

Local Transport Plan 3

Central Bedfordshire Council's new **Local Transport Plan 3** has now been published. The plan, which sets out the Council's long term transport strategy, has been developed in consultation with stakeholders.

You can view the Local Transport Plan 3 in its entirety on the LTP3 website: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/myjourney.

The Council has also recently submitted its bid for the **Local Sustainable Transport Fund**, a four-year Government fund that aims to build strong local economies and reduce carbon emission by encouraging people to travel by walking, cycling, public transport, and car sharing. The Council has some big plans as part of its £5 million funding bid, and you can find out more about these plans by viewing the bid document online at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/LSTF

Throughout this year Central Bedfordshire Council will be undertaking further work on additional Local Area Transport Plans and other strategies.

You can register to receive updates and further details of this work and by sending an email to: myjourney@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk or contacting the Transport Strategy Team, Central Bedfordshire Council, Technology House, 239 Ampthill Road, Bedford, Bedfordshire, MK42 9BD or by telephone on 0300 300 6516.



Vacancy for LSP Board Representative

There is now a vacancy for an Assembly representative on the LSP Board of Central Bedfordshire Together, following the resignation of Julie Benson, from Advocacy Alliance.

The representative must be from a frontline voluntary and community sector organisation and:

- have a commitment to partnership working and an understanding of community involvement processes;
- be involved in strategic issues and developments in, and be able to contribute to decisions on behalf of, the voluntary and community sector in Central Bedfordshire;
- be able to analyse complex issues, identify priorities and communicate information clearly;
- have experience of representing the voluntary and community sector and/or local communities in public meetings and partnership settings;

Further details of the vacancy can be requested at the Assembly meeting registration desk, down loaded from the VoluntaryWorks website or requested by email: cbassembly@action-centralbeds.org.uk. If you would like to undertake this important role please **submit a written expression of interest by 3.00pm Monday 13 June.**

All expressions of interest will be assessed against the selection criteria and shortlisted candidates invited for interview on 28 June 2011 (TBC) prior to the next meeting of the LSP Board on the 5 July 2011. Where the Representative is employed in a voluntary and community sector organisation they will be expected to have the support of their organisation when undertaking the role.

In this issue

- Power to the People?
- Volunteering Strategy
- The Localism Bill
- Big Society Awards
- Let's Talk Together
- Local Transport Plan
- Vacancy for Assembly Representative

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Power to the People?

As part the Government's Localism Bill and the Big Society agenda encouragement (but little resources) is being given to local authorities, town and parish councils, voluntary organisations, community groups, local communities and community activists to take on the delivery of local services through social action. Local councils and neighbourhoods will be given more power to take decisions that shape their area.

Central Bedfordshire Council has embraced this philosophy and is asking local communities to do more for themselves. Services currently delivered by the local authority will in future be delivered by town and parish councils, voluntary organisations and community groups; who will inevitably have to rely upon volunteers to deliver some of these services.

Cllr. Richard Stay has been leading the Council's work in this area and is keen to engage with the voluntary and community sector in this. Richard is a strong proponent of localism and has argued strongly for a significant realignment in the relationship between local and national government. He is a member of the Government's Decentralisation Task Force, set up by the Rt Hon Greg Clark MP to address the localism agenda across Whitehall, and a regular contributor to national events and the media on the subject.

Setting up new community projects can be hard work. A recent televised example – The People's Supermarket – clearly demonstrated



this. 500 volunteers were needed to work four hours a month but the project had to open with just 100 volunteers. So how did celebrity chef Arthur Potts-Dawson and Volunteer Manager Rachael Block get the volunteers they needed to make the project a success? How did they recruit, train and support the 1,000 volunteers now involved?

What are the key issues and lessons we need to take note of when *communities do more for themselves*, when we engage with volunteers and when developing local strategies?

This Assembly meeting will also provide you with opportunities to have your say about what is important to your organisation; to influence local plans; and to get involved in the work of the Assembly and local partnerships. You can expect plenty of lively debate and a chance to network with colleagues through this half day event.



Volunteering Strategy

A Volunteering Strategy for Central Bedfordshire is currently being developed and we would like to involve you in this work. A draft vision for the strategy and some key priorities has been identified, with each priority attempting to answer three key questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be?
- How will we get there?

This Assembly meeting is an ideal opportunity for you to influence the development of this important strategy and to utilize your experience as someone who no doubt has a passion for volunteering.

