

DISExtra – NALC’s Direct Information Service

Issue 850 – 9 January 2015

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NALC

850/1 – Local Council Awards Scheme launched

The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) has launched its Local Council Award Scheme, supported by the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA) and developed following consultation with County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs) and NALC's member councils.

[Read more](#)

850/2 – NALC congratulates those recognized in New Year Honours list 2015

NALC would like to congratulate individuals from the local (parish and town) councils sector on being recognised in the New Year's Honours list.

Cllr Ken Browse, chairman of NALC, said: “Congratulations to everyone from the local councils sector who received an award in the New Year's Honours list. It is brilliant that these people have been acknowledged in this way for their outstanding contribution, impact on public service and dedication to local communities.”

[Read more](#)

850/3 – Council of the week: Stone Parish Council

The last Council of the Week for 2014, was nominated by the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) and has been chosen in recognition of its many and recent achievements.

Stone Parish Council has an excellent track record of success, which has been sustained on the foundation of sound management and a genuine vision for its community in an area that certainly does not lack demanding challenges due to economic pressures.

[Read more](#)

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850/4 – Survey feedback pays!

A little feedback has gone a long way for Sarah Pengelly, town clerk at Broadstairs and St Peter’s Town Council, the lucky winner of 2014’s conferences and events survey prize draw.

Miss Pengelly was one of the hundreds that filled out the survey issued in 2014, providing valuable feedback to NALC for our Conferences and Events review.

[Read more](#)

850/5 – NALC makes first recall demand to the government

NALC has asked the government to think again about its opposition to giving local councils a percentage slice of the business rates under the Sustainable Communities Act (SCA).

[Read more](#)

850/6 – Finance settlement must help not hinder parishes

NALC has called for the government to help local councils through local government finance after a finance settlement statement was made from the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) on 18 December 2014.

[Read more](#)

850/7 – Transparency Code for smaller authorities

The government has published the final version of the Transparency Code, which replaces the need for an external audit for local councils with turnover less than £25,000.

The code will require the online publication of information which the government says will provide taxpayers with a clear picture of council activities, spending, and governance, and will improve the ability of communities to hold local public bodies to account.

[Read more](#)

850/8 – NALC backs MPs planning report

NALC has welcomed and supported many findings of the parliamentary select committee for Communities and Local Government on planning.

Responding to the DCLG Select Committee report on the operation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), NALC chairman, Cllr Ken Browse, said: “I welcome the select committee report, in particular the recommendation that principal councils must move more quickly to get an adopted plan in place because this will help communities prevent unwanted and unsuitable development in their area and stop inappropriate housing as a result of speculative planning applications.

[Read more](#)

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850/9 – Hampshire sets the example

NALC has called on all CALCs with local councils to follow the example of the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC) by forging closer links with local Rotary Clubs.

[Read more](#)

850/10 – NALC responds to England devolution proposals

Responding to the command paper *Implications of Devolution for England* presented to Parliament by the first secretary of state and leader of the House of Commons, NALC chairman, Cllr Ken Browse said: "The command paper on the implications of devolution for England is a welcome step forward in giving more power to local people and putting communities in control of their areas.

[Read more](#)

850/11 – Manifesto calls for fair rural deal

The Rural Services Network has published its manifesto ahead of the 2015 general election, and has called for a fairer deal for rural England.

The document, *Seeking the Best for Rural England*, has called on an incoming government to set the framework for a thriving rural economy, mixed rural communities, and better rural services.

[Read more](#)

850/12 – Increase in spending for parishes

DCLG has informed NALC that the appropriate sum for the purpose of section 137(4)(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 (the 1972 Act) for local councils in England for 2015–16 is £7.36 per elector.

[Read more](#)

PLANNING

850/13 – The government changes its mind over neighbourhood plan area decision deadlines

Councils will have 13 weeks to determine applications to create neighbourhood planning areas, and just eight weeks if such bids follow parish boundaries, the government has announced.

The measure is one of the proposals announced by DCLG this week to speed up and simplify the neighbourhood planning process.

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The DCLG, in a consultation launched July 2013, had proposed a ten-week deadline for local authorities to consider neighbourhood area applications, if they followed parish or electoral ward boundaries.

But this week, the DCLG said in its consultation response that, instead, the deadline would be just eight weeks if the application follows parish boundaries.

If area applications cover more than one local planning authority, the deadline would be 20 weeks.

And for all other applications it would be 13 weeks, the document added.

