



Commentary on proposals put forward by rural local authorities under the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007

Introduction

The Commission for Rural Communities is delighted that so many rural local authorities have put forward proposals under the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007.

We note that details of the act and its operation are provided by the Local Government Association (LGA) at: <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=561616>. The LGA also has a pivotal role to play as 'the selector' in the implementation of the Act's provisions.

We commend the enthusiasm and work involved in these proposals. Whilst we do not wish to support, nor oppose, any particular recommendations we do look forward to the Panel selecting a number of these proposals and to their subsequent support by the CLG Secretary of State.

The potential, through the Act, to improve the quality and sustainability of rural communities is considerable and we look forward to seeing this realised. We would be happy to advise, where we can, on some of the 'winning' proposals and to promote subsequent learning and success to other communities and other authorities.

Commentary

The proposals put forward would all variously improve the sustainability of the local communities concerned. It is, of course, fair to question exactly *how* 'sustainability' is being supported within each proposal. To ask, for example, what will be sustained? At what scale. By whom and for whom? And, how?

Examples of proposals that struck us as being of particular interest included:

- Proposals for rate reliefs for small businesses involved in low carbon technologies (Central Bedfordshire)
- Providing more affordable housing for local people (East Devon)
- Retention of business rates from caravan parks for local reinvestment in community renewal projects (East Lindsey, Lincolnshire)
- Reopening the York to Beverley railway (East Riding of Yorkshire)
- Provision of high speed broadband throughout the county (Herefordshire)
- Opening more train stations on existing lines within the county (Herefordshire)
- Switching traffic lights to flashing amber at night to reduce carbon emissions (High Peak, Derbyshire)
- Reviewing and renewing and extending parish councils and parish meetings to improve very local democracy (Lewes, East Sussex)

- Increasing Council Tax on second homes for local re-investment (Lewes, East Sussex)
- Applying rural weightings within resource allocations to ensure better access to services for rural communities (North Dorset)
- Giving stronger protection to allotments (Rother, East Sussex)
- Introducing regulation of bottled and Liquid Petroleum Gas (Ryedale, North Yorkshire)
- Granting rate reliefs to businesses earning 50% of their turnover from selling local foods and goods (South Hams, Devon)
- Top slicing some RDA/LSC/DWP resources for rural district councils to fund local training and skills development (Suffolk Coastal)
- Provide financial incentives for landowners to sell land for community purposes (particularly for affordable housing) (West Devon)
- Reinvest Vehicle Excise Duties raised from local residents back into the local community (Wiltshire)
- Revise priorities to take immediate action to reduce levels of surface noise of the M40 between junctions 3 and 8 (Wycombe, Buckinghamshire)

These proposals would involve varying level of resources from the very significant to the very minor. We would hope that the extent of the value to the local communities affected should weigh high in the balance when making decisions. It should also be the case that proposals that show potential for replication elsewhere should also be weighed well in the balance.

Commission for Rural Communities, October 2009