



All Local Authority Leaders and  
Chief Executives in England

**The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP**  
*Minister for Decentralisation*

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### **Sustainable Communities Act - an invitation to inspire the Big Society**

1. Over time central government has become too big, too interfering, too controlling and too bureaucratic, undermining local democracy and individual responsibility. We have a radical vision for reforming government in order to create a society that is free, fair and responsible – a Big Society in which citizens and neighbourhoods drive local priorities and the shape and standard of local services.
2. Decentralisation will drive a radical redistribution of power for democratic decision making and public service delivery from Westminster and Whitehall to people, neighbourhoods, communities and local institutions. We trust people to take control of the decisions that affect them by devolving power and increasing citizen participation, promoting community ownership and removing regional government.
3. Local authorities have a unique role, as the champions of localism, to inspire involvement in local democracy and highlight where we can decentralise further. This inspirational role – to inspire ideas on how local areas can be improved, and to tell us if there are things stopping you from doing it – is the foundation of the Sustainable Communities Act (“the Act”).

#### *Formal invitation*

4. We want to make localism real, and give people the opportunity to come together and discuss new and innovative ideas to decentralise power and improve the economic, social or environmental well being of their area. Therefore, under section 5A(3) of the Act, the Secretary of State is today formally inviting your local authority to refer to matters specified in the Schedule of the Act and:
  - a. Consult your communities from time to time and ask for their ideas about how their local area can be improved, or how they can become involved in Big Society projects;
  - b. Try to reach agreement with them about what can be done to make their ideas work – and take whatever action you see fit as a result;

- c. Ask us to remove a barrier stopping you from taking that action by submitting a proposal through our new online portal at <http://barrierbusting.communities.gov.uk>

*What will happen to my proposal?*

5. A member of our barrier-busting team will contact you shortly after you submit your request and work with you to investigate the removal of the barrier stopping you from implementing the idea you've inspired from your community.
6. You will be able to contact your team member or check our progress online. We will try our best to remove the barrier or explain how you can take forward the idea you are promoting in other ways.

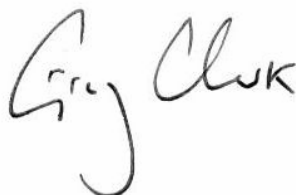
*Why engage with people under the Sustainable Communities Act?*

7. The portal is open to anyone who wants us to remove a barrier whether submitted under the Act or otherwise, and we will try our best to remove it. But I firmly believe that the best ideas often come from local people – and that there should be an incentive for councils that inspire people; that become champions of localism promoting community ideas on behalf of their citizens.
8. In certain situations you may be unhappy with the help we've been able to offer you. You may disagree with our decision if we cannot grant your request or take other action to remove the barrier you have identified. Those councils who go the extra mile will have an extra right of appeal.
9. In January, we intend to consult on how the current role of 'selector' can evolve so it has more freedom to challenge us on these – to identify the most serious barriers to localism presented through proposals made in line with this invitation.
10. If you have inspired your communities to come up with ideas and you are disappointed with our response, we will empower the selector with the ability to request we reconsider it, and consult and try to reach agreement with them before we do so.
11. Furthermore, engaging with people under the Sustainable Communities Act may inspire people to truly become involved in the Big Society and you, or your communities could find themselves eligible for a **Big Society Award**.
12. The Prime Minister recently launched this with the intention of highlighting examples of work that helps to build the Big Society in communities across the country. This allows members of the general public, from across the UK, to nominate those people and organisations that they feel make an outstanding contribution to society, whether on their doorstep, across their local authority or across the country.
13. The nominations can include people and organisations in the public, private and civil society sectors and will focus upon public service reform, community empowerment and individual and corporate volunteering. A Panel will meet on a quarterly basis to assess the awards and make recommendations to the Prime Minister who will make the final decisions. Further details can be found at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/bigsocietyawards>. If you have examples of such

organisations then please nominate them to receive the award. Consulting under the Sustainable Communities Act, asking for ideas on how to build the Big Society, and asking us to remove barriers stopping you, can be a powerful way to promote the Award in your area.

*How, and when, should I consult and try to reach agreement with people under the Act?*

14. You can ask for people's ideas under the Act at any time, and try to reach agreement with them about what should be done. The Government has made clear our belief that local councils know how best to consult and reach agreement with their communities about what can be done to improve their area.
15. 'Trying to reach agreement' with people was one of the core concepts behind the Act's introduction, and the ensuing dialogue between councils and communities has proved to be one of its most useful rewards. You may find it helpful, therefore, to consider providing evidence of how you have engaged with your community – especially including people from traditionally under represented groups. There is space to do this on the online form. This will allow the selector to more easily identify whether your request is one it wishes to promote, as it is likely to favour requests to remove a barrier the local community itself has identified.
16. You can decide when would make most financial sense for your authority to consult. Local groups are likely to ask you when you plan to do this, so it is a good idea to plan ahead and decide what's best for your area. You may, for example, wish to combine a consultation with others you are doing. Alternatively, you may wish to establish a new local panel expressly for the purpose of seeking agreement on what action to take.
17. This Government is committed to making local decisions a normal part of everyday life, giving communities, neighbourhoods and individuals more say, choice and ownership of their local facilities. We have promised to decentralise power as far as possible, turning government upside down and inside out. We believe localism isn't simply about giving power back to local government – it is about pushing power downwards and outwards to the lowest possible level, so that power is held by local people. The Sustainable Communities Act is a means to hold us to account and ensure we deliver on this promise.
18. I look forward to receiving your proposals.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Clark". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**GREG CLARK MP**