town & country planning

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Pam Warhurst on seeds to solutions, pages 113-117
Cover illustration by Clifford Harper. chcliffordharper@gmail.com

TCPA Annual General Meeting 2022
The 2022 TCPA AGM will be held online on 13 July 2022 — see page 143 in this issue for details

a new, genuine emphasis on the quality of homes and places?

In mid-March, the TCPA was delighted to hold its first in-person conference in two years. While we have held a number of very successful virtual conferences during the pandemic, at times with more than 500 people in attendance, it was lovely to see delegates in real life once again!

The conference was on the important issue of long-term stewardship—a fundamental aspect of the Garden City model and something that the TCPA believes must be at the heart of creating and sustaining great places. As the Association's work on this issue highlights, if we are to create places in which people can live healthy and fulfilling lives, then spaces, places and infrastructure that people need to live well must be part of those places—and the natural world needs to be enabled to thrive as well. And people need to be empowered to have a say on how their homes and neighbourhoods are created and managed. This powerful combination is captured in the concept of long-term stewardship, which is a holistic approach to ensuring places that can be looked after in perpetuity.

While the new Housing Minister, the Rt Hon. Stuart Andrew MP, sadly could not be there in person, he did send a pre-recorded address in which he recognised the importance of long-term stewardship and its influence over how people feel about the places in which they live and work. His speech, unsurprisingly, focused on beauty, pointing to the importance of design codes and design-led regeneration, and linked that to the levelling-up agenda. This was reflected in the announcement earlier in March that 25 areas will benefit from funding as part of the Design Code Pathfinder Programme.[1] In his address, the Minister also recognised that the TCPA's values and campaigns seek to inspire and provoke dialogue about the future of the built environment, a dialogue which he said the government welcomes 'whole-heartedly'.

To coincide with the event, the TCPA was also pleased to launch *The Heart of the Matter: Emerging Lessons in Long-Term Stewardship,*[2] its new report, drawing on research undertaken over the last two years to understand, capture and share lessons emerging from places that have implemented, or are trying to implement, various stewardship models.

While this has been an important issue for the TCPA for over 120 years, for some places and practitioners in England it will be rising up the agenda as the statutory biodiversity net gain requirements in the Environment Act come into force in 2023. While people are perhaps focusing currently on understanding how to calculate the statutory 10% net gain, a really important aspect of the new requirements is that the net gain must be maintained for a period of at least 30 years. Thinking about long-term stewardship from the start, rather than as an after-thought, will be crucial.

In his speech, the Housing Minister also argued that stewardship helps to encapsulate what the government is trying to achieve through levelling up. While the White Paper[3] setting out the 12 high-level levelling-up 'missions' was published in February, there has inevitably been a lot of discussion since then about what levelling up will mean in practice. Much of the policy programme set out in Chapter 3 of the White Paper points to announcements that have already been made, or other White Papers or legislation still to be published. Much of the detail relating to the mission seeking to narrow the gap in healthy life expectancy by 2030, for example (which also relates to the TCPA's healthy place-making work), is expected to come forward in the forthcoming Health Disparities White Paper.

One of the most interesting parts of the White Paper for me was the recognition set out in Chapter 1 that there are negative impacts and market failures in those areas that are, from a simplistic economic point of view, seen to be well performing. As is noted, housing affordability, congestion and pollution are often issues in those places. As the White Paper

seems to recognise, basing policy decisions on an economic growth theory that gives prominence to the role of productivity as a driver for economic growth is not working. Far less welcome is the fact that the White Paper seems to totally overlook natural capital.

In light of the ongoing speculation about what will happen next in relation to planning reform, however, it was interesting to read the short section (on pages 227 and 228) on reforming the planning system in England. It at least recognises that 'a strong planning system is vital to level up communities across the country and give them a say in how their land is used and where beautiful, sustainable houses are built'.

Beyond that, the White Paper perhaps does not give too much away. The section highlights the emphasis that has been placed on beauty, but also on 'Project Speed' and changes to permitted development rights to 'enable' the expansion of public infrastructure without the need for a planning application. But in terms of what more needs to be done, it points to simplifying and shortening Local Plans to make the planning system more transparent and easier to engage with. It also reiterates a commitment to a new Infrastructure Levy to enable local authorities to capture value from development 'more efficiently', and a desire to enhance compulsory purchase powers to better support town centre regeneration. The section concludes by stating that there will be wider changes to the planning system:

'... improving democracy and engagement in planning decisions; supporting environmental protection, including support for the transition to Net Zero; and securing clear benefits for neighbourhoods and local people.'

It is perhaps helpful to note that there is no mention of zonal planning—which could be positive. But, as noted already, we wait to see what some of these warm words will really mean in practice.

● *Fiona Howie* is Chief Executive of the TCPA.

Notes

1 'Communities empowered to shape design of neighbourhoods'. Press Release. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 11 Mar. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/news/communities-empowered-to-shape-design-of-neighbourhoods

2 *The Heart of the Matter: Emerging Lessons in Long-Term Stewardship*. TCPA, Mar. 2022. www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=5d113e5d-a3d6-40e9-97ba-869888e565f4

3 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*. Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

The TCPA's **vision** is for homes, places and communities in which everyone can thrive. Its **mission** is to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone.

Informed by the Garden City Principles, the TCPA's strategic priorities are to:

Work to secure a good home for everyone in inclusive, resilient and prosperous communities, which support people to live healthier lives.

Empower people to have real influence over decisions about their environments and to secure social justice within and between communities.

Support new and transform existing places to be adaptable to current and future challenges, including the climate crisis.

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Follow the TCPA's policy and project work on Twitter, **@theTCPA** and on the TCPA website, at **www.tcpa.org.uk**

● Affordable housing
● Community participation in planning
● Garden Cities and New Towns
● Healthy Homes Act campaign
● Healthy place-making
● New Communities Group
● Parks and green infrastructure
● Planning reform
● Planning for climate change

time & tide

With time to act fast running out, we need to create a new planning system to properly address the climate crisis, say **Hugh Ellis** and **Jessie Fieth**

a climate-focused planning system — no time to wait

The TCPA has always had two roles: to make the best of whatever tools the existing planning system has to offer; and to agitate for systemic changes that secure places which support people's health and wellbeing. In the spirit of making the best of our very broken planning system, the Association is working to tackle the skills deficit on climate adaptation in local government.

We have produced our planning for climate change guide with the RTPI[1] and are about to launch a short training video with the Environment Agency as an entry-level resource on flood risk. This, combined with a new area of the TCPA website should, for the first time, draw together all the key resources of the Environment Agency and other organisations in one place. The initiative complements months of joint lobbying with other organisations for changes to law and policy in order to bolt together the planning and climate change Acts to ensure that planning decisions support the nation's carbon reduction target regime.

But in the wider balance sheet of success and failure in the endeavour to tackle climate change through planning, there is undoubtedly a major problem. Since 2010 the disastrous deregulation of the statutory planning system in England, along with the cancellation of the zero-carbon homes policy in 2015, has set back progress on tackling climate change. The mechanisms of planning have been fatally damaged, but the priority given to climate change in national policy has been fatally undermined, too. The 2020 Planning White Paper effectively ignored the climate crisis, showing no understanding of the existential threat it poses to many communities and to the wider economy.

When Michael Gove became Levelling Up Secretary of State, there was a tangible outbreak of hope across the sector and a belief that he might take the chance to act. The TCPA, along with other organisations, asked for an urgent Ministerial Statement to confirm the key role of planning in tackling the climate crisis, providing specific wording for urgent changes to national policy. The response from officials has been positive in principle. Commitments were made to rewrite national policy to support the net-zero ambition and to update planning guidance on flood risk.

But as we come to the six-month anniversary of Michael Gove's tenure as Secretary of State nothing has happened. Not one statement, speech or commitment has emerged from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the climate agenda. The Levelling Up White Paper[2] provides a powerful analysis of the problems faced by left-behind places, but curiously fails to identify flood risk as one of the key drivers of future economic decline. It is simply hard to understand or account for this blind spot in central government thinking.

Of all the commodities we have at our disposal in tackling the climate crisis, time is the most precious. Actions we take now on carbon reduction are crucial in offering hope for future human survival. The fact that we in the UK have lost 12 critical years in which to plan and prepare for the impacts of climate change is, in retrospect, inexplicable. We have lost a further six months despite there being a Secretary of State who plainly understands the importance of climate change and the wider environment. During these wasted years, climate impacts have become even more stark, and the challenge set out by the Environment Agency's own published data in terms of extreme weather and sea level rise is daunting.

