

---

# Small towns, Big Societies.

"It is up to those of us interested in this topic to learn more about how places function, how their potential might be better exploited, and how to help policymakers and politicians help those involved in making sense of 'localism' and the 'Big Society' make the most of their towns."

---

Essay No.2 October 2011

# Small towns, Big Societies.



Dr Gordon Morris



---

# Introduction

This essay explores the British Government's keenness on 'localism' and the 'Big Society', and the semi-invisibility, in relation to policy and local government terms, of England's small towns. Given their diversity, geographical spread, traditional roles and human scale, these settlements appear, intuitively, to be well suited to these, admittedly rather abstract, notions.

Indeed, the fact that previous governments have expressed their desires to devolve powers from the centre to more local areas defined in similar, but equally abstract, terms (eg, "neighbourhoods" and "communities", rather than boroughs, towns or villages) provokes questions about the seriousness of the intentions, policy differences within government, a lack of understanding about how and where to devolve power, and the type and extent of the powers to be devolved.

Irrespective of the politicians' desire to devolve, the reality is that the trend has been towards centralization<sup>1</sup>. This has had particular implications for England's small towns, as bigger, more remote government and governance mechanisms have gradually taken power from the local authorities that held sway until 1974. Consequently, Small Towns for Tomorrow (STfT) and the Coalition Government are at one in their wish to see the return of local authority.

As indicated above, experience suggests that the omens are not good. We can, I believe, accept that the desire to devolve is genuine, but that there are uncertainties about how to develop the capacity of people and places to govern themselves. Over the years attempts have been made to encourage local people to become involved in helping to shape the places in which they live, albeit without devolving much actual power.

One such approach in 'community-led development' (CLD) was the Market Towns Initiative (MTI) announced in the Rural White Paper of 2000.

---

I hope both to provoke debate and stimulate thoughts about how the inherent strengths of small towns and their populations are underexploited in terms of CLD, and to discuss their potential to help achieve government's ambitions for more local control. In doing so I draw on my research into the roles of a small country town<sup>2</sup>, and my assessment of the MTI between 2005 and 2010<sup>3</sup>.



Gordon Morris, an engineer by profession, trained and served with the Royal Navy until 1976, when he left to work in industry, initially as a sonar engineer, and eventually as a partner in a consultancy specialising in water conservation. After a spell lecturing in Further and Higher Education he joined the Rural Development Commission as a Business Adviser in 1993.

In 1999, he joined the Countryside Agency, where he worked on various aspects of rural regeneration, including the Market Towns Initiative and Beacon Towns Programme, both of which he helped to design and manage. He left the Countryside Agency in 2005, and now works as a freelance writer and researcher. He has a Post-graduate Diploma and an MSc in Rural Development from the University of Plymouth/Seale Hayne, and has a doctorate from the University of Exeter, where he has been investigating aspects of rural deprivation in England. Gordon is a Board member of Action for Market Towns.

---

## Small towns in the policy spotlight ... briefly

England's small towns have been neglected in policy terms for most of the post-war period. Interest was largely confined to a relatively small number of geographers, historians, and sociologists. In terms of settlement, social, and economic planning, small towns appear to have fallen between the two stools of rural and urban development, seen by the former as essentially urban, and by the latter as rural.

Nevertheless, interest developed during the 1950s, gathered pace in the early 1990s, and came to the fore between 1995 and 2005. After this period interest faded away, partly as a consequence of the understandable change in government priorities during the foot and mouth outbreaks, but also because of Lord Haskins' review of rural policy<sup>4</sup>, and the increasing importance to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of climate change and more traditional concerns relating to 'countryside'. In short, small towns were cast back into near-invisibility as far as policy was concerned.

During the period between the publication of the Rural White Paper in 1996, and the end of the MTI in 2005-6, a lot of work was done to improve our understanding of rural areas by central government organizations<sup>5</sup>. Some of this work, now under the auspices of the Commission for Rural Communities, continues to this day, as does that done by more local rural bodies such as local authorities, whose interest is obvious and of long-standing.

The lack of overt policy interest in these places did not mean, however, that all small towns were struggling to survive (although some were, and still are). Rather like Mark Twain's non-death, the terminal decline of country towns has been inaccurately reported over the years<sup>6</sup>. In reality many are successful places in which CLD work is helping to maintain and improve their capacity to perform traditional roles, and to find and exploit their 21st century potential.

