**Bananas with Pickles:**

**Does the localism menu risk creating the recipe**

**for strategic malaise?**

A Paper Produced for the Transport Planning Society

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## Introduction

This paper was produced in response to a Transport Planning Society (TPS) call for submissions to explore the subject of how localism will affect the planning, co-ordination and delivery of land use and transport. The paper considers the extent to which local transport infrastructure delivery is changing due to the localism agenda, and offers a practitioner’s perspective on the issues that are currently prevalent in the field.

The coalition government’s austerity response to the economic crisis of 2008 has inevitably led to a paucity of large-scale funding opportunities for nationally-insignificant infrastructure. In 2010 the Department for Transport (DfT) proudly announced the reconciliation of its numerous funding streams into four main pots[[1]](#footnote-1), including the much-vaunted Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF)[[2]](#footnote-2) that seeks to inject additional funding into sustainable transport schemes at a local level. However, with this newly-designated funding only available to authorities via the traditional competitive bidding process, the focus for many decision-makers at local level will be how to allocate what little remains of local authority capital budgets.

At local authority level many politicians and professional officers alike have welcomed the move away from the target-obsessed scheme selection criteria that often acted as gatekeepers to the door of integrated transport block funding. A variety of local processes were adopted[[3]](#footnote-3) that saw an assortment of prioritisation mechanisms in place to sort, select, and sift the pool of improvement schemes that were originated at the local level. With the potential to frustrate local aspiration as much as it sought to further nationally-aligned intervention, the lurch from political ‘pet projects’ (LTP1) to the often strait-jacketed technocratic number-crunching of LTP2 was indeed stark. The new direction of localism charts a changed course and a new heading, but by giving the community such direct influence there risks being a strategic deficit, or at the very least a divergence from the hunt for value.

This paper discusses the impact of the new localism on transport investment decisions under three broad headings:

1. How did we get here and what are the principles of localism trying to achieve? Perhaps more pertinently, who is it that is freed from bureaucracy by localism? Is it local authorities free from central government prescription and targets; is it local councillors free to determine transport investment priorities; or is it local people free to lobby directly for their needs?
2. What then for strategic prioritisation? If greater local variation and the influence of lobbying communities could be assumed to lead to greater politicisation of the investment (scheme selection) process, what hope is there for joint delivery of Infrastructure Delivery Plans, particularly in two-tier areas?
3. Finally, taking transport as a microcosm of public sector investment, and recognising that, more than ever, there is simply not the level of funding available necessary to address local transport needs; could it be said that localism is the tool by which local communities are empowered to choose what *not* to fund, with the logical conclusion being an ability to frustrate strategic priority as much as to further it? By this token, have the ‘banana’ brigade (build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone) been thus provided with the ammunition to defeat strategic infrastructure proposals?

It is hoped that this paper will provide some useful context and discussion for practitioners currently engaged in designing new methods to incorporate the localism agenda within the their LTP implementation programmes, as well as stimulating ideas for further refinement and improvement in the targeting of local investment.

## Key Concepts

As outlined above, the new thrusting localism of the coalition government and its impact and influence on the funding and nature of local transport infrastructure investment, is to be considered within the spread of three key concepts:

### How did we get here: Set adrift on a sea of localism...

Following the general election on 6th May 2010, and the subsequent forming of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government on 12th May, it took the newly-appointed Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, just 55 days until 6th July that year to officially revoke the former Regional Spatial Strategies, “hammering another nail in the coffin of unwanted and unacceptable regional bureaucracy”[[4]](#footnote-4). In conjunction with the Minister for Decentralisation, Greg Clark, this came to symbolise one of the most significant transfers of power (and responsibility) to a local level; the power to shape the future of development: “Today is another significant step in the Coalition Government’s drive to transfer powers from remote bureaucracies to local communities”[[5]](#footnote-5).

However, it was also recognised within central government that this shift in power to local communities also transferred responsibility, and that by relinquishing central or regionally-placed control, a greater risk was inherent that ‘wrong’ decisions would be made. In the context of local transport funding and the local prioritisation of investment, the Minister for Transport, Norman Baker, was refreshingly straightforward about the implications of his department ceasing their previous level of scrutiny and oversight saying “the ceiling is going to go, so will the floor...There will be brilliant practice in some places and bad practice elsewhere”. He added: “Some of the decisions will be perverse; some we won’t agree with. The consequence of that is people can moan at the councils and not me”.[[6]](#footnote-6)

One of the most significant changes in local transport funding came when the 2011/12 allocations to local authorities were announced on 13th December 2010 as capital grants as opposed to the historic supported borrowing approvals[[7]](#footnote-7). In response to the earlier consultation on local transport capital funding, the DfT report outlining the results of this consultation clearly showed that the vast majority of authorities expressed a preference for capital grant rather than supported borrowing[[8]](#footnote-8). This change not only gave authorities greater financial flexibility, it also ensured that each authority received grant funding to maintain some form of local investment rather than failing to take up borrowing approvals, which were subject to the political preference and appetite at local level for increasing locally-held (council) debt.