But two factors have added to this challenge. The first is economic, and relates to the increasing costs and availability of insurance for vulnerable places and households. Work being carried out in partnership with Flood Re has helped the TCPA to understand the implications of the closing of the reinsurance scheme in 2039 and the consequent impact on the ability of vulnerable households to gain any form of affordable insurance. This economic impact is compounded by the emerging understanding among lenders, who are increasing — sometimes dramatically — the level of deposit required for homes located in flood risk areas. Taken together, these factors mean that the direct impacts of climate change on people's lives will be compounded by a corrosive set of economic impacts which undermine the viability of communities. In some cases — such

Flood risk is one of a number of growing and increasingly clear direct impacts of climate change on people's lives

as many of our coastal communities—these places are already suffering multiple social and economic problems.

The second part of the challenge relates to the climate science. The data offered to planners on future climate impacts is based, inevitably, on a range of scenarios that relate to scientific understanding of climate change five and sometimes 10 years in the past. The problem is that the observable trends of climate impacts are now, generally, much more severe than anticipated. This means that the higher-end predicted impacts are now becoming likely outcomes. Temperature spikes of the magnitude recorded in the Arctic and Antarctica in March of this year will, if continued, lead to dramatic impacts much earlier than anticipated. The recently published IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report on resilience[3] confirms that we are critically unprepared for such shocks.

All of this is, of course, self-evident. We have written about this many times, and there is a limit to the merit of depressing people about the failure of our national government to deal with the basic security of the nation. As a result, the TCPA intends to do two positive things. We will continue to work hard within the existing system to secure the best outcomes we can, and to lobby, in partnership, for changes to law and policy. But our growing focus will be on the creation of an entirely new planning system designed to deal with the climate emergency.

This system will be based on ideas which first emerged from work carried out under the Raynsford Review of Planning in England, and centres on the re-purposing of Development Corporations to secure the necessary action in the most vulnerable regions and sub-regions of England. These areas might include vulnerable coastal communities, but there will also be a focus on the need for dramatic changes in upland land management. These new planning bodies will be ambitious, powerful, democratic and designed to deliver change rapidly and effectively. They will be able to secure everything from the promotion of community flood defences to the relocation of whole communities. They will take on board the lessons of the past in terms of new forms of effective community participation. But above all they will bolt together strategy and delivery within one corporate body.

When we put these ideas to various parts of government three years ago, we were kindly shown the door, as if we had suggested building a mushroom farm on Mars. But political and community attitudes to the climate crisis have changed dramatically, and now is the time for new thinking. The time needed to patch up our existing system or respect the chaotic and fragmented institutional arrangements that we currently have for dealing with climate impacts has run out. From the Somerset Levels to the Lincolnshire coast, from Doncaster to Carlisle, people need the certainty of an effective body which can enable communities to survive and thrive.

Over the coming months the TCPA will start an active conversation about this new approach, with the aim of developing a draft prospectus for new legislation. This prospectus will provide the details of how the new Development Corporations will be designed and run and where they will be designated. We will need all the help and experience we can muster, not least because strategic planning is now a dying art form. But within 24 months, ready for the next election, the TCPA will have created a new planning system, the adoption of which will be the foundation of our national economic and social survival.

● **Dr Hugh Ellis** is Policy Director and **Jessie Fieth** is a Projects and Policy Manager at the TCPA. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

1 *The Climate Crisis — A Guide for Local Authorities on Planning for Climate Change.* TCPA and Royal Town Planning Institute. TCPA, Oct. 2021. www.tcpa.org.uk/planning-for-climate-change

2 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom.* Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, , Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

3 *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability.* Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Feb. 2022. www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/

snakes & ladders

Sue Brownill looks at the lessons offered by an exhibition on community-led planning in Southwark and Lambeth, and at why the histories of such action should not be lost

learning from SE1 stories

In November 2021, I went along to Morley College in London to see an exhibition called 'SE1 Stories', which was put together by people who had been involved in community planning and community action in the SE1 area of London in the 1970s and 1980s. The exhibition featured photos, copies of the community-produced *SE1* newspaper, maps, plans, posters, booklets and personal accounts documenting community campaigns on poor housing, planning battles, and other issues in the area.

The exhibition toured a number of venues in the area in the autumn of 2021, and some of its elements can be seen online, at https://se1stories.uk. The organising group is planning to put it on at other venues over the spring and summer of this year (see Box 1, below), but in the meantime I spoke to some of the people involved, including Andy Benson, Steve Barran, and Jane Matheson, to get a sense of what lessons can be learnt for today from this history, and to get their top tips for other groups who might be thinking of embarking on a similar project.

What does the exhibition cover?

The exhibition covers the story of the organisation of community action, largely in the 1970s and 1980s, in North Southwark and North Lambeth. It charts the coming together of local residents, activists, some local politicians and trades unionists, and the efforts and resources that were used to try to bring about what local people wanted to see in the area—documenting campaigns and actions such as the

setting up of tenants associations, struggles against rogue private landlords, and direct action events demanding decent housing in the area. It looks at the work of community planning groups such as the North Southwark Community Development Group, the Waterloo Action Group and the Coin Street Action Group in response to major development proposals, and at the alternative ideas that they put forward. And it covers the *SE1* community newspaper, which provided information on what was going on and how groups could organise around these issues, and the Blackfriars Photography Project, a community darkroom resource that supported the visual communication and documentary needs of many of these organisations.

Speaking at the opening of the Morley College event, Andy Benson said:

'Basically, this is really all about opposition and resistance. You know, people who were fed up with being disrespected and ignored and local leaders who, with intelligence and commitment, were able to inspire.'

Why hold the exhibition?

The SE1 Stories project was sparked by one of the photographers who had worked in the area and was putting together her own archive and contacted others involved as she tracked down photos and negatives. Many were just contact sheets, and most were unlabelled.

Gradually, a group of about 10 people who had been involved in the groups and campaigns at the time (many of whom had stayed in touch even though some had moved out of the area) met (pre-Covid) at Southwark Library to try to sort out what to do with the photos. 'And we realised that that group of us could soon be dead or demented, and nobody would know what these photographs were about,' said Steve Barran. Initially, the group got together to identify

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Box 1

The SE1 Stories exhibition

The SE1 Stories group is putting on the exhibition in a variety of places in London in April-July 2022. Details can be found on the SE1 website, at **https://se1stories.uk/**

BLACKFRIARS SE1 IN THE 1970s

COMMUNITY ACTION IN A LONDON NEIGHBOURHOOD

The 1970s and 80s was an extraordinary period of **community action** in Blackfriars, Waterloo and North Southwark along London's South Bank. With so many SE1 stories to be told, this exhibition focuses on the Blackfriars Road area. It receives funding through Southwark Council's Blackfriars Stories initiative.

Launch of the tenants' association at the Peabody Blackfriars Road estate was a typically lively affair.
Photo by Paul Carter / Blackfriars Photography Project

The Fight For Fair Conditions

Community workers and volunteers worked alongside community leaders and local residents campaigning for better housing and social conditions. The area housed many people in overcrowded and inadequate accommodation. A lack of open space, community facilities, essential shops and poor school buildings added to the general feeling of neglect. With the docks moved downstream and many long established local industries closed, large amounts of land became available, opening up a fierce debate over what should replace these former uses.

Part of one of the display panels from the SE1 Stories exhibition
Source: SE1 Stories

and label the photographs, but they also felt that there was a wider story to be told about community organising at that time, helped by other archives such as those of the *SE1* community newspaper.

The group acknowledge that their work was not in itself unique: 'At the time in the 1970s there were loads of people around the country' engaged in similar activities—which is why they thought it was even more important that these histories should be celebrated, captured and shared to bring others into the debate about their legacies and continuing resonance. Also important for members like Steve was the desire to document *how* things were done—for example, the role of the *SE1* newspaper in spreading information, initiating debate in the area, and passing on organisational and campaigning skills; and the alliances built between activists, politicians, trade unions, and others.

How was the exhibition put together?

