

**Tactical resources guide: navigating power at the
neighbourhood level**

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OPEN ACCESS

**Navigating
Power**

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(with contributions from neighbourhood representatives in England)**

Tactical resources guide: navigating power at the neighbourhood level

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Introduction: what is this document, who is it for and why make it?

Where this document comes from

This document has been put together by the ‘Just Neighbourhoods?’ research team with input from residents who have been involved in case study work in England. The JN research project explored how people engaged with planning at the neighbourhood scale in areas deemed to be socio-economically disadvantaged. It reflected on how communities have fared across the UK, see: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/justclp/>

The authors

The team of Gavin Parker, Tessa Lynn, John Sturzaker and Matt Wargent have worked on a variety of neighbourhood planning projects over the past 12 years, see: <https://research.reading.ac.uk/justclp/just-neighbourhoods-team/>

Open access and testing or beta version

This version is the beta edition - that means we still want to add examples and instances from neighbourhoods and community workers, so please do contact us via g.parker@reading.ac.uk

Aim

The **main aim** of this resource is to help members of communities navigate through what can be best and most simply expressed as ‘bureaucracy’ - through communications, meetings and other interactions with decision makers, such as local authorities, agencies and others. The aim is to help ensure that their voices and priorities are heard and that attempts to influence policy and decisions are achieved. **At its centre it is about power and how to navigate it.**

While there are lots of technical and policy specific questions and advice offered, we feel that an important gap exists in helping or advising people on the ‘workings’ of power and planning. If it has the intended effect, this guide will assist in effectively learning and mobilising: what tactics, scenarios and actions are important in order to counter common power imbalances for communities, in terms of **position, resources and knowledge.**

We are hopeful that this resource will lend community members greater insight on how to navigate and maximise the profile and standing of their views, ideas, evidence and priorities. We have aimed to keep this resource accessible - although some ideas and insights need to be set out in high level language - we have made efforts to explain and unpack where this is the case. **So, please be warned: to crack this there will be a bit of thinking and a bit of study involved!**

Power and why it matters (in getting to where you want to be...)

“I don’t think it’s money that shifts its more about people shifting. I don’t think people value their input, I think community members will be honest and truthful but feel like their views are not going to matter. People’s views need to shift so that they do hold the power. Supporting and teaching them in the right approach.” (Community representative, Middlesbrough)

At the heart of this guide is a simple but important question:

Q. What shapes whether communities can influence what happens in their area?

To help you reflect, organise and act, this section sets out an overview of power and why you should be concerned with it and learn a bit about how power ‘works’.

Power is a word which is used very often, but have you considered it closely? The way that power is distributed and exercised is central to whether outcomes are just. This makes understanding power essential—not only for making sense of what happens in neighbourhoods, but for thinking about what might help things change.

Power, empowerment, and justice are widely discussed, but in practice these ideas are often used without a shared understanding of what they actually mean or how they work in real situations. So first there is an imbalance of knowledge as well as an imbalance of power – and these are linked. You may now ask - so what?...

Why this matters for neighbourhoods?

Understanding power highlights an important point: *Neighbourhood-level action alone is not always enough to shape outcomes.*

Given these grounding points and general examples, we should move into thinking about the neighbourhood and shaping policy and decisions that benefit people at this scale.

We should firstly recognise that:

- a. there are different dimensions of power**
- b. different actors hold different types of power**
- c. some forms of power are less visible than others**
- d. there are factors that affect what is possible**

This does not mean that community or neighbourhood action is ineffective. But it does mean that:

- different **strategies** may be needed in different situations
- and that **change often depends on how different forms of power interact.**

If those bullet points are difficult or vague, we break it all down from here. The following parts aim to show where and on what basis influence is realised '*how power is exercised and what shapes it...*' What the sections below tell us, is that there are a variety of moving parts that influence. Have a read and do take some notes that relate to your situation and experience. Later on, you may want to compare notes with others in your network about how the assessment of the situation looks to you.

a. Dimensions of power: breaking it all down

A common assumption is that power can be *given* to communities (or anyone). But power is not something that can simply be handed over. It is shaped through **relationships, resources, institutions, and context**. Brief explainer:

Relationships

What this means is that how we interact with people is one part of the story here.