So the landscape of local transport investment changed substantially in the 18 months following the general election. From the sweeping away of regional planning, to the rationalisation of DfT funding streams, and the provision of capital grant (albeit at a reduced level) for local highway maintenance and transport improvement schemes; the levers had been pushed and pulled to empower local decision-making on local transport infrastructure.

### On Strategic Prioritisation: What we want isn’t always what’s best for us...

The policy of empowering local communities via localism can be seen as both a blessing and a curse; it has both good and bad aspects that, if not managed appropriately, can stifle and undermine local aspiration. Policy implies system and consistency; it suggests order, authority and expertise (Colebatch, 2009), and yet the policy of localism could be seen to remove consistency, for it was a centralised strategic authority (whether that be DfT or the former Regional Assemblies) that attempted to provide such consistency with strategic aims, delivering what the county, region or country believed to be in the best interest. However, the true nature of policy is to deliver outcomes or achievement; finding legitimacy in effectiveness (Parsons, 1995). So let us not be concerned with consistency of application in decision-making regarding transport investment at a local level, but instead focus on the outcomes it may deliver and the effectiveness by which such legitimacy is gained.

The fundamental tenets of localism are to provide real power at a local level and to bring that power to bear on such decision-making as may occur in the directing of resources or other matters that affect the lives and well-being of the community. However, in the context of local transport investment the entire Integrated Transport (IT) block grant is made available to authorities in order to address specifically *local* transport improvements, with ‘major’ schemes of strategic significance funded via an alternate mechanism[[9]](#footnote-9). Therefore the question becomes how authorities seek to prioritise and allocate this funding in line with local aspirations and the localism agenda.

There have been many examples of how strong local (political) leadership has delivered significant local improvements[[10]](#footnote-10), this being set out as far back as the 2001 DTLR White Paper[[11]](#footnote-11) and the subsequent DCLG White Paper of 2006[[12]](#footnote-12), yet there remains a tension between the local councillor as a democratically elected representative making strategic decisions at an authority level, and that of the local councillor representing his or her local ward in the most local of situations. Transport is one of the many areas where local aspiration does not always align well with strategic need; the classic example being that of weighing strategic investment in road network enhancements compared to the operational budget required to fill the local pothole. Yet the same decision-makers are required to rationalise this distinction for the greater good of the whole local authority area as well as their specific ‘patch’. Therefore defining what ‘local communities’ want will absolutely depend on who is being discussed using the terminology of local people. It is this challenge that provides a significant new hurdle for authorities seeking to apply the principles of localism to prioritising their IT block allocations; do they appease local clamour for minor investment that no doubt has a big impact on local satisfaction, or are they to try and deliver the strategic priorities as outlined in emerging core strategy and infrastructure delivery plans?

### So choose what (not) to fund: Listening to those who shout loudest is easy...

In considering such prioritisation at local authority level, the prevailing localism agenda can appear as a temptation to revert back to pre-LTP2 days where authorities ‘struggled to demonstrate strong performance” (DfT/Atkins, 2008, p1-2), by failing to utilise an effective (and robust) prioritisation process. After all, prioritisation “provides a robust method for rejecting ‘pet’ or ‘historic’ schemes which are not well aligned with the overall strategy” (DfT/Atkins, 2008, p2-1). However, many local authorities have been live to the possibilities of such outcomes, and have taken steps to ensure that any prioritisation of investment under LTP3 incorporates both elements of locally-identified need and strategic aspiration. This duality of purpose in LTP3 investment prioritisation can be encapsulated in some of the comments on incorporating localism as noted at the Local Society Seminar in February 2011:

*“It should be local councils that lead on strategic planning and delivery because they are democratically accountable. But if any of us want to stay elected, we need to make sure we get that strategy right, deliver and reflect the needs of our communities”.*

*Councillor Abigail Bell, Deputy Leader, Hull City Council[[13]](#footnote-13).*

So strategic intent and aligning with broader objectives while ‘reflecting the needs of communities’ becomes a well-worn phrase in the concept of LTP3 IT allocation, bearing in mind the impracticalities of local referenda determining spend. It therefore becomes critical, as with defining ‘who is local’ (see earlier section), to reflect the genuine need of the community rather than simply the loudest objector or scheme promoter. This is a role in which local councillors are well-versed, however the success of the local authority in defining, determining, and then delivering on local aspiration through the use of the LTP3 IT block is key to how both the local councillor and the local authority will be perceived in future years.

## Objectives

This paper uses the conceptual analysis as discussed above to set the framework for an analysis of the way LAs are approaching their transport spend (focusing on non-maintenance (IT block)) under LTP3. More specifically, the objectives of this paper are to:

* Review the extent to which localism has been accounted for in LTP Implementation Plans
* Compare and contrast the various different methodologies employed to bring the principles of localism into the prioritisation and implementation process; and
* Determine whether at this early stage there are any key recommendations that can be made regarding lessons learned from practitioners, or the emergence of best practice in this field.

