

## Preparing Community Led Neighbourhood Development Plans How can AMT help?

### Introduction

The Decentralisation and Localism Bill (Localism Bill for short) is a radical new bill that is currently going through parliament. It provides many of the tools and mechanisms for delivering the government's desire to create what it calls 'Big Society'. It is a far-reaching bill, bringing in new policy relating to councils, housing, and planning and regeneration. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent in the autumn, with commencement in early 2012.

Action for Market Towns (AMT) has developed what we call 'The Localism Ladder' as a tool to help you to determine how Localism affects you and what your next steps might be to take advantage of some of the new opportunities that the bill presents.

This paper relates to one rung of that ladder, called Preparing Community Led Neighbourhood Plans, and details the support that AMT can offer to you.

### Localism Bill Briefings

We have developed a series of briefings on the Localism Bill that you might find useful reading as they provide more detailed explanations of the relevant Localism Bill proposals. They are as follows:

- [AMT's Guide to the Localism Bill](#)
- [Overview of the bill process to date](#)
- [An introduction to Neighbourhood Planning](#)
- [Assets of Community Value \(Community Right to Buy\)](#)
- [The Community Right to Challenge](#)
- [Funding the Big Society](#)

### What is Big Society?

The Commission for Big Society, chaired by Lord Rennard, former chief executive of the Liberal Democrats, defines Big Society as:

"A society in which power and responsibility have shifted: one in which, at every level in our national life, individuals and communities have more aspiration, power and capacity to take decisions and solve problems themselves, and where all of us take greater responsibility for ourselves, our communities and one another."

Clearly Big Society is already happening in many places and the government wants to extend this by enabling everyone to take part. To this end it aims to decentralise decision making powers to the local level – that is local councils, communities and individuals. The government wants to decentralise service delivery and perhaps most radically, planning policy.

### What is Neighbourhood Planning?

The Localism Bill introduces a number of new opportunities that small towns can take advantage of.

Neighbourhood Planning is a new process that will allow local people to come together and have a direct say in the way their town is developed, focussing on land-use and spatial planning. It will enable them, for example, to input into where new houses, businesses and shops should go, as well as necessary infrastructure around these - and also what they should look like.

Neighbourhood planning will be taken forward by two types of body - town and parish councils or 'neighbourhood forums'. Neighbourhood forums will be community groups that are designated to take forward neighbourhood planning in areas without parishes. It will be the role of the local planning authority to agree who should be the neighbourhood forum.

Neighbourhood Planning offers three new tools to communities:

- **Neighbourhood Development Plans** – Neighbourhood Forums and town/parish councils will have the opportunity to develop, in consultation with the wider community, a plan which sets out planning policies for the development of land at the very local level. The plan would be subject to independent examination and a local referendum, and if it succeeds at both, would form part of the statutory Local Plan for the area.
- **Neighbourhood Development Orders** – This is a new power that enables communities to permit development they would like - in full or outline – without the need for planning applications.
- **Community Right to Build Orders** – This is a special type of Neighbourhood Development Order that enables local people to bring forward smaller-scale development on a specific site, without the need for planning permission. This reform would give communities the freedom to develop, for instance, small-scale housing and other facilities that they want.

In addition to Neighbourhood Planning, the Bill also provides two new opportunities for communities wishing to safeguard assets and have a greater say over local service delivery. These are:

**Assets of Community Value (The Right to Buy)** – This aims to make it easier for community groups to take over buildings and land considered to provide a valued local service or public facility. These 'assets' can be placed on a list held by the local authority. Should a listed asset come up for sale, communities will be given time to put together a bid for its purchase.

**The Community Right to Challenge** – This will allow community and voluntary bodies, parish councils and local authority employees to submit an expression of interest in taking over the delivery of local services. The public service provider must then undertake a full commissioning exercise.

It is useful to be aware of these opportunities if you intend to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan.

In parallel to the Localism Bill, the government is currently reviewing the National Planning Policy Framework. The aim is to simplify the current system and decentralise powers, with a new "presumption towards sustainable development". This means that the government is pro-growth and unless there is reasonable grounds against it (set out in the Local Plan for example), development will be granted.

As a way of encouraging communities to consider sustainable development at the local level, the government has introduced a series of financial incentives including:

**The Community Infrastructure Levy** – This was introduced in force in April 2010 and allows local authorities the option to raise funds on new developments in their area. The Localism Bill brings in a requirement for local authorities to allocate a 'meaningful proportion' of CIL revenue back to the neighbourhood from which it was raised. This proportion of the revenue would in theory go directly to the parish/town council or the neighbourhood forum.