Resources

Not just money but knowledge, other people who we represent or are in agreement with.

Institutions

This doesn't mean organisations necessarily but the 'rules of the game' that are often pre-defined.

Context

Referring to the environment, timing, and specific situation. This affects the above three dimensions (some relations, resources, or rules will apply - some not).

We will pick-up on those four aspects when various examples are set out. Now, in relation to the above we can see there are different participatory 'spaces'.

NOTES:

b. Spaces of power: understanding where decisions happen

Power also operates in different kinds of **spaces** - in reality, most situations involve a mix of these:

- ***Closed spaces***
e.g. decisions made by a small group, often behind the scenes
- ***Invited spaces***
e.g. opportunities to participate, such as consultations or neighbourhood planning
- ***Claimed spaces***
e.g. spaces created by communities themselves, outside formal processes.

What 'spaces' are involved or likely to be relevant to your situation?

NOTES:

c. Seeing Power: invisibility of power

We can say that Power is not always easy to ‘see’:

- **Visible power**
e.g. formal rules, meetings, and decisions
- **Hidden power**
e.g. who sets the agenda and decides what is discussed
- **Invisible power**
e.g. the beliefs and assumptions that shape what people think is possible.

This helps explain why participation does not always lead to **influence**. Addressing all of these may be needed.

NOTES:

d. Possibilities of power

Four key factors often shape what is possible and these overlap quite a bit with the four dimensions in section a. above.

- **Agency**
i.e. People's ability/freedom to act, individually and collectively
- **Structures**
i.e. wider systems that enable or constrain action - for example, the ingrained assumption that developers must be able to make a profit
- **Institutions**
i.e. formal and informal rules, such as how the planning system works in practice
- **Discourse**
i.e. how issues, places and people are talked about

These are big so simply understanding that these all play a part may be enough for now.

NOTES:

Step 1: thinking about how power works

*Power is often thought of in simple terms—
one group or person having power ‘over’
another. But in reality, it works in more
complex ways...*



The four ‘faces’ of power

We can break some of this question of how power works by considering four ‘faces’ of power: **‘Power over’ / ‘Power to’ / ‘Power through’ / ‘Power within’**

This way of thinking about power is based on years of research and thought and tries to set out how power is not a ‘thing’ but is a resource that is used and experienced. While these ideas about power can feel abstract, they are useful for making sense of real situations. They can help to:

- **identify where influence is possible**
- **understand why some approaches work and others don’t**
- **think about different ways of responding**

Below we explain the four ‘faces’ and set out some lived examples to help reinforce all this theory. These examples have been placed under the face of power they illustrate most clearly, but each contains several forms of power. The country-park experience, for example, involves power over through formal decision-making, power through relationships and alliances, power to through neighbourhood planning, and power within through the hope or disillusionment created by the outcome. Readers should therefore use the faces as lenses for inquiry rather than fixed categories.

Example 1: 'power over'

Power-over - planning rules can limit what neighbourhood plans can include. Or what evidence is considered valid. Recall that **'Power over' is the most 'visible' form of power, typically involving formal decisions, use of rules, policies and regulations.**

Case study example 1: When community priorities are redefined by more powerful actors

Residents identified the creation of a community park as one of their leading priorities through their neighbourhood planning process. The town council had supported the proposal and, at one stage, sought to enlarge the area designated for it. However, following representations about a proposed distribution centre and its potential to bring employment, most councillors changed their position and the supporting NDO - Neighbourhood Development Order¹ was abandoned.

Participants described several forms of power operating:

- the developer's financial resources and perceived business authority;
- control over the information presented about prospective employment;
- the formal power of councillors to cancel the proposal;
- the ability of decision-makers to reinterpret what the community most needed;
- unequal credibility, with commercial arguments appearing more "realistic" than the expressed preference for green space.

