

PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING IN ENGLAND: THE JURY IS STILL OUT

Jeff Bishop: BDOR Limited, Bristol

Abstract

The English planning system has recently been subject to major reforms, partly to enhance participation. The roots of this lay in established concerns about participation – eg. representation and equity – and the new system attempted to address these with challenging new requirements and national guidance from government to practitioners. This paper will argue that general planning practice has yet to cope successfully with the challenges, but it will also elaborate how and why that is now changing. It will show how the best of recent practice is beginning to create a context in which participation practice is addressing many (but by no means all) of the traditional concerns. The paper will also show how the wide-ranging work of some practitioners is beginning to create a robust context and infrastructure that is moving participation in planning and development from being an exception to a situation in which participation is the norm.

Introduction

The United Kingdom is often looked at, occasionally enviously, by others around the world because it is believed that our planning system has been at the leading edge of the theory and practice of participation in planning for many years. Looked at from inside the UK, and from the perspective of someone attempting to advance practice in participation, this is at best a half truth. There have indeed been some significant experiments and good one-off initiatives, and some very minimal procedures for participation have been embedded in formal policy, but the general picture is far from the impression given by those who have promoted UK practice to others.

Until recently, that is. This paper is not focused on providing a detailed chronology of participation in planning since the real start of coherent ‘town and country planning’ in the UK after the key government Act in 1948. Aspects of that long history will be referred to but the main focus is the quantum leap in policy terms that took place around 2003 and the sometimes equally dramatic but – as will be argued – more often rather minimal changes in practice that this generated.

The focus will also be on England because, shortly after the ‘New Labour’ government was elected in 1997, there was a major programme of regional devolution of some government functions to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. That resulted in autonomy on almost all aspects of local planning policy for the regional governments and, although they are all following much of the pattern put in place in England (occasionally bettering it), they are generally a few years behind in terms of widespread practice upon which to report. The focus is also on activity at local authority (municipality) level, not least because there is significant contention about the value of new processes at the regional and national planning levels.

The other important proviso is about terminology. Even without the nuances created by translation into other languages, and without overlooking some important points of principle, terms such as ‘consultation’, ‘involvement’, ‘participation’ and, more recently, ‘empowerment’ are all used regularly in the discourse about participation in the UK. The term ‘participation’ is used in the title of this paper to keep it in the frame with the other papers in this issue, but the most commonly used term in the UK (at least currently) is ‘involvement’, so this will be used from now on.

This paper starts with some of the historic and more recent influences, trends, theory and practice (some from well beyond planning) that underpinned the quantum leap that took place, outlines the basic policies and practice that the quantum leap put in place and then evaluates the extent to which, and some of the ways in which, regular practice has, or has not, fulfilled the ambitions of those who created the changes. However, with some minor exceptions (some early and minimal formal evaluations), the opinions expressed are those of this particular author - someone who is strongly committed to better involvement, was central to the policy changes and for whom practical involvement work in planning forms the main part of his workload.

Influences on Policy and Practice Reform

Progress within the Planning System

Looking back, and despite some minor aspects of planning policy from 1948 onwards, the real roots of what we would nowadays consider to be genuine involvement practice emerged during the social challenges and changes of the 1960s, not just in planning but in all areas of society. It is of course impossible to proceed further without mentioning what is now the worldwide baseline of principle for many: Sherry Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation' (Arnstein, 1969). The striking simplicity and power of the 'ladder' model, and its several 'levels' from therapy to citizen control, struck a chord with many and it was used time and again, and still is, in debates and papers in the UK. Spinning off from that were some experiments aimed at shifting practice 'up the ladder' on both large area spatial planning and neighbourhood renewal projects. Significant resources were allocated to those projects and there were some clear successes, although more at the local level than on large area plans.