**New Homes Bonus** - Announced in April 2011, this is a government scheme which is aimed at encouraging local authorities to grant planning permissions for the building of new houses, in return for additional revenue. Essentially councils will be rewarded each time a new home is built. The government has set aside up to £250m a year for the implementation of the scheme.

### **Taking Advantage of the new powers**

To take advantage of the new powers will require an approach that empowers the whole community to have a collective say in the way their town or neighbourhood develops. It will also require strong partnerships between the community, public and private sectors.

Many towns and parishes will have experience of this way of working having undertaken Community Led Planning as an inclusive and holistic process to understanding their place and developing a plan for improvement.

### **Building on lessons learned through Community Led Planning**

Community Led Planning (CLP) has long been promoted by AMT across England and has provided a very effective way of empowering communities to identify issues and deliver appropriate local solutions.

It is a step-by-step process, that enables citizens to participate in, and contribute to, improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their local area. It relies on people coming together locally, researching local needs and priorities and agreeing a range of different actions which help to improve their neighbourhood.

In considering the overall wellbeing and sustainability of their neighbourhoods, communities are more likely to understand the need for securing future development and growth. For example, in many rural areas communities have proposed new housing on the basis that this will help to sustain the local economy and services such as schools and public transport.

Successful community engagement is critical to the preparation and delivery of a Neighbourhood Development Plan. AMT believes that the Neighbourhood Planning can be most effectively delivered by building on the principles of CLP as a systematic, well-proven, inclusive and holistic, which goes beyond purely land-use and spatial aspects.

We recommend that the neighbourhood forum/ parish undertake a Neighbourhood Development Plan **as part of a wider Community Led Plan**. The Neighbourhood Plan 'chapter' would deal with land use planning and spatial aspects, while the wider community led plan would include broader actions that would benefit the community but would not require external examination. This is illustrated in the diagram below:



In this diagram, the responsibility for the Local Plan lies with the Planning Authority, although having engaged with its community. The Wider Community Led Plan and Neighbourhood Development Plan would be led by the Neighbourhood Forum/Parish Council in partnership with the community, and with ongoing dialogue with the planning authority (or both planning authorities where relevant).

## AMT Tools

[Town Action Planning Framework](#) - This provides a step to step guide to setting up and completing a Community Led Neighbourhood Plan. Based on a review of the original Countryside Agency town health check process handbook, the framework incorporates collaborative work with ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), including both town plans and parish plans, within an overall concept called LEAD (Launch, Evidence, Agree, Deliver & Monitor). This refers to a logical sequence of activities that community groups are expected to undertake, to produce plans that achieve high rates of participation, are linked in with local service providers and result in well-researched actions that can be implemented to meet local need.

AMT has designed a simple, user-friendly TAP workbook to help towns facilitate the whole planning process themselves. Alternatively, AMT can provide input, training and mentoring at specific stages or provide an independent facilitator to support the whole process. AMT's Facilitators are able to provide practical advice and support to you and your communities in developing your plan. Working independently from the local authorities we are well positioned to bridge the gap between communities and local authorities in an impartial manner. With considerable expertise in consultation techniques and with our experience of working across a range of communities, we can help catalyse local activity and secure the support of other key stakeholders along the way.

[Making the Most of Community Led Planning – a guide for local authorities](#) - Action for Market Towns and Action with Communities have developed a best practice guide for local authorities with a foreword written by Greg Clark MP, Minister for Decentralisation and Communities.

The guide offers insight into how community action can be kick-started to take advantage of the new rights that will become available to them through the Localism Bill.

Examining best practice from across England, the guide shows how local authorities can support communities at different stages during the development of their plan. They can help them to research their neighbourhood, understand the relevance of statutory plans and provide communities with the confidence to produce high quality plans with achievable actions that have local support.

[Download the guide](#)

### **AMT's Menu of Support**

AMT is already supporting a number of towns and parishes through the neighbourhood planning process, either by guiding the whole planning process or distinct phases of the process as an external facilitator. We are also providing support to planning authorities looking to develop an effective framework that can set the scene for their communities wishing to take advantage of new localism powers.

In terms of what AMT can offer, this is set out below.

#### **1. Setting the Context/Launching the Community Led Neighbourhood Planning Process**

We can facilitate the launch the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) process, bringing together a range of stakeholders. This would include celebrating the success of any existing community-led Town/Parish Plan, and identifying next steps for developing an NDP.

