



## COMMUNITIES: Community Action

### Working together towards change

In sustainable communities, people have the power to work together to make a difference, improving their area and their lives. Community 'action groups', such as the Residents' Association, involve local residents collaborating to address certain issues in the local area and act as a 'voice' for their community. They might, for example, work to reduce the amount of litter in a community by asking the local council to install more rubbish bins or 'No littering' signs, or they might organise a 'litter drive' where volunteers go through the area picking up rubbish and cleaning up public areas.

They might also tackle a particular issue or problem (e.g. stopping plans for a motorway to be built near to the area, which may increase pollution and noise). This might involve putting up signs to make people aware of the problem, sending letters or petitions signed by residents to the local council, or even organising a protest march.

Community action groups sometimes work to raise money for particular purposes, such as the restoration of a local historic building or the purchasing of new equipment or facilities for local schools or hospitals.

### Supporting the local economy

A community shouldn't only be environmentally sustainable, but also have a healthy and sustainable economy. This means having a strong and thriving business community with plenty of work opportunities.

#### Independent shops versus 'chain' stores

One of the problems facing local business is the introduction of the larger high street 'chain' stores and large, out-of-town retail centres taking business away from independent businesses. In the past, shoppers would go to the baker for their bread, the butcher for their meat and the greengrocer for fruits and vegetables. More recently, supermarkets have opened up in local areas. They can sometimes sell things more cheaply than independent stores and also offer busy people the convenience of getting everything in one place. In doing so, they can 'steal' business from the independent shops, which can end up going bankrupt.

#### Encouraging local spending

Some communities have systems to try to keep the exchange of money and skills in the local area. Some of these include:

- **Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS)** are schemes in which people within a community organise to trade their goods and skills between themselves. Members set up a directory of what they have to offer and the 'price' in LETS units. They use the directory to get in contact with other members to use their services or buy their goods, 'paying' with a credit note or printed LETS notes, or both members accounts are adjusted to show what they have done or what they owe.
- **Local currency**, such as Brixton Pounds or Lewes Pounds, which can be bought for the equivalent value in Pounds sterling, can only be spent at local independent shops that have signed up to the scheme. The shops give them out as change, so they are circulated within the community.
- **Local loyalty cards**, such as the 'Wedge' card, reward people for shopping locally by offering discounts and special offers with a number of local shops and independent businesses.