The group managed to get a small amount of funding from Southwark Council, linked to a project centred around the Blackfriars area. This funding was crucial, but limited the area that they could cover to a few blocks either side of Blackfriars Road—meaning that the North Lambeth (Coin Street) stories could not be included in the same depth. With the help of a knowledgeable archivist, the group began work at Southwark Archives, trying to label the myriad of photos, moving their activities

onto Zoom during Covid-19 lockdown. They also drew on material kept in people's lofts and lock-ups, which included minutes of meetings and copies of the *SE1* newspaper.

The group decided to put on an exhibition which could tour locally to tell the story to a wider audience, and obtained help from an architectural practice run by the son of one of the original group in designing the exhibition panels and the stands.

The exhibition toured four venues in the SE1 area in autumn 2021, with launch meetings and the comments book capturing reactions and further memories. Short booklets on particular campaigns and issues were also produced 'because we wanted some of the words not to get completely lost themselves—even though we know how powerful images can be'. And those words give the context of what was happening in the area and the community's responses, as well as the personal experiences of the people involved. Finally, the group set up a website which summarises the history of the area and includes some of the information from the exhibition. More about how all this was done is included in the 'top tips' section below.

What lessons can we draw?

For Steve some of the key lessons are about campaigning and method: 'It's no good just saying we don't want it. Both in North Southwark and North Lambeth success was achieved, where it was

achieved, by being positive rather than negative.' The gaining of planning permission for a community-led scheme at one of the Coin Street inquiries is one such example of pursuing a positive alternative.

Another lesson relates to the role of community newspapers in informing and engaging people. Also important was the 'insiders/outsiders' tactics used, in which campaigning was combined with working with like-minded councillors and politicians to achieve the campaign's objectives. Greater London Council policies at the time, such as the Community Areas policy, not only supported groups but diverted resources towards them, 'and not just into ephemeral things like groups of people, but into community capital investment in community halls; physical facilities that had a chance of lasting longer than people's energy sometimes'.

Also of significance was the mood of the time. Some talk of the 'hope and optimism'; a feeling that, even if battles were lost, there was still energy, conviviality and inspiration gained through working with like-minded people and getting arguments and alternatives across — which enabled them to undertake the huge amount of work they did. Jane Matheson recalls enriching relationships developing between the local community leaders and the group: 'It was a person-to-person relationship. And it was collective action.'

But some of those involved also commented on how things are different now, with austerity governance and cuts to voluntary groups:

'There was an enormous number of different organisations. Sadly, you know, very often they don't exist any more.'

'We've seen power move from local to national to global, and that makes a real problem for people who want to be involved in political activism. In the 1970s it was difficult but at least we were able to get to the local authority.'

The 'dismantling' of the 1947 planning system is a further factor: 'The control that members in Southwark had in the 1970s over planning issues has been taken away and largely has been given to developers.' And this raises questions about the types of tactics needed now and where hope and optimism can come from. Jane also noted how most of the members of the group in the 1970s were able to take part in community activism as they were either on social security or had part-time jobs. They admit that they were somewhat inexperienced, but they were enthusiastic, hard-working, and learned on the job. Young people are not able to take this path now.

A final lesson lies in the way that the exhibition brought the story of community action to people who live in the area now, particularly those who came to the area after the events concerned. This is underlined by some of the entries in the comments book:

'Brilliant display. So much for my generation (20s) to learn.'

'A revelation to me of how wide ranging the problems were with derelict sites and appalling housing conditions. More relevant lessons now than ever.'

'The only sad thing is that the struggle continues, but well done to the activists of the 1970s and 1980s'.

'Interesting glimpse of the more 'hidden' side of London and the struggle of ordinary people.'

'So! What has changed in 40 years? Not much really.'

What are the top tips for other community groups?

'The first tip I would give is: don't trust your memory,' says Steve Barran. The names of people in photos — even the dates of key events — fade. Having a pool of people helps here, as well as having documentary evidence. The group were helped by some people who kept documents, minutes, etc., and also by comments from those who attended and wrote in the comments book. Jane Matheson recommends documenting and dating things at the time!

This links with another point, about widening the input 'beyond the people who might want to put together a bit of local planning history or local community activity history, to try to reach out as far as possible to other people who are not part of the group'. This is why the group focused on an exhibition and the comments book.

Even so, one reflection and a point noted at the launch was that the exhibition group were mainly men. Back in the 1970s the team was a mix of young women and men, and decisions were made collectively at meetings. Unfortunately, few women were involved in developing the exhibition — but one woman with whom the group had lost contact heard of and visited the exhibition, and it turned out that she lived and was active nearby.

Another tip from Jane is to use a variety of communication techniques and venues. The exhibition has moved around four venues so far — all of which have been very different and helped to reach different audiences. Starting at Blackfriars Settlement, it

reached many older people, some of whom had lived in the area all their lives, plus some younger people who recognised their friends. The Oxo Gallery provided more of a chance experience, with casual passers-by and local people on their riverside stroll dropping in, along with those drawn in by a related tweet. Naturally, social media has been essential in attracting people to see the exhibition.

However, the group still sees a need for posters and neighbourhood leafleting (as in the past) to reach those who do not engage in social media. The act of leafleting on estates or outside a local school also generated conversations.

Obtaining funding was difficult, but important. For SE1 Stories, a grant from Southwark Council linked to the Blackfriars area covered the material costs, but 'there's actually quite a lot of labour or money in-kind that needs to go into making it physically happen'. This includes the designing of the exhibition, and physically moving it around. A practical tip from Jane is that, while working with the designers, the group tried to ensure that the structures would be light enough to carry, yet safe and strong enough to withstand movement between venues.

The group also drew up a rota for the attendance of group members at the exhibition, which proved to be a positive aspect, leading to many exciting and exhilarating discussions with viewers and reinforcing for the group the very point of putting on the exhibition. Having a member of the group present was useful in encouraging people to contribute comments in the book or through the website. In time, the group plans to link up with contacts made to enrich the narrative, with the potential to develop an oral history strand.

Another issue is getting permissions for photos and for including images of people, particularly if they are going on the internet. The group found this process time-consuming. Some photos could not be used because of copyright issues, while others (where the original photographer could not be traced) could be used (legally) only in the exhibition, and not the website. But the difficulties were also offset by the conviviality and the shared memories. Members of the group commented on the realisation that in their future careers and in other places many had carried on with the same values and principles. There was 'astonishment at the amount of energy and stamina we had at the time', and some reflection on the fact that 'we thought we were going to change the world'. Many had not met for 45 years, 'so it could have been a kind of mystery/ disaster, but actually it was a fantastic experience'.

Reflecting on the exhibition, one participant at the Morley College event commented:
'Opposition and resistance is still needed. In fact, if anything it is needed more now than it was in the past.'

'As the baton passes to younger generations organising responses to pressing problems such as poverty and the climate emergency, exhibitions and stories like this have the potential to spark more hope and optimism, along with a dialogue between past and present about how to meet such challenges'

As the baton passes to younger generations organising responses to pressing problems such as poverty and the climate emergency, exhibitions and stories like this have the potential to spark more hope and optimism, along with a dialogue between past and present about how to meet such challenges. As one of the entries in the comments book says, 'It's a great reminder that there is hope; people working together can change things.'

● *Professor Sue Brownill is with the School of the Built Environment at Oxford Brookes University, and is Principal Investigator in the People's Plans project. The views expressed are personal.*

People's Plans

If you are inspired by this story, People's Plans, a research group involving a number of universities, is putting together a history of community-led planning and would love to hear from you — see the project website, at **www.peoplesplans.org/plans/**, for details and contact information.

bird's eye view

If the aspirations of the Levelling Up White Paper are to be delivered, the government will need to think about spatial planning as a positive tool for change, says **Catriona Riddell**

levelling up or dumbing down? that is the question

The government has finally published its flagship White Paper on 'levelling up' the country, which aims to address quality of life challenges in both 'left behind' and 'steaming ahead' places.[1] Although there is a lot to digest in a document which spans almost 300 pages, a large chunk is dedicated to a history lesson on past national (and regional) socio-economic policy, and particularly its failures. But it does include some analysis of what is needed to at least give a new approach a fighting chance of success.

