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**Beyond Consensus and Conflict in Housing Governance:
Returning to the Local State**

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Keywords:	Local State, Political, Post-politics, Housing regeneration, Consultation, Participation, Consensus democracy, Promotion
Abstract:	<p>This paper contends that the de-politicizing tendencies in urban planning that are often interpreted through a post-political frame of analysis might alternatively be investigated via the analytical lens of a transforming local state. Examining the formation of entrepreneurial municipal housing strategies in Gateshead, northeast England, the paper reveals a recent history of community consensus being manipulated, a technocratic steering of participatory planning, and a de-amplifying of dissenting voices. Amid protracted conditions of austerity, the more recent strategy sees Gateshead municipal authority assuming an increasingly 'promotional' role, essentially as a housing developer. Placing critical decisions over housing futures within Gateshead Regeneration Partnership, a potentially rough road toward attaining democratic legitimacy is actively being smoothed. These are all trends that are emblematic of a post-political repertoire. However, a more forensic examination reveals how these anti-democratic processes might be more appropriately understood as political accomplishments on the part of those who have been newly incorporated into a local state in transition. The paper thereby offers a conceptual antidote to the post-political narrative.</p>

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Beyond Consensus and Conflict in Housing Governance: Returning to the Local State

1 Between Consensus and Conflict in Post-Political Planning

In recent decades, and drawing lessons from the critique of high modernism (Dear, 1986), scholars of urban planning have been motivated to formulate conceptual approaches facilitating a deeper involvement of *the public* in actively planning and designing places (Healey, 1996; Fainstein, 2000). This commitment to encourage participation and to foster consensus among diverse stakeholders meant that collaborative and communicative approaches found favour with various Third Way political projects that prevailed during the 1990s and early 2000s (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). Such projects were stimulated in part by communitarian ideals of a ‘partisan-free democracy’ (Mouffe, 2005), envisioned to transcend the divisive politics of left-versus-right. They also simultaneously ‘rolled forward’ neoliberalism by merging a competitive economy with an enabling state while instilling horizontal partnership arrangements between the public, private, and community sectors (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Hall, 2003).

The internal contradictions of such political economic projects came to a head following the recession of 2008. If initially a financial crisis triggered by waves of sub-prime mortgage foreclosures across US suburbs, the ensuing fallout has seen many countries being governed through austere state projects amid ‘the strange non-death of neoliberalism’ (Crouch, 2011). Of particular note here is the extent to which, in confronting protracted austerity (Peck, 2017), urban planning regimes are evermore compelled to pledge favourable conditions to land owners and developers. This thereby raises doubts about whether the voices, aspirations, and demands of *other* stakeholders – advocates for public housing, for example – will feature meaningfully in any so-called consensus. It is also leading some scholars in urban planning to question the credentials of a collaborative-participatory paradigm designed to achieve consensus among divergent stakeholders (McClymont, 2011; Gualini, 2015; Legacy, 2016b). In particular, the imperative to gain a profit-maximizing ‘consensus’ is understood to de-amplify, suppress, or even coercively silence those whose views might diverge from the seemingly more influential voices participating in the dialogue (Metzger et al, 2015; Legacy, 2016a).

It is this expression of ‘consensus democracy’ (Ranciere, 1999) that some interpret to be illustrative of a post-political landscape. Informed by ‘enlightened technocrats’ (Zizek, 1999), metropolitan planning regimes are increasingly predisposed to tightly orchestrate consensual decision-making while foreclosing on possibilities for dissent and intransigent political conflict (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015). Contributions to this body of thought have undoubtedly disclosed some limits to consensus models of planning and formal political engagement while also revealing seemingly neutral practices like ‘good governance’ to be deeply politicized (Swyngedouw, 2009; MacLeod, 2011; Brown, 2015). Nonetheless, adhering to a post-political narrative in turn risks positing a troubling binary between consensus and conflict: one that envisages places to be governed through a ‘police order’ in opposition to ‘proper political’ undertakings that disrupt this very order. These disruptions are often viewed to foreshadow the potential for a more progressive

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3 democracy (cf. Ranciere, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2011, Dikec and Swyngedouw, 2017). Such a
4 binary suffers:

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6 ...from an overly limited definition of what counts as politics proper, as well as a failure to
7 understand consent as fundamentally political. In so doing, it undermines its own ability to
8 understand how consensus is won and whose interests it serves (Mitchell et al, 2015: 2636).
9

10 Taking inspiration from Mitchell et al, this paper examines the tactics that are deployed to de-
11 politicize housing-led regeneration in Gateshead¹, an industrial town in the north-east of
12 England. Section two introduces the case study area; the neighbourhood Bensham and
13 Saltwell in Gateshead, and its prolonged journey of housing regeneration. It focuses
14 particularly on the recent transitions in local government amidst protracted austerity and the
15 neoliberalisation of housing governance. Whilst such movements might be deemed
16 symptomatic of post-politicization or de-politicization (MacLeod, 2011; Wood and Flinders,
17 2014; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015), the concept of the local state is offered as an antidote
18 to this narrative, enabling us to prise open conceptual space to reveal the presence and
19 persistence of politics. Such a conceptualisation is empirically grounded in Section 3, with an
20 analysis of the governing of consensus locally through the UK government-funded
21 programme *Housing Market Renewal Initiative* (HMRI). Here attempts to de-politicise both
22 public engagement (through consultation and participation) and contestation (through
23 resident opposition) are revealed as inherently political. However, the HMRI initiative was
24 cut in 2011 following the recession and a new hegemonic state project of ‘austerity localism’
25 (Featherstone et al, 2012) was enacted. Gateshead Council swiftly initiated a new locally led
26 organization, the *Gateshead Regeneration Partnership* (GRP), which is the focus of Section
27 4. Heralding a more explicit strategy of place ‘promotion’, the GRP has assumed
28 responsibility for a significant portfolio of housing sites demarcated to be ‘not public’ and
29 boldly advertised to private buyers as such. Section 5 analyses how these trends are
30 compromising political representation and democracy within the local state: not least in terms
31 of how the GRP is insulating the public from potentially ‘messy’ and ‘confusing’ dialogue,
32 thereby eroding even the veneer of a consensus democracy. The final section draws together
33 the compelling evidence that Gateshead *appears* to be experiencing a post-political mode of
34 governing, but this narrative has conceptual limits. Instead, we contend that local politics
35 might be investigated with greater empirical forensic precision, which can both inform and be
36 informed by the conceptual development of the local state.
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41 **2 Governing through Partnerships: Rethinking the Local State in** 42 **Gateshead**