The distribution centre was subsequently built, but participants said that the expected employment had not materialised and the accessible land that residents had hoped would form part of the country park was lost.

Other examples of power-over from this case study

- **Information being controlled:** Participants described decisions about the Towns Deal and the cancellation of the country park being communicated indirectly or after decisions had been made.
- **The board being dissolved before the work was complete:** closure of the Towns Deal Board reduced opportunity for local representatives to question decisions and obtain explanations.
- **Power through delay:** Participants described years passing without clear progress or explanations. Delay itself can weaken community influence as energy, relationships and opportunities disappear.

Reflections

- Who is able to redefine the problem and the available solutions?
- What evidence supports the promised benefits?
- Which risks and trade-offs are being made visible—and which are not?
- How will the community's expressed priorities be weighed against new proposals?
- Who ultimately has the authority to change an agreed direction.

We welcome any more examples to further develop the resource

¹ An NDO is a specific tool that neighbourhood planners can use to allocate a site and give permission for a particular development (see references: Locality, no date).

Example 2: 'power to'

Power to - is mainly about the ability to act, having the resources, funding, knowledge, support, skills, or authority to make things happen, or being able to organise and pursue a goal

Case study example 2 : *Turning community knowledge into a neighbourhood plan*

In this instance residents identified problems and created a neighbourhood plan capable of shaping future development. The process brought together community knowledge, evidence and formal planning powers. Not everything in the plan was realised, nevertheless, completing the plan was itself a major exercise of community power. It created an enduring policy document and influenced proposals for new housing.

Despite scepticism, limited participation and complex relationships, local people completed the plan based on extensive engagement. Participants described the country park and improvements around the station or bridge as prominent community priorities.

The plan also sought to respond to longer-term structural challenges, including expanding the type of housing locally. Participants reported that the plan had influenced housing provision, including the development of four-bedroom homes.

Power to examples - knowing the funding opportunities that are relevant; understanding processes; creating a strategy; developing credibility.

What enabled this power?

- persistent local leadership
- extensive community consultation
- knowledge of the formal planning system
- the ability to convert aspirations into evidence and policy
- continuing despite disagreement and setbacks
- connecting individual concerns to a wider vision for the town
- The community centre and organisation helps build connections and responds directly to residents' needs.
- **Reflections**
- What formal powers or processes are available to the community?
- How can lived experience be translated into evidence and policy?
- Which parts of the community vision can endure beyond individual projects?
- What capacities are needed to complete a long and technical process?
- How will responsibility continue once the plan is adopted?

We welcome any more examples to further develop the resource

Example 3a,b: 'power through'

Power through relationships - power is also shaped through: networks, partnerships, trust and communication. These can influence how decisions are made, even when they are not formally recognised.

Case study example 3a: *When a relationship becomes part of the community's infrastructure*

The neighbourhood had developed strong relationships with councillors who understood the place, communicated what was happening inside the local authority and helped keep projects on course. Their value was not simply personal. Through those relationships, information travelled, concerns reached decision-makers and local people could better understand institutional processes. When the councillors left, the community lost supportive individuals and access - continuity, knowledge, and trust. New representatives entered during a period of political change and conflict, and the relationships had to be reformed. Relationships can carry power, but influence becomes fragile when political change occurs.

Power through examples - building support for a position or outcome; bringing together people with useful knowledge, skills and resources; gain the support of someone in a position of influence.

Reflections

- What does this particular relationship make possible?
- Is knowledge held by one individual or shared across several people?
- Who else in the organisation needs to understand the community?
- How can agreements and institutional knowledge survive staff or political change?
- Are community relationships reaching officers, elected members and senior decision-makers?

We welcome any more examples to further develop the resource

Case study example 3b : rivalry can weaken collective influence

Communities do not only build relationships with institutions. They must also navigate histories, identities and power within their own networks. Considerable community activity existed alongside rivalry between groups within the community itself. This made it harder to form a common position and easier for external actors to deal with competing voices separately. One participant described community actors as fighting over small pieces of a limited resource rather than joining together to increase what was possible. Relationships may enable collective action, but relationships shaped by mistrust can also fragment it.

