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

Action with Communities in Rural England

Local Government Group Annual Rural Conference

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Localism in practice

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Rural Community Action Network: Our members' work

- Catalyst and enabler of rural initiatives:
  - Community-led action and strong local governance
  - Long-term sustainability, social cohesion and vibrancy
  - Influencing policies and services to achieve equity for rural communities.
- Social, environmental and economic initiatives
- 40,000 grass roots contacts and organisations in England's 11,000 rural communities

'The Localism measures are the means by which we generate the Big Society'

- Re-balancing relationships, and expectations, between the state and civil society
- Local people taking action for themselves
- A focus on small neighbourhoods (parish or ward)
- A shift from 'engagement' in shaping public services to allowing communities to empower themselves
- Rural areas will be 'front runners' in implementing Localism policies

The Localism Bill measures: What do they mean for communities?

- Shifting the balance through giving ‘Rights’ to communities
- Offering a basket of options from new and existing processes
- Permissive – no community is required to exercise the Rights
- Roles reserved specifically for parish and town councils

The Rights (and constraints):

- **The Right to Plan** (neighbourhood planning)
  - parish councils propel a community-led vision into a statutory framework, within limitations
- **The Right to Build**
  - communities able to develop small scale sites, but at what cost?
- **The Right to Challenge**
  - improving public services through community influence, but not necessarily community control
- **The Right to Buy**
  - safeguarding assets of ‘community value’, but taking ownership requires a willing seller

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The Right to Plan: Neighbourhood Planning

- Communities take the lead; local authorities support
- Parish councils submit plans and evidence to independent examination
- Front runners show appetite in rural areas, many drawing on existing Community Led Plans

Constraints and hurdles:

- Managing a bureaucratic process
- Has to pass sustainability or environmental tests
- Must conform with local plan (if it exists) and NPPF
- Gaining the community's confidence that the plan will hold out against a 'presumption for development'
- Passing a referendum test

Out with the old – in with the new?

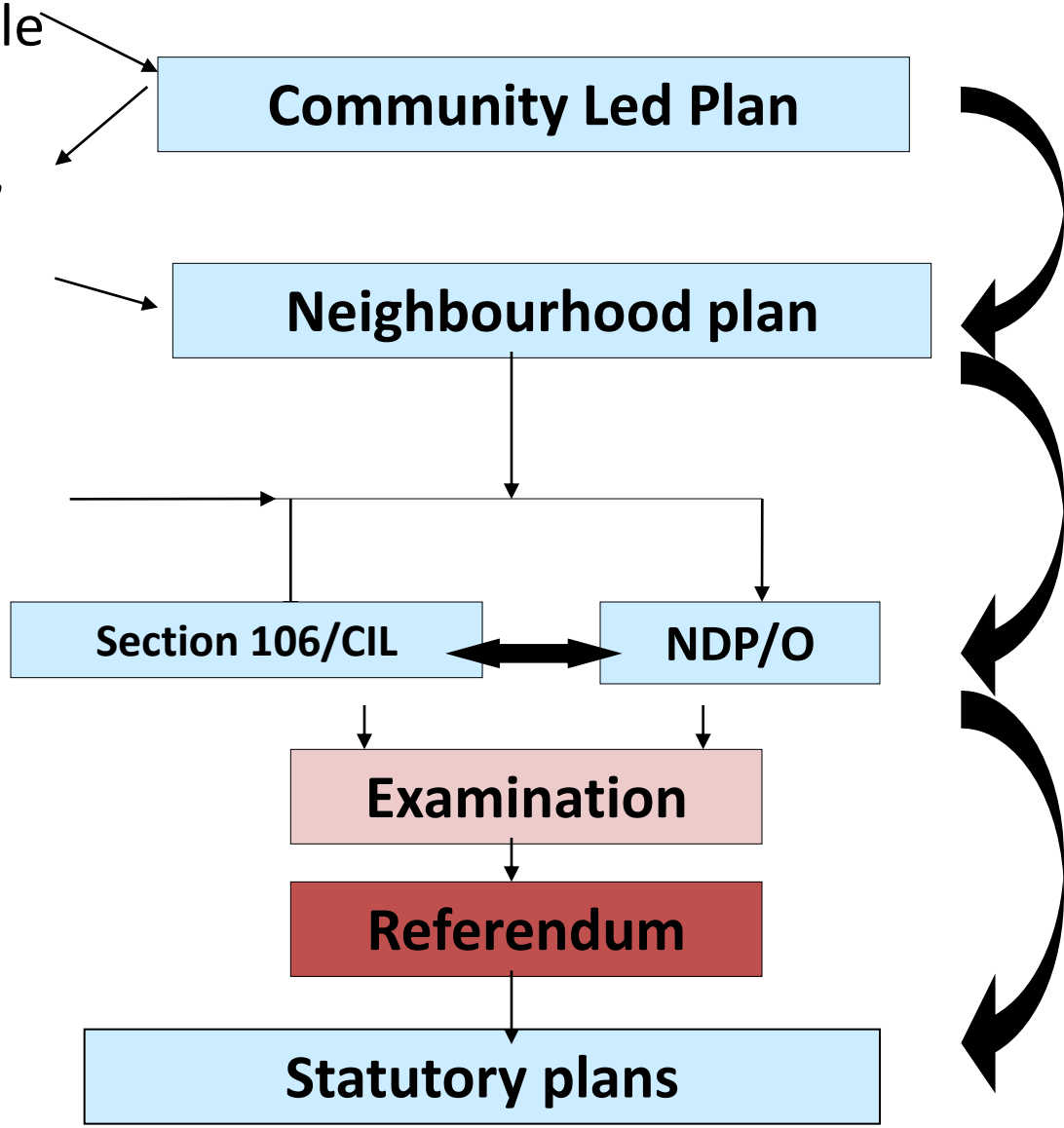
- Community views are already being polarised by the current debate on ‘sustainable growth’
- Referendum is a barrier and has negative impact
- A Local Planning Authority could negotiate with communities to use existing processes:
  - Area Action plans, Local Development Orders, Supplementary Planning Documents
  - Rural exception sites methodology
  - Avoid ‘key rural services’ policies in a local plan
  - Community Led Planning as the basis for statutory plans

Community Led and Statutory Plans

Consider Localism opportunities; compile evidence base

Remove 'community' actions

Cost actions, define site-specific actions (Rights to Build & Buy)



Big Society: the desired outcome of localism

- **Basing neighbourhood statutory plans on Community Led Planning delivers:**
  - *Community participation and support*
  - *New volunteers, new community initiatives*
  - *Renewed interest in local governance*
  - *Achievable and sustainable change*
- **Best value is achieved by**:
  - *Independent facilitation delivering quality*
  - *Quality will increase the success rate*
  - *Increased success avoids wasted expenditure*

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Further information

ACRE's ***Neighbourhood Planning briefing*** – the process and options for communities
www.acre.org.uk/Resources/publications/acre-briefings/Localism+Bill

Making the most of Community Led Planning – a best practice guide for Local Authorities
www.acre.org.uk/our-work/community-led-planning/Resources/

Community Led Planning can build the Big Society
www.acre.org.uk/our-work/community-led-planning/Policy/CLP+Briefings