

What is the Sustainable Communities Act?

The Sustainable Communities Act became law in October 2007. The Act was the result of a five year campaign run by Local Works, a coalition of 85 national organisations. www.localworks.org

The Sustainable Communities Act aims to promote the sustainability of communities based on the principle that local people know best what needs to be done to promote sustainability and wellbeing. Local Works describes this as 'changing our system of governance by setting up a new process where communities and their local authorities can drive central government policy and action on reversing community decline and promoting local sustainability.' The Act covers economic, social and environmental issues – within that broad scope there is no limit to the type of action that could be put forward. The Local Works website gives a number of suggestions for proposals. These include ways of supporting local post offices, promoting local and affordable housing and promoting small business through rate relief.

How does the Act work?

1. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government invites local authorities to make proposals for new government action. This happened in October 2008 with a deadline for first round proposals on 31st July 2009. Local Works are campaigning to introduce a rolling programme of proposals rather than have periodic deadlines.
2. When a council decides to use the Act they must set up or use an existing panel of local residents. The purpose of the panel is to listen to residents proposals and put them to the council.
3. Proposals submitted by residents and councils should make a good case for the help needed from government for local areas to make changes. There is a duty on local government to 'reach agreement' with the residents panel, not just consult it.
4. Proposals are first considered by the Local Government Association (LGA), the appointed 'selector', and a short-list is drawn up in co-operation with the Secretary of State who then decides (preferably in agreement with LGA) which proposals should be implemented.
5. Decisions (with reasons for them) and an action plan is published. The action plan progress is reported annually to Parliament.

What's happening in Camden?

Camden Council supports the aims of the Act but did not put forward a bid in the first round after being unable to establish a clear issue. The potential of the Act was discussed with Highgate Area Forum but residents were unable to identify issues that would make a suitable proposal. In Camden there is already a citizens panel, Camden Talks, where proposals can be discussed and agreed. A report to the council's Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee in July gives more detail about Camden's approach to the Sustainable Communities Act. [Download this here](#)

Information about the proposals submitted by other councils can be found on the Local Works website. Government guidance to the Act can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/sustainablecommunitiesact