

Thursday 26th January 2012

Dear Greg

Sustainable Communities Act Regulations: Two Problems - Two Solutions

We write regarding the regulations that are soon to be laid before Parliament for the Sustainable Communities Act. The regulations provide the opportunity to deal with two problems with the 'bottom-up' process established by the Act.

Delays

It took seventeen months for people who submitted ideas in the first round to receive a response. Delays like this cause disillusionment and disengagement in the Act amongst communities and councils. Our concern is that if there are delays again it will be ever harder to inspire people to get involved.

The way forward: The regulations should put a time limit on how long it will be before a submitted proposal is fully dealt with. If people knew it would be, say, no more than six months (with, perhaps, provision for exceptional circumstances) before they received a response to their proposal this would deal with the frustrations people have had. We are flexible on how long the time period should be, but there needs to be a time limit for responding to proposals.

Watering Down

The fundamental difference of the Act is the right it gives communities to participate. This came through the duty on councils to not just consult, but to also try to reach agreement with their communities when submitting proposals. This duty was deliberated on at great length by MPs when the Act was going through Parliament in 2007 and received support by all parties and the LGA.

If the regulations do not retain the duty on councils to try to reach agreement with their communities then citizens will not have the rights under it that they had under the previous government.

In the first round our members and others felt that what their council did to engage them was different and was something much more inspiring and meaningful than just consultation. Many councils ran excellent examples of processes that were a dialogue with citizens and a genuine attempt to decide together on what proposals to put forward. This happened because of the duty to try to reach agreement.

The way forward: The regulations should retain the duty on councils to "try to reach agreement" with their communities about the proposals they will put forward when using the Act. (NB we accept that the regulations should not prescribe *how* councils do this – just that they *should*).

We ask that you please ensure these provisions are contained in the regulations. Thank you.

Yours sincerely

 *Mervyn Kohler*
Mervyn Kohler, Special Adviser
Age UK

 *Ruth Bond*
Ruth Bond, Chair
National Federation of Women's Institutes

 *Stuart Etherington*
Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive
National Council of Voluntary Organisations


 *Ben Cowell*
Ben Cowell, Assistant Director
National Trust

 *John Walker*
John Walker, National Chairman
Federation of Small Businesses

 *Sue Holden*
Sue Holden, Chief Executive
Woodland Trust

 *Mike Benner*
Mike Benner, Chief Executive
CAMRA - the Campaign for Real Ale

 *Paul Foote*
Paul Foote, Managing Director
Conservative Environment Network


 *Lesley-Anne Alexander*
Lesley-Anne Alexander, Chief Executive
Royal National Institute for the Blind

 *Phil Orford*
Phil Orford, Chief Executive
Forum of Private Business

 *Kenneth Parsons*
Kenneth Parsons, Chief Executive
Rural Shops Alliance

 *Stephen Fishwick*
Stephen Fishwick, Head of External Communication
National Pharmacy Association

 *Ruth Scott*
Ruth Scott, Head of Policy
Scope

 *Peter Brooker*
Peter Brooker, Head of Corporate Affairs
Pay Point

 *Dot Gibson*
Dot Gibson, General Secretary
National Pensioners Convention

 *Kieran McDonnell*
Kieran McDonnell, National President
National Federation of Retail Newsagents

 *David Tyler*
David Tyler, National Director
Community Matters - National Federation
of Community Organisations

 *Farooq Murad*
Farooq Murad, Secretary General
Muslim Council of Britain

 *Malcolm Shepherd*
Malcolm Shepherd, Chief Executive
Sustrans

 *George Thomson*
George Thomson, General Secretary
National Federation of SubPostmasters

 *Neil Jameson*
Neil Jameson, Executive Director
Citizens UK

 *Andy Atkins*
Andy Atkins, Executive Director
Friends of the Earth

 *David Babbs*
David Babbs, Executive Director
38 Degrees

 *Tony Armstrong*
Tony Armstrong, Executive Director
Living Streets



Simon Burall, Director
Involve



Julian Grocock, Chief Executive
SIBA - Society of Independent Brewers



Ruth Cartwright, Manager
British Association of Social Workers



Katie Ghose, Chief Executive
Electoral Reform Society



Judy Ling-Wong, President
Black Environment Network



James Cathcart, Chief Executive
British Youth Council



Stephen Joseph, Director
Campaign for Better Transport



Kevin Curly, Chief Executive
National Association for Voluntary and Community Action



Michael Gelling, Director
Tenants and Residents Organisations
of England



Peter Facey, Director
Unlock Democracy



Heidi Seary, Co-ordinator
Community Recycling Network



Stewart Wallis, Executive Director
New Economics Foundation



Michelle Reid, Chief Executive
Tenant Participation Advisory Service



Alison Eardly, Policy Manager
Action for Market Towns



Toby Blume, Chief Executive
Urban Forum



Paul Bodenham, Chair
Christian Ecology Link



Catherine Kibbler, Director
Community Composting Network



Helen O'Brien, Chief Executive
Caritas Social Action



John Goodman, Head of Policy and
Regions, Co-operatives UK



Richard Mehmed, Managing Director
National Wood Recycling Project



Mike Jeram, National Secretary
Unison



Hugh Lanning, Deputy General Secretary
Public and Commercial Service Union



Billy Hayes, General Secretary
Communication Workers Union



Paul Kenny, General Secretary
GMB



Neal Lawson, Chair
Compass



Elaine Brooks, Education Co-ordinator
Gaia Partnership



Dave Sowden, Chief Executive
Micropower Council



Dr Keith Tyrell, Director
Pesticide Action Network UK



Debbie Tripley, Chief Executive
Environmental Law Foundation



Ron Bailey, Organiser
Sustainable Energy Partnership



Stephen Shaw, National Co-ordinator
Local Works

cc: Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, Rt Hon Nick Hurd MP, Rt Hon Oliver Letwin MP, Rt Hon Alistair Burt MP