

Public Sector Austerity – Managing in an Environment of Reduced Budgets

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ACRE

Action with Communities in Rural England

***Supporting vibrant and sustainable rural communities through the
Rural Community Action Network***



ACRE & the Rural Community Action Network

- Generating and supporting community action in rural communities across England
- Based at county, regional and national levels
- Integrating social, environmental & economic objectives in delivering local solutions
- Strategic input supporting over 70 higher tier authorities
- Over 12,000 fee paying members
- In contact with over 40,000 organisations at the grass roots



Government's Big Society principles

- Re-balancing relationships, and expectations, between the state and civil society
- Local people taking action for themselves, replacing statutory services by voluntary action
- A focus on small neighbourhoods (parish or ward)
- Policy decisions to support bottom-up decision-making and responsibilities
- A shift from 'engagement' in shaping public services to empowering communities to deliver services



What's the change from existing 'empowerment'?

- Local government previously 'empowered' communities – it now has to enable communities **to empower themselves**
- The focus for engagement is now between **local government and individual neighbourhoods** not via area partnerships or committees

SO

- How does local government become an **'enabler'** of community action?
- Does community action simply emerge?
- What positive or negative changes will have to be managed in relationships with communities?
- Are rural and urban differences in Big Society implementation likely to widen
- Can local authorities capitalise on this?



Public sector cuts in a rural environment

- Rural service withdrawal occurs more rapidly
- Cuts happen 'tomorrow' without space for transition
- Innovative alternatives need start-up funding, but sources of investment are scarce
- Localism puts the onus on local government
- Some government policy proposals will support rural community action; others may create new hurdles.

BUT

- Rural culture already exists in 'filling the vacuum' via community action
- No shortage of good practice examples



Rural 'Big Society' in action

- Independent neighbourhood governance
- Most local community assets under local ownership
- Already delivering some 'public services'
- Culture of community-led planning to decide on local priorities
- Support systems for delivery well developed
- Rural innovation – integrated service delivery, cross sector partnerships



Government policy measures - strong rural 'Big Society' impact

- **Decentralisation of planning & New Homes Bonus**
- **Right to Build**
- **Right to Buy**
- **Right to Bid**
- **Council tax referendums**
- **Cutting red tape**
- **Big Society Bank (?)**
- **Green Investment Bank (?)**



Decentralisation of planning

- No top-down targets but payment by results to Local Authorities through New Homes Bonus
- Planning Inspectors deal only with process, not content (?)
- Impact of national planning framework?
- Local authorities set local planning policies
 - Communities that don't want housing will know LAs will benefit financially – expect NIMBY campaigns
 - Communities that do decide they need more housing will be arguing for their share of the New Homes Bonus

Right to Build

- **A community organisation that acquires land for development can gain planning permission**
 - Subject to certain requirements on governance
 - Community referendum to evidence support (80%+)
- **This will be ‘outside’ the planning system**
 - Limited number of statutory checks to pass re site suitability
- **Parish Councils do not qualify as community organisations**
- **No dedicated fund for Community Land Trust Development or building**
- **Potential impact on rural housing???**



Right to Buy

- A community can 'list' a site (private or commercial) if it is delivering a valued service – held by who?
- 'Listing' will prevent development through change of use, or sale on the open market
- Policy appears to be avoiding the Scottish Community Right to Buy, which requires referendums to evidence support
- Debate around what constitutes 'the community' and their wishes
- Requires current change of use categories to continue in the national planning framework.



Right to Bid

- Largely focused on development of cooperatives and mutuals, staff-takeovers.
- Rural relevance is more likely to:
 - Be focused on offering a lower or different level of service through use of volunteer labour
 - Be a response to the withdrawal of a statutory service
 - Involve a rationalisation of community facilities
 - Require time and support to build capacity to deliver



Council Tax Referendums

- Consultation proposed this applied to parish & town councils (with de minimus rule)
- Claimed to have no 'rural proofing' implications
- The relevant local authority (ie parish, fire service) would be expected to pay the costs
- Binding on the relevant authority.

This could spell disaster for:

- Devolving services to parish & town councils
- Getting people to propose local initiatives that would require an increased parish precept
- Community cohesion and any efforts to build the Big Society



Tying it all together

- Rural communities can do this, but only if:
 - New policy hurdles are not imposed (referendums, ignoring the role of parish & town councils)
 - Local Planning Authorities work with rural stakeholders to create local plan policies that obviate the need to use the Right to Build
 - Future service delivery is negotiated between local government and individual communities (who does what)
 - Communities have a chance to plan their response to loss of services in a way that is holistic & sustainable
 - Implementation makes a virtue of the current culture and practice in rural communities