So what are the headlines, and what part is planning and place-shaping more generally expected to play? Although there are a lot of words (and a lot of repetition) in the document, the main planks can be distilled as follows:

- The introduction of a **systems approach** to national policies and investment priorities, recognising that the quality of places is influenced by a wide range of factors (referred to in the White Paper as 'capitals') and that spatial considerations must be 'hard-wired' into all decisions.
- The need to **manage change over the long term** (25 years or more), recognising that the ambition to transform large parts of the country will take time to achieve, as well as requiring continuity and stability in public policy and investment interventions.
- The need to support **stronger local leadership** with more direct accountability, recognising that each place has different challenges and will therefore require a different response, but will also need robust decision-making with clear measurable outcomes.
- **New relationships and partnerships**, especially between tiers of government, between local authorities and stakeholders, and between the public and private sectors.

The overarching component of the government's strategy for levelling up is a new integrated 'systems' approach, with six interlinked drivers (capitals) to be applied to national policies and investment priorities.[2]

This is based on the conclusion that, in order to encourage flourishing communities and address socio-economic disparities, a number of factors need to be taken into account — and that, while each is important in its own right, the real value is in considering them in combination. This approach is to be supported by the promise of a commensurate re-wiring of the way that government departments operate, to improve co-ordination and end the current 'silo' mentality across Whitehall.

Although there is very little new money promised in the White Paper, government funding pots are to be streamlined, with a re-appraisal of how they are allocated.[3] Provided the Treasury falls into line with this new approach in terms of the government's overall investment strategy, this will be good news for the Midlands and the North. But it will also potentially be bad news for other parts of the country, especially London and the South East, which have relied on a significant injection of public funding to help address land viability issues and to deliver strategic infrastructure.

Although we are yet to see the promised planning reforms,[4] it is implied that London and the South East will be compensated for the loss of government funding by a rethink on how housing targets are set through the local planning process, to help reduce the pressures on land, and particularly on greenfield (Green Belt) land. These areas will still need to grow, however, and will continue to rely on some level of public funding. The overall approach will therefore require a different model of fiscal interventions locally to support growth in these areas in future, which will have to include more private sector funding and more public-private partnerships. As a consequence, it will also require more certainty in local planning and stability in local decision-making to provide the level of investor confidence that is going to be needed.

As part of the new systems approach to national policy, spatial considerations are to be 'hard-wired' into all government decisions to ensure that they align with the priority being given to 'levelling up' places:

*'A **well-directed spatial strategy** [emphasis added] would address two market failures at source — the first affecting left-behind places, the second afflicting well-performing places. By correcting these market failures, potential opportunities and growth are unleashed in places*
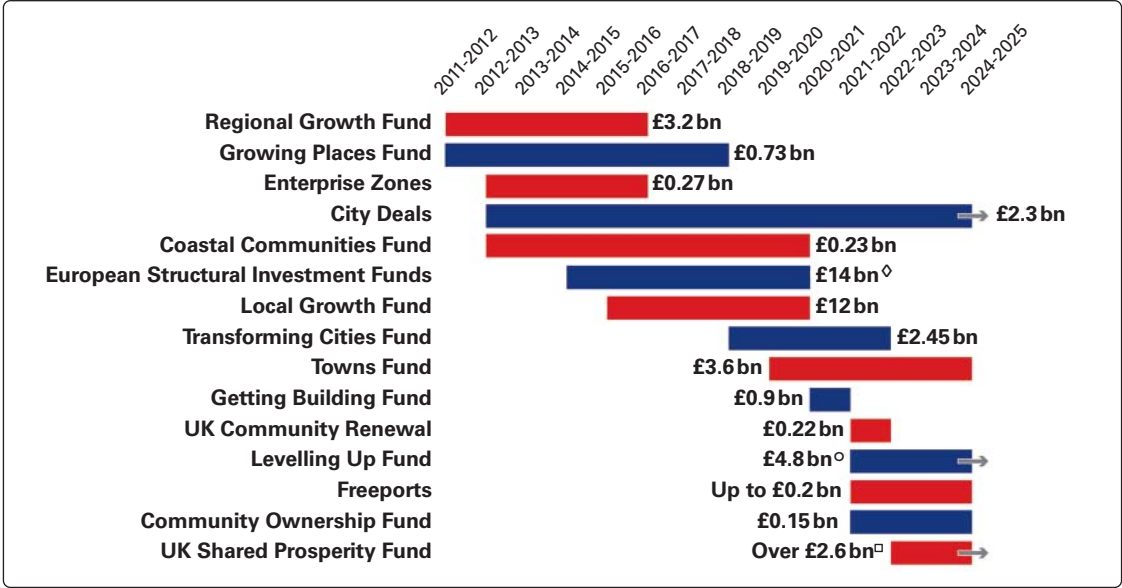
Local growth funding pots introduced in the UK since 2011-2012

◊ Using an exchange rate of £1 = €1.18. This exchange rate was used in the October 2021 Spending Review calculations used by HMT
○ Of which £0.3 billion comes from Towns Fund
□ Of which £1.5 billion in 2024/25

Source: Levelling Up the United Kingdom,[1] p.127

afflicted by these market failures. In other words, by addressing place-based market failures, place-based strategies can grow the pie. They are about unleashing opportunity and boosting allocative efficiency, not redistribution between places per se. That is the essence of levelling up.'[5]

This is good news on the face of it; but why then does spatial 'planning' get only one reference in the whole document—and that within the context of digitising the planning system? And why is planning as an activity more generally confined to just over a page in the whole document?

The need for a systems approach to strategic planning, which aligns spatial, economic, social and environmental policies[6] and priorities around 'places', was identified in my recent *Future of Strategic Planning in England* report,[7] produced with the County Councils Network, as an essential component of managing sustainable growth. If the government is serious about a place-based approach to levelling up, spatial planning—and specifically spatial planning at the strategic scale—will be essential, and the relative silence on it within the White Paper represents both a missed opportunity and a significant weakness in the overall approach.

Reading between the lines, this reflects a general lack of understanding at government level about

what strategic planning is, as well as concerns that any new formal approach will be seen as a return to regional planning, which was abolished with considerable fanfare as part of the coalition government's planning reforms after the 2010 election:

'This government is committed to localism and greater local decision-making in planning. The flawed top-down targets of regional planning, centrally imposing development upon communities, built nothing but resentment. They will hang over communities no more.'[8]

However, contrary to many misconceptions, strategic planning is not local planning on a larger scale, neither does it have to be managed on the basis of a regional geography. It provides a long-term spatial investment framework which aligns the different factors that impact on quality of life. It is also usually better managed at the sub-regional level, which is big enough to implement national policies effectively but small enough to also reflect local circumstances and context.

That said, strategic planning at the regional level has played a significant part in implementing national socio-economic policy for decades. Between the mid-1960s and 2011 it was one of the main tools for giving effect to national policy, and it has

played a vital role in ensuring that national growth ambitions can be delivered on the ground.[9] It was the 'ringmaster' of levelling up! Key in all previous iterations was the role that a clearly articulated vision played and the strong links between the overarching vision, its strategy, and its delivery. While the White Paper acknowledges (on page 101) that the 'most successful interventions have been rooted in a clear and common vision, shared among key stakeholders', the value of a strong vision as part of the implementation programme is referred to only in the context of planning at the neighbourhood level.

'**Although the government is advocating a systems approach at the national level, with spatial considerations hard-wired into all policy and investment decisions, this fundamental requirement for levelling up does not flow down to the local level and therefore into a key strand of its implementation**'

A new vision-led strategic 'spatial' investment framework for each area will be essential both in setting the priorities locally in an integrated way and in the interventions used to support delivery. For this to happen, however, the government must move away from the polarised view that strategic planning can be managed only at a regional level and look much more closely at how it could be incorporated into its proposals for expanding devolution, another key plank of the overall approach to levelling up:

'Levelling up requires effective and coherent local institutions with responsibilities defined across appropriate strategic geographies. It also requires adequate capacity and strong leadership to make effective decisions. At present, there is a patchwork of local administrative bodies across the UK, which often overlap and are complicated to navigate. This can inhibit the cultivation of local capacity and leadership.' [10]

Real transformation of an area takes time and will never be realised if public policy and other interventions constantly change, with knock-on impacts on investor confidence. The White Paper acknowledges that more stability in implementation,

strong political leadership, more public-private partnership and investment in the right skills and capabilities will all be needed at the local level. Its main solution is to provide stronger and more stable local leadership by expanding the scope of devolution both through existing (and some new) mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) around the core cities, and also through new 'County Deals', recognising that over 80% of England lies outside the main metropolitan areas and core cities.