Lessons from the 1960s and early 1970s experiments eventually found their policy outlet when the UK planning system (it was still all UK at that time) was reformed in the mid 1970s and 'Local Plans' were introduced. These statutory plans covered a whole municipality and addressed all land use planning issues, looking ahead over a timescale of around 10 years. The legislation that supported this change included within it a 'requirement' for planning offices to 'consult' with local communities in formulating their plans. However, that requirement was not elaborated anywhere, in either the legislation or the associated guidance. ('Guidance' is produced by central government or professional associations to assist or guide but not determine local practice.) The result was that many local planning authorities either ignored the 'requirement' or undertook some minimal, occasionally absolutely minimal consultation that barely reached the bottom two rungs of Arnstein's ladder. By having no clarity within the legislation about what was actually required, it was then impossible for central government to deem any plan inadequate because the planners had failed to consult properly. (We know of one case where a report listed involvement activities that did not even take place but was still approved!) It also has to be said that there was no real or widespread support within the professional culture of planning at that time, especially at the government level, for more or better involvement.

At the same time, however, some local authorities as a whole and some planning teams in particular adopted the spirit of the legislation and started to put in place involvement work that moved well up the Arnstein ladder, if not yet to near the top (an issue to which we return in the following section because that is not necessarily a criticism. Some interesting and engaging methods were developed in this period from within planning or associated practice (eg. renewal) – notably 'Planning for Real' (Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation, no date) - and work at the neighbourhood level in particular advanced quickly.

Progress from Policy Areas other than Planning

Work in and around the Local Plans system evolved and developed from the mid 1970s but, in relation to involvement, with little shift in regular practice and only a few challenging examples. The real changes that led to the 'quantum leap' came from either the fringes of planning or from nearby areas of theory and practice, and sometimes from totally different areas of work. The pattern was fascinating to watch, immensely stimulating, excitingly interconnected and extremely complex, so much so that what follows can only be a partial (and personal) picture and each trend can only be touched on briefly – though even these brief mentions show how much each theme linked with others.

- As in many other societies, there has been, since at least the 1960s, a continuing debate about the relative merits of representative as compared to participative democracies. This has, however, almost always been based on a rather banal 'either/or' argument, assuming (or perhaps just asserting) that it is impossible for the two to co-exist. In the 1990s, linked to many themes that follow, the debate shifted to one of seeking an approach that used balanced representative and participative forms and used each in its appropriate setting in a complementary way (eg. Hoggett et al, 1994).
- During the 1980s there was a significant growth, and widening, in the principles of management theory, most notably within mainly large organisations to start considering the benefits of working together with employees. This became the case even within large private sector bodies (if only through an instrumentalist view of the world) and within the public sector (as the power of trade unionism declined). It may not have been called 'participation' but the principle was the same (eg. Etzioni, 1993 and Hutchinson, 1997).
- From a whole variety of disciplines (eg. whole systems thinking, theories of creativity and design methods) new and far more inclusive approaches started to emerge to problem-solving and process design and management. Almost all of these were holistic and multi-disciplinary and hence also inclusive – again not necessarily using the term 'participation' ('collaborative' was more commonly used) but that was a core principle (eg. Friend and Hickling, 1997 and Powell and Cooper-Davis, 1997).
- Ideas emerged from the 1970s onwards that would all now be considered to be part of, and bring together, consensus building, conflict resolution and the use of deliberative and dialogue-based methods to address complex social challenges (eg. Ury, 2003 and Susskind, 1999). That generated some serious concerns about the Arnstein ladder (as hinted at earlier), because that is rooted in the 1960s protest movement ideology and is essentially a win/lose model rather than the win/win of consensus building. Some of this was both applied to and developed further within the broad planning area, especially in urban renewal (eg. Forester, 1999 and Healey, 1997).
- The 1970s, especially in the UK, also saw a huge change in the amount, type and effectiveness of environmental education in schools – often called (in the UK) Urban Studies. This was rooted in educating children to become active citizens and genuine participants in the changes that would affect their environments, both as children and in the future as adults (eg. Ward, 1978 and Fyson, 1973). At the peak, there were over 26 Urban Studies Centres in UK towns and cities providing challenging resources mainly to schools but also to adults. There is informal evidence that the generation who experienced this has now become the core of those, both within and without government and the professions, pushing for greater involvement.
- Closely related to environmental education was the growth of an approach described in the UK as 'Community Technical Aid'. At the peak of this activity (linked closely to urban studies) there were Technical Aid Centres or services all around the UK, once again sharing a central ideology about community participation. Less significantly at the time (but see later) a national 'Planning Aid' service was established to enable mainly disadvantaged people to get free access to planning advice.
- As the 1980s proceeded and drifted into the 1990s, this became the period when the need for principles and practice of sustainable development came to the fore. The key trigger was the Rio Conference of 1992 and the production of 'Local Agenda 21' or LA21 as it is often known (United Nations, 1992). The one theme that recurs on just about