## Methodology

Rather than attempt a national review of every local transport plan adopted across England, I have used the National Highways and Transport (NHT) Survey as a starting point to provide a sample group. This survey has been run annually by Ipsos Mori since 2008 on behalf of a number of authorities across the country in order to benchmark performance across a range of indicators. For the purposes of this study, I will be using the 2011 survey results in the reference group of county councils, which comprises 22 county authorities throughout England. The full sample list is available online[[14]](#footnote-14), as are the survey results across a range of transport indicators measuring importance and satisfaction from a surveyed group of almost 33,000 respondents nationwide. However, for the purposes of this paper I will simply be using the indicator of ‘overall satisfaction with highways and transport’ as a starting point to then review each authority’s LTP3 Implementation Plan in order to determine whether there is any correlation between overall public satisfaction and the degree to which localism is promoted within the investment prioritisation process.

This methodology will enable the objectives set out above to be met through: a review of a sample group of LTP3 Implementation Plans; a comparative analysis of how localism was embedded within local prioritisation methodologies; and an investigation into any correlation with public satisfaction levels with transport as recorded in the NHT survey.

## Analysis and Results

The sample group being used is the county council reference group from the 2011 NHT survey. This consists of the following (22) authorities:

Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Cumbria, Derbyshire, Devon, East Sussex, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Somerset, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, West Sussex.

The LTP3 Implementation Plans were reviewed to determine the extent to which they discussed and promoted localism, or the way in which they incorporated the principles of localism into the prioritisation of the resultant capital programme. Where this was not clear within the published plan, contact was made with the authority to clarify or determine the local process. The results of this review are shown in the table below:

