

The Rural Challenge –

Achieving sustainable rural communities for the 21st Century.

The Rural Coalition launched today their long awaited report *The Rural Challenge* at the LGA in London. This follows on from the Matthew Taylor report in 2008 and *The future is rural too* published by the Rural Coalition in September 2009. *The Rural Challenge* has been developed by the Rural Coalition against the background of the new government's Big Society principles.

The Commission for Rural Communities brought the Rural Coalition together in September 2008. The coalition members, chaired by Lord Taylor are:

- ACRE – Action with Communities in Rural England
- CPRE – Campaign to Protect Rural England
- CLA – Country Land and Business Association
- LGA – Local Government Association
- RTPI – Royal Town Planning Institute
- TCPA – Town & Country Planning Association

Action in rural Sussex is a member of ACRE. Sylvia Brown, Chief executive of ACRE says “Rural *communities already demonstrate the Big Society in action, but with a supportive context set by central and local government, they can and will do far more to respond to new opportunities. We are pleased to see the Rural Coalition's backing for using the principles of Community Led Planning to help local people decide on how they can better meet their aspirations*”.

Key recommendations of the report include:

- Urging the Government to give greater independence to local residents and councils to ensure that rural communities can continue to live and work, and therefore be the foundation of a beautiful and living countryside with a secure long-term economic future.
- Scrapping plans for referendums in the Government's Community Right to Build scheme which would require 90% community support before new, small scale development can go ahead in villages. The coalition says the requirement could wreck the aim of the Government's proposals and create long lasting conflict within communities which brings local development to a halt. Instead, elected parish councils, empowered by a community-led plan, should be able to initiate small community-led developments, within a reinvigorated and localised planning system designed to meet local needs in keeping with the area.

- That town hall planners, local councils and communities should be free to come up with innovative solutions to the rural affordable housing crisis. By reforming the Housing Revenue Account and allowing councils to keep money from selling council homes, local authorities will be freed to help address the urgent need for new housing for young families and low-income households in rural areas.
- A call for the Government to take proper account of the impact of public sector funding cuts on rural areas before finalising the Comprehensive Spending Review in October. By allowing communities to share some of the savings the Government makes to public spending on services, communities would be empowered to develop innovative local alternatives through community provision - including community ownership of shops, Post Offices, pubs, broadband hubs, sustainable energy and local community transport.
- Pressing for a radical transformation of planning practice to give communities the lead in planning for thriving and sustainable new neighbourhoods when market towns need to grow. Too often market towns in rural areas have been ringed with endless suburban style housing estates and business parks, without any sense of rural identity.

The full Rural Coalition press release, and the report are available on the [ACRE website](#). The executive summary of *The Rural Challenge* is included here.

Action in rural Sussex

August 2010