Devolution is to be guided by a new framework which sets out a list of potential functions and is underpinned by four principles: effective leadership, sensible geography (with a combined population of 500,00 or more), flexibility, and appropriate accountability. The specific roles and responsibilities awarded to each area will depend on the model of governance agreed, with three currently on offer:[11]

● *Level 3*—a single institution or county council with a directly elected mayor (DEM), across a functional economic area (FEA) or whole county area;

● *Level 2*—a single institution or county council without a DEM, across an FEA or whole county area; and

● *Level 1*—local authorities working together across an FEA or whole county area (for example through a joint committee).

And here is the sting in the tail: although the government is advocating a systems approach at the national level, with spatial considerations hard-wired into all policy and investment decisions, this fundamental requirement for levelling up does not flow down to the local level and therefore into a key strand of its implementation. Spatial planning, and specifically strategic spatial planning, provides a place-based investment framework with a shared vision at its heart, within which all the key components to support levelling up (the capitals) can be co-ordinated. Yet planning is not mentioned in the devolution framework, despite the clear reference to this being about 'shaping the places where we live, work and travel'.[12]

Again, reading between the lines, this suggests more a misunderstanding about the purpose of spatial planning (as well as reflecting current politics within local government around the threat of re-organisation) than a misunderstanding of how planning could operate within the prism of levelling up and specifically devolution. Since the introduction of the new local planning regime in 2011/12, the focus has been on housing delivery, resulting in it being put into a reactive, regulatory box by the government (and, sadly, also by many in local
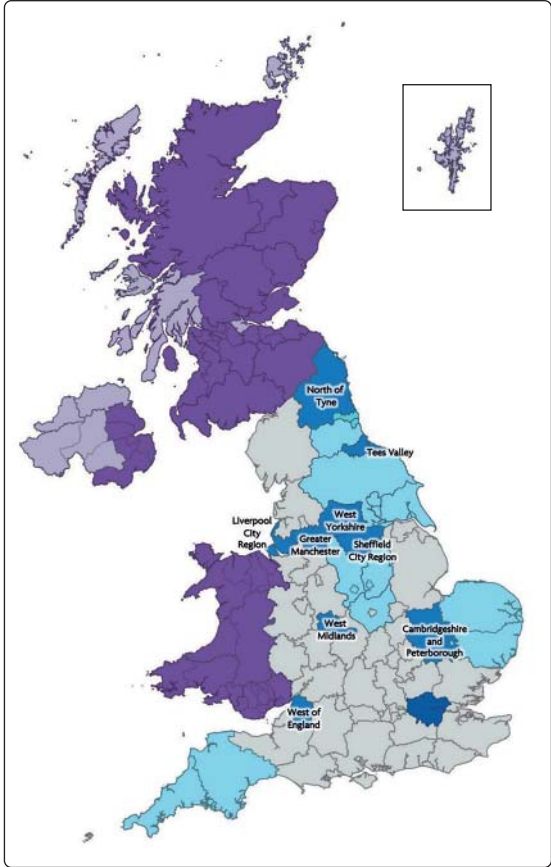
Devolution Deals and City and Growth Deals

- ■ Signed City and Growth Deals
- ■ Planned City and Growth Deals
- ■ Mayoral combined authorities
- ■ Greater London Authority
- ■ Proposed Devolution Deals
- ■ Proposed expanded mayoral combined authority
- ■ Counties and unitaries

Source: Levelling Up the United Kingdom,[1] p.134

government). Its wider and much more proactive and positive role in supporting good place-making is therefore not acknowledged in the White Paper generally, nor specifically in the devolution framework.

Although this may in part be due to a genuine oversight and the fact that the planning system is separately being reformed, it is not helped by the fact that, while district councils in two-tier areas are encouraged to play a part in County Deals, they are not *required* to be involved, nor can they veto any potential deal. As they are the local planning authorities in two-tier areas, any reference to planning could be divisive and conceived as a power bid by the relevant county council. For levelling up

to work, however, planning must be part of the solution, and, for it to work within the context of devolution, spatial investment frameworks at the strategic scale (i.e. strategic planning) must be a requirement of all existing and potential deals.

And this should apply equally to existing MCAs as much as to new MCAs and County Deals. The West Midlands MCA,[13] for example, has significant regeneration powers and funding within its control to address a wide range of things that impact on the quality of place, yet it has no spatial planning functions. So while the MCA can directly control some major long-term investment priorities within the area, it cannot directly influence the long-term spatial strategy, nor, specifically, ensure that the long-term economic, social and environment priorities are fully aligned with spatial priorities. This fundamental gap in responsibilities and the seriously fragmented governance arrangements across the MCA area are likely to make the job of levelling up in this priority part of the country less successful—or at least much harder.

Devolution will also require a new relationship between central and local government. The silo culture within Whitehall departments and the disjoint between tiers of government have arguably been exacerbated by the abolition of the government's regional offices in 2010. The nine regional Government Offices (GOs) were established by the Conservative government in 1994 to act as the local representatives of several government departments, implementing national policy at the local level and managing the spending programmes of the sponsoring departments. They also acted as the conduit between central government, the main regional bodies (Regional Development Agencies and Regional Planning Bodies), and local authorities within each region.

While there is no proposal to return to this model, a number of new 'Levelling Up Directors' will be recruited to act as the interface between local and central government and to provide oversight in terms of national levelling-up policy around each place. The success of this approach will obviously depend on the people that fill the roles—but also on whether they are genuinely there to support local implementation of levelling up and ensure the full co-operation and support of government departments. To do this effectively, their allegiance will have to be divided between both tiers of government.

A key function will be how they manage the government agencies within this model. Although there is some reference in the White Paper to Homes England and its new, expanded regeneration role, there are no references to Natural England, the Environment Agency, or National Highways.
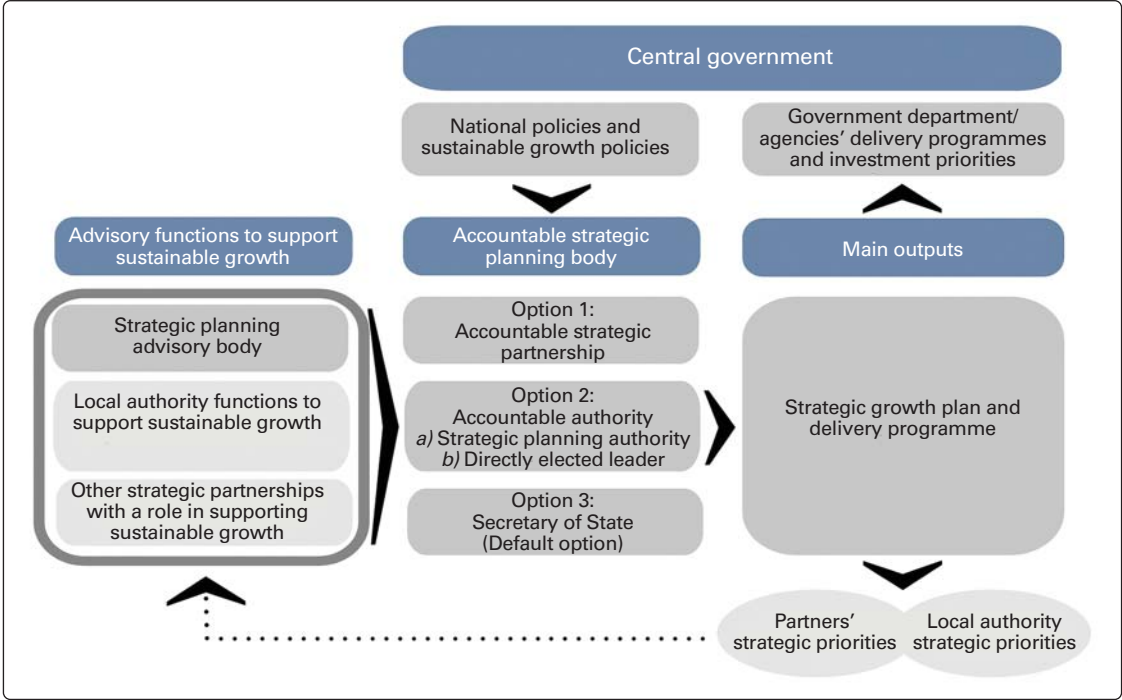
A new model for strategic planning
Source: The Future of Strategic Planning in England[7]

All of these bodies will have a major role to play in levelling up the country, especially in terms of the location of development. It is therefore vital that there is much better co-ordination between government delivery agencies and their host departments. It is also vital that their respective policies and investment priorities are aligned horizontally across government, as well as vertically from national to local level.

