



PRESS RELEASE

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THE LOCALISM BILL – THE START OF POSTCODE POKER?

The forthcoming Localism Bill will represent a radical overhaul of the current planning system that has basically been in place since the 1940s. 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.

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. Often radical proposals such as this get watered down as they pass through parliament and practicalities take over. In the past, pitching District Councils against supermarket new store planning departments has sometimes been cavalry against machine guns. Giving the average parish council planning powers would be spears against nuclear bombs. This could be the end of the postcode lottery and the start of postcode poker, as local communities bid against each other for desirable new developments.”

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."

Notes for editors:

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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