The importance of the strategy, as we develop volunteering in the context of the Government's *Big Society* policy agenda, can not be understated.

Extracts from the draft strategy were included with your joining instructions and pre-event information so that you had the opportunity to read it before attending today's event.

We want to hear what you think of the strategy, how it can be improved and whether it includes the issues that you think are important.

Vision

Central Bedfordshire is a place where people feel inspired to volunteer, have the opportunity to do so, and have excellent volunteering experiences.



Volunteering England calls upon Government to rethink its Volunteering Plans

Volunteering England (VE) has said it was pleased to see "some big, ambitious plans for volunteering" from the government, which had talked about every adult as an active member of a community group. But they warned: "We're concerned that it's too ambitious and the government needs to have a bit of a rethink."

Volunteering England said volunteering organisations lacked the resources to support volunteers and had been hit by a huge fall in funding from local authorities and primary care trusts, as well as a drop in funding from central government.

"We found that councils were particularly reliant on local agreements and early intervention grants to fund volunteering" and that "it is cuts to these grants that have hit our sector worst." VE said they expected several volunteering funds to be announced in the Giving White Paper, due out around the end of May, but that these would go "no way at all" to replacing lost funding.

VE also said they felt the government's plans for the 'right to challenge', which would allow groups of local volunteers to bid to take over the running of public services, would be difficult to achieve. "We saw with the previous administration that asset transfers from the local council often ran into problems when volunteers realised the difficulties of running these buildings without council funds. We think this could be replicated here."

VE said they did not expect the right to challenge to be as widely taken up as the government predicted, because many local groups were wary of the public accountability involved in running services such as parks and libraries.

- Third Sector Daily, 13 May 2011

Let's Talk Together Meetings Leighton Buzzard and Linslade

Following a successful pilot round of Let's Talk Together meetings, Central Bedfordshire Together has announced dates for three more rounds of meetings [all meetings will start at 7.00pm and finish at 9.00pm]:

Cranfield, Marston and Woburn

- Thursday 2 June 2011 at Marston
- Tuesday 4 October 2011 at Woburn
- Tuesday 31 January 2012 at Cranfield

Sandy and Biggleswade

- Tuesday 7 June 2011 at Sandy
- Thursday 20 October 2011 at Potton
- Tuesday 24 January 2012 at Biggleswade

Shefford, Stotfold and Arlesey

- Thursday 9 June 2011 at Stotfold
- Tuesday 25 October 2011 at Arlesey
- Thursday 2 February 2012 at Shefford

Amphill and Flitwick

- Thursday 16 June 2011 at Flitwick
- Tuesday 15 November 2011 at Clophill
- Thursday 8 March 2012 at Amphill

Dunstable, Houghton Regis and Rural

- Thursday 23 June 2011 at Dunstable
- Tuesday 29 November 2011 at Caddington
- Tuesday 28 February 2012 at Houghton Regis

Leighton Rural

- Thursday 30 June 2011 at Barton
- Tuesday 6 December 2011 at venue TBA
- Thursday 22 March 2012 at Toddington

- Tuesday 5 July 2011 at venue TBA
- Tuesday 1 November 2011 at Leighton Buzzard
- Thursday 16 February 2012 at venue TBA

Central Bedfordshire Council Together recognises it is important to have more people from the local communities involved with the work it does. *The Let's Talk Together* meetings give members of the community and local groups the opportunity to discuss their particular issues and concerns with Councillors and representatives from key organisations and services.

Let's Talk Together provide an important opportunity for the Council and other providers to advise communities of the issues they are able to help resolve, and explore how they can work with communities to make a difference.

Let's Talk Together meetings offer everyone the opportunity to meet with Central Bedfordshire and Town and Parish Council members, browse information stands where relevant issues can be discussed with representatives from key organisations and services.

The second part of each meeting, chaired by an elected councillor, provides a brief overview of the key issues raised at the information stands and proposals for addressing them. The Police will also report on crime statistics for the area and discuss key issues, with progress fed back at the next meeting.

Let's Talk Together meetings are a great opportunity for local voluntary organisations and community groups to get involved in their local community.