And finally, the White Paper is a national policy document setting out a strategy for the whole of the UK, and the sum of its parts must therefore add up to a whole. But, as with the Planning White Paper,[14] the programme of action to level up the country reads as a disparate number of interventions and not as a coherent framework for how we live, work, and move around. It also does not provide a clear road map to intended outcomes in terms of the economy, connectivity, and health and wellbeing — and for how we are to address the serious challenges that we face on climate change.

Unlike Wales and Scotland, England does not have a national spatial framework — despite the very credible case presented by the TCPA's Raynsford Review[15] and the UK2070 Commission,[16] and many others, for a high-level framework within which strategic and local policy and investment interventions could be managed. This could provide clarity on what

areas are considered 'left behind' and what areas are considered to be 'steaming ahead', and therefore on what this means in relation to critical issues such as the spatial distribution of growth (especially housing numbers) and government funding priorities. The alternative is more comprehensive coverage of devolved authorities or, at the very least, strategic spatial frameworks for all parts of England, whether within the confines of devolution or not.

A new and effective approach to strategic planning could be a significant asset to the overall strategy on levelling up, and it is vital that this is considered now, given that the government has already signalled its intention to replace the current mechanism for strategic planning, the duty to co-operate.[17] The model put forward in the *Future of Strategic Planning in England* report[7] (see the diagram above) is not the only solution, but, with a little refinement, it is a credible one. Vitally, it could, in part, be implemented straight away, giving an immediate 'leg-up' to the government's levelling-up implementation programme.

There is also a lot of synergy with the White Paper's analysis of the current problems in supporting sustainable growth, as well as some agreement in the solutions presented, especially between the governance options put forward for devolution in the White Paper and those for 'accountable strategic

planning bodies' set out in the *Future of Strategic Planning in England* report.

Moreover, this model would fill a gap in the current planning system, not redistribute any power base, and therefore should dimminish any district concerns about a 'county takeover'. It would also provide a way forward for comprehensive coverage which would add up to 'the whole' in the absence of a national spatial framework for England. This will be vital to ensure that the overall approach taken, especially the redistribution of investment, is not at the expense of supporting either the key national economic role that places in the South East will continue to play or London's role as a leading 'world city'.

There are still so many questions about how the White Paper proposals will all work in practice, especially on the role that the planning system is expected to play — which we will not know until we see the next iteration of the proposed planning reforms. It will also take a long time before the infrastructure for delivery is put in place, not least the new governance arrangements, the change in culture and values needed within government to support an integrated 'systems' approach, and the streamlined approach to fiscal interventions. There is no doubt that a systems approach to levelling up places is going to be challenging, but it will be even more challenging if the approach does not maximise the benefits of planning, and specifically the 'ringmaster' role of strategic planning. But for this to happen, the government needs to start thinking about spatial planning differently, and as a positive tool for change. Get this right, and there is a fighting chance of success.

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Notes

1   *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*. Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

2   The six 'capitals' to be applied (set out in Section 1.3.1, pages 42-44 of the White Paper) are 'physical capital' (infrastructure, machines, and housing); 'human capital' (the skills, health and experience of the workforce); 'intangible capital' (innovation, ideas, and patents); 'financial capital' (resources supporting the financing of companies); 'social capital' (the strength of communities, relationships, and trust); and 'institutional capital' (local leadership, capacity, and capability

3   This will partly be managed through the recent review of the Green Book appraisal process which has already been implemented (see page 123 of the White Paper)

4   The government's Chief Planner has indicated that the next iteration of proposed planning reforms will be

published in spring 2022 and this 'will provide further detail on how we will take forward measures to create a modernised and effective planning system that empowers communities to support, and local authorities to deliver, the beautiful, environmentally-friendly development this country needs' — see *Message from the Chief Planner*. Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, Feb. 2022. https://tinyurl.com/22b3vwaz

5   *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* (see note 1), p.96

6   Although there are references throughout the document to the environment in the context of levelling up, the six capitals referred to as part of the new place-based approach do not include *natural* capital

7   *The Future of Strategic Planning in England: Effective Decision-Making and Robust Governance*. Catriona Riddell Associates/County Councils Network, Dec. 2021. See 'Report calls for a new planning model, as two thirds of councils say the pressure on their infrastructure is 'excessive' due to housing'. News Story, County Councils Network, 8 Dec. 2021. https://tinyurl.com/5thu9b5d (including link to the report itself)

8   The then Communities and Local Government Secretary, Eric Pickles, quoted in 'New step for localism as every regional plan has gone'. Press Release. Department for Communities and Local Government, 27 Mar. 2012. www.gov.uk/government/news/new-step-for-localism-as-every-regional-plan-has-gone

9   An integrated approach to regional policy was a key part of successive governments' national economic policy between the mid-1960s and 2011 when the coalition government abolished it through the Localism Act 2011 (Regional Economic and Planning Councils and Boards from the mid-1960s to 1979; Regional Planning Guidance between the mid-1980s and 2004; and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies from 2004 to 2011)

10 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* (see note 1), p.133

11 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* (see note 1), Table 2.3, p.140

12 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* (see note 1), p.141

13 See the West Midland Combined Authority website, at https://beta.wmca.org.uk/who-we-are/?_ga=2.105660227.1513250901.1644849640-1751731980.1631628589 The seven West Midlands metropolitan authorities have full voting rights, and ten other district and county councils within the West Midlands and three Local Enterprise Partnerships have reduced voting rights

14 *Planning for the Future*. Planning White Paper. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Aug. 2020. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future

15 *Planning 2020 — Final Report of the Raynsford Review of Planning in England*. Raynsford Review. TCPA, Nov. 2018. www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review

16 *Make No Little Plans — Acting at Scale for a Fairer and Stronger Future*. Final Report. UK2070 Commission, Feb. 2020. http://uk2070.org.uk/publications/

17 Although the government acknowledged in the 2020 Planning White Paper that the duty to co-operate has not proved to be an effective mechanism for strategic planning and proposes to replace it, there are as yet no details on what this means in practice

off the rails

Robin Hickman examines the Levelling Up White Paper and the potential for transport investment to contribute to improved social equity in the UK

levelling up, transport, and capabilities

I am not sure who first had the idea of writing government White Papers in the vacuous style of the *Daily Mail*, but the latest does this magnificently well. Now that the much-anticipated Levelling Up White Paper has appeared,[1] you should take a look, if you haven't already. The condescending London-centric tone and Brexit boosterism are extremely tedious, and the heavy rhetoric is rooted in little evidence whatsoever. The inspiration for 'levelling up' seems to be Renaissance Florence, as if this gives the secret ingredients for high urban quality and plenty amid social equity. There really should be more contemporary and relevant examples used, but perhaps they would not be so politically palatable — from Germany, France or the Netherlands, for example, where regional planning is much more consistently developed.

The cover of the White Paper uses the Union Jack as background, and the first line starts as you might expect: 'The United Kingdom is an unparalleled success story…' There is a little more realism in suggesting that 'there has been no shortage of attempts to tackle geographical disparities in the UK over the past century. These have been insufficient to close the widening gaps.' This, of course, is the difficulty, and there is little in this White Paper to suggest that levelling up is to be seen any time soon. There is much postulation and grandstanding, but little substance in the way of funding or projects. There seems to be little understanding of how difficult it is to change levels of social equity within and across different cities and regions — including how transport might be used.

The general framing of the argument is that the 'underperforming' North should aspire to be as 'successful' and 'productive' as London and the South East — with transport viewed as an important facilitator. Social equity is not defined, but is usually viewed as fair access to opportunities, livelihood, education, and resources. Hence transport should be

an important element within a levelling-up strategy. We have known that transport is important to social equity for decades, at least since the 2003 *Making the Connections* report from the Social Exclusion Unit.[2] But there are many empirical difficulties with this topic, including what level of equity is appropriate in different contexts (it is a relational term); and how transport can be supportive in the process is also not a straightforward question.