Reflections

- What unresolved histories are shaping the current issue?
- Where do groups share interests despite their disagreements?
- Is competition for scarce resources reinforcing division?
- Who can create a trusted space for difficult conversations?
- Can people agree a common position without needing to agree about everything?

Moral authority as relational power - participants described former miners as holding a form of moral authority over decisions concerning the pit site. Their history and identity gave their views particular weight. This is an example showing that power can arise from identity, memory and community legitimacy.

We welcome any more examples to further develop the resource

Example 4a,b,c: 'power within'

'Power within' (internalised power) - Power also affects how people see themselves: whether someone feels able to speak up or whether they believe change is possible. In some places, long-term experiences can limit expectations of what can be achieved.

Case study example 4a: When broken promises shape what people believe is possible

In this neighbourhood people have experienced repeated promises of employment, regeneration, and investment. As projects stalled or benefits failed to reach residents, disappointment accumulated. Participants described growing cynicism towards new plans and consultations, because people had heard similar promises before. This illustrates power within because people's belief that their involvement can make a difference affects whether they participate, speak or organise. When trust is repeatedly broken, disengagement may be a rational form of self-protection rather than a lack of care.

Power within examples - visioning positively; identifying weaknesses in an opposing agenda or body, or developing arguments that can be used; creating confidence

Reflections

- What previous experiences are shaping people's response now?
- What promises have been made before, and what happened to them?
- Are people disengaged because they do not care or because they do not expect to be heard?
- What small, visible commitments could begin rebuilding confidence?
- How can organisations be honest about uncertainty and limitations?

Case study example 4b: confidence built through trust

A local community leader who runs a local charity reflected that residents allowed him into their homes and shared circumstances they were not necessarily proud of because trust had developed over years. That trust created both knowledge and legitimacy. It enabled him to represent experiences that might otherwise remain invisible to formal decision-makers. This is an important positive example of power within because being listened to without judgement can help people feel that their experience matters and that they have a legitimate voice.

Case study example 4c: *recognising one's capacity to influence*

A local town councillor described a local community leader as influential on the town councillors because of his sustained work within the community, the volunteers he inspired and the practical difference made in residents' lives. This shows that power within is not simply individual confidence. It can grow through:

- seeing that action produces results;
- being recognised by others as credible;
- belonging to an organisation;
- developing knowledge through experience;
- receiving trust from the community.

This is about ***being better able to navigate different situations, and to recognise where change might be possible.***

Therefore, asking questions like this will draw out what to do next:

- What is the decision actually being made?
- How is that decision being influenced?
- Who has influence at that moment?
- What rules or constraints are shaping this?

So, we now move to first, recognising these moving parts (Step 2), and then to the application of these ideas in practice (Step 3).

Again, if you have further examples or instances do let us know..

Step 2: recognising power in practice

In many situations, it is not a lack of ideas, effort, or participation that limits what communities can achieve. Instead, people often encounter forms of obstruction, delay, or redirection that make it difficult for their priorities to be heard or acted upon. Notable scholars term these are examples of 'counter-conduct'.



Some have indicated that a 'playbook' of tactics typically used to frustrate citizens can be seen, and have labelled these as 'political modulation' (Parker and Street, 2015). It is important to note that those using these tactics may not be deliberately doing so, but the end result can be the same. The question then is how to anticipate, counter and overcome such moves - given these are often tactics used to frustrate or deflect participatory overtures. These include blocking, frustrating, deflecting, slowing down... Table 1 below sets out some forms that this 'modulation' takes, in the next step we consider how you might counteract modulation.