43 **2.1 Governing through Partnership in Gateshead**

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47 Gateshead sits on the south bank of the River Tyne overlooking the city of Newcastle. Its
48 original growth owed much to the industrial revolution. However, as with many industrial
49 towns, the latter half of the twentieth century saw Gateshead’s administration confronting
50 significant deindustrialization, large-scale unemployment, poverty, and out-migration
51 (Manders, 1974). The neighbourhood of Bensham and Saltwell was caught in the tide of such
52 powerful waves of socioeconomic destruction, and by the beginning of the twenty-first
53 century some of its Victorian terraces were housing disproportionate numbers of low-wage,
54 precariously employed, and recently migrated households. Such conditions placed Bensham
55 and Saltwell under the spotlight of a series of slum clearance and later regeneration schemes
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3 for many years, such as the Single Regeneration Budget. The most recent of these was the
4 1997-2010 New Labour government's plans to renew 'low demand' neighbourhoods
5 containing allegedly 'failing' local housing markets across the north and midlands of England
6 through the *Housing Market Renewal Initiative* (HMRI). Running between 2002 and 2011,
7 HMRI was granted £2.2 billion to encourage "radical and sustained action to replace obsolete
8 housing with modern sustainable accommodation, through demolition and new building or
9 refurbishment" (ODPM, 2003: 24). It was governed via metropolitan *Pathfinder* partnerships,
10 such as Bridging Newcastle Gateshead. As one of many unelected public-private partnerships
11 that proliferated the urban landscape at this time, the multi-agency coalition Pathfinders
12 included on their boards Local Authorities, Regional Development Agencies, Local Strategic
13 Partnerships, Housing Corporations, the Government Office and private sector
14 representatives. Understood to be agencies of *governance*, overseen particularly by local
15 government, Pathfinders map onto Purcell's (2008) critique of public-private partnerships
16 more broadly; being "streamlined [to] foreclose lengthy debate and more quickly respond to
17 market opportunities" (ibid: 27). Explicitly a program of *market* rather than *housing* renewal
18 (Allen, 2008), HMRI sat on the neoliberal flank of New Labour's vision of a Third Way path
19 to blend a competitive economy with a reformed state (MacLeod and Johnstone, 2012), or
20 perhaps a 'quasi-state apparatus' (Clark and Dear, 1984), which we will return to.
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23 At a local level, a range of consultants were employed to produce a series of assessments in
24 relation to a neighbourhood's housing market, landscape, urban design and heritage as well
25 as community consultation. This evidence base then sign-posted pockets of areas that became
26 the target for regeneration intervention. In Bensham and Saltwell, this was proposed though a
27 combination of external improvements to houses or outright demolition of blocks of streets,
28 which began in Spring 2008. However, in the wake of the great recession of that same year,
29 and the subsequent election of a Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in
30 May 2010, £50 million was cut from the annual HMRI budget of £311 million (Leeming,
31 2010). Before long the initiative was terminated, as the Coalition initiated and steered the
32 United Kingdom through a period of extended austerity (Crouch, 2011; O'Hara, 2014). This
33 left Bensham and Saltwell part-way through a drawn-out demolition programme, having been
34 stalled by opposing resident intervention (see below). The curtailment of central government
35 support propelled those involved in the original *Bridging Newcastle-Gateshead* pathfinder to
36 coalesce around a resolute concern to 'finish the job' embarked upon with HMRI
37 (Respondent in Economic and Housing Growth, April 2015). As much out of strategic intent
38 as fiscal necessity, the conflation of austerity alongside the UK Government's localism
39 agenda (Featherstone et al 2012) saw Gateshead seeking to transcend the previous
40 'dependence' on central state funding (Respondent in Economic and Housing Growth, April
41 2015). Drawing on the market-facing insights accrued under HMRI (Webb, 2010), and
42 following a competitive bidding process, a joint venture partnership was formed in 2012.
43 The *Gateshead Regeneration Partnership* (GRP) is a Limited Liability partnership made up
44 of Gateshead Council, who provide the land, construction group Galliford Try who build the
45 houses (under their house building arm Linden Homes), and housing association Home
46 Group, who offer funding for and managerial oversight of any social housing provided².
47 Although the stalled regeneration of Bensham and Saltwell was the catalyst for the creation
48 of the GRP, the partnership is not confined to this neighbourhood. Instead, in seeking to be
49 commercially attractive, a range of nineteen publicly owned brownfield and greenfield sites
50 across the borough constitute the GRP portfolio, with the flexibility to include other sites in
51 the future.
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3 The GRP is a long-term partnership bound by a business plan and several legal agreements³
4 and is expected to construct 2,400 homes over a fifteen to twenty year period. In tying itself
5 so closely with private developers, Gateshead Council would seem to be engaging in a
6 routine interlude of privatism and neoliberal municipal entrepreneurship (Peck, 1995;
7 Hackworth, 2007). These various forms of partnerships have been previously understood to
8 be mutating into an unelected state, where “‘business interests’ are [...] mobilized, given
9 their form and presented with their function *by the state*” (Peck 1995:17, original emphasis).
10 And yet the GRP represents a significant departure from the customary trend in recent
11 decades where local authorities ‘contract out’ key functions to private firms (Cochrane, 1989;
12 Raco, 2013), as was the case under HMRI. Instead, by harnessing together private developers
13 and finance alongside sources of governance and legitimacy (via Home Group), the GRP is
14 *contracting in* key operations to local government. This is illustrative of a trend whereby,
15 amid protracted austerity and the full withdrawal of revenue support grant⁴ by 2020 (Councils
16 in Crisis, 2017), local councils are increasingly transitioning to self-funded models adopting
17 innovative approaches to land and property, sometimes to cross-subsidize other services
18 (Beswick and Penny, forthcoming 2018). Such changes are indicative of an emerging
19 conjuncture whereupon local government is regaining some *autonomy* in formulating a
20 strategy for housing policy; the intricacies of which we contend demand an analytical focus
21 stretching beyond local government itself or even the broader category of local *governance* to
22 re-embrace the concept of *the local state*.
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26 **2.2 Returning to the Local State**