The White Paper states that 'levelling up requires a focused, long-term plan of action and a clear framework' — with which we can all agree. But national and regional spatial strategies or transport strategies are not mentioned, and without them it is difficult to pursue a systematic and consistent approach. The White Paper oddly focuses on six 'capitals' as important to social equity, derived from 'evidence from a range of disciplines' (unspecified) and experience in Renaissance Florence. These are physical capital, human capital, intangible capital (innovation), financial capital, social capital, and institutional capital. It is suggested that:

'Places with rich endowments of all six capitals benefit from a virtuous circle of agglomeration. They are home to skilled people with high quality jobs and have access to outstanding schools and globally-competitive universities. They have good roads, trains and fast internet. Residents live in fine housing. Funding is available for local businesses to invest and innovate, and communities are bound together by good relationships and a strong sense of belonging.'

Well, there is much to discuss here, including the odd dichotomy presented of London and the South East doing well and providing the model for the poor-performing rest of the country. This conveniently overlooks the varied distribution of income, wealth and transport provision in London and the South East. Not all that live in London, or perhaps even in Florence, live in fine housing, some schools are not outstanding, many businesses may struggle for funding, and communities within these cities are not all necessarily well bound together. Good roads may not be the basis of success.

The White Paper gives a very simplistic presentation, and is cynical in its motivation — offering the marginal voters in northern constituencies a few projects to

Robin Hickman

The tramway arrives in Droylsden—an initial step towards changing deep-seated social inequity across neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester. Can this level of public transport provision be replicated in low-income communities across the UK?

suggest that they are getting more priority in public policy. Renaissance Florence, from my cursory understanding, allowed an extraordinary accumulation of wealth by merchants and bankers, with political power residing with a few families, and limited wider democracy—very few even had a vote. Perhaps this is the ideal governance framework that is admired by our current national administration?

In terms of transport, the White Paper gives us, as the third in a number of 'missions': 'by 2030, local public transport connectivity across the country will be significantly closer to the standards of London, with improved services, simpler fares and integrated ticketing'. Looking beyond the tired space race 'mission' metaphor, this is a very lofty aim and, of course, left unspecified for measurement purposes. A public transport system akin to London's will be very difficult to achieve in Blackpool, Doncaster, Hastings, Manchester and Plymouth, and many other places, without huge investments in very depleted urban, regional and rural transport networks.

Meanwhile, the White Paper offers little in terms of transport funding. The very short list of transport projects includes the £96 billion Integrated Rail Plan (the widely derided partial funding of the wider Northern Way proposals), £24 billion on motorways and strategic highways (oh dear!), £5.7 billion in City Region Sustainable Transport Settlements, and £5 billion for buses, cycling and walking networks. These, as we all know, are projects released previously, which represent only a marginal proportion of the funding required to improve transport systems. The Road Investment Strategy will only lead to great environmental problems (through increased traffic and carbon dioxide emissions) and social

equity problems (people will be 'forced' to use cars, as there are few alternatives in place, and spend high levels of household budgets on this form of travel). Add in some token funding for buses and cycling—and we really have little of substance.

In reality, very extensive investment in high-quality public transport systems (regional and suburban rail, tramways, and buses) and walking and cycling is needed across multiple urban areas and regions, representing radically upgraded transport systems. This is a fundamental task that will take consistent investment over decades and over a much wider spatial scale, far beyond the oddly chosen rhetoric and the handful of projects given.

The government needs some help here—to carefully think about what social equity might mean in different cities and regions and about what transport strategies might be useful. Social equity is multi-dimensional and the solutions are likely to be fairly complex—much more than suggested in the White Paper. A much more interesting conceptualisation would be to think about transport investment and how this might relate to activity participation, including issues of appropriation; i.e. some people take up the new accessibility on offer, and others don't, for many reasons. Recent research on transport and social equity has drawn upon the 'capabilities approach'[3] to distinguish between the following concepts:

- *Capabilities:* The alternative combinations of doings and beings that can feasibly be achieved, i.e. the real opportunities for people to do and to be.
- *Functionings:* The various things a person may value doing and being, with the realised functionings representing what a person actually achieves and how.

In transport, this helps us to differentiate between the theoretical opportunities available to individuals (perhaps related to new infrastructure provision, and relative to what a person may value and wish to do), and what they actually do. Hence, travel and activity participation are directly related to infrastructure provision, including the availability of public transport, but are also reliant on and modified by other 'conversion factors'. These include the governance and cost of public transport, the shape of the built environment, the cultural context and social norms, individual characteristics, and wider factors. All of these will influence how well new public transport, walking and cycling facilities are used.

Let's look at just two of these issues, with particular illustrations from Greater Manchester. Bus provision is deregulated across England, Scotland and Wales, with the exception of London, as a 36-year-old experiment and paean to the supposed efficiency of the private sector. It was promised that this framework would give a much more efficient delivery of bus services. But we can all see that it leads to private operators shaping their delivery to extract maximum income relative to limited investment. It leads to a focus on profitable routes and schedules and the use of old, polluting buses, ignoring everything else that might be possible. Single operators concentrating on specific routes have actually led to higher fares.

> **'There is some heavy rhetoric, but few projects to actually improve public transport within and across multiple urban areas'**

Greater Manchester is seeking to move away from this model and use a bus franchise system, akin to that remaining in London, to gain control of the bus system in the region. Let's hope that this is successful, as services can then be more effectively planned, using integrated schedules, and low fares can be maintained and vehicle standards improved. This framework can then be replicated across wider urban areas and regions, to help shape much more extensive, affordable and cleaner bus systems. The governance framework for public transport delivery is not mentioned in the White Paper, but it is very important for better public transport provision.

The cost of travel is also critical to individuals wishing to use new public transport projects. Let's imagine that we live in Droylsden, to the east of Manchester, and wish to work in Manchester city centre. The cost of a single Metrolink ticket for zones 1-3 is £3.80, a day travelcard is £6.10, and an annual travelcard is £967.00. Let's say that we wish to work in Leeds — an annual Manchester–Leeds travelcard ticket is £2,744.00. All of these prices, particularly for the rail tickets, are very prohibitive and mean that even a Metrolink route, or a new rail service, are unaffordable for many. The wages on offer will not be enough to cover the travel costs.

So, instead, we may have to rely on non-existent cycle routes, or walk, or work locally in Droylsden, or not at all. Again, there is no discussion of this component of transport-related social inclusion in the White Paper, but cost is one of the important wider conversion factors that can help people to use the public transport infrastructure that might be provided.

The Levelling Up White Paper is hence unlikely to make much difference — it is another government initiative to be forgotten within a year. There is some heavy rhetoric, but few projects to actually improve public transport within and across multiple urban areas. There is little understanding of the deep-seated inequities in many areas; the role that extensive investment in public transport, walking and cycling, across multiple urban areas, can play; and the wider conversion factors that are required to improve the level of realised functionings. Let's look to cities in Germany, France or the Netherlands for better practice in transport planning — this is where the serious efforts are being made to use transport investment to improve social equity.

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Notes

1 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*. Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

2 *Making the Connections: Final Report on Transport and Social Exclusion*. Social Exclusion Unit, Feb. 2003. Available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_policy/---invest/documents/publication/wcms_asist_8210.pdf

3 See A Sen: *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, 1999; and R Hickman, M Cao, B Mella Llra, A Fillone, J Biona and N Lopez: 'Understanding capabilities, functionings and travel in high and low income neighbourhoods in Manila'. *Social Inclusion*, 2017, Vol. 5 (4), 161–74. www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion/article/view/1083/1083

off the fence

For those whose lives are stuck in a bad way, the Levelling Up White Paper is full of wonderful prospects; the issue now is delivery, says David Lock

on levelling up

On 2 February 2022 the recently appointed Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (formerly known as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government), the Rt Hon. Michael Gove, published the 297-page White Paper *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*.[1] Readers will know that White Papers are meant to lead to legislation quite soon. This column is not a substitute for reading this excellent White Paper, but just an opinionated taster. Unlike the dramatic planning reform White Paper of August 2020,[2] this is one to be taken seriously.