every one of the 400 or so pages of LA21 is 'participation' (or other linked words), more than any of the substantive themes such as waste or energy. The UK government (mainly because of a maverick individual Minister) picked that up and acted on it and the development of LA21 within UK municipalities became the trigger for a huge variety of participation-based events and activities (eg. Manchester City Council, 1995).

All of the above trends were being moved steadily forward by thinkers and practitioners in the 1980s and early 1990s. However, the block in the system that prevented further progress was undoubtedly the government of the time, led by Margaret Thatcher. Although civil servants commissioned our own research on 'Community Involvement in Planning and Development' during that period (Department of the Environment, 1994), the politicians refused to tell anybody that it had been published! By that time as well, nearly all Urban Studies Centres and Technical Aid services had been starved of funds and shut down, and environmental education had almost disappeared (except through a brief revival via LA21).

Despite this, some practitioners (including my own organisation) were able to put in place a number of practical projects using (not alone but centrally in processes) deliberative and dialogue methods which slowly became recognised as national 'models of good practice'. So the message about new approaches was beginning to get out into the wider world. This was then the time of the rise of what is termed 'New Labour', the rebirth in different form of the traditional party of the left. Central to a New Labour approach were principles of joint working, partnership, collaboration, consensus and a search, through strong and managed processes, for win/win outcomes. Quite specifically within the New Labour 'project' there was a fundamental commitment to better involvement and engagement in all policy areas, and ideally in the private and NGO sectors as in the public sector. That highlighted (If not invented) terms and approaches such as 'community capacity building' and, more recently 'empowerment'. All that set the scene for major changes.

The Planning Reforms

With New Labour in power in 1997, committed to a more inclusive and involvement-based set of agendas, a number of structural changes started to be put in place, if not immediately. It is perhaps surprising that it was in and around planning that one of the first, and still (in principle) one of the most radical sets of changes occurred. It is surprising because of the by now 50 year old and highly constrained legislative tradition within planning, backed up by years of proven case law in the courts and because there were pressures towards opening up the planning system to enable private developments to happen more quickly – and involvement was judged to be a cause of delay.

The commitment to make major changes was stated by the government in a 'Green Paper' on planning, the first way in the UK to make a public announcement about an intention to bring in new legislation and, in effect, also a call for comment. (The subsequent 'White Paper' gave more detail and was a formal consultation document.) As part of the government's own work towards shaping the new approach, a team was commissioned to produce topical, best practice guidance on plan-making (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002). We were part of that team and wrote in particular the chapter on Participation (note that word). Together with our earlier work (mentioned above), these two documents have been quoted by government planners as forming the groundwork for their new approach to involvement. Other work was then commissioned, for example on Statements of Community Involvement (to be explained shortly), and on methods.

This all came together in a major piece of government legislation reframing many aspects of the English planning system - the "Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act" of 2004. From the very opening lines of the Act itself, and all the associated material, there is an up-front commitment to ensuring that genuine involvement should be part not just of plan-making (at

the local government level), but also, ideally, for developers and others seeking planning permission. Within that general commitment there was an especially strong emphasis on consensus based approaches, on setting a coherent overall approach at the local level (rather than inventing approaches for each separate plan or project) and on final accountability – i.e. for the government to be able to reject a plan if it was clear that appropriate involvement standards had not been met.