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28 Research on the local state owes much to Cockburn’s (1977) pioneering investigation of
29 Lambeth in London. Taking inspiration from Marxist conceptualizations of the state in
30 capitalist society (Miliband, 1969), Cockburn urged readers to step “outside the conventional
31 frame of reference” and to view local government as necessarily entwined with the central
32 state as well as with the relations of class domination throughout capitalist society
33 (Cockburn, 1977: 41-45). The local state is therefore understood to be made up of multiple
34 organisations alongside local government functions, such as the police and the law courts and
35 importantly for Cockburn this includes the influence of powerful business interests at a
36 national level. Cockburn’s research also emerged at a particular moment of transition in local
37 government, principally the rise of corporate management, which saw the introduction of
38 new organisational structures including chief executives, directors and cabinets. In light of
39 which, Cockburn sought to foster a deeper understanding of the local state’s role in enabling
40 the reproduction of capitalism, which she understood to be “carried out not by repression but
41 by ideology - by inculcating a view of the world to bring about consent through cultural
42 persuasion” (Cockburn, 1977:57).
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46 While Cockburn perceives the local state as having a basic unity, she also emphasises that we
47 must resist seeing it in purely mechanistic terms, as an omnipotent state at work. Instead she
48 identified complex and multiple power struggles over the local state’s institutional and
49 political form as well as its functioning. Even to the extent it may come to be viewed as ‘an
50 obstacle’ as much as ‘an agent’ of any given project orchestrated by the central state (Duncan
51 and Goodwin, 1988). It is in this sense not least that:

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53 As soon as you abandon the idea of the state merely as an institution, as a function, and begin to
54 recognise it as a form of relations, a whole new way of struggle opens up (The London Edinburgh
55 Weekend Return Group⁵ (1979: 77).
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3 Understood as a set of social relations and struggles, the local state offers a powerful
4 analytical frame through which we can understand local decision-making and governing
5 more broadly. Nonetheless, earlier conceptualisations of the local state were deemed to fall
6 into the trap of generalising trends from specific local empirical findings or as lacking a
7 consistent analytical focus (Rhodes 1988; Johnson 1989). Others however aimed to cultivate
8 a more fluid and geographically adaptable conceptualization of the local state (Fincher, 1987;
9 Duncan and Goodwin, 1988). Nevertheless, more generally the conceptual deployment of the
10 *local state* has waned somewhat since the 1980s, particularly as the inculcation of neoliberal
11 statecraft and the imperative to foster entrepreneurial economic restructuring is purported to
12 have eroded at least some of the scope for alternative local political strategies. This, along
13 with the ‘contracting out’ of once municipally managed functions to non- or quasi-state
14 agencies, has done much to encourage an analytical focus on local and urban *governance*
15 alongside government (Brenner, 2004; Painter, 2009). And yet it was these very trends in the
16 rise of neoliberal planning and policy that Allan Cochrane – writing in the early 1990s – saw
17 as demanding a clear distinction between local government and the local state, to the extent
18 that:
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21 It will no longer be possible to equate local politics with the politics of local government, since
22 many of the most important decisions will be taken in quite different forums. And it will only be
23 possible to understand the politics of local government within a wider framework of local politics
24 and the local state (Cochrane 1993: 124)
25

26 Twenty-five years on, we wish to reiterate this argument. In doing so we further consider Bob
27 Jessop’s (2016) strategic-relational approach to state power as a compliment to the principles
28 outlined above. For like Cockburn, Jessop rejects any view of the state as a monolithic object
29 or unified subject. Instead, the strategic capacity of any given state to undertake specific
30 actions is only dependent upon the modes of representation and social bases of support that
31 operate through the state as an institutional ensemble. In appreciating these incessantly
32 relational arrangements we can understand how, through a continuous process of structural
33 and strategic selectivity, certain interest groups rather than others are able to gain privileged
34 access to the state’s institutional form and its different branches and divisions. Through the
35 modality of state power, the substantive direction of political economic strategy and mode of
36 policy intervention can be choreographed to favour those very interest groups, classes, and
37 regions over others. Whilst he has largely investigated the state at a national or inter-national
38 level, Jessop’s most recent work on the state encourages a multi-spatial understanding of the
39 state as an emergent, partial and unstable ensemble, with “its powers (plural) ... activated by
40 changing sets of politicians and state officials located in specific parts of the state” (Jessop,
41 2016: 56). Recalling a key principle of the earlier debate on the local state, this approach
42 therefore enables us to interpret *the local* as a site of “competing political interests rather than
43 a neutral set of administrative institutions” (Goodwin, 1989: 156).
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46 Drawing on all of these conceptual ideas, we will go on to interpret the transformation of the
47 local state in Gateshead, with the emergent GRP assuming a crucial role as a structurally
48 inscribed actor. At a key moment of wider political-economic pressure, the local state’s
49 institutional form and strategic operation, as well as in its political representation and (re-)
50 direction is under transition. This newly configuring local state is following a path that builds
51 upon the inherited institutional landscapes of the HMRI and its marketization of municipal
52 housing and particular inscription of ‘centrally orchestrated localism’ (Peck, 1995). But under
53 conditions of protracted austerity and the impending curtailment of any central state funding,
54 the local state in Gateshead appears to be asserting some form of autonomy. Such moments
55 of fiscal stress are shaping the representation and strategic vision of the local state,
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reconfiguring its very institutional *and political* character. So whilst Cockburn (1977:103) alerted us of how it is “the tactics and strategies of the state we most need to understand”, we would also urge the need to reveal how the social relations and struggles of such strategies open up space to reveal the persistence of local politics. Whether garnered to foster cooperation and consensus or to instill or de-amplify conflict, such struggles are inherently political. For as Helga Leitner identified many years ago:

