the data sets that local groups developing neighbourhood plans are interested in, we have developed a short survey with panel members which will be sent out to Locality’s neighbourhood planning contacts.

The survey will introduce the context – namely, that we are developing a list of data sets which citizens can consider requesting as part of the neighbourhood planning process to help those involved in future” – then, pose recipients the following questions:-

1. Name of your Local Authority.
2. What data have you sought in developing your Neighbourhood Plan and from what sources?
3. What data have you requested from your Local Authority in developing your Neighbourhood Plan?
4. What data have you successfully obtained from your Local Authority in developing your Neighbourhood Plan?
5. Was your Local Authority unable to supply some of the data you requested? If so, which data sets were you unable to get from your Local Authority? And, was the data

(a) unavailable

(b) restricted by a licensing agreement

(c) regarded as confidential

(d) no reason given

1. What data have you found particularly useful in developing your Neighbourhood Plan?
2. Did you encounter difficulties in manipulating the data you obtained? If so, which data sets proved particularly challenging to work with?
3. Have you sought expert assistance and/or purchased the services of a data manipulation intermediary to help analyse some of the data you acquired?

9.  Would you be supportive of Locality calling for the Government to mandate access to useful data held by local/central government for neighbourhood planning purposes?

The survey will be promoted during the w/c December 3rd with a return date of December 14th. It is acknowledged that this represents a relatively short turn around, but it is intended to allow the collection of evidence to support Locality’s response to DCLG’s data transparency consultation, in addition to informing the work of the Local Public Data Panel in the new year.

**Update prepared for the Local Public Data Panel by Annemarie Naylor, Locality**