The DCLG also expressed support for its suggestion that neighbourhood area applications should be automatically designated if authorities do not make a decision within the deadline, saying it would "consult on more detailed proposals".

However, the document said the government would not go ahead with plans to scrap the statutory six-week publicity period before the draft plan is submitted for examination.

It also said it would not implement proposals to introduce requirements to test the extent of the consultation undertaken during the plan's preparation and for plan-makers to consult the landowners of sites allocated for development.

The DCLG said it believes the current arrangements regarding consultation and publicity "are workable and proportionate while providing for local flexibility".

It will, however, push ahead with a requirement for neighbourhood planning groups to provide information on whether the document complies with the European Union's Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

The consultation, which ran until September 2013, received 467 responses, according to the DCLG.

850/14 – The government publishes 'plain English' guides to planning

Housing and planning minister, Brandon Lewis MP, has published a 'plain English' guide to planning for free schools, with an accompanying guide to the planning system in general.

The *Plain English guide to planning for free schools* aims to make clear the steps anyone looking to set up a free school in their area needs to take.

It sets out the stages of the planning process and the role of the government quango, the Education Funding Agency, in helping to secure premises and obtaining planning permission. It also explains what alterations can be made to free school premises under permitted development rights.

The accompanying guide to the planning system is intended to offer a "quick and easy explanation" of how the system works, how local and neighbourhood plans are written and adopted and how to go about obtaining planning permission.

Mr Lewis said the guide was part of government policy to reverse the "system of top-down targets" and "put people back in control", and the guide gives "all the information anyone would need to get involved in the local decision-making process".

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850/15 – Judge dismisses housebuilder's bid to sink neighbourhood plan

A housebuilder has failed in its High Court attempt to block the adoption of an East Midlands neighbourhood plan that passed referendum in July last year.

Housebuilder Larkfleet Homes Limited applied for a judicial review to challenge the decision of Rutland County Council to allow the Uppingham Neighbourhood Development Plan to proceed to a neighbourhood planning referendum, in which it was endorsed by more than 90% of voters on a 26% turnout.

The neighbourhood plan, a government-designated "front runner", proposes at least 170 homes between 2013 and 2026, allocating three sites for development in the market town.

Larkfleet Homes, which has an interest in a 4.1 hectare plot near the town – which was not one of those selected to feature in the neighbourhood plan – fiercely objected to the process.

But High Court judge Mr Justice Collins dismissed the housebuilder's arguments that the legislation does not permit specific allocation of sites within neighbourhood development plans.

Also rejected were complaints that the referendum covered too wide an area and that the three selected sites should have been subjected to environmental assessment.

In ruling on the company's judicial review challenge, the High Court noted that much of the underlying legislation, including parts of the Localism Act 2011, were "not always well drafted" and that that was likely to produce over-complexity and lengthy processes which would do nothing to reduce expense.

R on the Application of Larkfleet Homes Limited v Rutland County Council. Case Number: CO/3063/2014.

850/16 – Report shows London's lack of neighbourhood planning

Neighbourhood planning is failing to take off in London because of a lack of support from some councils and the difficulty of defining urban neighbourhood boundaries, experts have said, after a report found that just one community-made blueprint has been adopted in the capital.

The London Assembly Planning Committee's study revealed a lack of progress with neighbourhood planning in the capital since the government's flagship localism policy was introduced in April 2012.

Only a handful of neighbourhood plans are likely to be in place in London by the time of the general election, the report says.

The study found that only around 80 of London's 1,200 neighbourhoods have expressed interest in neighbourhood planning. Meanwhile, just one neighbourhood plan has been adopted as yet – Norland in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The report said while it is difficult to pinpoint reasons for the low take-up, evidence suggests that the policy is designed for "smaller, more homogeneous areas than London".

In contrast, about 1,200 communities across the country have embarked on neighbourhood planning, the latest figures showed, with 29 plans adopted or "made".

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But neighbourhood planning consultant Tony Burton said he does not accept that progress in the capital has been slow, adding it is "pretty impressive" that 80 plans are under way in London within the first three years of the policy.

However, he added: "London has too many examples of local authorities dragging their feet or being deliberately obstructive of neighbourhood forums' efforts to get going and start preparing their neighbourhood plans."

Consultant Stephen Tapper, vice-president emeritus of the Planning Officers Society (POS) and neighbourhood planning convenor, said councils differ over the degree to which they promote neighbourhood planning in their areas.