---

It is good that small towns engaged the attention of policymakers in recent years, featuring in the white papers of 1996 and 2000, but it should be noted that this interest resulted in the MTI, not in greater political and economic autonomy. In fact, the policy direction continued to point away from local autonomy, towards unitary authorities and regional bodies. Today, although the rhetoric speaks of greater local control, many policies, such as those associated with health, education, housing and wider planning, appear to have at their heart central control mechanisms designed to by-pass local democratic institutions. The status of town councils remains largely unchanged. Consequently, local power remains largely unchanged.

## ‘Big Society’ implies local power, control, and influence

Centralized government is relatively recent. The late Professor Ray Pahl, whose personal interest and commitment led to the formation of STfT, noted how, “In the 19th century business people did much to improve their own towns and cities by providing parks, libraries, town halls and other public goods”<sup>7</sup>. Today, as we will see, local people continue their predecessors’ work in, around, and for, England’s small towns.

Indeed, people in small towns are as aware as anyone else of tensions around democracy, employment, housing, planning, and economic and social development. There are myriad examples in our towns of local people’s self confidence, determination and ability to take the lead and get things done. Is this the sort of activity, of local leadership, that David Cameron means by ‘Big Society’? Is this what lies at the heart of his stated intention to bring about the “... most dramatic redistribution of power from the elite in Westminster to the man and woman on the street.”? Or is it, in the end, yet more rhetoric, an example of yet another politician who, like David Miliband, Hazel Blears and John Denham before

---

him, sees political need and advantage in the concepts of devolution and ‘Big Society’, but does not know how to do it, or is simply unaware that attempts have been made to do it by his predecessors?

The reality is that a lot has already been done where ‘Big Society’ – although it is still difficult to know what the term means<sup>8</sup> - activity is concerned. Although, according to some, the ‘Big Society’ is more likely to be working in the suburbs than in rural areas, the work done in England’s small towns by local volunteers, elected officials from town and other councils, public servants, and representatives from the charitable and private sectors, epitomises society at work. Nor is this work restricted to wealthier places. Research by the New Local Government Network indicates “There is no strong link between a community’s wealth and its ‘Big Society’ resources ...”.

On the basis that one has to start somewhere if flesh is to be put on the ‘Big Society’ bones, I will argue that its foundations have already been laid in small towns, and that these places, for so long taken for granted and often ignored in policy terms, and yet rich in history and local government – and governance – experience, are ideally placed to be the focus of policy making and implementation related to ‘localism’.

First, however, to provide some context, I will explain briefly the roles of the Rural White Papers in highlighting the importance of small country towns, before drawing on my research in an attempt to explore two related things: 1) the extent to which volunteer-led work gives life to the intentions behind the ‘Big Society’; 2) the limitations of volunteerism, and the consequent need for well-supported local democracy and help for local partnerships from paid professionals.

---

# The Rural White Papers revived interest in small country towns

From the first white paper emerged Action for Market Towns. It was formed by the Rural Development Commission following a 1995-96 study into the state of smaller market town centres, despite some inevitable, but in the event unwarranted, nervousness from some consultees that a new body might affect their work. From the second came the MTI, the first national CLD programme designed to help local people take the lead in understanding and improving their towns.

From today's standpoint these developments were welcome and useful. They were also something of a lost opportunity, however, in that the MTI was eventually allowed to fade away, rather than to evolve in response to participants' experiences and methodological advances.

At the centre of the process was the Healthcheck, which was essentially an audit of community assets and a record of aspirations. Web-based, it was free for all to use, and was designed to ensure that its development – and improvement – would be informed by users' views and experiences. In time this deliberately iterative approach would, I believe, have resulted in improved ways of working, more local influence, and more, and better, outcomes.

In the event the Healthcheck was only updated once, although Action for Market Towns, which was given the handbook by the Countryside Agency, used it to help develop its Town Action Planning work.

The Healthcheck was paid for by taxpayers. That it is now no longer available suggests that the taxpayer received poor value for money. The cost of leaving it on the Web, and of updating and maintaining it, would have been minimal. If support for the Healthcheck and related processes had continued, it is possible that

---

ideas relating to the ‘Big Society’ would be clearer.