### Review of Localism in Sample Group LTP3 Implementation Plans

| **County Council** | **LTP3 Implementation Plan available online?** | **Mentions Localism Principles?** | **How has the localism agenda been incorporated into prioritisation methodology?** | **Was additional contact required with the authority?** | **Initial RAG Rating** | Following clarification | **Final RAG Rating** |  | **Emailed on** | **Response Received** | **Number of days** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Buckinghamshire | Yes. http://www.transportforbucks.net/Strategy/LTP3/Implementation-Plan.aspx Although only online as a draft version as at 18/10/11 | Yes - discusses localism within policy context section | Unclear - the use of an Activity Prioritisation Tool (APT) to select schemes for investment is referred to within the IP, but the factors that contribute to this assessment aren't listed. However, there is no mention of how a list of potential schemes is generated before passing through the APT. | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. Clarification that the 'long list' is an officer-led process, but that circa £500k each year is delegated to Local Area Forums; thus enabling localism intent via the directing of funds. Improvements planned for next year will see live 'LTP Local Area Action Plans' published online to detail local community priority and investment. | Amber | >>>>> | Green |  | 18/10/11 | 31/10/11 | 13 |
| Cambridgeshire | Yes. http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/transport/strategies/currenttransportplans/local+transport+plan.htm | No. The sole reference to localism is as part of pump-priming for community transport | No mention of localism as a contextual policy issue, or of seeking to embed/incorporate the principles. The allocation of funds is based on a scoring system where individual schemes and sub-programmes are assessed and rated against LTP objectives to prioritise schemes. | Yes - to clarify any evidence of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 18/10/11 (done using online web contact form) | No | N/A |
| Cumbria | No. Cumbria has not produced an Implementation Plan for 2011. | No. N/A | Unclear - the LTP3 simply states that "the first Implementation Plan will cover the period April 2012 to March 2015." | Yes - to confirm what is in place for 2011. How are investment decisions being made prior to the first IP being adopted? No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 18/10/11 | 1 day (from Director); a full response was never received. | N/A |
| Derbyshire | Yes. http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/transport\_roads/transport\_plans/ltp3/inv\_protocol/default.asp | No. | No mention of localism anywhere within the 'Investment Protocol', and it is not clear how these were shaped, although it does mention consultation and analysis that shaped the plan. | Yes - to clarify how prioritisation is taking place and whether localism is incorporated into this in any way. No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 18/10/11 | No | N/A |
| Devon | Yes. http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/transportroads/devon\_local\_transport\_plan/ltp3.htm | No. The sole reference to localism is in an appendix discussing community transport. | Unclear how capital programme has been prioritised, although the Implementation Plan does state that schemes "focus on facilitating changes to travel behaviour and ensuring the network operates efficiently using low cost and high value traffic management measures and capital interventions". | Yes - to clarify how prioritisation is taking place and whether localism is incorporated into this in any way. No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 26/10/11 | No | N/A |
| East Sussex | No. East Sussex has not published its final LTP3 online yet. Only a draft version is available with no implementation plan. | No. N/A | Unclear - no published LTP3 or Implementation Plan available to review. | Yes - to confirm status of adopted LTP3 and query existence of Implementation Plan. Confirmation that the 11/12 programme was made up of *"mostly rollover schemes from LTP2"*. However, a draft Implementation Plan was published at the end of October to cover the implementation programme from 2012 to 15/16 (which included a feedback form to note local proposals). This includes a 3-tier prioritisation process with the first being a high level sift looking at proposals from *"members of the public, communities and local members as well as schemes identified by officers"*. | Red | >>>>> | Amber |  | 26/10/11 | 09/11/11 | 14 |
| Essex | No. Essex has not published its Implementation Plan online | No. N/A | Unclear - no published Implementation Plan available to review. | Yes - to query existence of Implementation Plan. Confirmation that a programme does exists for 11/12, but that it is an interim programme which, due to budget availability, has meant much of the programme consists of schemes rolled forward to meet local commitments. They do expect that a new long-term contract with a service provider will help refine their process (to include local input as a key element). | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 26/10/11 | 01/11/11 | 6 |
| Gloucestershire | No. Gloucestershire has not published its Implementation Plan online, although chapter 11 of its LTP3 refers to a prioritisation process being established. http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=102114 | No. N/A | Unclear - no published Implementation Plan available to review. | Yes - to query existence of Implementation Plan. Confirmation that the 2011/12 implementation plan is *"made up of schemes rolled forward from 2010/11, developer funded schemes and the limited new money allocated in 2011/12, all or which (apart from the community funding) is being used to address safety issues or towards ongoing major schemes.*" There is a separate allocation of £100k for community-led initiatives in 11/12, with the intention that this is increased in 12/13. | Red | >>>>> | Amber |  | 26/10/11 | 09/11/11 | 14 |
| Hampshire | Yes. http://www3.hants.gov.uk/transport/local-transport-plan.htm | Yes. Outlines broad principles within the context of government funding and includes a definition within the glossary. | Unclear as while categories of spend have been identified and outlined, it is not clear how these were arrived at, nor how spend on individual schemes within these investment priorities are to be selected. | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. No response received by 21/11/11. | Amber | >>>>> | Amber |  | 26/10/11 | No | N/A |
| Hertfordshire | Yes. http://www.hertsdirect.org/services/transtreets/transplan/ltp/LTP3/ltp3docs/ | Yes; references the localism agenda (although doesn't explain fully what is meant by this). | Unclear, as while scheme list exists for the first 2 years there is no reference to prioritisation process. Although it states that most schemes will be brought forward from town transport studies it also recognises that "the emerging localism agenda is likely to see an increase in demand for small scale schemes that are designed in response to community needs. This would include schemes for areas outside those covered by the urban transport plans." | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. No response received by 21/11/11. | Amber | >>>>> | Amber |  | 26/10/11 | No | N/A |
| Leicestershire | Yes. http://www.leics.gov.uk/ltp3\_implementation\_plan-2.pdf | Yes; references to localism in the way the council seeks to deliver services. Also mentions 27 local community forums which allow for local discussion of transport issues. | Unclear as prioritisation process not set out; although a new process clearly exists: "Through a new appraisal process, which tested potential activity against the LTP3 priorities, we assessed each option considering a range of factors, such as the impact of the activity, the resources required to deliver it, the risk involved and whether there are environmental or equality impacts. This process enabled us to identify the activities that would be most effective and provide the best value for money." | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. Confirmation that local views were taken into account via consultationin the plan-making process, and that "*During development of the 2011/12 and 2012/13 implementation plans we introduced interim arrangements... [which] include considering the views of residents, as well as considering the views of businesses and partners etc, based on data that we currently hold. In future years, we will build on this approach, including making better use of Highway Forums and Community Forums as ways to build the publics’ understanding of the scale of challenges faced by the area, and identifying ways in which they can help contribute towards addressing them*." So a shift in emphasis is planned in future years. | Amber | >>>>> | Amber |  | 26/10/11 | 04/11/11 | 9 |