The often conflicting nature of [competing] demands, and the inability of the local state to meet them all simultaneously and satisfactorily, may give rise to explicit political conflict over the role of the local state; conflict which itself can represent a further source of pressure (Leitner, 1990: 156).

3 Housing Market Renewal in Gateshead: Governing Consensus, Repressing ‘The Political’

In foreshadowing a large-scale demolition of family homes while simultaneously deploying stigmatizing discourses pertaining to ‘failing’ and ‘obsolete’ housing, HMRI proved highly controversial. However, reactions unfolded differently geographically in HMRI neighbourhoods across the North and West Midlands (Cameron, 2006; Allen, 2008; Webb, 2010). The following sections examine the local tactics and strategies that were drawn upon in the locality of Bensham and Saltwell; the first identifies the deployment of key moments of public engagement to elicit neighbourhood consensus while the second reveals the articulation of local dissent by one interest group.

3.1 Manipulating Consultation, Steering Participation: Limits to Consensus Democracy

As we saw earlier, plans initiated in 2004 by the *Bridging Newcastle-Gateshead* Pathfinder identified Bensham and Saltwell as an area in need of ‘regeneration’. Gateshead Council subsequently contracted *Social Regeneration Consultants* (SRC) to undertake extensive community consultation in 2005, a move not un-common in the co-evolution of planning with expert consultancies (see Raco et al, 2016). The SRC consultation included stakeholder interviews, neighbourhood workshops, surveys, outreach sessions and drop-in surveys. In conclusion, the SRC (2005) recognized significantly high levels of resident satisfaction throughout Bensham and Saltwell, with broad support for the regeneration plans. Nonetheless, a close reading of consultation documents discloses how key response categories appeared to have been manipulated so as to exaggerate the number of residents favouring demolition over refurbishment: with support for demolition appreciably low among residents whose properties were targeted. One example of this is in the drop-in surveys that were held in the neighbourhood to gauge views of the proposed Neighbourhood Action Plan. Here it was reported that twenty per cent of residents strongly opposed the plan, twenty five per cent strongly supported it, forty nine per cent supported it to some extent (importantly supporting refurbishment, but not necessarily demolition), and six per cent were unsure. SRC went on to combine the twenty five per cent of people who strongly supported the plan, with the forty nine per cent who supported the plan to some extent to conclude that ‘there were high levels of support for the plan from right across the area (74%...)’ (SRC, 2005: 58). Whilst it was acknowledged that ‘most respondents wanted to see changes made to the draft plan’ and that such a change was ‘around reducing the amount of demolition and focusing