My research confirms that the approach worked well. About 240 partnerships took part in the programme, and many useful and imaginative projects were developed and implemented. Encouragingly, more than 65% of the MTI partnerships I surveyed were still active three years after the programme officially ended. Also, Action for Market Towns is now an established membership-based organization. It provides advice and support to its members, via its planning and related services, and more widely (eg to policymakers). In today’s straitened times, however, it is grappling with the fact that grant aid and contracts are harder to come by at the very time that its potential to contribute to the development of policy and practice has never been greater, or more needed.

Therefore, despite the end of the MTI, CLD work continues, and has, at its heart, the conviction that involving local people in the development of their towns is a critical, if not the only, ingredient for success.

The recent history, political ‘push’, and theory and practice behind CLD will be familiar to many readers. So, rather than try to shine new light on what is, in truth, straightforward work, I will instead briefly review the developments that have brought us to where we are today.

## From post-war interest to ‘age of austerity’ opportunities

It must not be forgotten that our small towns, many with ancient charters, were largely self-governing until the encircling and centralizing hand of national governments began to erode their power, and change their administrative roles. This trend, which gathered pace from the mid-19th century, culminated in the 1972 and 1974 Local Government Acts. These brought about the end of Rural District Councils, many of which were centred on, and based in, small country towns.

---

The extent to which traditional town functions continue is illustrated by the results of my investigation into the roles that Sherborne in Dorset plays in the lives of local people. Although the degree to which surrounding settlements depend on Sherborne's services varies quite considerably, the town is a significant, if not the only, centre for the people who live in and around it. More generally, small towns, given their variety and distinctive characteristics, epitomise rural – and parts of industrial – England as powerfully as any village, hamlet, or idealized landscape.

In terms of recent interest in their roles, and their advantages and vulnerabilities, post-war work about the functions of small towns was largely done for, and to, rather than by, local people. For example, during the 1950s and 1960s locals were consulted by social researchers<sup>9</sup> and geographers<sup>10</sup> about the ways they lived their lives, and the ways in which they used local services.

Things began to change in the 1970s. Community development workers increasingly encouraged local people to use community planning tools such as Planning for Real and Village Appraisals (the latter now replaced by Parish Plans<sup>11</sup>). During the 1990s, Village and Town Design Statements<sup>12</sup> influenced the development of the then Countryside Agency's Parish Planning and MTI work. At about the same time, politicians of all parties began to talk about how power might be devolved to local areas, with, from 1997, "... community leadership ... placed at the heart of local government reform."<sup>13</sup> From this, as discussed above, the MTI eventually grew. Today, we are in similar linguistic territory, but the MTI, which flowered and died, has yet to be replaced or substantively built upon in terms of either policies or programmes.

Politicians' and policymakers' commitments have, therefore, promised more than they have delivered in terms of local control (responsibility, power, and influence). The changing terminology has somewhat obscured the fact that the underlying thrust of the intentions appears to be the same: to engage people more widely and actively in local, often voluntary, action, be it by means of

---

conventionally accountable processes (local authorities), or groups structured along the lines of, for example, Market Town Partnerships.

We need to recognize that it may be easier for politicians to will the means than to provide them. To an extent it is up to those of us interested and involved in attempting to help local people achieve some local control over their towns, to do so. This might not be as difficult as it seems, for the CLD work done by Market Town Partnerships gives life to the politicians' wishes and words. It provides valuable foundations for future work in terms of both method and achievements; it is rhetoric made real by local people.

One note of caution, however.

The success of partnerships stemmed in part from the involvement of paid professionals who helped locals to improve their understanding of their towns, and to develop and implement projects. Community-led development might be a good way to involve and empower volunteers, but it cannot be done on the cheap.

It is also worth pointing out that, although the MTI encouraged partnerships to think strategically (eg in terms of housing, transport, employment), their ability to implement plans was severely constrained by: the limited abilities of organizations such as regional development agencies and local authorities to satisfy partnerships' needs; the MTI's short life; the centralized nature of many policies and related powers; and the essential lack of wider strategic policy and money (tax) raising powers, not only of town councils, but other local authority tiers.

