

NORFOLK

# Community Foundation is key to the Big Society

By **SHAUN LOWTHORPE**

Communities in Norfolk could play a leading role in the development of a prime minister David Cameron's Big Society dream, the man hailed as the architect of the idea said last night.

Phillip Blond, director of the think tank Respublica and author of the book *Red Tory*, told a meeting of the Norfolk Community Foundation that its philosophy of promoting small causes was at the heart of what the Big Society was about.

The Norfolk Community Foundation has provided grants totalling more than £2m to more than 1,000 groups and individuals linked to grassroots projects across Norfolk.

The Bishop of Norwich, the Rt Rev Graham James who founded the Norfolk Community Foundation five years ago, told the meeting that the foundation had been promoting the cause of the Big Society locally well before the term was invented.

But with Norfolk County Council looking to stem a £155m funding black hole in the wake of the government's comprehensive spending review, critics have dismissed the Big Society idea as an excuse to make savage cuts, and organisations such as the Community Foundation could be under more

real disaster," he said. "Small amounts of money can make more of a difference if you use them more effectively. What worries me is that the Treasury doesn't have anything to say about the Big Society."

"Community Foundations are a very important part of the solution," he added. "If you can get people to give locally to causes that matter to them, that's hugely important."

Robert Ashton, a trustee of Norfolk Community Foundation, said there was growing interest in how the ideas could be applied in communities across Norfolk and help make them more self-sufficient.

"It's not about bemoaning the lack of government funding, it's about what we can do for ourselves," Mr Ashton said. "The Big Society has opened the aviary door but still the birds are reluctant to fly free. When they get outside they find there's no seed and water, so they are tempted to go back inside because it's scary."

Broadcaster Carol Bundoock, who is a newly appointed trustee, said a small amount of money could go a long way and the Community Foundation was likely to have an increasing role helping to support grassroots causes in the wake of public spending cuts both nationally and among councils.

Picture: MATTHEW USHER



**LEADING ROLE:** Phillip Blond, author of *Red Tory*, pictured at the John Innes Centre where he spoke at a Norfolk Community Foundation event.

pressure to help out.

Speaking to the EDP, Mr Blond said he believed the cuts could provide an opportunity to recast people's relationship with the state, but this needed to be done alongside other measures to create the Big Society linked to giving people more political

and financial control over their lives.

"The cuts are an opportunity, but if you just have Thatcherite cuts where you cut back and do not build alternatives and end up with a smaller version of what you have already got, I think that would be a