For further information contact Sarah Hughes, Community Engagement Manager, Central Bedfordshire Council on 0300 300 6166 or email

sarah.hughes@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

The Localism Bill - Its Passage through Parliament

The National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) has brought together a number of key partners to form the Real Power for Communities Campaign www.rp4c.org.uk

It has looked in detail at specific provisions and has published its own assessment of the impact on voluntary organisations and community groups: <http://digbig.com/5beacf>

The report stage of the Localism Bill in the House of Commons took place last week (16-19 May 2011), prior to the Bill's Third Reading. This was the stage at which MPs tabled amendments to the Bill. The Real Power for Communities Campaign had asked MPs to support a number of amendments designed to improve the Bill, in particular Part 4 of the Bill, which will have the greatest impact on the activities of voluntary and community organisations – watch this space!



Big Society Awards

BIG SOCIETY AWARDS 2011

Assembly members may want to think about how they and the sector in Central Bedfordshire can benefit from their website <http://digbig.com/5beacg>. Launched last November by the Prime Minister, these are a way of recognising and celebrating individuals, businesses, local authorities, charities, community groups and other organisations who illustrate the Big Society in action. **Deadline for the current rounds of nominations is 6.00pm, 23 May, 8 August and 4 October 2011.**

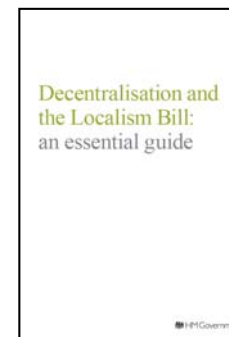
The Big Society is about moving power away from central government and giving it to local communities and individuals. The Big Society Award has been created to recognise individuals, groups or organisations that are demonstrating the Big Society in their work or activities.

The award focuses upon:

- **Promoting social action** – people being, and being encouraged to be, be more involved in their communities through giving time, money and other resources.
- **Empowering communities** – local people taking control of how things are done in their area and being helped to do this by local government and others.
- **Opening up public services** – public sector organisations and individuals demonstrating innovative ways of delivering public services and charities, social enterprises and private companies showing new ways of delivering public services.

Anyone can make a nomination for an individual or group to be recognised with an award. Nomination guidance notes and a nomination form can be downloaded from the Big Society Awards website.

The Localism Bill - an Essential Guide



The Localism Bill is intended to devolve greater power over decisions about local services to local communities. It has the potential to give communities the power to change their areas, to take control of their neighbourhood and improve the quality of life for local people.

The Government has published an Essential Guide to Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: <http://digbig.com/5beaca>

This is a synopsis of what will be contained in some 400 plus pages of the Bill itself. Here's NAVCA's summary of the main aspects.

What, No Consultation?

At the end of the Executive Summary to the Guide, is the following statement:

"This guide is not a formal consultation document. Rather, in advance of a progress report due to be published next year, it sets out the thinking that underpins the Localism Bill and which forms the basis for further action across Government. It is intended as a stimulus to help policy makers within Whitehall and beyond develop ideas for further decentralisation"

Is this an attempt to side-step the fact that there was no Localism White Paper and therefore no opportunity for interested parties and members of the public to be consulted formally? More particularly, no opportunity for voluntary organisations and community groups to contribute their views on how the localism agenda might be embodied in legislation and delivered on the ground? No matter, the Bill has sparked enough interest to generate a torrent of responses. For those wishing to respond directly, CLG's formal channel for

responses to the Guide is decentralisation@communities.gsi.gov.uk

The Case for the Prosecution

The Guide sets out the Case for Decentralisation, quoting from David Cameron in September's Observer *"There's the efficiency argument – that in huge hierarchies money gets spent on the bureaucracy rather than the frontline. There's the fairness argument – that centralised national blueprints don't follow local solutions to major social problems. And there is the political argument – that centralisation creates a great distance between the government and the governed."*

As might be expected, there's also a distancing between the Coalition's approach to governing and that of the previous administration. The Guide claims that Centralisation has failed, on three counts: it has not created excellence in public services, it has not solved fundamental social problems and it has undermined public trust in democratic institutions.

Remarkably, for a Government publication, there is a section of classical rhetoric, anticipating the arguments against decentralisation and offering a refutation. *'Decentralisation is just a longer word for cuts'* posits the guide, before responding *'Decentralisation isn't just about the level of public spending, but who controls it. The benefits of local control apply in all economic circumstances and help to make the best use of available resources'*. But as we know, the way in which cuts have been dealt with by local authorities shows huge variation – one authority cutting aid to the voluntary and community sector by three quarters. That's a big downside to decentralisation. Let's hope that Government listens to our real views as the Bill passes through Parliament, rather than inventing our view for us.