In reality, therefore, partnerships, with or without the support of their local councils and other organizations, were restricted in what they could do. For example, although participants in my research offered examples of impressive projects, some of which are mentioned below, they tended to be discrete one-offs, rather than a part of wider, long-term strategic plans over which the partnership/town council had total control. Given the way that

---

government in England is structured, and powers distributed, this is inevitable. This makes the achievements of partnerships even more impressive, and hints at the potential waiting to be tapped. It also shines a very bright light on the difference between the assumed intentions of those keen to devolve power via, for example, the Localism Bill, and the actions of those elsewhere in government whose instincts towards national planning, appear to be much more prescriptive.

Clearly, if the 'Big Society' is to mean more than occasional help along the lines of the MTI, considerable thought will need to be given about how to (re)develop local skills, delegate political and financial powers, and increase democratic engagement (although this last could follow quickly and naturally from the first three points). If these important and challenging points are addressed, small towns will, I believe, be well-placed to build on their CLD work, and to make real the 'Big Society'.

Community volunteers cannot, however, do this on their own.

## Community-led partnerships work, but members need help

If government is serious, it must recognize that there are limits to what volunteers can achieve. They will need financial support, but, and perhaps more importantly, they will need help from experienced professional community development workers and supportive local authority officers and councillors. This tripartite arrangement helps to ensure that the enthusiasm and knowledge of volunteers is matched and supported by equally enthusiastic professionals and elected representatives.

These last, who sometimes appear to be neglected and perhaps even resented by central government, are important. They provide a direct democratic link to the electorate via town councils. Training for councillors, and town clerks (and others), encouraged by the Quality Town and Parish Council scheme announced in the

---

2000 white paper, has done much to prepare this tier of government for additional responsibilities. Unlike informal partnerships these statutory bodies are permanent and accountable. As such they are well-placed to provide essential management and auditable financial accounting support to partnerships. The evidence from my research is that this type of broadly drawn partnership is effective and long-lasting.

Unsurprisingly, many of the people who contributed to my research made clear their affection for, interest in, and loyalty to their towns and fellow inhabitants. They are community leaders. Their efforts and commitment demonstrate that civic interest and civil society are alive and well. It is troubling that many politicians and civil servants do not appear to know about their achievements, possibly because programmes such as the MTI have been largely unevaluated and unmonitored. Consequently they cannot understand how effective these programmes and processes have been.

Let me give, therefore, an insight into the make-up and achievements of the partnerships using information taken both from my research, and that collected for the Countryside Agency<sup>14</sup>.

## Partnerships, their composition and achievements

Market Town Partnerships had about 25 members, including local authority officers and councillors (from all tiers), officials from the Countryside Agency, Regional Development Agencies, other public sector bodies (eg English Heritage), representatives of the private and voluntary sectors, and members of community groups and the general public. Perhaps predictably, the individuals involved tended to be the 'usual suspects' mix of the often retired and the professional, with their wide range of valuable skills and experience, rather than the young, the disadvantaged, and the unemployed, all of whom could both benefit from, and contribute

---

to, CLD. Generally, the private sector has proved to be the hardest to involve, presumably because of the day-to-day pressures on them.

Members gave many reasons for their involvement, ranging from straightforward matters of duty in the case of councillors and town clerks (although many of these were essentially volunteers, as they were not statutorily required to be involved), to people with specific concerns about, for example, the lack of local amenities and opportunities for the young and the elderly. Others' interests were broader, but tended to be associated with a wish to help their towns regenerate (a frequently used word, reflecting, perhaps, the various programmes with regeneration as their aim, and the word – now almost clichéd – in their titles). Also expressed were concerns about other aspects of their towns and lives, including transport, housing, and employment.

It can be assumed that the people who took the time to share their views are likely to be the most interested in the programmes (although not necessarily the most approving). From a personal and research point of view it was frustrating not to be able to find out exactly how representative of the wider community the partnerships I surveyed were. This gap in understanding reinforced my belief that monitoring and evaluation should always be a formal part of CLD programmes such as the MTI. Failure to do this means that much valuable learning is lost, and makes it more difficult to assess value for money.

Nevertheless, the information gathered suggests that valuable work was done. Participants were clearly proud of their achievements. More than 40 examples of projects were given. These included: a business support fund; heritage rail trips; an outdoor youth facility; local radio projects; shrub and tree planting; bungalows for the elderly; a credit union; the redevelopment of a fire station; and a day centre. Other, more familiar, but still important, projects such as those relating to car parking, web sites, and a local directory, also featured.