AMT can:

- Deliver presentations on appropriate subjects, such as “what is localism”, “what does it mean to your parish / town”, “the process involved in developing a NDP” etc
- Deliver Workshops and tailored training as appropriate, eg designing questionnaires, project planning, leadership, team working etc
- Help establish a partnership/ steering group to lead on the process
- Help the partnership deliver a launch event to raise awareness of the Localism agenda, the opportunities it presents and the process involved
- Provide case studies of NDP work taking place elsewhere
- Develop a tailored strategy with the parishes and key partners that leads to the Neighbourhood Planning process

#### **2. Evidencing local needs and aspirations**

In order to be in a position to put together the NDP it is important that the partnership has a full understanding of the community and wider hinterlands, as well as the existing plans at the planning authority level.

AMT can:

- Review existing plans and their impact on the emerging NDP
- Advise on the types of additional evidence which should be collected for the NDP
- Gather sets of data as required – for example through our town centre benchmarking service, facilitate community engagement/participation, running workshops, advising on/producing surveys/ workshops focussing on local land-use planning and spatial issues (eg. Planning for Real)

- Help the partnership to analyse the collected data
- Provide advice and support on the role of local interest groups and local authorities
- Provide expert advice on external examination of the Neighbourhood Plan and how to prepare for this

### 3. Drafting the NDP and feeding into the developing Local Plan

Once the research has been undertaken, the NDP can be drafted to reflect the current and future needs for the parish. It will set out a vision for an area and planning policies for the use and development of land. At this stage, the work undertaken so far can also feed into the emerging Local Plan to ensure that it sets the context in a way that will be of most benefit to the neighbourhood.

AMT can:

- Help the partnership to agree on the policies to include in the NDP, ensuring that they are in line with local and national policy - this could cover where new shops, offices or homes should go and what green spaces should be protected, traffic management, community safety.
- Help to work up a series of sites and appropriate policies to enable affordable housing if appropriate.
- Provide recommendations to the development of the Core Strategy to ensure that the neighbourhood can take advantage of Community Infrastructure Levy and the New Homes Bonus as appropriate.
- Advise on where Neighbourhood Development or Right to Build Orders might be appropriate and help develop these.
- Facilitate community engagement on the draft NDP in order to gauge support and enable any changes to finalise the draft.
- Help the partnership to check that the finalised plan meets the relevant legal and EU requirements.

The Neighbourhood Development Plan will now be at a stage to undergo independent assessment, and if successful, a local referendum. Once passed, and once the Bill has become law, the Plan can then be adopted as a statutory planning document within the Local Plan.

### 4. Agreeing any additional action for the wider Town/Parish Plan

In parallel to the work on the NDP potential actions may emerge that would not be appropriate for the NDP, but might be well-placed to be included in a new or refreshed Town/Parish Plan. For example, the Localism Bill includes new rights such as developing a list of community assets of value to the local community.

AMT can:

- Help the partnership prioritise additional emerging actions for the wider Parish Plan and where necessary engage wider partners who may be best placed to take forward particular actions, for example working with the Highways Department on public realm improvements
- Provide effective action planning training and templates
- Support the development of a funding strategy to deliver actions

At the end of this stage of the work, the neighbourhood will have an agreed Parish Plan which will include a chapter incorporating the NDP, the latter being an adopted as a statutory planning document.

### 5. Delivery of the Neighbourhood Plan

Given the amount of work involved in creating it is essential that communities continue to have faith in their plan and know exactly how they will turn their aspirations into reality. This usually involves continued negotiation with local authorities and other service providers who can help to make sure this happens.

- Help the partnership prepare monitoring and delivery plans

- Provide tailored training and one-to-one support to increase the relevant skills of these groups in order to deliver actions
- Support the development and implementation of town centre improvement projects, through the services of amt-i our town centre consultancy arm, including helping towns to benchmark their economic performance, the preparation of tailored town centre strategies and providing advice and guidance on implementing town centre loyalty programmes.
- Share good practice and facilitate peer-to-peer support to assist communities in negotiating for and running local services.
- Assist in negotiating appropriate local housing targets including affordable housing and the use of Community Land Trusts to provide housing as a community-owned asset.

One of the major obstacles we meet in developing community led plans is the mismatch in timing for the production of local plan documents. Therefore in addition to the support we offer in preparing Community Led Neighbourhood Development Plans, AMT can also work with communities and local authorities to ensure that Local Plans are set out in a way that reflects the views of the community and leave open opportunities available in the Localism Bill to be taken up.

**If you would like to find out more, please email or call us for an informal chat and we will be happy to help.**

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