| Lincolnshire | No. LTP3 contains a 2-page summary of available budget - no detailed information. | No. | Unclear - no Implementation Plan available to review. Lincolnshire's LTP3 "has involved simply rolling forward the policies and strategies from LTP2 for a further 2 years i.e. to cover the years 2011/12 and 2012/13" | Yes - to query existence of detailed Implementation Plan and prioritisation process. Confirmation that the prioritisation and scheme selection process for LTP2 was rolled forward due to lack of clarity around funding levels at the time. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 31/10/11 | 31/10/11 | 0 |
| Norfolk | Yes. http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/Travel\_and\_transport/Transport\_future\_for\_Norfolk/Local\_Transport\_Plan/index.htm | No. | Unclear - an investment programme is set out in the plan, but only to categorising spend against investment headings. It is not clear how schemes will be brought forward and prioritised within these headings. | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. Confirmation that only a "*small minority*" of schemes are officer-originated - mainly those around road safety where targeting (at blackspots) is of particular importance. The majority of schemes are originated by "*Parish, Town and District Councils, Local Elected Members, local residents and businesses, action groups, petitions or from schools*" and are then appraised against LTP objectives. Specific examples to improve local input and steering include a dedicated fund launched in Sept '11 for Parish and Town councils to bid for county match funding for locally-identified pavement improvements/ crossing facilities etc, plus the county funding of vehicle activated signs in areas where parishes have previously self-financed (indicating local prioritisation). | Red | >>>>> | Green |  | 31/10/11 | 15/11/11 | 15 |
| North Yorkshire | No. | No. N/A | The LTP3 includes an appendix (6) on 'Scheme identification', but this discusses studies and appraising schemes against the LTP3 objectives rather than describing a methodology. | Yes - to query existence of detailed Implementation Plan and prioritisation process. Confirmation that they do not have an Implementation Plan but have instead rolled forward the prioritisation approach used for LTP2, albeit updated to reflect LTP3 objectives. Specific statement that they believe "*it is wrong to assume that localism is confined to scheme prioritisation*", and point to community engagement in identifying local needs while using a countywide prioritisation process to have a "*consistent and auditable*" system. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 31/10/11 | 15/11/11 | 15 |
| Northamptonshire | Yes but only an interim plan as part of the adopted LTP3 prior to a full Implementation Plan being produced for April 2012. http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Transport/TP/Pages/LTP3.aspx | Yes | Unclear, although the proposed programme for 11/12 does include a community-directed element of £700k, or 18.5% of the integrated transport spend. | Yes - to clarify how schemes were prioritised and to query how they intend localism principles be taken forward in future given the one-year status of this implementation plan. No response received by 21/11/11. | Green | >>>>> | Green |  | 09/11/11 | No | N/A |
| Nottinghamshire | Yes. http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/home/traffic\_and\_travel/strategy-policy/ltp/ltp3.htm#impplan | Yes | Describes the community contributing to local accessibility transport studies to identify local improvements, but not clear how these have fed into the programme, or how prioritisation/selection takes place. | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests ie how the improvements identified in the local accessibility transport studies make their way into the investment programme. No response received by 21/11/11. | Amber | >>>>> | Amber |  | 09/11/2011 (done using online web contact form) | No | N/A |
| Oxfordshire | Yes; plan published as a webpage: http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/transport-investment-programme-0 | No | Unclear, no context given in 'Transport Investment Plan'. | Yes - to determine whether that web page is the whole Implementation Plan (no separate document exists), and to clarify how schemes are prioritised and how localism principles may have been included. No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 09/11/11 | No | N/A |
| Somerset | Yes. www.somerset.gov.uk/futuretransportplan | Yes | Includes 'What evidence is there of community support for the proposal?' as one of the prioritisation criteria, and states that "locally-promoted schemes will be considered alongside any strategic proposals that might be necessary", but it is not clear how this has manifested itself in practice as no programme is provided. | Yes - to establish how much of the programme is locally-directed and to determine how locally-promoted schemes are considered. Confirmation that schemes were promoted by local councillors resulting in a programme that is split approximately 80:20 in favour of locally-originated schemes to those recommended by officers (focusing on road safety or broader strategic need). This was a new protocol established for 2011. | Amber | >>>>> | Green |  | 09/11/11 | 16/11/11 | 7 |
| Staffordshire | No. | No. N/A | Unclear - no published Implementation Plan available to review. | Yes - to query existence of Implementation Plan. Confirmation that they do not have a published LTP3 Implementation Plan. One was written and went out for internal consultation but never got signed off. "*This was not because it said anything controversial, rather that the Council was (and still is) going through a period of ‘transition’ and many peoples’ roles were changing within the authority. It now seems a bit late and I am not sure that it will ever get the green light*." An agreed programme for 2011/12 does exist but many elements were carried forward from 2010/11. New schemes are assessed against LTP3 priorities, and while there is a recognition and a process to appraise 'bottom up' (community-originated) schemes as well as 'top down' (strategy-led) ones, there is no clear evidence of the extent to which community-led schemes feature, since there is no publicly available implementation plan. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 09/11/11 | 10/11/11 | 1 |
| Suffolk | Yes. http://www.suffolk.gov.uk/TransportAndStreets/Policies/LocalTransportPlan.htm | No | Unclear - spend is broken down largely by town, although a proportion (14.5%) is allocated to 'locally determined quality of life' schemes - indicating that localism principles are present. | Yes, to query what the process is for selecting the locally determined schemes and to clarify that the principles of localism are being promoted (despite any statement/explanation to this effect). No response received by 21/11/11. | Amber | >>>>> | Amber |  | 09/11/11 | No | N/A |
| Surrey | Yes. http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/LookupWebPagesByTITLE\_RTF/Surrey+Transport+Plan+Implementation+and+finance?opendocument | No. | Unclear - spend is not allocated to any particular headings and the plan states that for 11/12 maintenance will be the priority. "During 2011/12, options for future levels of integrated transport expenditure will be examined for the financial year 2012/13 and beyond." | Yes, to clarify whether there is any transport improvement spend in 11/12 or whether plans will be developed for future years. No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 09/11/11 | No | N/A |
| West Sussex | Yes. (Included as part2 to LTP). http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/your\_council/plans\_projects\_reports\_and/plans/west\_sussex\_transport\_plan/west\_sussex\_transport\_plan1.aspx | No. | Unclear - no programme is set out, just a list of objectives/priorities for each town/district. | Yes - to clarify extent of localism in prioritisation and local input to scheme generation/requests. No response received by 21/11/11. | Red | >>>>> | Red |  | 09/11/11 | No | N/A |

