

# **Big Society** **Big Deal or *Big Deal***

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## Shortcut to *Big Society* and localism

- **Encouraging communities towards self-determination**
- ***Localism Act* should come into force *sometime* 2012**
- **Detailed guidelines follow...2012/13!**

## Longcut to *Big Society* and localism

“People...in their neighbourhoods...feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own Communities....”

[David Cameron, July 2010]

## To engage or not to engage?

- **Spectator or player?**
- **Localism *currently* = only game in town**
- **Eradicating poverty...and immediate need**
- **Maintaining integrity**
- **Community primacy – 1<sup>st</sup> & foremost**
- **Guarded optimism...or optimistic caution?**

## What exactly is on offer?

## Part I

- **Community approval/veto** (local?) council tax rises via referenda
- Local councils etc **right to challenge**: express interest in running local authority services
- Community **right to bid** for a local asset when it comes available
- **Local council listing of assets** for protection and purchase

## What exactly is on offer?

## Part II

- **General Power of Competence** – free to do anything legal!
- **Community Infrastructure Levy**: money to places where development occurs
- Local council led **Neighbourhood Plans**
- **Right to build** without planning permission, given 50% support from voters

## Making localism truly local

- ***Community right to support*** – local council finances initiatives serving community / addressing needs
- ***Community right to plan*** – ‘Russian Doll’ - CLP + Neighbourhood Plan
- ***Community right to combine forces*** – Local Council with Community Trust as ‘executive’ arm
- ***Community right to cluster*** - market town & hinterland parishes as viable, sustainable unit for action

**Right Reverend Host:** *"I'm afraid you've got a bad Egg, Mr. Jones!"*

**The Curate:** *"Oh no, my Lord, I assure you! Parts of it are excellent!"*





## The bad and the ugly?

- “for he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath” (Mark’s Gospel)
- “**492** cuts reported...worth **£76,296,681**” (Voluntary Sector cuts online)
- Community Organisers: 4,500 part-time volunteers
- 500 full time senior organisers – paid for 1 year
- “The job of the organizer is to maneuver & bait the establishment” (Alinsky, 1989: 100)

# The struggle for power

- **Central Government**
- **Principal authorities**
- **Local councils**
- **Community groups**
- **Communities, & their local councils, need to take power to boost self-determination**

## The curate's egg – evidence from Glos.

- **75% of respondents:** “spending cuts are undermining the Big Society and only half feel able to compete for public service contracts”
- **“Over 90% feel that the cuts are disproportionately affecting disadvantaged communities”**
- **Is Big Society achievable?** 56% “unsure”
- Third sector suffering “reduction of a fifth in their income” 2011. Struggle to maximise revenue, reduce costs, save services, & sustain activity

**Source:** Jason Dunsford (2011) *The Big Society in Gloucestershire in the Context of Public Sector Cuts*, undergraduate dissertation

## Rallying cry for local councils

- “There can be no localism without local government...are we the innovators, the grassroots representatives....?”  
Michael Chater, NALC Chair, 9.7.2010
- Michael Portillo (SLCC, 2010): It is up to us “to write the blank pages” of the *Big Society*
- Local Councils: 1894 – 2011 **RIP?**
- Local leaders – **if not the Local Council then who? RSVP**