But he added that the POS always expected that neighbourhood planning would not be easy in urban areas. Creating neighbourhood forums within "complex, diverse and sometimes very poor neighbourhoods" is going to be difficult because communities are not so clearly defined, he said.

He said: "The designations have taken a long time in London boroughs. It is hard to do, because these are overlapping communities with overlapping interests and in some places are very competitive."

Mike Kiely, director of planning at the London Borough of Croydon, said neighbourhood plans outside the capital have often aimed to influence where development should go. However, Kiely said because London is largely brownfield land, the key planning issue is often the design of a scheme rather than its location. "For this reason there is much less neighbourhood planning activity," he said.

Residents of Malmesbury in Wiltshire voted on a draft neighbourhood plan for their area yesterday.

Arun District Council in Sussex has voted to adopt or "make" three neighbourhood plans – Bersted, Littlehampton and Yapton.

A prospective neighbourhood forum for Heathrow Villages in Middlesex, covering the five villages between the airport and the M4, was due to be launched yesterday.

RURAL AFFAIRS

850/17 – Groups unite for rural communities

Rural organisations have come together to warn that the priorities of rural communities risk being sidelined.

With a few months to go before the general election, the Rural Coalition of 13 organisations – including the Rural Services Network – is calling on politicians to recognise the national importance of the countryside.

The Rural Coalition has published a Rural Challenge 2015 document outlining a new set of rural priorities for the next government.

The document urges the government to address three core areas: the rural economy, affordable housing, and health and social care services.

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Rural Coalition chairman Lord Teverson said: "In the build-up to the 2015 general election, we want to make the case for a healthy and flourishing countryside.

"Despite the enormous environmental, social and economic contribution that rural areas make to this country, they are in danger of being overlooked on key issues like housing, health and economic growth.

"That is why we are following up our 2010 report with a new Rural Challenge that asks the next government to do more to address rural concerns.

"With demands for essential services increasing, as well as calls for more housing, it is vital that the needs of rural populations are considered alongside those in urban areas."

In 2013, 486,000 rural businesses had a combined turnover of £369bn, says the coalition.

Lord Teverson said: "It is time that the contribution of rural areas is formally recognised by integrating rural considerations more effectively in national policy."

Acknowledging the difficulties facing rural populations in maintaining essential services, the Rural Challenge 2015 shows that rural areas are often overlooked in national policy.

The Rural Coalition believes it is crucial that central government retains the capacity to properly assess the impact of all policies on rural communities.

Despite recent moves by the government to devolve decision-making powers away from Westminster, the Rural Coalition says economies remain vulnerable and are often overlooked in national and regional policies.

It is calling for a greater acknowledgement of the role of rural areas, and a commitment to supporting rural business by rolling out high-speed broadband and encouraging small enterprises.

At the same time, those on lower incomes are being squeezed out of the rural housing market, leading to a talent drain from rural areas and difficulties for local businesses and services.

To help counteract this trend, the Rural Coalition advocates a number of measures, including targets for affordable housing in small communities and more flexible public investment.

Against a backdrop of the increasing cost of public service delivery and growing numbers of elderly residents, the Rural Coalition is also calling for greater coordination of health provisions.

Funding systems should be improved to ensure better access for those in isolated communities, it says.

Members of the Rural Coalition include: Action with Communities in Rural England, People and Places, Arthur Rank Centre, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Country Land and Business Association, National Association of Local Councils, National Farmers Union, National Housing Federation, Plunkett Foundation, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, Royal Town Planning Institute, Rural Services Network, and Town and Country Planning Association.

The full Rural Challenge 2015 document can be downloaded [here](#).

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850/18 – Guide tackles rural housing crisis

The Rural Housing Alliance and Rural Services Network (RSN) have launched a guide promoting affordable rural homes.

The guide, aimed at local councils across England, promotes the benefit of affordable rural housing developments and the role those local community groups, like the parish council can play in their delivery.

The guide opens with a call to action from HRH The Princess Royal, a longstanding advocate of affordable rural housing, encouraging parish councils to take the lead in tackling the affordable housing crisis facing the countryside.

The Princess, who is patron of the English Rural Housing Association, said: "Small scale affordable rural housing developments help to rebalance communities, keeping families together whilst providing a boost for local services.

"Local councils are a driving force for change and a key partner in delivering affordable homes for local people."

The need from local people for affordable rural housing continues to increase as demand for rural living soars, with greater access to the countryside, low levels of development and migration from high income urban households all major causes.

