

Community Right To Build

How PS Consultants Can Help

The Government has recently announced that it is going to give communities a new 'Right to Build'. This will allow communities to take the lead in developing new homes, shops, and facilities for their area.

The new right will be 'community-led'. The government envisages members of a community coming together to decide that they want to take forward development in their community.

- If you are a **group of people living in a community** with an idea for housing, shops, community facilities, or culture, leisure, and recreation opportunities – PS Consultants can help.

We can help you develop your idea, talk to your local council and other potential partners, and find designers and developers you might want to work with.

- If you are a **developer or builder** – PS Consultants can help

We can help you identify potential schemes and communities, develop the community engagement and consultation, and develop the capacity and understanding of the groups you will work with.



How will the Community Right to Build Work?

The key idea is to allow local people to have the ability to instigate development in their community with 'minimal' red tape'.

Local people will form themselves into a corporate entity, identify projects that benefit their community, and develop and deliver those projects (including identifying sources of finance). Only local people living in an area can initiate the CRB, but they may work with designers, developers, and builders, to achieve all of those things.

Development may not increase the size of the community in question by more than 10% over 10 years, at least under these initial proposals.

The media has interpreted the CRB as implying development that will not require planning permission. But the Government's own guidance simply says, in relation to planning and green belt issues, that proposals under CRB will be subject to 'minimum criteria to ensure that development is sustainable' and that the detail is, as yet, undecided.

Is it just for rural areas?

The Community Right to Build announcement was widely reported simply as an initiative to allow communities to initiate more house building in rural areas. Comments made by the Housing Minister, and the Government's own guidance on the CRB, clearly show that they see this as its initial, primary focus.

But it has potential power to kick start the development of more than just housing – even in rural areas. New shops, community and play facilities are all mentioned as possible objects of CRB proposals, as are support for, and re-development of, existing facilities (e.g. low rent commercial accommodation for village shops).

And with the well documented history of often highly organised NIMBYism in rural areas, a 90% threshold for community support , if that is what is finally proposed, may be very hard to achieve.

So we believe it may well be a power that is taken up, in some more urban areas too. Whether this happens will depend upon a promised, future definition, of 'community'.

Will it be possible to get a 90% vote in a referendum?

Although the Government's guidance is bullish about this being possible, and if this turns out to be the target figure the government uses, it is going to be very difficult to achieve for almost any scheme. There are few precedents for referenda or other tests of opinion achieving that level of support in democratic, pluralist societies.

As a result, we think this is an area where the Government may have to revise its proposals. But it seems likely that they are looking to fix a high level of indicative support for a proposal under the CRB, even if it comes down from 90%.

The key to getting that support will be to ensure that what is being proposed clearly comes out of a well established, and well understood, local need. That will mean the community group being able to make a very strong case locally, including to local councils and other stakeholders, and having the expertise to make that case persuasively to their community.

Few community groups will be able to do this without specialist support from organisations such as PS Consultants, and without some form of external funding and other resources.

What role will councils play?

Again, there is something of a discrepancy between how this has been reported, and what the Government guidance actually says.

The media reporting has been that the role of councils will be to provide the land which will be used in new build CRB proposals.

This will undoubtedly have to happen in some areas if successful schemes are to be delivered.

But the guidance itself doesn't really say this. It simply talks about council's having a role 'in ensuring developments meet the minimum criteria'.

But council's will clearly play an important role in facilitating successful CRB proposals – not least because their active opposition will almost certainly make the 90% (or whatever) threshold impossible to achieve.

So it will be important for community groups to involve their local councils at a very early stage. This is another area where specialist external support will be very important.

We Can Help!

We have worked across the UK since 1995 on a wide range of community-led development projects specialising in: community consultation and engagement, feasibility studies, fundraising, and business planning; project development and co-ordination; all involving housing, commercial development, and community / leisure / play facilities.

PS Consultants works with community and voluntary sector groups; local councils; housing associations; designers and planners; and private sector builders and developers.



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