## Analysis

The results show a number of different themes coming though in analysis; these are discussed under the sub-headings below:

### Response Rate

One area I was not expecting to comment on was the response rate, however it should be noted that only 10 of the 22 councils responded (45.5%)[[15]](#footnote-15). The results therefore show the outcomes from the initial research together with clarification where this was forthcoming from councils.

### LTP Implementation Plans

One of the most interesting aspects of this research that became immediately apparent, was just how many of the sample group did not have published Implementation Plans. 15 of the 22 councils had a plan of some sort available, while one (East Sussex) was consulting on one at the time of this research being undertaken. Of the remainder, 5 confirmed that they had essentially rolled the previous programme forward and 1 failed to provide a clarifying response.

### Localism in Prioritisation

At first glance only 7 councils discussed localism in their implementation plans; however it may be slightly disingenuous to suppose that the remainder ignored the issue entirely given that many have simplified the overall feel of such documents to the extent that such terminology may have been excluded in the name of readability. Of more interest is that, without exception, the various prioritisation processes either outlined or alluded to were in the main described as ‘unclear’ with regards to their inclusion of localism or any local weighting. Some councils were able to provide further clarification when asked on just how they were incorporating local aspiration (and some are doing a comprehensive job on demonstrating this), but the overall quality of the information made available to the public was lacking in detail.

### Council Responses

All councils were contacted to provide clarification on various points as described in the table above. This was done via email to the appropriate contact – often a transport policy/planning email address was given on the webpage where such documents were published. Where this was not provided, contact was made via the general council contact email, with the explicit title that the enquiry related to the Local Transport Plan and related Implementation Plan (in order that the enquiry could be sufficiently targeted to an appropriate officer to respond).

As stated above, 10 responses were forthcoming. Details on the responses are contained within the table, but it can be seen that 4 councils were able to provide detail such that the summary perception of their RAG ratings were improved. In the most extreme example of this, Norfolk went from an initial Red assessment to a Green once they had confirmed the local origination of much of their programme together with specific examples of how they are investing in areas of local priority. In this case, as with many others, it could be said that by making more of this type of information available on the council’s website a stronger impression of local focus would be generated.

One of the most intriguing responses came from Staffordshire where an officer explained that an Implementation Plan had indeed been drafted and was circulated (internally) for consultation, but that this was shelved in light of various transitional arrangements at the council – including change in many peoples’ roles within the authority. From speaking informally to officers at a range of councils it seems like this is a common contextual issue, and while some are more open about it than others, many are struggling with the dichotomy that is increasing (resource-intensive) local community focus at a time of severe funding and staffing cuts.

### RAG Assessments

It was clear that some sort of assessment of councils’ ‘performance’ on localism matters relating to local transport investment was going to be necessary for this research. But it was also clear that this could in no way be formulated as an exact score given the qualitative nature of the research and the limited scope of the analysis. However, it was felt that a simple Red/Amber/Green assessment would provide a useful method of separating the councils into categories while recognising the inevitable subjectivity that is inherent in such a process. Given the factors noted during the research, the categories could be broadly described as:

Red: No plan available, or no reference to localism/no evidence of how locally-originated schemes might be promoted.

Amber: Considering local need from a range of sources, a small allocation of funding for community schemes, or evidence of intent to consider local aspiration within any sifting process.