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3 more on modernisation / refurbishment' (ibid: 59), the conclusion was drawn that 'the
4 consultation process gave broad endorsement to the draft [plan]'(ibid: 76).
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6 It should be noted that it is not clear whether it was SRC or Gateshead Council itself that
7 undertook this manufacturing of a consensual community perspective. This difficulty in
8 ascertaining responsibility is potentially troubling when considering the democratic
9 credentials of such action. It is also problematic for research analysis, in that such contracting
10 out to consultants blurs the boundaries between state and non-state agents. There is also a
11 methodological limitation when researching actions that occurred a decade earlier: in effect,
12 endeavours to capture the social relations or the decisive moments of agency can often prove
13 inconclusive (see Parker and Street (forthcoming, 2018) on the importance of understanding
14 agency in relation to planning and consultants). What is clear is how the tactics of
15 SRC/Gateshead Council amount to a clandestine attempt to eliminate potentially polemic
16 elements of the consultation; to in a sense represent "the community as an organic whole with
17 nothing left over" (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015: 13). What emerged was a decisive leap
18 from the 'evidence'. Stretching the credulity of the percentages outlined above, a local
19 narrative was established which concluded that 'demolition was what was proposed by the
20 community... [and that] it was led by the community' (Respondent, Economic Growth and
21 Housing, February 2014). Importantly, the net result saw a plan to demolish 440 dwellings in
22 the neighbourhood whose legitimacy was premised entirely upon a cynical manipulation of
23 community consultation.
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26 In addition to this process of 'community-led consultation' and in accordance with the HMRI
27 recommendation to involve community *participation*, throughout 2007 and 2008 –
28 importantly this is some time after the demolition decision – Planning Aid⁶ was enlisted by
29 Gateshead Council to help build community capacity and trust. In partnership with a range of
30 civic organisations, Planning Aid devised a programme of activities to 'engage' and 'educate'
31 residents in the *Bridging Newcastle-Gateshead* neighbourhoods in the practice of urban
32 design. This phased programme included drop in sessions, leaflets and questionnaires to
33 ascertain resident interest, leading on to design workshops and excursions to consider a range
34 of urban design initiatives across the region, including other HMRI sites in the Newcastle
35 Gateshead pathfinder area. The scheme culminated in one small group of residents in the
36 Felling area of Gateshead going on to produce a design 'audit' of their neighbourhood.
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39 In focusing on urban design, attention was gently steered away from impending demolition,
40 towards an education of what might constitute 'good' and 'bad' design in the area, with a
41 view to informing the design of replacement houses. Using the guise of participation, design
42 experts can be understood to have applied deft 'techniques of consensual persuasion'
43 (Paddison, 2009) to encourage public 'buy in' to the proposals (Allmendinger and Haughton,
44 2012; Lees, 2014; Legacy, 2016b). While such participation engaged a small group of
45 residents in another HMRI neighbourhood in Gateshead, residents in Bensham and Saltwell
46 did not participate. Instead some residents described feeling 'patronised' by the earlier stages
47 of the process. Frustrations also arose with the educational rather than participatory nature of
48 the process; of being "told about my area" as opposed to being asked. For such residents,
49 there was a sense that this form of engagement was a way to "promise us everything...you
50 will get a new house, it will all be better, buses will run on time, there will be more
51 employment" (Resident, March 2015). These attempts to smooth the process and circumvent
52 potential opposition could be considered post-political, representing a case of "carefully
53 choreographed processes for participation which minimise the potential for those with
54 conflicting views to be given a meaningful hearing" (Allmendinger and Haughton, 2012: 92).
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4 However, those residents in Bensham and Saltwell that did not engage the later design
5 workshops - who felt the attempt to be persuaded - actively chose *not* to 'buy in' to such
6 forms of participation. Resistance to participation is often framed as a lack of interest, a
7 general operational 'problem' of community engagement. However, a closer appreciation of
8 the sensibilities and emotions of some residents and of their relation towards these
9 participatory planning methods can also enable us to interpret non-participation as active
10 *disagreement* through disengagement. Despite the scheme going on to win commendations in
11 the Royal Town Planning Institutes Regional Awards for Planning Excellence for the work
12 with one group of residents⁷, for others it can be considered as a failed attempt to build
13 consensus. Whilst that does not deny the attempt to depoliticize regeneration (cf. Mitchell et
14 al, 2015), understanding disengagement in this case as a more gentle form of political non-
15 compliance and disagreement offers some nuance to the post-political narrative. It may not be
16 the 'agonistic confrontation' that Mouffe suggests is required (1993:6), and indeed it did not
17 succeed in disrupting the regeneration development. Nonetheless such active rejections of
18 consensus building – entirely obscured from the post-political narrative and its obsessive
19 search to uncover 'proper politics' – do have implications for the electoral and representative
20 legitimacy of agencies operating through the local state, and for how citizens relate to the
21 local state. All of which raises broader questions about the status of such consultation and
22 participation in relation to democratic representation, and the role of public voice in local
23 politics and democracy. Whilst a forensic investigation into how people engage with the local
24 state has revealed them to enact modest, perhaps at times seemingly passive forms of
25 resistance, that is not to say that Gateshead has been entirely devoid of more explicit tactics
26 of contestation, as the following section considers.

3.2 Disrupting Consensus: Bensham and Saltwell Residents' Association

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33 Following the announcement of Bensham and Saltwell as a HMRI area in 2005, a local
34 Residents' Association (RA) formed in opposition to the proposed demolition. An active
35 campaign was launched via petitions, local meetings, a strong media presence, blogs and
36 posters. Gateshead Council viewed such resistance inauspiciously, judging it to be not
37 representative of the community, with one local government official describing it as
38 "guerrilla warfare tactics", designed to deliberately delay and eventually curtail the
39 regeneration as other pathfinder areas had done (Respondent in Economic Growth and
40 Housing, February 2014). Funding allocated precisely to support local resident groups in the
41 Pathfinder areas was withheld from the RA, as the Council moved to repress it, by claiming it
42 was less of a residents association and more of a political organisation:

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45 ...they refused to involve us as a community organisation because they didn't respect us; they
46 refused to acknowledge the fact we were a Residents' Association, they said we were a *political*
47 *pressure group* (RA member A, March 2015).

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49 Moreover, the local network of councillors and their involvement with and presence on
50 various community organisation boards meant that the RA felt unable to organise meetings in
51 community buildings 'the problem is the Council is everywhere' (RA member C, March
52 2015).

53
54 In rejecting the RA's demands while simultaneously upholding the façade of community
55 consensus established through the consultation and participation, Gateshead Council
56 appeared to be espousing a *post-politicizing* or even *anti-political* tactic. Invoking Ranciere's
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(2010: 42) premise that the essence of consensus lies in the very “annulment of dissensus” and “the end of politics”, Erik Swyngedouw has been foremost in igniting the influential narrative about institutions of neoliberal governance “including all in a consensual pluralist order and on excluding radically those who posit themselves outside the consensus” (Swyngedouw, 2009: 610). Within the context of such thinking, the Gateshead coalition of administrative and political institutions under HMRI would be considered as ‘the police’: “an order of bodies that defines the ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying” (Ranciere, 1999: 29), which renders anything outside of the police order as ‘noise’. However, the mechanism by which this was carried out was to explicitly deride the RA, to simultaneously position it as both antagonistic noise and as inherently ‘political’. The *police logic* here therefore attempts to de-politicise the regeneration process by labelling and excluding what it defines as political. This nuance is important as it moves our understanding of what constitutes the political away from silos of ‘the police’ and ‘noise’. Again, investigating the social relations within and beyond the local state therefore makes space to better understand the multiple dimensions of local politics.

In defining the RA as political, its members were thereby denied any recognition as legitimate within the HMRI process. Any common symbolic space for agonistic engagement and even ‘respectful disagreement’ was thus erased (Inch, 2015). Such a positioning forced the RA to pursue an alternative means of resistance via judicial channels, including the High Court in London, a route not uncommon in such cases (see also Raco et al, 2016). After many years of tireless campaigning, however, the might of a local-national police logic saw the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG, 2013) finally rule against the Bensham and Saltwell RA, considering the case to have failed to “raise concerns about heritage and design [...] and is widely supported” (DCLG, 2013). This decision upholds the local narrative that we saw earlier had been established through manipulating the consultation process. The DCLG thereby returned responsibility for such decision-making to Gateshead Council: part of a ‘localism’ agenda which was intertwined with a period of deeply controversial and damaging cuts in public expenditure (Featherstone et al, 2012). This context underpins discussion in the next section.

