



# Securing the power shift

## August 2011

The Localism Bill intends to bring a welcome “power shift” to communities. This should liberate the knowledge, expertise and dynamism locked up in communities and too often ignored by local councils. Local communities care deeply about their area and know it better than anyone.

This note summarises the key areas where Civic Voice believes the Localism Bill and its implementation needs to be further strengthened to provide the rights, support and incentives for communities that will transform involvement in shaping the future of their area.

Front-runner communities – a programme of community front-runner neighbourhood plans and a major community awareness-raising initiative should be announced to complement the local authority and business-led front runners and give true expression to a community-led approach

Community-led support – funding for the free advice available to local communities to engage in planning their area should be substantially increased and the approach adopted by the organisations supported to deliver it should be community-led. It should be complemented by communities receiving independent support from business on relevant issues in their area

Guaranteed co-operation – the test of the power shift will be the support it provides communities with an unwilling or weak local authority – this needs a requirement on local authorities to “*cooperate*” with communities undertaking neighbourhood planning as well as provide “*advice and assistance*”

Make development plans sovereign – communities need guarantees that the time and effort they invest in a neighbourhood plan will not be wasted by seeing planning permission given for development which rides roughshod over their efforts – we support curtailing appeal rights for departure applications and the introduction of a community right of appeal where a local authority grants consent for a conflicting development which has not won community consent

Restore faith in planning for well being – the purposes of neighbourhood planning should be to promote the social, economic and environmental well being of those living and working in the area and not solely for any one purpose

Protect local services – the role of the planning system in supporting diversity in the High Street and a town centre first approach by managing the loss of important local shops and services should be strengthened by amending the Use Classes Order to require express planning consent for changes of use away from valued local shops - such as greengrocers and butchers - and services – such as post offices and pubs

Value local assets – the importance of local, undesignated assets in the historic and natural environment should be a centre-piece of the new National Planning Policy Framework and communities should be encouraged to identify and conserve them