Dear

As organisations that supported the campaign for the Sustainable Communities Act we write to ask you to please ‘opt in’ to the new process in the Act when invited by central government this October.

The Act deals with a major problem – the ongoing decline of local shops, services, jobs, economic activity and communities. Important as this is, there is no concerted action by central government to assist councils in stopping Ghost Town Britain (as it has been called) and promote the opposite – communities and high streets that are vibrant and sustainable. The Sustainable Communities Act fills this vacuum – and even more importantly, in such a way that allows councils themselves to drive the ways in which government can help to reverse the decline, because the Act gives government a duty to assist councils (i.e. not the usual top down imposition of yet more duties on you!).

In short,

- The Act enables you to put forward proposals to government on how it can help you promote ‘local sustainability’.\(^1\)
- All councils’ ideas will then be collated and prioritised by the Local Government Association (i.e. by your representative body, not by ‘Whitehall’).\(^2\)
- The government is then under a duty to ‘reach agreement’ with the Local Government Association on the implementation of your suggestions. This is not just another consultation exercise: it is the very first attempt at ‘bottom-up’ government.

Additionally, the Act requires the government, for the first time, to publish a local breakdown of all public spending. You will then have the power to request and argue for centrally controlled public spending, and its related function, to be transferred to local control.

So, as we are sure you will agree, this Act presents new and exciting opportunities for you. Enclosed is a briefing giving more detail on how the Act works, the benefits and further reasons why you should choose to use it and also a draft motion for you to put before the council.

We, and our members who live in your communities, are very keen to be part of the new process in the Sustainable Communities Act. This is an opportunity to engage citizens in governance. We hope you choose to use it.

\(^1\) Defined in the Act as ‘the improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of the authority’s area’ whereby ‘social well-being’ includes participation in civic and political activity.

Yours sincerely,

[Signatures]

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\(1\) British Association of Settlements

\(2\) Network for Social Change

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\(3\) Sam Clarke

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\(4\) UK Coalition Against Poverty

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\(5\) Eileen Devaney, National Co-ordinator

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