4 Beyond Consensus and Conflict in Housing Governance: Toward a Promotional Local State

Following the cessation of HMRI, the ensuing Gateshead Regeneration Partnership (GRP) continues to draw upon the problematic sources of consultation and participation produced by and on behalf of *Bridging Newcastle-Gateshead* between 2005-2008. In the words of one GRP representative (January 2016) “it is a continuation of that process, it’s what people wanted in the first place, it underpins what we do now”. The GRP phase of redevelopment in Bensham and Saltwell therefore features no new public consultation:

We are not...there is no current proactive engagement...no current on-going regular engagement with residents (Respondent in Economic and Housing Growth, January 2015).

Given how the geography of the GRP development also stretches well beyond that of the original HMRI area, an uncomfortable truth emerges: a majority of the nineteen sites are bereft of any community consultation whatsoever. In foreclosing on even the shallow ‘consensus democracy’ that had been initiated via the HMRI, the GRP is eviscerating any scope for public engagement, save for the formal planning application consultation stage.

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4 However, in paying close analytic attention to the social relations within this new form of *in-*
5 *sourced* local state, we see evidence of the struggle within it which Cockburn (1977) and
6 Leitner (1990) earlier highlighted:
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8 Whilst I am sure my colleagues [in the GRP] are doing everything they can to make sure local
9 politicians and local communities are aware of the planning application and what's going on, what
10 isn't happening is those really interesting and exciting and added value and engagement co-
11 production models that we started out with (Respondent in Culture, Communities and
12 Volunteering Service, March 2015).
13

14 There is clear evidence of an institutional memory present amongst local state actors, a
15 presence that is important in understanding the state not to be unified or monolithic, but
16 constitutive of people and social relations. Such relations are in constant negotiation and
17 often involve struggle, as the institutional form and strategic direction of the local state –
18 working relationally with other spatial scales - is continually (re)assembled and articulated.
19 There is therefore an internal politics to the local state: a politics featuring conciliatory lines
20 of consensus, disagreement, dissent and plain old disaffection. All of which are significant in
21 shaping any institutional coherence as well as the formulation of strategic plans and strategies
22 (cf. Cockburn, 1977). In the case of the GRP's incorporation into the local state, we see how
23 longer established state actors recollect and even seem to mourn the loss of an earlier moment
24 in local planning (although itself compromised as outlined above) just as the newer recruits,
25 often with backgrounds in business, are endeavouring to engage in new ways of working and
26 a quite different mode of address.
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29 The latest form of public engagement works more directly with fundamentals dictated by a
30 neoliberal housing market and is understood to be “promotional activity”, designed to “pave
31 the way for a smoother ride for the development” (Respondent Economic and Housing
32 Growth, January 2015). In particular, energy is channeled toward branding the replacement
33 housing development as exclusively private:
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35 Obviously trying to explain to somebody what we do, obviously as far as the public are
36 concerned, they see the Linden Flag and Linden speaks for itself, it's private and I think obviously
37 that keeps the values up and they know what to expect (Respondent A in GRP, January 2016).
38

39 This remarkably candid declaration to prioritize exchange-values over use-values in what
40 remains an ostensibly municipal housing strategy is accompanied by a more clandestine
41 endeavour. For in promoting the impression of an exclusively private development with a
42 view to – in Ranciere's terms – *acquiring legitimacy* among its corporate friends, partners,
43 and prospective buyers, the GRP is concealing any vestige of ‘publicness’:
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46 ... you notice there is not a GRP website, there is not, and the Council doesn't have – apart from
47 one splash page [on] regeneration – I don't think it's particularly one of our goals to let the public
48 know what GRP is because it might confuse things as far as we are concerned (Respondent B in
49 GRP, January 2016).
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51 This apparent production of ‘ignorance’ (Slater, 2014) is a mechanism deployed as part of the
52 recent move of local governments, under conditions of austerity, to regain autonomy in
53 formulating strategies for housing policy and property more broadly. This is increasingly
54 with a view to using housing to cross-subsidize other services via complex financial
55 mechanisms (Beswick and Penny, forthcoming 2018). There is however a notable uneven
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geography to how this is unfolding that demands further research. For whilst Gateshead is shedding its land assets under the GRP, other local authorities continue to grow portfolios of property, operating as private landlords or even publicans or shop keepers in the case of Sevenoaks District Council in the UK (Councils in Crisis, 2017).

5 Smoothing the Democratic Burden: A *Political* Achievement

The loss of even a perfunctory version of community consultation alongside the promotional and privatized neoliberal trajectory of the GRP provokes non-trivial questions about the place of politics and democracy within Gateshead. The formal organization of the GRP board consists of eight representatives from its three partners: two from Galliford Try, two from Home Group, and four professional senior officers from Gateshead Council. This leaves no space for democratically elected councillors. Whilst there are manifest aims to project a unified vision from all actors within the local state, the GRP's working relationship with local politicians is worth some reflection:

The Council [as part of the GRP] is in the complex position of having to bring our councillors along with us, the political side of things. So it's obviously a very strong Labour authority with very strong views on affordable housing, and some members would like all new housing to be in some way social or shared, so it's one of the challenges for us beyond just this partnership, is bringing our politicians along with the changes in the Housing and Planning Bill (Respondent in GRP, January, 2016)