Low income families living in rural areas now face a difficult future, often having to move, leaving support and employment networks behind them.

Recent analysis found that in 90% of rural areas, property prices were on average eight times local incomes.

This unsustainable affordability gap is destabilising many villages, driving out low income households and starving local services of employees and customers.

The guide provides the building blocks to identify and tackle the housing needs at a local level. Ensuring that the problem is fully understood and the solution tailored to local circumstances.

Graham Biggs, RSN chief executive, said: "We are really pleased to have been able to work hand in hand with the Rural Housing Alliance to produce this excellent guide which we know will be very well received across rural England."

Rural Housing Alliance chairman, Peter Moore, said the importance of this problem should not be underestimated.

"This is not a new crisis, but one that continues to get worse.

Many rural communities are approaching a watershed moment where, if nothing is done, longstanding local families, businesses and cultures will disappear, damaging the very way of life that makes our villages so appealing.

Maintaining a balance of income earners, household types and age groups is crucial to keeping villages vibrant and active. Developments of affordable rural homes help to achieve this balance and diversity."

The full guide can be downloaded [here](#).

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850/19 – Manifesto calls for fair rural deal

The Rural Services Network (RSN) has published its manifesto ahead of the 2015 general election, calling for a fairer deal for rural England.

The document, *Seeking the Best for Rural England*, calls on an incoming government to set the framework for a thriving rural economy, mixed rural communities, and better rural services.

RSN chair, Cecilia Motley, said: "In England, almost one in five people live in our rural towns, villages and countryside.

"Rural communities are significant contributors to the nation's economy. If they thrive, the chances are that the nation thrives too.

"Policies for health care, education, economic growth, transport, housing and so on must all benefit rural communities and meet their needs. "

Sustained budget cuts had left many rural local authorities at a tipping point where frontline services will start to collapse, said Councillor Motley.

The scope for management and back-office efficiencies had now been exhausted, she added.

"This is not an unrealistic call to hike government spending, but a call for recognition that in hard times especially, rural areas deserve their fair share of public expenditure.

"It cannot be right that in almost every sphere of public policy less is spent on rural communities than on communities elsewhere," added Cllr Motley.

"The historic underfunding of rural services must be brought to an end."

The manifesto calls on the government to address the following issues:

Planning: the government must get real about the time it takes for local authorities to go through the complex process of producing a Local Plan for their area, especially since delays are often caused by its own Planning Inspectorate. When developers go to appeal, more weight should be given to draft Local Plans.

Affordable housing: the ill thought through proposal to exempt smaller housing development schemes from any obligation to provide some affordable homes should be scrapped, at least for settlements with fewer than 3,000 residents.

Local government finance: the formulae used by the government to distribute grants among local authorities needs revision. The current approach is demonstrably unfair to rural residents and taxpayers, leaving them paying higher council tax bills while receiving fewer services.

Public transport: local authorities should be funded to cover the home-to-school transport costs of 16 to 19 year olds who stay in education. The value of Bus Service Operators Grant must be protected.

Health facilities: both the funding system for NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups and that for public health services require urgent change to make them fairer. Steps are required to ensure national targets for ambulance response times are being met in rural areas.

Older people: Initiatives which support older people in their own homes, such as Village Agents and First Contact schemes, should be supported and promoted.

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Fuel poverty: the government should enforce the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) target, which says that 15% of households helped by their energy provider to reduce bills should be rural.

Village services: the government should renew the 2010–15 commitment, that there will be no programme of post office closures, through the next Parliamentary term. It should support Local Plan policies, which seek to retain village services in their current use.

Broadband connectivity: the government should announce a much more ambitious target for access to fast broadband networks. Its existing target, that all households can access a 2Mbps connection, is out-of-date and unhelpful.

Rural economy: business support and advice services must extend into rural locations, so these opportunities are not squandered. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) or their successor bodies must set out how they will achieve this and then assess their rural impacts.

Rural proofing: we will look to an incoming government to recommit to the principle of rural proofing – that its policy making will take proper account of rural needs. Policies that are designed simply with the urban majority in mind will not do. This commitment should come from the top, with the backing of the prime minister and cabinet.

Any moves to devolve more powers and budgets away from central government and to local levels must pay equal attention to rural areas, said Cllr Motley.

"Devolution is not just an agenda for cities or city-regions. However, devolution should not be tied to some centrally imposed restructuring of local government."

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