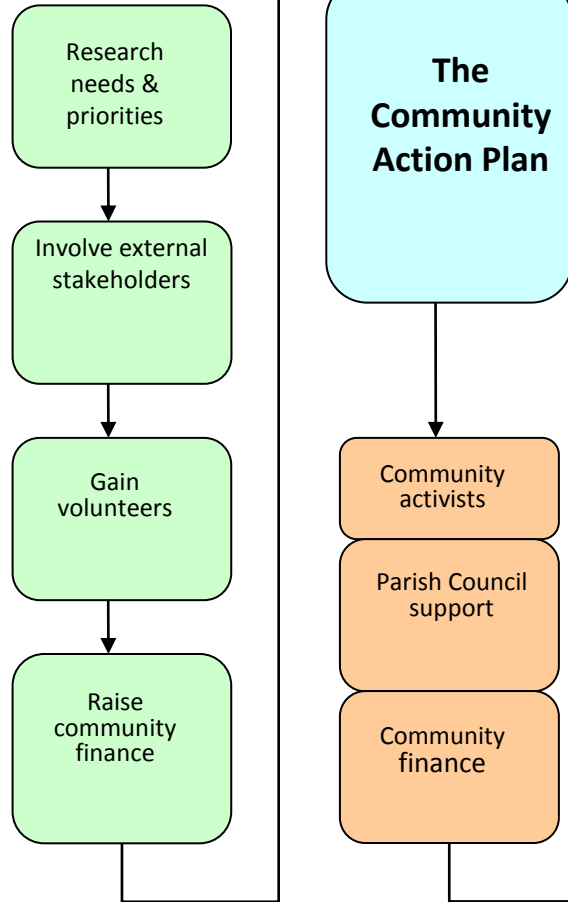


Community Led Planning

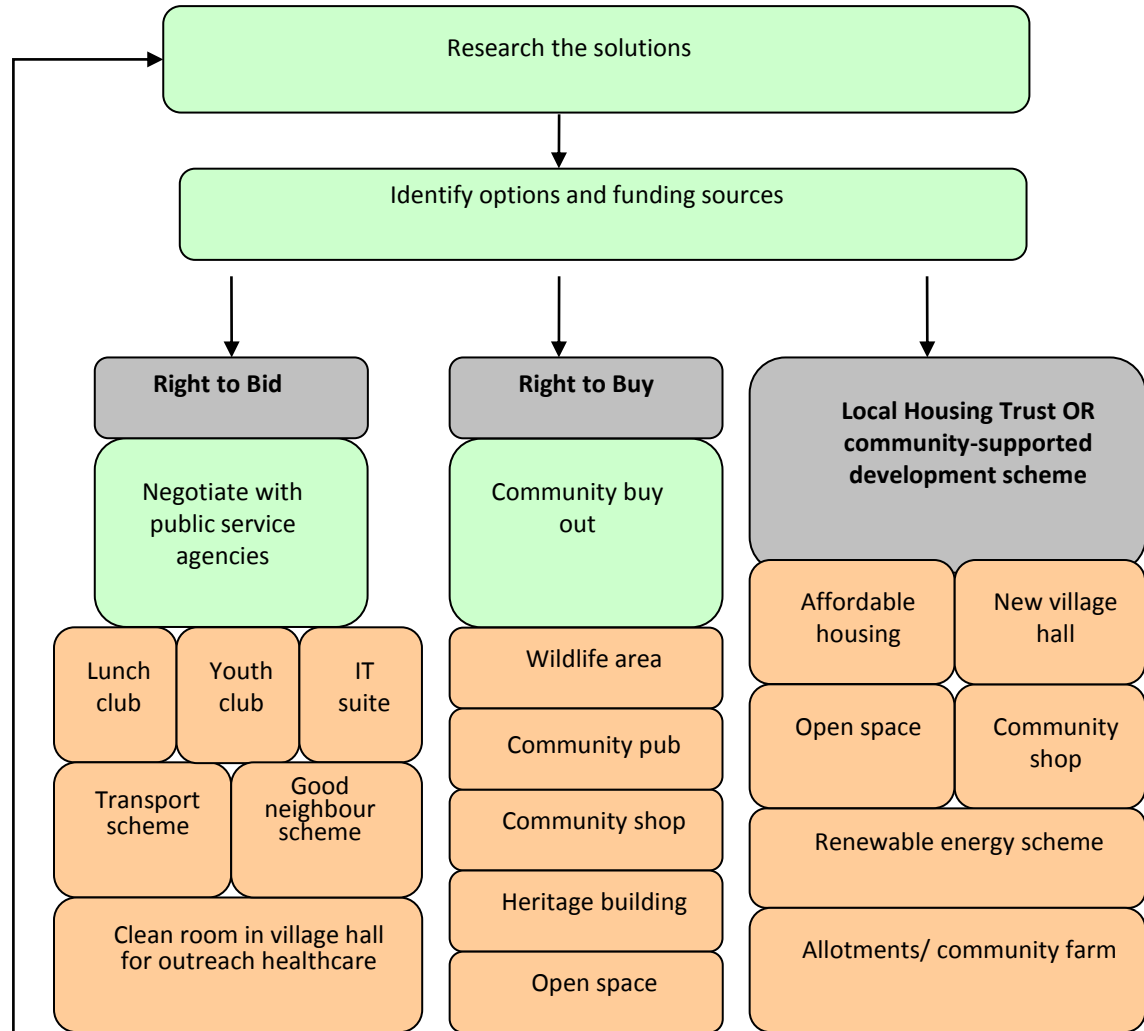
- Community organised, involving parish & town councils and all existing community groups
- Well developed, quality standards in development, strongest approach to inclusive, collaborative democracy
- 47% of actions taken on by the community themselves, generating thousands of local initiatives
- Sustainable outcomes
- Evidence that communities can come to collective decisions on complex issues (housing, development and services)
- Exciting interest within government, because of its potential and the results it has already achieved



1. Community Led Plan process



2. Implementation route map through Big Society mechanisms



Key:

Process

Output

Outcome

Conclusion

- Rural communities can do this, but only if:
 - New policy hurdles are not imposed (referendums, ignoring the role of parish & town councils)
 - Local Planning Authorities work with rural stakeholders to create local plan policies that obviate the need to use the Right to Build
 - Local authorities harness Community Led Planning to challenge communities, but using independent facilitation
 - Local authorities enter into negotiation with individual communities to negotiate service delivery (who does what)
 - Communities have a chance to plan their response to loss of services in a way that is sustainable



For more information

ACRE & the
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www.acre.org.uk

Community Led Planning:
www.communityledplanning.org.uk