Table 1: Modulating community input

Modulation form	Description	Examples
1. Deflection	Avoidance or part acknowledgement of issue or responsibility	Failing to claim ownership of an issue or problem, causing communities to look elsewhere for the point of influence, perhaps ultimately in vain. This can look like passing issues between departments or organisations.
2. Passing on	Acting to shift responsibility elsewhere – could be upscaling or downscaling	Local authorities discouraging communities from intervening in issues deemed ‘too large’ for them, e.g. national infrastructure provision, or stage A of the Community Led Planning (CLP) process
3. Delaying	Slowing a process, freezing out, boring activists into giving up	Drawing out or lengthening timeframes to deter contributions or challenges from all but the most persistent. Delaying can also assist interests in preparing arguments
4. Speeding up	Expediting a formal process, setting deliberately short timeframe for inputs	Speeding up a decision-making process reducing the opportunities for wider inputs and/or engagement
5. Rebuttal	Explaining the issue away	Overwhelming or overloading communities with complex information that they can’t understand
6. Denial	Refusing to acknowledge an issue	Argument that dissenters are ‘making it up’, ‘no proof’
7. ‘Impossibility argument’	No viable alternative, imperative to proceed; or Unaffordable, low priority	Resource arguments, e.g. ‘too costly.’ This can look like narrow interpretations of policy or rules or pre-determined solutions presented as the only option
8. Withholding information	Deliberate and strategic release and withholding of facts, data, records or useful names and contact details	Delaying or denying the existence of information that campaigners need to produce a ‘logical’ case or argument, e.g. road use figures.
9. Localising / particularising	Keeping the issue at local or micro scale, uniqueness stressed	The tendency for ‘experts’ to manage and reduce overall demands to singular or particular complaints, marginalising them and impeding collective action
10. Compartmentalising	Breaking the issue apart and picking off elements – keeping it separate from other issues	Preventing communities from joining together on campaign issues, e.g. by removing or blocking channels of communication
11. Closing down / opening up	Narrowing by framing or opening up by highlighting new evidence or unrecognised factors	Can be used to both ‘translate’ or to destabilise / reset terms of the resolution/dispute.
12. Technocratisation	Use of technical or complex language	that obscures meaning, attempts to assert superiority of knowledge and understanding.

(source: based on Parker and Street, 2015)

How this can feel in practice...

- Being listened to, but not taken seriously
- Having to repeat the same points multiple times
- Feeling that decisions are already made
- Being asked to engage, but not seeing change
- Working to someone else's timeframe (i.e. too quick or deliberately slowed down)

NOTES:

From our recent research we spotted the following tactics (Table 2) outlines **cases where people were faced with obstruction / 'modulation' in the Just Neighbourhoods cases.**

Table 2: Modulation seen in neighbourhood scale planning

Form	Identifier
Prescriptive behaviour	Imposing a specific, pre-determined solution to "fix" the problem, rather than listening to the people actually experiencing it
"Saviour complex" / Paternalism	'Because they are deprived, they clearly need help'
Co-option	Political actors wanting to co-opt grassroots community action
Bypassing	Nationally significant infrastructure projects bypassing local planning
Institutional legitimacy	Regeneration programmes, like Big Local, provided credibility for community members on panels, but has not continued post-programme
Information imbalance	Neighbourhood Plans not known about or recognised by local officials
Regulatory Capture	Developer influencing local councillors to consider local economic opportunities that their proposed development can offer, however councilors didn't have all the information and didn't think to ask (e.g. the warehouse development is vacant 2 years later and is unlikely to provide employment for local people)
Top-Down / Funding-led Displacement	Community-led plan made for a park, but then funding opportunity prompted council to pursue a council-led plan, leaving the community and their efforts to engage the community to feel unappreciated
Future-Oriented Planning:	Local plan protects future residents' rights and opportunities, but not necessarily current ones (e.g. the sightlines of headstocks referred to protect in the Local Plan, but the new warehouse blocked the view of a significant proportion of the existing community's views of them)
Siloed working	Council departments saying that it is another departments issue (e.g. passing the buck between communities, regeneration and planning)
The "Need to Know" Principle	Needing to become a councillor to get direct access to council officers.