These projects demonstrate the breadth and depth of

---

partnerships' ambitions. They lie far beyond stereotypical favourites such as improved Christmas lights (although these useful, smaller scale projects are found within larger projects). Although locally centred, they address national priorities and needs.

There is a lesson here for the 'Big Society'. The work would have had greater value if the experiences of those involved were captured and disseminated formally, not only between partnerships, but more widely with policymakers, practitioners and towns that were not part of the MTI programme. For similar reasons, there is also a need for more formal, but 'light touch' long-term action research and monitoring similar to that used in the short-lived Beacon Towns Programme<sup>15</sup>.

This programme was designed to complement and support MTI partnership work<sup>16</sup>. Whereas work in MTI towns tended to cover a wide range of topics, the 18 Beacon Town partnerships were selected because of the potential that the work being done on a particular topic in each town (such as transport, tourism, housing, migrant workers) had to help others. Each town was awarded an annual grant of £3,000 to be spent on sharing their experiences with other town partnerships. Additional support took the form of, for example, an international conference and exchange programme. The – unrealized – hope was that this work would be monitored, biennially, for ten years in an attempt to improve the understanding of how community groups grapple with change. The programme was intended as a long-term study, the lack of which, and need for, has been commented on since the 1940s, when Lord Justice Scott, in his eponymous report, noted our national inability to think and plan ahead<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to the MTI and Beacon Town programmes there were other related initiatives. These included Gateway Stations<sup>18</sup>, One-Stop Shops<sup>19</sup>, Parish Plans (this last similar in intent to the MTI, but for smaller settlements), together with other, more distantly related programmes, such as the Local Heritage Initiative and Rural Transport Partnerships<sup>20</sup>. Also established was the

---

National Market Towns Advisory Forum, formed to take an overview of the MTI. When these are considered as a whole, it can be seen that an attempt was made to take a coordinated long-term approach to developing the potential of small towns, not least “... as the focus for rural jobs and services.”<sup>21</sup>.

My research, together with more recent examples of community-led partnership in action (for example, those featured on the South East Rural Towns’ website, and in Action for Market Towns’ annual Market Town Awards), suggests a continuing desire in towns to develop this potential. It also suggests that people can be trusted to get things done in ways that are imaginative, and of real benefit for their towns and also, in many cases, for the surrounding villages and hamlets.

## With encouragement, people get things done ...

In a summary of research into community responses to climate change<sup>22</sup>, the authors noted the willingness of people to do things, and their belief that, “There are many problems, from the management of chronic diseases to youth offending, where ... community or user-led innovation could add great value to the work of public service professionals.” The work of Market Town Partnerships suggests that this is the case. As does, to take one more example, the work of community-led enterprises, known as Resident Services Organisations, highlighted in a Joseph Rowntree report<sup>23</sup>. Such findings are not new.

It seems clear, therefore, that local people want to influence their towns, and are prepared to take responsibility for their actions, if allowed and encouraged to do so. They are instinctive ‘localists’. Irrespective of any narrowness of the demographic from which they are drawn, and whether elected, nominated by a group or organization, or simply interested individual volunteers, they have a part to play in the development of the ‘Big Society’. It will be

---

largely on their experience, expertise, and willingness to participate, that the government's belief in the potential of 'localism' to help transform government and governance, will depend.

Arguments against allowing them to do this cannot, in the majority of cases, be made on grounds of population, or any substantial lack of government, governance or other skills; not least because more people are likely to become involved in partnership working and democratic politics if the move to a 'Big Society' based on 'localism' within 'communities' is handled well.

In the meantime, the 'Big Society' remains an enigmatic but emblematic aim of government; paradoxically instinctively understood, but elusive. Perhaps this is inevitable, given the hurly-burly of politics, and the need for parties to mark as distinctive their particular suite of policies from within an increasingly narrow and crowded centre ground. So be it. It is, I believe, up to those of us interested in this topic to learn more about how these places function, how their potential might be better exploited, and how to help policymakers and politicians help those involved in making sense of 'localism' and the 'Big Society' make the most of their towns.

