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Local Councils, localism and the BigSoc

Parish & Town Council strengths

- **Widespread**, long-standing, stable, accountable
- **1894!** [Local Government Act]
- **Regular** meetings – within parish – publicised and open to the public
- ***Precept*** – finance initiatives serving local community/addressing their needs

More strengths

- Linking *social capital* – good practice/networking
- Junction: representative & participatory democracy
- **'Bridge'** or conduit for Town Healthcheck-LSPs-
principal authority...**multi-hats**
- **Local knowledge**, resources, contacts
- **Policy backing** – BIG Society & Localism Bill

A right Pickles [7.7.2010]

- “we will put people in charge of....local affairs.....councillors have the chance to take real decisions.

To get things done.”

Weaknesses

- **Perceived reluctance to precept**
- 703 **QPs**/ 8,500 English P&TCs (Feb 2011)
- Councillors **poor representativeness/diversity**: male, 'straight', white, middle class and older.

“Of the twelve councillors...only two are female, and both are of ‘mature years’...one...moved to sheltered accommodation and the other, was building up her business and so didn't have time to devote to council work.”
Clerk, SE England

Weaknesses

- Lack access to Community & Voluntary Sector £
- **self-aggrandisement!**
- variability and inconsistency in council activity
- 'P'olitics & conservatism – party or community 1st?

Threats to local councils

- **Community alternatives** *because* the P&TC is weak, ineffective or obstructive
- **Funding/staffing follows function?** Clerk *and.....?*

Opportunities

- **Raise the majority** (not just 703 QPs) to the level of the best acting for their communities
- ***Sustainable Communities Act***
- ***Clustering*** or market town & hinterland parishes as viable, sustainable unit for delegated powers

Opportunities

- **Combine forces:** P&TC with Development Trust as 'executive' arm
- **Lead by example/precept**
- Greater representativeness/diversity – **PR** campaign to alter *parish pump*/address 'democratic deficit'
- (Eligible councils) Exercise ***General Power of Competence***

“harnessing the economic resource of older people will be one of the critical components in pursuit of sustainable communities. This age group contributes via business leadership, voluntary work....”

Derounian, J.G. (2004 unpublished), *Stepping Stones For the Rural Economies of Yorkshire and the Humber*. Cheltenham: Countryside Agency

Opportunities

Enabling factors for vibrant communities:

- ◆ “Enhancing community assets of all kinds”
- ◆ “Effective community-led planning and **stronger local governance**”

Source: Carnegie UK Trust (2009) *A Manifesto for Rural Communities*,
Dunfermline: Carnegie UK Trust Rural Programme

The Localism Bill & Local Councils

- Public expenditure cuts
- Reinventing the wheel – CRC/defra
- Axing *Planning Aid* ££ [new funding]
- Community Organisers – the 5,000
- Right to bid to run local authority services
- Right to buy local community assets as enter the market
- **Community Infrastructure Levy** - funding to neighbourhoods where development has happened

Neighbourhood Planning

- **Neighbourhood Planning**

“will radically reform the planning system to give local people new rights to shape the development of the communities in which they live.”

- ***Neighbourhood Planning Authorities (NPAs)***

“based on existing parishes - or a group of parishes or by an organisation designated by the Local Planning Authority as a “Neighbourhood Forum.”

- ***Community Right to Build Order***: communities have the power develop in their area without planning permission, subject to safeguards and securing 50 % community support via a referendum

Rallying cry for local councils

- “There can be no localism without local government...are we the innovators, the grassroots representatives.....?”

Michael Chater, NALC Chair, 9.7.2010

- Michael Portillo (SLCC, 2010): It is up to us “to write the blank pages” of the Big Soc.
- Someone to lead & take responsibility – e.g. **Local Councils**