Perhaps the most important new approach (at least in principle) was the requirement for every municipality responsible for planning to produce, with local community and stakeholder involvement, an overall ‘Statement of Community Involvement’ (SCI) to guide all its future planning work. The legislation and associated guidance (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2004) framed SCIs very strongly. An SCI must (inter alia):

- include some principles and aims for community involvement;
- show how involvement in planning links with involvement on related issues;
- include lists of methods and show how they would be used on different types of plan and at different stages;
- clarify expectations of what involvement developers/applicants are expected to do; and
- make clear what resources are to be allocated to involvement work.

Once drafted at the local level, the SCI must then be approved by central government. Very late in the process, political interference introduced the idea that this should be done by the independent Planning Inspectorate, the body responsible for the process of checking, verifying and approving all statutory plans. This was unfortunate and inappropriate for several reasons, for example because Inspectors had no training in community involvement and were therefore unable to make skilled judgments and because they have no power to tell a local authority that inadequate resources are being committed and require them to allocate more. (This approach has now been rescinded but no other external checking process was put in its place – equally unfortunate!)

Nevertheless the need to prepare an SCI and its very existence not only made community involvement unavoidable but set standards against which to check it. The checking comes at the end of a plan preparation process, when the authority submits its proposed plan to the Inspectorate. That submission must be accompanied by a ‘Statement of Compliance’, which must describe the involvement undertaken and make clear where, how and why (or why not) involvement results have been integrated into the plan. Because of the robust legislative basis, such evidence becomes what is called (in long established legal terminology) a ‘material consideration’. This means, in principle at least, that a whole plan can be rejected (declared ‘unsound’) if it can be shown that the involvement was inadequate or its inputs totally ignored.

With an SCI in place, a local planning authority has guidelines that it must use on all possible and appropriate occasions. There is still, however, a considerable amount of discretion at the local level about how exactly one goes about the community involvement. Official national guidance was produced, as well as some almost government endorsed material and some by particular groups or professional organisations. As yet, there is little guidance targeted specifically at developers and applicants. This is partly because community involvement is not (yet) a legal requirement for an acceptable planning application – it remains discretionary, even if some SCIs push hard to encourage applicants to conduct it, particularly on large projects.

In parallel with the guidance, a number of organisations have run ad hoc training events for planners, and some for elected members, and there have been occasional larger scale programmes of training (one of which we initiated and led, training planners from 60 municipalities). There have even been occasional training courses for community groups

and stakeholders to help them to engage more productively. This has been supported by a new and major programme of government financial support for Planning Aid. All Planning Aid regional teams (which cover all of the UK) now employ people specifically to undertake community planning work with disadvantaged communities, either on formal plan-making or on specific projects (private as well as public).

Reflecting back on the inputs that led to the changes described above, it is valuable to note that, at best, the regulations and guidance are grounded in several key principles:

- The system is consensus-based.
- There is an emphasis on dialogue and deliberative methods.
- A key process principle (a consensus building principle) is to start the involvement very early – what is now termed ‘front-loading’.
- Involvement is deliberately wide and inclusive – local communities and wider stakeholders.
- There is some emphasis on overall processes, not just random assemblies of enjoyable methods.
- There is an emphasis on capacity building for all.
- Processes have a high degree of consistency and transparency.
- There are forms of accountability and means of recourse to ensure things are done properly.

Before moving on to report on whether such significant ambitions are being realised in planning practice, it is also worth noting that, since 2004, there have been numerous further policy changes rooted heavily in ensuring, as introduced earlier, that involvement and engagement – even ‘empowerment’ – are central features of all local government practice, on everything from children’s services to transport, refuse collection to social work, even overall budgeting and local police priorities.

Experience Since 2004

In some respects it is still too early to see the overall effects of the major changes, although some plans have now passed through the new regime and been approved (‘adopted’) or not, and some larger projects have been developed with serious community involvement and secured planning permission. As part of a long term government monitoring research programme, some initial evaluation has been done of involvement work (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007) and a recent report on the planning application process (Killian-Pretty, 2008) makes considerable reference to the poor quality of much involvement activity. Results from the first of these projects and from other minor evaluations have informed this paper, but in all cases the research looked at what had been done in plan preparation and the reports’ authors were not able to draw robust conclusions about whether more or better involvement has made any difference in the eventual ‘soundness’ of plans or value of resulting projects.