## .... so, let's help them get on with it

At the beginning of this essay I remarked on the resilience of England's small towns, and of the tendency of policymakers to ignore them, perhaps because, like the equally romanticised landscapes of Olde England, they appear, in their Hardy-esque permanence, unchanging. This impression can be misleading. When considered overall their diverse strengths and weaknesses make for ever-changing stories about decline and growth, advantage and disadvantage, and social, cultural and economic change. Their relatively large number (a figure which ranges upwards of 1,600 depending on yet another strand of academic

---

and political debate), and geographically dispersed nature, means that the impacts of the ebb and flow of economic luck and judgement on individual towns can be masked by trends in the majority.

This complexity might help to explain why policymakers, faced with many more obvious, if no less straightforward, urban and rural problems, find it difficult to categorize and, therefore, to prioritize these places. Consequently, opportunities to learn from this complicated mix of experiences and fortunes have been missed. Although, in many towns all is well, in others, for example small fishing towns and ex-coal mining towns, the reality is different. In both cases, however, to judge from the findings of my research, the people who live in these places are ideally placed to help the coalition government test and implement their CLD-related policies.

This is not an original thought!

In 1943, in his introduction to the Town and Country Planning Association's report, *Country Towns in the Future England*, Sir Eric Macfadyn wrote of towns "By-passed for the time being by the Industrial Revolution ... [they] now stand ready, under the new conditions of today, to claim once more their rightful place in the mainstream of national progress." Interestingly, this view is similar to that expressed by Lord Cameron in his introduction to the first essay in this series.

Although many towns have done exactly as Macfadyn hoped, many of their achievements have gone unremarked, lost in the constant swirl of organizational and policy and programme changes, undermined by a tendency to plead, rather than lead, and, despite the talk of 'localism', a lack of faith in the third (or, as some would say, first) tier of local government.

Yet there is much to celebrate in and about our small towns, and, as explained above, about the CLD work that has been, and is being, done in them. There is much to learn, but the work done by volunteers involved in programmes such as the MTI, and the steps

---

taken by local councillors and clerks to improve themselves and their councils, proves that local people can get things done. It is difficult to see, however, that they will be able to achieve much more unless they are given greater powers and responsibilities.

Given that the main concerns and problems identified in my, and others', research included transport, housing, and economic development inadequacies, it is reasonable to suggest that neither central planning nor the free market have all the answers. Perhaps, therefore, policies relating to these topics should be recast to bring the people and their councils in England's small towns into the heart of the decision making process? It will not be easy; it will require significantly changed attitudes, a lot of thought, and a commitment to 'localism' that extends far beyond the tentative and yet still contentious steps proposed by the government.

Are the main political parties willing to plan for and implement such fundamental changes? Are town councils capable of taking new responsibilities (many of which would be similar to those they held until 1972-74, for example, planning, social housing, public health)? Have times changed so much, or are things so set in stone that globalization and centralizing trends are unstoppable? What, in the end, do people want, and how determined are our politicians to try new approaches?

Whatever the answers to these questions, Small Towns for Tomorrow will support and inform, via research and other methods of engagement and involvement, the efforts of everyone who is working for, and on behalf of, our small country towns. In this way we will help to ensure that they are able to take their rightful place in what may one day be, if the politicians are to be believed, a less-centralized world in terms of government and governance structures.

Dr Gordon Morris  
*gm@tanglewood.u-net.com*

---

# Notes and Sources

1. Strengthening the Role of Local Councillors: an overview of information, policy and debate. 2007. Prepared by Gordon Morris and Claire Nichols for the Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham. <http://tinyurl.com/43krtlr>
2. 2002, a Spatial Odyssey. An Investigation Into the Sphere(s) of Influence of Sherborne, Dorset (an English Country Town). 2003. Seale Hayne, University of Plymouth. <http://tinyurl.com/o4el7q>
3. People Helping People, an Assessment of the Market Towns and Related Initiatives, and the Extent to Which They Addressed Rural Poverty. <http://tinyurl.com/6f6qs3a>
4. Rural Delivery Review – a Report on the Delivery of Government Policies in Rural England. 2003. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, London.
5. See, for example, the State of the Countryside Reports produced by the Countryside Agency and the Commission for Rural Communities produced between 1999 and 2010, <http://tinyurl.com/3weadte>, and the research done by STfT’s John Shepherd’s team at the Rural Evidence Research centre, University of London, <http://tinyurl.com/42ub3xy>
6. In 1905 Arthur Anderson was advertising a talk in Smith’s Weekly entitled, “Our Dying Country Towns”
7. New Statesman, January 2005
8. According to Lord Wei, briefly the government’s chief adviser on the ‘Big Society’, it features 3 key qualities:
  - i) The needs of different places are dealt with in different ways
  - ii) It lets people take control
  - iii) It leads to similar senses of community arising in inner-city and rural areas that weren’t there before.He also listed 3 issues that the Big Society is a reaction to:
  - i) Bureaucracy - that stifles rather than nurtures
  - ii) Isolation - government systems miss people
  - iii) Feeling shut out - the system shuts us out rather than involves us