It is acknowledged here that relationships between the GRP, Gateshead Council as a partner, and locally elected politicians are 'complex'. It is in this context that debates about local post-politicization or de-politicization can be helpfully conceptualised through the lens of a more fluid local state as examined by its social relations. In the case outlined above, the pressure of having to '*bring councillors along*' with strategic policies – not least some highly controversial changes included in the UK Conservative government's *Housing and Planning Bill* (Minton, 2017) – reveals two notable dynamics. First, the balance of different interests operating within the institutional form of Gateshead's local state sees crucial decision-making laying firmly with the officers in the Partnership. Second, not only are democratically elected members dislodged from any representation on the partnership, they are deemed a *burden*. They are viewed as a potentially disruptive political surplus to be circumvented while the GRP pursues an entrepreneurial strategy to enhance property values and extend the provision of private housing across the town: in other words, to proudly fly 'the Linden flag'. Indeed the active camouflaging of the very character of the GRP leaves key planning decisions to take place behind closed doors involving privatized arrangements with developers and other corporate interests and beyond the reach of democratically elected representatives. All this is carried out on the understanding that engaging with the public is "a messy business" wherein "the public don't understand how development works" (Respondent in GRP, January 2016). This would seem to be an emblematic instance of post-democracy, one where the 'pincer of economic necessity' forces the local state to 'evacuate politics' (Ranciere, 1999: 110; Crouch, 2004).

In identifying the burden of "bringing" politicians into line with national housing policy – notably politicians holding "strong views on affordable housing" – the GRP respondent simultaneously compartmentalizes 'the political side of things'. In this regard, the Partnership appears to be espousing nothing short of a post-politicizing consciousness: one that separates

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3 out in conceptual terms ‘the political’ from the evermore pressing technocratic obligation to
4 build houses for the private market – to deliver and ‘get the job done’ (Raco, 2015). At the
5 same time this de-amplifies or disavows the more socialist leaning local political voices that
6 deviate from the ‘sensible’ police orderings enforced by austerity-neoliberalism (Ranciere,
7 1999), or who fail manifestly in the “economic tribunal that claims to assess government
8 action in strictly economic and market terms” (Foucault, 2008 [1979]: 247).
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10 Nonetheless the very identification of them as a *democratic burden* exposes some internal
11 power struggles being waged within the Gateshead local state, notably the place of elected
12 politicians and their capacity for voice on matters such as the influence of the GRP upon their
13 own local constituents. We are talking here about the basic principles of local representative
14 democracy. More generally it reveals precisely whose knowledge, ideas, and standpoints are
15 to be drawn on in developing any strategic vision for housing. However, understanding local
16 politicians as some type of hurdle to overcome also positions them as a form of resistance to
17 the hegemonic entrepreneurial vision; as a potentially antagonistic *presence* in the local state.
18 Again, in analysing the local state through the prism of its constitutive social and political
19 relations we gain appreciation of its fragmented form, its internal hierarchies – formal and
20 informal – as well as its choreographies of inclusion, exclusion and vulnerability throughout
21 its internal institutional architecture. Here disagreement or dissent within the local state might
22 be prised open, perhaps independent of – or directly an outcome of - insurgent acts that take
23 place ‘outside’ in civil society (Purcell, 2009; Legacy, 2016a). Moreover, by keeping the
24 analytical focus on the local state – as opposed to characterising a post-politicized police
25 order – it becomes possible to appreciate, the local state itself is an ever-present *stake* in
26 political struggle (Brenner, 2004). Just as we saw earlier Leitner’s (1990) forewarning that
27 the competing demands of the state may give rise to political conflict over the role of it, the
28 concept of the local state offers space to see such political struggles.
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32 That is not to deny how useful key writings on post-politics are in revealing the endeavours
33 of neoliberal agents to masquerade the political content of their actions. However, we contend
34 that to conceptualise local planning via Ranciere’s (1999; 2010) ‘police order’ designed to
35 promote consensus democracy while de-amplifying ‘proper politics’ can lead to an over-
36 extended binary between consensus and conflict. Three inter-relating shortcomings emerge,
37 each of which might benefit from re-engaging with the concept of the local state (Etherington
38 and Jones, 2018). First, much is demanded of a concept – ‘the police’ – that Ranciere himself
39 is frustratingly non-committal in delimiting. More than this, though, the police is largely
40 presented as a *given* order, such that its very construction, content, and maintenance are
41 insufficiently analysed (Mitchell et al, 2015). In other words, there remains a reticence
42 around interrogating the very ‘politics of the police’ (Chambers, 2011). We have seen
43 through the lens of the local state that such politics is very much present and constantly
44 negotiated. Second, the strict demarcation between the ‘police’ and ‘politics’ or ‘the
45 political’ invariably restricts what might come under the criteria of ‘proper politics’ (cf.
46 Zizek, 1999; Swyngedouw, 2009; Mitchell et al, 2015). Within a post-political perspective it
47 seems that all actions are presented as “either radically transformative or part of an endless,
48 and seemingly pointless, process of framing and reframing a police order without its
49 fundamental alteration” (Darling, 2014: 83). Yet the examples we have considered in
50 Gateshead – the deployment of participatory planning to garner consent for HMRI, while
51 simultaneously pacifying political conflict *and* the subsequent decision of the GRP to
52 expertly circumvent local political channels – are in themselves political. It is thereby
53 important to appreciate how acts that either maintain or unobtrusively reject police orders are
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3 *political achievements* “forged through particular political and institutional settings” (Legacy,
4 2016b: 2).
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6 Third, any achievement of a *consensus* also demands deeper examination. Mouffe (2005:
7 105) draws on Gramsci (1971) to offer the critical premise that “every consensus exists as a
8 temporary result of a provisional hegemony, as a stabilization of power, and that it always
9 entails some form of exclusion”. The latter can manifest in the form of ruthless repression
10 and disavowal. But hegemony also incorporates the intellectual foundations informing any
11 consensus – in recent years most obviously, neoliberal economic theory – alongside manifold
12 ‘common sense’ discourses. These are deployed to nurture popular support and ‘consent’
13 among a local ‘community’, some members of whom might otherwise be anticipated to
14 dissent: all processes which are “intensely political” (Mitchell et al, 2015: 2636). Through the
15 monolithic concept of the ‘police’ the post-political lens would struggle to uncover and
16 dissect these intricate relations. It would also be hard pressed to locate the place of those
17 elected councillors being ‘brought along’ with the hegemonic neoliberal economic grid
18 trumpeted by the GRP while simultaneously disavowed of their political desire to provide
19 social housing. It is in this sense that research on the very acts of de-politicization and post-
20 politicization of towns and cities can benefit from more fluid conceptualisation of the local
21 state and social relations to reveal the very presence and perseverance of politics.
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24 25 **6 Seeing Like a Local State⁸: Concluding Comments**