From our own observations, drawn from a large programme of research, training and practical work and from regular if informal feedback from colleagues, some interim conclusions can be drawn.

There has undoubtedly been some high quality practice, some by planning teams already familiar with such work but also some from teams in authorities not at all well known for their involvement work. In general:

- There has been some exciting and strong innovation in some areas, especially in attempts to secure consensus in a way that places their work well up the Arnstein ladder.

That innovation has happened within plan-making processes but also on larger projects, especially neighbourhood renewal and regeneration projects.

- There have also been some genuine attempts to break old habits, especially amongst some elected members who have started to understand that an active role in involvement work can enhance rather than undermine their representative role.
- In some cases, some extremely innovative work has been undertaken by private developers as part of their project design and planning work prior to a planning application.
- Rather than seeing involvement work as something that goes along in parallel with the plan preparation work, a few local planning teams have tried hard to make collaborative approaches into an integral part of their plan preparation work.
- The growing emphasis on coherent, corporate* approaches to involvement – i.e. between and across a range of policy areas (not just planning) – is having an effect and some genuinely cross-discipline approaches are developing. (* The term ‘corporate’ is used in UK local government to refer to the effective overall involvement of all departments and professions in integrated policy development and implementation.)
- There have also been one or two plans which have been turned down (declared ‘unsound’), at least in part because the planning team failed to provide enough or good evidence that they had undertaken involvement work to their own SCI standards.

If the above had by now become the norm then the major reforms would have had striking success. Unfortunately, as in earlier stages of work on involvement in planning in the UK, such good practice remains an exception. It is our view that practice in the majority of local authorities has barely improved at all since the system was reformed. Indeed, given that expectations have risen, quite correctly because of the reforms, what happens in some places is probably now worse than it was before. What one can find, only too easily, is the following.

- National guidance which lagged (and continues to lag) behind the type of good principles and best practice that informed the policy changes; indeed some of it was written by people who had never experienced modern methods.
- Poorly written SCIs, which clearly fail to live up to the ambitions of the reforms, notably when one finds all the correct words about ‘consensus’ but no consensus building methods are listed; (or, even worse, conflict creating methods such as public meetings are listed).
- A lot of ritual responses in which planners and elected members simply ‘tick the boxes’ and aim to get away with the most minimal practice.
- A regular failure to use any coherent approaches which are ‘front-loaded’, still resorting to out of date practice that leaves any involvement until after the professionals have, in effect, decided on the policies.
- Random use of ad hoc methods, occasionally just a single method, and an inevitable absence of any overall, coherent process.
- To ensure that a plan can be approved as ‘sound’, it must be rooted in a very robust evidence base, and many planners still believe that any evidence drawn from community or stakeholder involvement has no value compared to their own ‘objective’ evidence.
- Practice by professionals, and endorsed by elected members, none of whom have had any form of training to enable them to understand and then use the new principles and practices.
- A refusal by elected members, partly understandable for legal reasons but firmly against government guidance, to join in fully with involvement processes (as consensus theory demands) and still retaining their traditional right to comment and change things at the very last minute regardless of involvement results.
- A lack of detailed guidance on what might qualify as a thorough, final Report of Compliance, matched by a lack of training for planning Inspectors to seek and then evaluate appropriate information in such reports.

- At the time of writing, hardly a single university course in town planning included, as a core module, anything at all about community involvement either as theory or as practice.

These broad results can also be related to the topics used to frame the whole series of papers in this journal issue. Some key comments, nearly all in relation solely to better quality practice, are as follows.

