

Civic Manifesto  
2015–2020

# Localism for Real

Our ambition is for England to be a  
place where every individual can say  
“I am proud of where I live”





Two factors have created good cities. One is individual pride, perhaps manifested, in the past, in brilliant shop displays or neat front gardens or clean front steps. The other is civic pride, the communal action that cleared our streets of rubbish in the nineteenth century, our air of smog in the early twentieth century and, later, our historic buildings of neglect.

Today, our shops and offices are often run by international companies. Their owners often do not live locally. National governments tend to have a desire to control as much centrally as possible. We begin to feel powerless to effect what happens locally. We are not nor should we be.

The job of Civic Voice is to encourage local participation in the urban environment. This has value not just in the public arena but also in the private realm. It starts with pride in our places. It goes on to empowerment and participation in making them better.

Increasingly, we may wonder how things happen, why decisions of insensitivity are made, who is in control. Localism is about asserting distinctiveness. It is about asserting the right to be heard. It is about making the local population aware of their rights and capabilities. Localism is a national issue.

Civic Voice is here to try to ensure that successive governments are aware of that.

**Griff Rhys Jones**

President, Civic Voice



# Localism for Real

The quality of our cities, towns and villages is vital to the achievement of so many objectives which are shared across the political spectrum: economic growth and prosperity, social cohesion, public health, safety and crime reduction. Most people want to have a say, and many want to play an active part, in making sure that the design of their city, town or village is as good as it can be.

When the Coalition Government was formed they made a commitment to localism including “radically reforming the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live”. The results have been mixed. While the take-up of neighbourhood planning and listing of assets of community value has been growing, many citizens feel that their cities, towns and villages are not being shaped locally, but more by developers, planning inspectors and the courts.

**123**

**To achieve real localism the next Government needs to:**

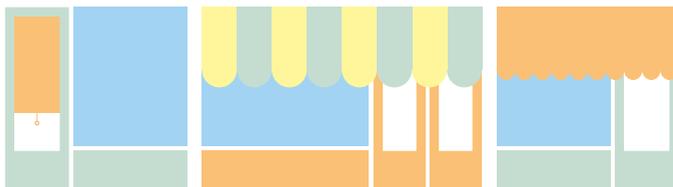
- 1. Make improving the quality of the public realm in our cities, towns and villages a priority**
- 2. Give all citizens opportunities to actively shape the future of their place**
- 3. Give local communities the powers they need to enable their town and city centres to prosper**



## Key measures

In particular, the following specific changes would demonstrate the Government's real commitment to localism and quality of place:

- a. Require every local authority to produce a Place Improvement Strategy
- b. Strengthen policy to support collaborative community planning for major developments and local plans
- c. Enable local authorities to control use classes and permitted development rights to meet local need



76%

In a recent poll 76% said that local authorities should have the power to shape the high street in line with the wishes of the community

Source: COMRES

46%

As of July this year 46% of local authorities did not have an up-to-date local plan

LOCAL  
PLAN

An illustration of a book titled 'LOCAL PLAN'. The book is green with a white title box. It is shown from a three-quarter perspective, resting on an orange shelf.



# 1

## **Make improving the quality of the public realm in our cities, towns and villages a priority**

To create attractive, prosperous places that everyone can feel proud of we need to make the planning system work to deliver better places. Every area must have an up-to-date local plan. At present this is a requirement of local planning authorities, but only just over half have achieved it, leaving local many communities in a 'planning limbo'. Planning authorities need sufficient resources to produce timely plans with quality of place at their heart, and effective measures need to be put in place if they do not. The speed and quality of plan-making should be considered at least as important as the speed of planning decisions.

Quality of place is not just determined by the planning system. That is why we also need integrated Place Improvement Strategies which complement the local plan but also include a strategy for heritage management and improving the public realm (such as streets, squares and parks). Like local plans, Place Improvement Strategies should be produced through an inclusive and participative process. A named senior officer and a senior politician should be answerable for producing this strategy and making sure it is implemented.



***Key measure: Require every local authority to produce a Place Improvement Strategy***



## 2

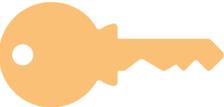
### **Give all citizens opportunities to actively shape the future of their place**

We face a crisis of civic engagement. This is a symptom of the frustration people feel as power is taken away from communities and they are subject to tokenistic consultation. The best Civic Societies engage people both in campaigning on local issues and taking direct action to improve and celebrate their place. More spontaneous, social-media-driven actions, like the clear-up campaign after the riots in 2011, show there is an appetite for civic engagement.

Both local plans and major planning applications should be shaped through an inclusive process of collaborative planning, not just passive consultation.

We need a national debate about the future of local government to secure a cross-party consensus that will give local councils significantly more powers to shape their places and raise their own revenues. At the same time the workings of local government need to more open and transparent.

We should move towards every part of the country having a parish or town council, but in urban areas they could be called community councils or neighbourhood forums.



***Key measure: Strengthen policy to support collaborative community planning for major developments and local plans***



# 3

## **Give local communities the powers they need to enable their town and city centres to prosper**

The state of the UK's high streets has been the cause of much discussion and several reports to Government in recent years. Many places have created their own strategies for regenerating their centres but stronger measures are needed to help town and city centres survive and thrive.

We need to move away from the model of dispersed, car-dependent retail and leisure development, incentivise business location in town and city centres, and encourage a vibrant mix of uses.

The next Government should allow local authorities to vary business rates to favour town and city centre businesses over those that locate out-of-town. A levy on out-of-town car parking spaces should be considered.

A much more sophisticated range of use classes is needed for town, city and neighbourhood centres. This would allow local authorities to protect essential shops (bakers, green-grocers, butchers, pubs, post-offices) and restrict those where cumulative impact is shown to cause problems (betting shops, hot-food take-away, charity shops and pay day lenders). Planning policy needs to be strengthened to discourage new large-scale out- of-town development.



***Key measure: Enable local authorities to control use classes and permitted development rights to meet local need***

This is an executive summary of the  
full Civic Manifesto 2015–20

For the full version contact Civic Voice  
at the address below or go to  
**[www.civicvoice.org/manifesto](http://www.civicvoice.org/manifesto)**



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