



# PRESS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 17 December 2010

## THE DECENTRALISATION AND LOCALISM BILL – THE LAUNCH OF POSTCODE POKER?

This Bill represents a radical overhaul of the current planning system, one that has basically been in place since the late 1940s. It includes very major changes to the planning and business rates system. In keeping with its Big Society credentials, the Bill will push decisions on planning issues to a much more local level, with communities – sometimes down to parish level – empowered to approve new developments.

The current national planning policy frameworks, including PPS4 for retail planning will be scrapped. Instead of the hundreds of pages of guidance, there will be one national planning policy document intended to streamline the planning system and allow for far more local decisions. Regional Spatial Strategies will be scrapped, and with them housing targets. They will be replaced by Neighbourhood Plans created at a very local level, down to individual parishes. These Neighbourhood Plans will have to be compatible with local development frameworks, sustainability guidelines and infrastructure proposals.

Ken Parsons, Chief Executive of the RSA, said “Taken at face value, this is a total upheaval of the entire planning system, a massive experiment where the government, and even less the RSA, cannot know what will happen. In the past, pitching District Councils not used to large retail planning applications against professional supermarket chains’ store development departments has sometimes been like pitching cavalry against machine guns. Giving the average parish council planning powers could be spears against nuclear bombs. Unless the right balance is achieved, then the proposals could lead to either NIMBYs preventing necessary housing or business developments, or else local communities bidding against each other for desirable new buildings. So much will depend on the exact nature of the checks and incentives that will be provided. This could make current postcode lotteries seem benign – this really could be the start of postcode poker”.

### **NOTE FOR EDITORS**

Details of proposals to radically change the planning system, ahead of the publication of the Localism Bill, have been announced as follows: Communities will decide what their area should look like and where new shops, offices or homes should go. Parish councils and new “Neighbourhood Forums” of local people - rather than town hall officials - will lead the way. If local people then vote in favour of new 'Neighbourhood Plans' in local referendums, councils will have to adopt them.

Direct democracy: New powers will also allow communities to give planning approval to chosen sites on local land; once the Plan is adopted. They can short-circuit lengthy planning applications.

Local benefits from local development: There will be a package of powerful financial incentives to reward councils and communities that deliver new homes and businesses to their area.

Vanguard areas. A dozen "Vanguard" areas will act as pilots.

Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said:

"For far too long local people have had too little say over a planning system that has imposed bureaucratic decisions by distant officials in Whitehall and the town hall. We need to change things so there is more people-planning and less politician-planning, so there is more direct democracy and less bureaucracy in the system. These reforms will become the building blocks of the Big Society."

Greg Clark, Minister for Planning and Decentralisation, added:

"Most people love where they live, yet the planning system has given them almost no say on how their neighbourhood develops. The Coalition Government will revolutionise the planning process by taking power away from officials and putting it into the hands of those who know most about their neighbourhood - local people themselves. This will be a huge opportunity for communities to exercise genuine influence over what their hometown should look like in the future. It will create the freedom and the incentives for those places that want to grow, to do so, and to reap the benefits. It's a reason to say yes."

**The Rural Shops Alliance (RSA) is the national voice for about 7,500 rural retailers. We campaign on their behalf and also help these shops to become more competitive with practical advice and support, to the benefit of thousands of rural communities. Many 'blue chip' suppliers and county councils sponsor and partner the work of the RSA. Our direct contact with rural shops and with these organisations means that we keep in close touch with emerging issues and concerns in our fast changing business sector.**

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