Achievement of Distributive Justice

There are good examples of a widely inclusive approach built around consensus-based processes that have created 'added value', to the benefit of often overlooked groups and sectors (as well as to those initiating the involvement). At best, real attention has been paid to all groups working collaboratively to include components in plans and projects that specifically favour, for example, children (through provision of high quality play facilities), disadvantaged households (through creating training and capacity building programmes), those with various disabilities (through the provision of appropriate signage and surfaces) and especially those on lower than average incomes (through the provision of low cost housing).

Processes that Exemplify Procedural Justice

Attention to both engaging, and then taking appropriate account of, what are often termed 'hard to reach' groups is a key, mandatory and tested criterion within all Statements of Community Involvement. Planning officers are therefore required to demonstrate in all their plans that such groups have been clearly identified and appropriately engaged and addressed in proposals. The emphasis on overall, explicit, transparent and testable procedures for community involvement not only ensures procedurally just processes, but also outcomes that reflect this. At the same time, such work is time-consuming and demanding on resources. It also requires very particular skills, with the result that much of the better work has happened through those with directly relevant skills (e.g. a youth worker) rather than a planner.

Increases in the Willingness of People to Participate

There is now a statutory indicator used to test progress in all municipalities in England in participation, in all policy areas, not just planning. It requires an annual survey to establish the percentage of the population who consider that they have a say in local decision-making; the aim being that this should show an increase in that percentage year after year. This is a slightly flawed criterion (research shows that raised awareness can actually result in lower assessments of participation) but it is already forcing changes in practice. There have also been a number of projects on which we ourselves have been involved where we set a basic standard that more people should attend later events in a process than early events, and that has often been achieved. Not only that, but the quality of the outreach, notably in terms of diversity from within the population, has been raised as well, moving well beyond 'the usual suspects'. All the experience (not just from planning) is beginning to show that people will engage and then continue to engage if they see some positive benefit coming from their efforts. (This is not necessarily linked to whether or not they achieve the outcome they were seeking - see final sub-section on Process or Product.)

To Institutionalise Involvement or Not?

It is uncertain whether the better practice across England has been forced on municipalities and developers by the high level of institutionalisation of involvement within the new planning system. As suggested above, there are quite a few examples of planning teams

engaged in innovative practice despite having no previous record in the involvement arena; though whether they felt forced to adapt their approaches or were personally willing to and simply needed legitimisation is unclear. Nevertheless, the majority of good practice remains amongst the 'already converted' and is becoming increasingly innovative within that group; there are no signs that institutionalisation has in any way reduced the innovation. However, although the system is potentially robust, the weaknesses within the Statement of Community Involvement process make it relatively easy for a planning team to resort to bland and non-committal responses and get away, with no external recourse, with low level practice. This raises the possibility of the age-old problem: institutionalisation may ensure that all do something reasonably well because 'the system' requires them to, but few do anything outstandingly well, because 'the system' inhibits them. However, we see little sign of that in England.

Addressing the Issue of Thorough Representation

At their best, current approaches take a very strong line on ensuring the appropriate breadth, depth and balance of representation within any involvement process. This starts with the now statutory identification of stakeholders and consultees, moves on into good networking to identify the specific detail of this in any particular area (not just the local area but, if relevant, further afield), raises questions about how exactly to ensure the widest possible representation and then uses methods that provide appropriate opportunities to all to take part on a genuinely equal footing. At all stages, however, the realities of time and resources start to intrude, so the final delivery of breadth etc. too often falls short – if often only a little - of the ambition. Most importantly, good processes have ensured a positive and appropriate role for elected representatives, even if, still too often, they are (wrongly) cautious about taking that up because of a fear of losing their traditional role and status.

Process or Product?

Some recent informal evaluations have shown that consultees can still rate an involvement process highly even if they did not secure the specific outcomes that they had sought at the outset; that they are willing and able to separate quality of process from quality of outcome. At the same time, other anecdotal evaluations have shown that properly designed overall processes are delivering widely agreed upon and sometimes unexpected outcomes more quickly and cheaply (overall) than was the case through traditional late consultation. There is therefore seen to be a strong if not deterministic connection between a robust process – if necessary a lengthy one – and the quality of the final product. The key word here, used twice above, is 'overall'. When judged solely in terms of time taken to reach adoption of a plan or the granting of planning permission, consensus-based processes can be seen occasionally to lose out against traditional processes. However, if the key criterion is about when and how a plan moves into implementation or a project actually gets built, considerable time and resources have now known to have been saved by consensus-based working because there is, at best, a widely agreed end outcome – what is often termed a 'sense of ownership'.