- NAVCA - Peter Grant

Six Actions to Deliver Localism

The Essential Guide contains one-page summaries of the Six Actions through which the Government intends to deliver Localism, along with summaries of the associated measures that will be introduced alongside it.

So here are the main headings with some of the measures and wider reforms.

Action 1: Lift the burden of bureaucracy

- Abolition of Regional Strategies and targets
- Abolition of the Standards Board controlling local councillors
- Ending of pre-determination rules preventing councillors acting on local issues
- Abolition of Comprehensive Area Assessments monitoring local authority performance

Action 2: Empower Communities to do things their way

- General Power of Competence allowing local authorities to do anything not prohibited by law
- Community right to buy - saving local assets threatened by closure
- Neighbourhood Plans - giving local people the ability to plan development in their area
- Support from Government in helping the community to exercise new powers

Action 3: Increase Local Control of Public Finance

- Council Tax referendums giving people the power of veto over excessive increases
- Business Rate discounts decided by local authorities
- Community Infrastructure Levy

retained with a proportion returned to neighbourhoods affected by development

Action 4: Diversify the supply of public services

- Community right to challenge and run local services
- Community right to buy (again - see 2 above) this time by taking over delivery of local services
- New rights for staff to take over and run public services through mutual societies

Action 5: Open Up Government to Public Scrutiny

- Local authorities to publish remuneration of chief officers
- COINS database on historical spending by Government departments
- Local authorities to publish every item of expenditure over £500
- More transparency from public bodies on contracts, salaries and staffing

Action 6: Strengthen accountability to local people

- Local referendums, via petition, on issues of local concern
- Elected mayors for 12 cities subject to referendums
- Elected police and crime commissioners.



The Localism Bill - A personal view from Peter Grant for NAVCA

The aspirations of the Localism Bill can't be achieved without the active participation of those living and working at the grassroots of communities. Before we go into the detail of the Bill, let's consider some of the themes that underlie it.

First, whilst all three of the main Parliamentary parties claim paternity to localism, this is the Conservative's take on the idea. This bill has a major part of its origins in the Conservative Party's policy document *Control Shift, Returning Power to Local Communities* (2009). That document promised five strands to the Conservative Localism agenda:

- giving communities a share in local growth;
- freeing local government from central control;
- giving local people more power over local government;
- giving local people more ability to determine spending priorities; and
- removing regional government.

All these strands are present in the Localism Bill. Decentralisation Minister, Greg Clark, announcing his six steps (see above) to return power to the people, said *The Coalition Government is determined to redress the balance through a radical shift of power from the centre to citizens and communities. The actions in this guide, embodied in the Localism Bill, will drive our commitment to decentralise power across every department and every level of government - and return power to the people to whom it rightfully belongs.*

There are a number of underlying themes, some glaringly obvious, others more subtle.

First is an attempt to re-balance the relationship between government and the governed. Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, in one of his many preludes to the

Bill said *"The legislation will set the foundations for the Big Society by radically transforming the relationships between central government, local government, communities and individuals."* So how much power will local authorities grab for themselves and how much will they pass down to communities. That's perhaps the biggest challenge for localism.

Second is the Spending Review and its consequences for local authorities. In his prelude to the announcement of the Local Government Finance Settlement, Eric Pickles said on the Today programme: *"I'm expecting local authorities to be able to provide more for less, I'm expecting them to be able to provide a reasonable level of service and I think local authorities shouldn't have some kind of alibi in feeling that these have been imposed from the centre and therefore they've got to provide every single cut on the front line."* But, with a 25% cut taking root over the next four years, enforcing that pledge could be difficult. We've already seen how some Councils have passed on the cuts directly to voluntary organisations and community groups.

Thirdly, decentralisation of power, if it materialises, will entail a transfer of responsibility and the attendant risks from central to local government and its delivery agents. In a time of austerity, when the affects of cuts in spending will be experienced quickly and painfully by service providers and service users, there is an obvious benefit for Central Government in detaching itself from the process. The Bill offers those working in local services the chance to take over and run those services as mutual societies, or local people an opportunity to own and run their libraries and community centres. But who will lose, and more especially, who will be blamed should there enterprises fail? Communities must be given an adequate support structure to ensure that risks are managed so that responsibilities can be fulfilled.