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28 There is compelling evidence of post-political regeneration and planning in Gateshead.
29 Through the auspices of the GRP, the institutional landscapes appear increasingly
30 preoccupied to govern land and property, and indeed quite literally space, in the service of
31 profit-maximization. The shibboleth of consensus works brilliantly to disavow the demos,
32 while pacifying the scope for disagreement (Zizek, 1999; Mouffe, 2005; Brown, 2015). The
33 case of Gateshead also prompts us to consider how, in not recognizing dissent as “the
34 legitimate and proper basis of the political”, the neoliberal police order “undermines popular
35 trust in politics while relegating key decisions to non-political economic or private actors”
36 (Oosterlynck and Swyngedouw, 2010: 1591). It also enables us to identify how the insurgents
37 and dissenters who dare to question the neoliberal order of things are radically excluded for
38 being ‘outside the consensus’ (Swyngedouw, 2009: 610). The examination of housing
39 regeneration in Gateshead has revealed all of these elements.
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42 Nonetheless, the endeavour to research post-politics, particularly when deploying the
43 conceptual distinction between ‘police’ and ‘the political’, can serve to conceal the graft, the
44 imagination and the sheer willpower that goes into fostering a hard-won but always
45 provisional consensus. For in succeeding to ‘render technical’ contentious policies, or being
46 able to apply the ‘economic grid’ as the gauge of what is valid and legitimate, these are in
47 essence actually existing (neoliberal) political achievements. Institutionalised through state
48 power, they work to favour some at the expense of others (cf. Foucault, 2008 [1979];
49 Magnusson, 2011; Mitchell et al, 2015; Jessop 2016). In this sense then, as Darling contends:
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51 ... many claims to a post-political condition leave unexplored the ways in which depoliticising
52 tendencies are embodied, reproduced and reinforced through policy discussions, public debate and
53 the very workings of governance (Darling, 2014: 75).
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3 In focusing on how such de-politicizing tendencies can be investigated through the analytical
4 lens of the local state, this paper offers a conceptual antidote to the post-political narrative.
5 In-depth placed-based empirical research alongside a more fluid conceptualisation of the
6 local state and its constituent social-relations has revealed the presence and persistence of
7 politics in municipal housing governance. The formation of an entrepreneurial housing
8 strategy in Gateshead has been revealed as a product and indeed a site of political decision-
9 making. This has involved a cyclical manipulation of community consensus, a steering of
10 participatory planning processes and a de-amplification or repression of the voices of those
11 residents who disagreed. This is a process we lamented to be de-politicizing, but one that is
12 always inherently political (Legacy, 2016a). The increasingly influential role of the GRP - as
13 conceptually part of the local state in Gateshead - revealed the democratic credentials and
14 representative role of the local state to be seriously compromised. In recasting its social base
15 and representation, the very balance of social, political and economic forces operating
16 *through* the local state is in flux. But particular parts of the local state are strategically
17 selecting 'the public' to be insulated from participatory dialogue and political debate about
18 public housing provision in Gateshead (Jessop, 2016). There is a shifting of the "*political*
19 character, meaning, and operation of democracy's constituent elements into *economic* ones"
20 (Brown, 2015:17). Such an appeal to economic necessity while simultaneously aspiring to
21 conceal its own identity heralds a 'modest' local state that sails close to evacuating the demos
22 (Rancière, 1999).
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26 In this particular case, the examination of social relations within (and beyond) the local state
27 can not only reveal the presence of politics, but the possibility that such politics may
28 potentially re-democratize the representation of the state and re-legitimise its actions.
29 Viewing politics this way does not necessarily render the local state unresponsive to the
30 future demands of local people; for as Gramsci underlined, any hegemonic project is always
31 provisional and open to challenge from counter-hegemonic projects. Perhaps future in-depth
32 empirical investigation of various local states can, without reifying *the local state*, open up
33 spaces of hope that such politics can disrupt current modes of governing and offer some
34 scope for the consideration of and movement towards some version of increasingly
35 egalitarian policies.
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38 Notes

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40 ¹ These research findings are based on empirical investigations conducted between 2014 to
41 2016 as part of the lead authors PhD research funded by the Economic and Social Research
42 Council. This included thirty-eight formal interviews with a range of stakeholders, forty
43 informal interviews with local residents and businesses, document analysis and archival
44 research.

45 ² Funding was provided from the Homes and Communities Agency, but has since been
46 withdrawn in Housing and Planning Act 2016, and the scope of Home Group's role in the
47 partnership was, at the time of research, under consideration.

48 ³ None of these are publicly available due to their 'commercial sensitivity'.

49 ⁴ At one time this constituted approximately eighty per cent of Council funding but in 2017
50 makes up around sixteen per cent.

51 ⁵ Cockburn was a co-author of this 1979 book 'In and against the state' which charted the
52 experience of public sector workers at the time.

53 ⁶ Planning Aid offers free independent planning advice to individuals and communities.
54 Supported by the Department of Communities and Local Government until 2012, when its
55 funding was withdrawn and the organization was forced to introduce staff redundancies and
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scale back its services, it largely operates now through on-line advice funded by the Royal Town Planning Institute.

⁷ It should be noted that it is not known what happened to the audit produced by local residents and it is unlikely to have gone on to inform the design of replacement houses.

⁸ The subtitle here is an adaptation of J Scott's (1998) classic text *Seeing Like a State*.

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