---

Therese Coffey MP gives a shorter definition: “Go and do it”.

Source: <http://tinyurl.com/3shk0bc>

9. For example, see *Tradition and Change - a Study of Banbury*, by Margaret Stacey, 1960, Oxford University Press.
10. See, for examples: *Howard Bracey’s Social Provision in Rural Wiltshire, 1952 and Industry and the Countryside – the Impact of Industry on Amenities in the Countryside, 1963*; Paul Courtney, Julia Dawson and Andrew Errington’s *The Functions of the English Market Town: a Comparison Between Devon and Cornwall*, 1998, and my own research into the spheres of influence of Sherborne, Dorset (endnote 2 above refers).
11. See, for example, <http://tinyurl.com/c933jv>
12. See, for example, <http://tinyurl.com/5uxqr4z>
13. *Interpreting ‘Community Leadership’ in English Local Government*. Helen Sullivan, Policy and Politics, 2007.
14. *Entec UK Ltd’s Assessment of the Market Towns Initiative*, 2004.
15. *People Helping People...* , pp105-107 (<http://tinyurl.com/6f6qs3a>)
16. *See Beacon Towns: the Story Continues*, written by Claire Nichols for the Countryside Agency (available from the British Library)
17. *Report of the Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas*. HMSO, 1942, p89.
18. *Gateway Stations: a partnership Story*. Final report on the two-year pilot study, 2005. Prepared by Claire Nichols for the Commission for Rural Communities, Cheltenham. Available from the British Library.
19. *Setting up One Stop Shops*, 2003, Countryside Agency, Cheltenham.
20. For some information about RTPs, see: <http://tinyurl.com/3vbeez8>
21. *Our Countryside the Future. A Fair Deal for Rural England*. 2000. p76. HM Government, Cm 4909, London.
22. *People-Powered Responses to Climate Change, Mapping Community-led Proposals to NESTA’s Big Green Challenge*, 2009 ([www.nesta.org.uk](http://www.nesta.org.uk)).
23. *Resident Services Organisations: Lessons From the Pilot Projects*, 2002, Joseph Rowntree, York. (search at [www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)).

---

# About us

**Small Towns for Tomorrow** is a group of concerned individuals, practitioners, academics, representatives of central and local government, and the private sector who wish to develop and promote a greater understanding of the issues facing small towns across the UK. We work with key agencies and opinion formers to influence the national, regional and sub-regional policy-making process as an informed, unbiased voice on issues relating to small towns.

If you would like to get involved with the work of **Small Towns for Tomorrow**, and for more details, please visit our website at: [www.smalltownsfortomorrow.org](http://www.smalltownsfortomorrow.org). Alternatively, contact any of the following:

■ **Economic Development:**

Gerald Milward-Oliver / [gerald@milwardoliver.com](mailto:gerald@milwardoliver.com)  
07802 335969

■ **Community:**

Dr Gordon Morris / [gm@tanglewood.u-net.com](mailto:gm@tanglewood.u-net.com)  
07917 577285

■ **Evidence:**

Prof John Shepherd / [j.shepherd@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:j.shepherd@bbk.ac.uk)  
07801 079249

■ **Policy/action:**

Alison Eardley / [alison.eardley@towns.org.uk](mailto:alison.eardley@towns.org.uk)  
07876 598957



Supported by Action for Market Towns  
[www.towns.org.uk](http://www.towns.org.uk).

Small Towns for Tomorrow

[www.smalltownsfortomorrow.org](http://www.smalltownsfortomorrow.org)