Do let us know about your experience, so we can add to future editions of this document

Step 3: Responding: what has helped in practice?

The question all this raises is:

Q. How can these situations be recognised (and what can be done in response)?

Recognising these for what they are can help on the way to overcoming perceived power imbalances – and on a practical level to unblock ideas and priorities, your preferred ways forward so that can at least be discussed properly. The objectives are to help ensure that voices are heard, points are given greater attention, and that tactics to avoid or ignore are closed down.

Table 3: Counteracting to modulation

Form of modulation	Response	Questions you might ask
1. Deflection	Clarify ownership and accountability. Ask direct questions about who holds responsibility, decision-making power, or coordination across organisations. Map where decisions are being made. Attempt to make the issue visible for all to refer to, rather than restarting the conversation.	Who actually holds responsibility here? Where is the real point of influence?
2. Passing on	Identify the chain of responsibility, rather than accepting it at face value. Identify where there might be opportunities for influence, and where there might be wider alliances or if there are any other external actors that can help.	Who is coordinating this across teams? Can we bring the right people together?
3. Delaying	Be sure to maintaining continuity and collective memory. Keep the issue visible through record keeping, timelines and follow ups. Persistence is key. Consider who else can help by collectively organising responsibilities to be persistent.	Who benefits from this taking longer? What happens if momentum is lost?
4. Speeding up	Request clarification on timelines and when decisions will be made. Ask whether there has been meaningful engagement in proportion to the significance of the decision. Attempt to seek pauses, extensions or interim discussions to open up opportunities for scrutiny and input.	Why is urgency being created now? Who loses the opportunity to respond if this is sped up?
5. Rebuttal	Ask for the translation into accessible language – requesting that the summaries, evidence, assumptions and implications are clearly explained. Bring in intermediaries, allies, or technical support where needed to strengthen confidence and understanding.	Is the complexity being used to close down discussion? What specifically needs clarification?
6. Denial	Be sure to re-anchor the discussion in lived experience, evidence and collective testimony. Demonstrate that concerns are shared and persistent rather than isolated and anecdotal. Use multiple forms of evidence where this is possible, and bring in local knowledge and experience.	What evidence or lived experience supports our concerns? Who else shares them?
7. 'Impossibility argument'	Ask what specific information makes it unviable. Seeking whether this is based on policy, finance, legislation, political appetite, timing, or institutional priorities. Explore whether alternatives exist and seek to clearly identify	Impossible for whom? What conditions are affecting the perception of impossibility?

	whether the issue is truly impossible or simply unsupported. Identify and share evidence that this has been achieved elsewhere.	According to whose priorities?
8. Withholding information	Attempt to use both formal and informal routes to increase transparency. Ask clearly what information exists, who holds it, and how decisions are being evidenced. Consider whether collective information gathering and external support may help reduce information gaps	What information is missing? Who controls access to it?
9. Localising / particularising	Connect across the scales, linking to wider policy, rights, examples or strategic priorities. Bring in external support if needed and build alliances across communities where possible to demonstrate that concerns are not isolated. When issues are minimised, reframe what is at stake, connecting to lived experience and make clear what could be lost, changed and/or gained.	Is this an issue that affects other places too?
10. Compartmentalising	Bring people together to demonstrate the scale of concern and reconnect any fragmented issues together. Highlighting how housing, health, transport, environment, heritage and wellbeing are all interconnected in everyday lived experiences. Building communication and solidarity between groups facing related concerns may help.	What wider connections are being separated or ignored?
11. Closing down / opening up	Consider how the problems are being framed and by whom. Attempt to open discussion by introducing any overlooked evidence, alternative scenarios, lived experience or wider consequences. Question any assumptions that narrow what is considered realistic or legitimate.	Who is deciding or shaping what counts as realistic, relevant or legitimate?
12. Technocratisation	Ask for clarity and challenge any unnecessary complexity. Asking for plain language explanations and clarification of any assumptions made, trade-offs and implications. Identify that technical expertise is important, but is not the only valid form of knowledge within planning and place-based decision making.	Is technical expertise helping with clarification or is it obscuring it?

