

ABOUT LOCALISM WATCH

Localism Watch is an online resource, owned and led by activists, helping local people make sense of the government's localism agenda – and challenge it. It's a collaboration between the National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA) and Open Democracy.

People began using the term 'localism' in the 1970s to describe philosophies advocating a retreat from globalism, corporatism and consumerism, while promoting a concern for the environment, egalitarianism and participative democracy.

The Coalition government has worked hard to 'reform' localism. The Localism Act 2011 purports to 'shift power from central government back into the hands of individuals, communities and councils'. It offers communities new rights and planning powers. Other 'localist' measures include the Health and Social Care Act, the Welfare Reform Act, the Growth and Infrastructure Act and the creation of Local Enterprise Partnerships.

But set in the bigger picture of austerity and privatisation, people are coming to see new localism as another weapon in the Coalition's drive to concentrate power in the privileged centre and maximise profits for its corporate backers. While local communities now 'enjoy' the right to challenge councils to run public services, they have lost the right to challenge strategic planning proposals like nuclear proliferation, fracking, and HS2.

What blows away any pretence that the government's giving power to the people is that it's never tried to explain localism in ways that connect with the grassroots. Instead, localism's become a sterile dialogue between politicians and their advisers, technocrats and think tanks - all too often in subscription-only publications and expense-account seminars.

By informing, engaging and challenging, Localism Watch aims to take localism back to where it truly belongs.