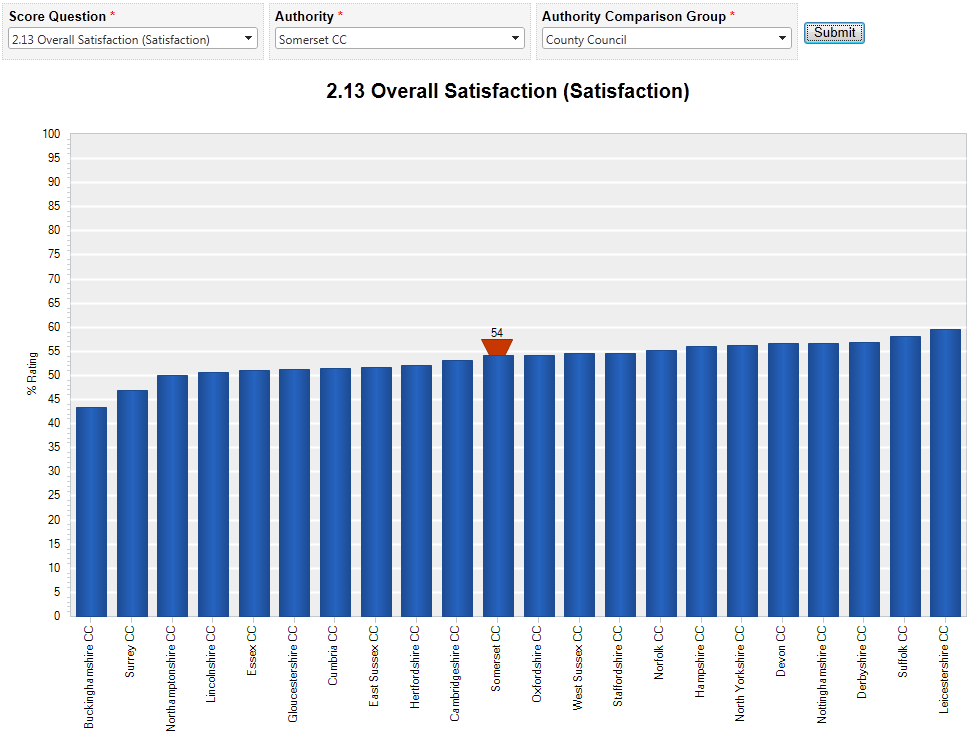
Green: A published implementation plan, a (new?) method for prioritising local schemes, dedicated funding streams for local prioritisation, or evidence of a determined (meaningful proportion) investment in community priorities.

Against this backdrop, councils were given an initial rating which was then refined for a final rating if they were able to provide clarification that addressed some of the relevant queries. In the situation where a council failed to provide a response, the initial rating was simply carried forward to the final rating. In the final rating, 4 councils achieved green ratings; 7 were classed as amber; and the remaining 11 categorised as red.

**RAG Assessments**

### Comparisons with NHT Satisfaction Data

As part of the final set of analysis to be undertaken as part of this research, the RAG assessment were then compared to the 2011 NHT survey data for overall satisfaction with highways and transport. While it is acknowledged that this NHT data incorporates public satisfaction on a range of measure unrelated to local transport investment, nonetheless it is felt that as a rational proxy for local satisfaction in transport services it is a useful comparator. The results for overall satisfaction for the county council sample group are shown below:



For ease of comparison, the above satisfaction data from the NHT survey has been used to split the councils into 3 groups so that it can then be established whether there is any correlation between the lower, mid and upper tiers of satisfaction[[16]](#footnote-16) when compared with the RAG assessments made on the localism assessment.

Of the 7 councils in the satisfaction upper tier, 3 were red; 3 were amber; and 1 green

Of the 8 councils in the satisfaction mid tier, 4 were red; 2 were amber; and 2 green

Of the 7 councils in the satisfaction lower tier, 4 were red; 1 was amber; and 2 green

This demonstrates that there currently seems to be no correlation at all between the extent of localism incorporated by councils in their investment programmes and wider public satisfaction. Indeed while Buckinghamshire scored the lowest for public satisfaction it also achieved a green rating for its efforts on adopting localism principles. If there was one caveat to this assessment it would be that the 2011 NHT survey results relate to investment that would have been carried out in the last year of LTP2, therefore any new approaches by councils post April 2011 (and many have done in tandem with their new LTP3 approach) will not yet be reflected in schemes being delivered and hence public perception at this stage. It would be interesting to repeat this research in a couple of years to see if a stronger link is apparent, given that surely public satisfaction (via increased input and influence) is precisely what the localism agenda is trying to address.

## Summary and Conclusion

This study has explored how the new localism agenda has manifested itself within the context of local transport investment; notably that of the LTP integrated transport block allocations that were, for the first time, made as direct capital grants to upper tier authorities in 2011/12.

The coalition government’s intentions have been to empower local communities and to give them the tools (and local authorities the corollary encouragement) to engender greater community influence over local council investment. On this point the research has clearly shown that the picture, or indeed progress towards this aim, is at best varied. This has also been noted by practitioners in the field and may be one reason why there is not the same level of self-induced pressure to publish an Implementation Plan as there is with the LTP:

*“It is interesting to note that no member of the public or stakeholder has asked to see a copy of the Implementation Plan and having scanned other authorities’ websites, not all have published one and those that have, quality/detail varies.”*

Some authorities have clearly taken steps to change their approach from that followed under LTP2, with new prioritisation processes adopted, revised methods to engage with their communities, or specific (and significant) dedicated funding allocations for community-determined transport interventions. In other cases authorities have been quite blunt about their current practices simply being rolled forward from LTP2 given the delay in scoping any programme for 11/12, the uncertainty surrounding council services and activity, or simply the inability to target staff resources at developing new approaches given the current pressures on revenue (including staffing) budgets.