Conclusions

The changes that have been introduced into the English planning system in relation to community and stakeholder involvement – or participation – were based at the time, by those (including ourselves) who 'designed' the new scheme of things, on a series of challenging, leading-edge principles. Since the 2004 Act the government has also moved to embed involvement practice just as strongly into all possible areas of (local) public policy.

Ensuring that such dramatic changes make a genuine difference to regular practice involves a challenge not just at the more technical level of methods, resources and skills but also,

more fundamentally, at the level of cultural attitudes, professional values, corporate priorities and the nature of democratic processes. All of these had intertwined, before the changes, in a classically self-reinforcing way. Elected members would reluctantly request their professional staff to set up an involvement process, the professionals would not only be reluctant but would also lack appropriate knowledge, skills and experience, with the result that what took place would then be disastrous – which only confirmed what the members had expected in the first place.

Turning this around was always going to be a major task, not least because it required coherent action and support at all possible levels. Our analysis suggests that, for the majority of local authorities, faced with guidance and detailed legislation that failed to highlight key features of a new approach, it is not surprising that the necessary corporate cultural change has not taken place. The exceptions – the portfolio of high quality examples of practice - may now be greater in number than they were just a few years ago but, as yet, there is no sign that these ‘models of good practice’ are having any significant positive influence on the majority of local authorities and their planning teams.

Finally, however, it is important not to be impatient about something so significant that started only a few years ago. The legislative basis is being sharpened, national guidance is shortly to be reviewed and the results of a major evaluation project (of all aspects of the new system, not just involvement) are expected soon. To that extent, it is not possible to reach any clear conclusion about progress. As in our title – the jury is still out.

References

- Arnstein, S 1969, A Ladder of Community Participation, American Institute of Planners Journal, Vol. 35 (4), pp. 216-224.
- Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007, Lessons 3: Participation and Policy integration in Spatial Planning, HMSO, London. (NB. It is not clear if this has yet been formally published.)
- Department of the Environment, 1994, Community Involvement in Planning and Development, HMSO, London.
- Etzioni, A, 1993, The Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities and the Communitarian Agenda, Crown, New York.
- Forester, J, 1999, The Deliberative Practitioner, MIT Press.
- Friend, J and Hickling, A, 1997, Planning Under Pressure: The Strategic Choice Approach, Butterworth Heinemann, London.
- Fyson, A, 1973, Streetwork: The Exploding School, Architectural Press, London.
- Healey, P, 1997, Collaborative Planning, Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Hoggett, P, Hambleton, R and Burns, D, 1994, The Politics of Decentralisation, Macmillan, Basingstoke.
- Hutchinson, C, 1997, Building to Last: The Challenge to Business Leaders, Earthscan, London.
- Killian-Pretty, 2008, Planning Applications: A Faster and More Responsive System, HMSO, London.
- Manchester City Council, 1995, First Steps: Local Agenda 21 in Practice, HMSO, London.
- Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation. ‘Planning for Real’ is the (copyrighted) generic term for a range of community involvement procedures and methods first developed for use in inner city regeneration and now promoted through the Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (NIF). Contact: www.nif.co.uk/planningforreal
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002, Making Plans: A Practical Guide, HMSO, London.
- Powell, J and Cooper-Davis, R, 1997, Enabling Creativity to Flourish in Design, EDA.
- Susskind, L, 1999, The Consensus Building Handbook, Sage, California.
- United Nations, 1992, Local Agenda 21, The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, United Nations.
- Ury, W, 2003, Getting to Yes, Random House, New York.
- Ward, C, 1978, The Child in the City, Architectural Press, London.