



RANT

WHERE BEST to find the Big Society? Surely it's in Britain's fabled villages, where lots of little folk are happily doing their bit to foster and nourish a strong sense of community?

No: the Big Society is a lost cause – certainly in the Suffolk village where I live. For a start, the village is dead most of the time. Hardly anybody works locally, and when they get back from London, Ipswich or Cambridge, they are knackered. All they want to do is to slump in front of the telly. I'm on the Parish Council, where it's hard enough to achieve a quorum – just three councillors attending one meeting every other month – let alone to get other villagers to take part.

For most people weekends are out, too. The lack of jobs nearby and the sky-high property prices mean families no longer live just down the road. Saturdays and Sundays are taken up by trips to visit scattered relatives. Don't expect anybody to have the time to man a coconut shy on the (probably unmown) village green.

It's in this context that Tory councils are attempting to coerce communities into taking on more responsibilities. Our library is likely to be closed unless volunteers run it. Ironically, it's one of the few places where people gather, rare evidence that any kind of society exists around here, let alone a 'big' one.

The Government wants more planning issues to be decided by local people. But the village philistines and well disguised local vested interests are a far bigger menace than the planning bureaucrats from the town hall. And isn't disinterested professionalism what we pay our council tax for?

What we'd rather not pay council tax for is Suffolk County Council boss Andrea Hill. This doyenne of outsourcing enjoys a salary of £218,000 yet has the cheek to urge locals to take on council jobs for no pay at all. Why should we do her dirty work? On that salary, let her sweep the roads.

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ILLUSTRATION BY TOM PLANT