*“...the Council was (and still is) going through a period of ‘transition’ and many peoples’ roles were changing within the authority. It now seems a bit late and I am not sure that it [the implementation plan] will ever get the green light.”*

The assessment of the extent to which localism is embedded within any local investment prioritisation does of course have the ability to collide and compete directly with the ability of the authority to address its strategic needs. This is evidenced by even those authorities choosing to make specific allocations for locally-originated schemes retaining an element of funding for officer-recommended investment, often directed by technical strategy work in town/corridor studies across the various counties. This demonstrates that there is a strong recognition by upper tier authorities that strategic investment will continue to be required, whether that be in projects that unlock countywide growth/economic development, or simply in supporting the infrastructure needs of development as set out within district core strategies. This research did not cover the extent to which professional officers at the authorities believed that such locally-originated schemes added value to the investment programme or whether they were viewed as a drain on scarce resources that might otherwise have been directed to strategic projects. However, given the variation in the extent to which councils are choosing to direct their funds, one suspects that a similar variation in officer opinion would also be prevalent.

By comparing the amount of local input given to transport investment with that of the satisfaction outcomes resulting from the NHT survey this research has proven that, as yet, there is no specific correlation between promoting greater local input and increasing levels of local satisfaction. However, as was noted earlier in this paper, this is perhaps too early to judge that such a link would not be forthcoming, as ideally authorities would like to believe that one of the by-products of giving communities greater influence over transport investment is an increased level of local satisfaction with transport. This would be the key recommendation for additional research going forward.

Moving to the question of whether the new localism is creating an ability to frustrate strategic investment as well as empowering local communities; this research has shown that even at authorities who have been the keenest to allow community-determined priorities to shape their investment programmes, an element of funding is retained for strategic transport priorities. In the first year of a new LTP phase many authorities are ‘trying something new’ and it will be interesting to note what (if anything) becomes common practice over the coming years and whether a defined proportional split between local and strategic transport investment emerges (as has been defined for the New Homes Bonus with 80% going to districts and 20% to the counties[[17]](#footnote-17)). County councils in particular will need to be balanced in their views of allowing local input while retaining the ability to meet strategic needs across their districts.

This situation (and risk) becomes more exacerbated when looking at proposed new streams of funding such as the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) where one ‘pot’ (which almost inevitably won’t be sufficient to provide the necessary infrastructure) must be allocated across a range of investment opportunities. As has been noted “They could include items such as cycle lanes or junction improvements but local communities could equally decide that sprucing up their local parks is more important. This is where localism and planning collide”[[18]](#footnote-18)

In conclusion, the localism agenda within transport investment is manifesting itself across a spectrum of intervention levels across the county councils in the sample group. It is to be expected that in the absence of any central control over the process, what takes place at local level will be varied, and indeed this is no doubt the intention. Local communities are starting to be empowered to go beyond simply making suggestions or pleas for improvements and, in a number of areas, are now being given (or allocated) the funds to deliver on their aspirations. Whether this frustrates strategic intent or improves local satisfaction remains to be seen, however it is clear that when local or neighbourhood aspiration conflicts with strategic priority, authorities will need to walk a fine line between making tough decisions and ignoring the very community that localism is intending to empower.

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1. Announced by Philip Hammond MP as Secretary of State for Transport on 20th October 2010 following the spending review settlement. Press release available at: <http://nds.coi.gov.uk/clientmicrosite/Content/Detail.aspx?ClientId=202&NewsAreaId=2&ReleaseID=416118&SubjectId=36> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/transportfund/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Advice on the Prioritisation of Smaller Transport Schemes, DfT / Atkins, January 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1632149> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1632149> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‘In Brief’, Local Transport Today, Issue 555. 1st October 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/local-transport-capital-block-funding/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://assets.dft.gov.uk/publications/local-transport-capital-block-funding/summaryofresponses.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Strategically significant ‘major’ schemes were formally prioritised as regional funding advice submitted to DfT, however at the time this paper was produced, the major schemes funding stream was being re-engineered and public consultation imminent on the notion of Local Transport Consortia, with DfT keen for the replacement to be agreed and in place by the end of 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Doing Something Big, Local Government Group Report, June 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ‘Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services’, DTLR, 2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Strong and Prosperous Communities – The Local Government White Paper, DCLG, 2006 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Speaking at the Local Society Seminar on 4th February 2011 – Seminar Summary Report ‘Local Society 2011, available from localsociety.org.uk [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://nhtsurvey.econtrack.co.uk/Content.aspx?3181> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Oxfordshire, West Sussex, Herts and Surrey Councils responded after the analysis had been completed, hence not being included in the results as published. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. These were assigned using a 7:8:7 split for upper:mid:lower given the total of 22 councils. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/newhomesbonus/newhomesbonusquestions/ [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Local Transport Today, 4th November 2011, ‘Editorial comment’ p15, LTT 583, Landor Publishing [↑](#footnote-ref-18)