There is no single response - but across different places, some approaches have helped.

Collective organising

- Working together to show the scale of concern
- Building shared positions rather than isolated voices
- Identify what time, skills and resources are required

Building a clear case

- Gathering information and evidence
- Asking for the information needed to make informed arguments and to inform others

Working across scales

- Connecting local issues to wider policy, legislation, or rights
- Drawing on regional, national or international support (are there relevant directives / legislation?)

Persistence over time

- Continuing to engage, even when progress is slow
- Recognising that change often takes time

Using different spaces

- Working within formal processes where possible
- Creating or using informal or community-led spaces where needed

Framing what is at stake

- Making clear what could be lost
- Connecting issues to everyday life and lived experience
- Identify

Step 4: Application - making it work for you

Understanding power does not guarantee influence, but it can help you make more informed choices about where to invest your time and energy. Reflecting on the different forms of power discussed in this guide can help you identify opportunities, anticipate challenges and develop strategies that are better suited to the context you are working within. The aim is to strengthen your community's ability to navigate complexity, build influence over time, and protect what matters most.

1. Start with your purpose

Before deciding what to do next, be clear about **what you are trying to achieve**.

Ask yourself:

- What are we trying to influence?
- What would success look like?
- What are our priorities?
- Which outcomes are non-negotiable and where might compromise be possible?

2. Understand the landscape

Think about how power is operating.

Relationships

- Who already supports your aims?
- Where are relationships strong?
- Which relationships need developing?
- Where is trust missing?

Decision-making

- Who formally makes decisions?
- Who influences them behind the scenes?
- Where are decisions actually being made?

Community

- Where is confidence high?
- Where are people becoming tired or disengaged?
- What strengths already exist within the community?

3. Anticipate likely tactics

Power is rarely exercised only through formal decisions. Think about what might happen next. Could there be:

- delays?
- requests for more evidence?
- changing priorities?
- competing narratives?
- promises of future benefits?
- consultation without genuine influence?
- attempts to divide community groups?
- changing personnel?
- information arriving late?

Anticipating these possibilities allows communities to respond rather than simply react.

4. Develop your response

What would strengthen our position? Possible strategies include:

- strengthening relationships before they are needed
- documenting agreements and commitments
- broadening community support
- sharing responsibility across more people
- building alliances
- gathering evidence early
- communicating consistently
- creating spaces for community reflection and learning
- celebrating small successes to maintain momentum

5. Reflect and adapt

Power shifts over time. So..do return to these questions regularly.

- What has changed?
- Where has influence increased?
- Which assumptions proved wrong?
- What new opportunities have emerged?
- What have we learnt that will help next time?

Finally, there is no single route to influence. Every neighbourhood is different. Every challenge is different.

The purpose of this guide is not to provide a formula, but to help communities ask better questions, recognise how power is operating, and make more informed choices about how to respond.

Power is not fixed. Relationships evolve. Context changes. New opportunities emerge.

Communities may not control every decision, but they can strengthen their collective ability to understand, navigate, and influence the systems that shape their neighbourhoods.

Further reading and resources

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Webpages and links

- The Citizens Handbook: <https://citizenshandbook.org/index.html>
- Planning Aid England: <https://www.rtpi.org.uk/need-planning-advice/planning-aid-england/>
- Planning Aid London: <https://planningaidforlondon.org.uk/>
- Planning Aid Scotland: <https://www.pas.org.uk/>
- Planning Aid Wales: <https://planningaidwales.org.uk/>
- Community Places NI: <https://www.communityplaces.info/>
- Just Space (London): <https://justspace.org.uk/>
- Be more pirate: <https://www.bemorepirate.com/>
- Locality (neighbourhoods): <https://locality.org.uk/assets/images/Community-powered-neighbourhoods.pdf>
- New Local: <https://www.newlocal.org.uk/research/community-power/>
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/neighbourhoods-and-communities/from-community-connection-to-community-power>