There is a typically hyperbolic foreword by Prime Minister Johnson in the manner of an exciting short conference speech at first read; an obviously exaggerated and overblown statement at second. 'From day one,' says Johnson, 'the defining mission of this government has been to level up this country.' By 'this government' he means his latest one of December 2019, when the 'red wall' of safe Labour constituencies in 'the North' turned Conservative blue and earned him a majority of 80. This White Paper, he says, is 'the crucial first step […] The most comprehensive, ambitious plan of its kind that this country has ever seen.' Only if the country had never seen the Labour manifesto that led to Clem Attlee's government of 1945!

Then there is a foreword written jointly by Secretary of State Michael Gove and the fresh-thinking economist Andrew Haldane,[3] who is the new Head of a Levelling Up Taskforce. They are surprisingly revolutionary (even Maoist) in tone, although the word 'mission' is over-used. It would take many decades and radical change to achieve the happy, healthy, rich, enterprising, productive, innovative, creative, outward-looking, world-leading, multicultural modern version of Renaissance Florence (which time and place is their lodestone). It is really exciting — reading like a first outline of a manifesto for a new social democratic party — but we

have been made undeliverable promises so often that the drag of cynicism is the elephant in the room.

Understanding what we've got

The first 103 pages of the White Paper are an illustrated lecture on the geography of disparities, including riveting sections on economic growth theory, new economic geography, social geography, and infrastructure. The hand of Haldane here no doubt, but too many footnotes refer to American academic texts to which readers may not have ready access.

'Future structural factors' driving the UK's economy are identified. We are then introduced to the 'six capitals' to be used as the framework for evaluating geographical disparities (and therefore the progress being made in bringing about change): physical, intangible, social, institutional, financial, and human capital. There are many maps and charts to show broad patterns of subject matter, but none are easy to interrogate. The UK is too big usefully to be mapped at A4 size, and the charts here are as vague as ever they were in national Covid briefings from Professor 'next slide please' Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer.

Having educated us into new ways of seeing what we've got, there is a hectoring tone about how far we must now travel to 'level up'. One problem seems to be that the authors so often use 'world cities' as a measuring stick. That is too coarse to be much use — their radically different history, geography and political systems mostly explain how ours differ. Within the UK, the frequent use of London — a world city and national capital — as comparator, from which resources must now be redeployed to 'level up' the North, is a cheap and ugly political game. Nowhere else in the UK can be 'like' London in so many respects; and how horrid that would be. Better to cultivate and celebrate the distinctiveness of regions — a vision only occasionally glimpsed in the White Paper and one that should be deployed more strongly, save the fundamentals of health and happiness.

Systems reform

The 53 pages of the 'Systems reform' chapter of the White Paper include nine covering the history of policy approaches in the UK and lessons to be drawn. Disproportionate wordage is given to years
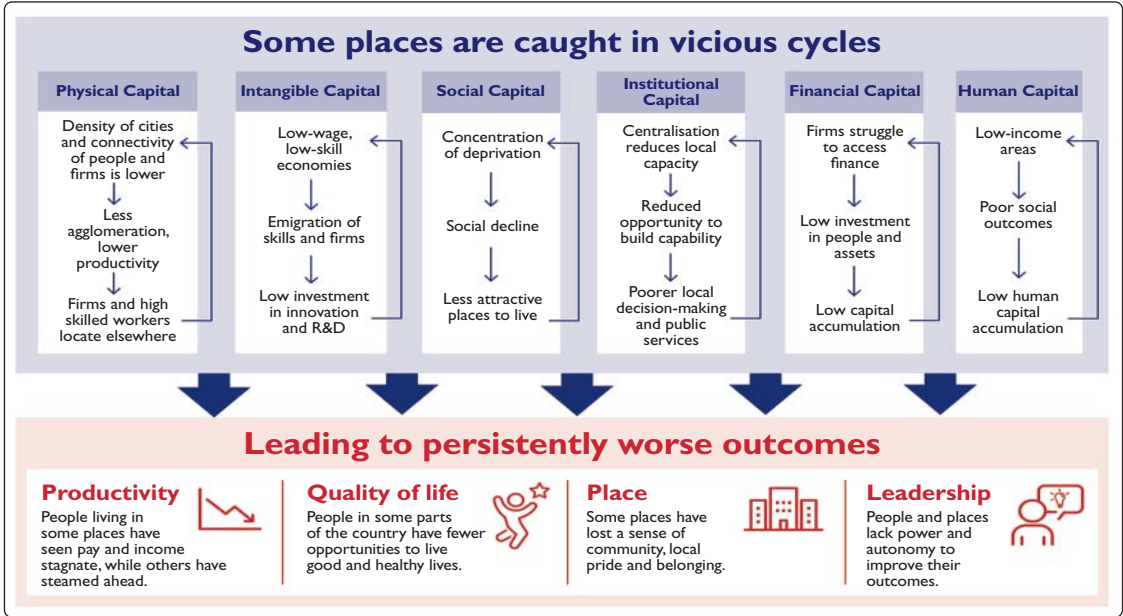
'Levelling Up Capitals Framework', taken from the Levelling up White Paper[1]

starting with the Thatcher government in 1979. The truly revolutionary achievements of Clem Attlee's government of 1945 (second mention, for his government should be our yardstick) are aggressively and airily (pun intended[4]) dismissed in a sentence: 'Post war, there were further interventions [to reduce spatial disparities]'. From this biased fly-through, followed by a nevertheless candid and welcome summary of lessons to be drawn from past and other policy regimes, the White Paper constructs 'principles for a successful policy regime':

- longevity and sufficiency;
- co-ordination;
- local empowerment;
- data, monitoring and evaluation; and
- transparency and accountability.

No fresh ambition is set by the text under these familiar headings. It is action on each for which we yearn. The self-congratulatory acclaim for creating metro mayors in 2017 is controversial (not all parts of metro territories are happy to be minor princes in a medieval-style 'city state', and many of us are free from that anyway), and 'local leaders' imposed upon areas chosen by Whitehall form a layer of governance that has yet to be properly evaluated. We live in a small island, and more layers of 'leadership' mean more hiding places in consultation and decision-making processes.

From the principles are drawn 'a new policy regime' for levelling up, which has five pillars (oh

dear, the dreaded pillars of 1980s management speak still haunt us!):

- medium-term missions (referencing JFK's brief to NASA to achieve a moon landing—be clear on the objective and put black boxes on the flow chart marking unsolved links, and then work your way through them);
- re-shaping central government decision-making ('hardwiring spatial considerations into decision-making and evaluation' and requiring 'public bodies to have an objective of reducing geographical variations in the outcomes relevant to their business area');
- empowering local decision-making (a 'single institution or County Council' features heavily here, with or without a directly elected mayor, according to the 'level of devolution'; and maybe the 'single institution'—which could be a private sector initiative—is the answer where counties have quaint boundaries no longer relevant to the real geography of which the White Paper wants us to be aware);
- data, monitoring and evaluation (better ways of assembling and presenting data to aid decision-making); and
- transparency and accountability (a 'statutory obligation' is proposed for government 'to report annually on progress towards meeting the Levelling Up missions'—but for all the promise of improved democratic accountability that runs through the White Paper, the political landscape it

draws will be very hard for people to follow, and no comfort is given that we shall be properly consulted on anything much, or protected from manipulation by digital techniques).

A VIP Levelling Up Advisory Council is announced. Like the National Infrastructure Commission, it will give 'independent expert advice on matters relating to the design and delivery of levelling up', yet membership is in the gift of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up.[5]

The policy programme

Pages 159–243 recite the wonderful things this government is already doing, and sets out incredibly ambitious new targets under several headings (the writer's pick from each cornucopia):

- 'Boost productivity, pay, jobs, and living standards by growing the private sector' (for example, 'We will enhance digital connectivity through Project Gigabit and the Shared Rural Network so that by 2030, the UK Government and private sector will deliver nationwide gigabit-capable broadband and 4G coverage, with 5G for the majority of the population', and '[we] will continue to increase the National Living Wage'…);
- 'Spread opportunities and improve public services' (for example through initiatives such as 'Education Investment Areas (EIAs)'; a 'UK National Academy'; 'Local Skills Improvement Plans'; and a White Paper 'designed to tackle the core drivers of disparities in health outcomes'…);
- 'Restore a sense of community, local pride and belonging' (for example by regenerating '20 of our towns and cities'; improving—not expanding as misreported—the Green Belt; increasing 'culture spending outside the capital'; relocating civil servants out of London; establishing a National Landlord Register to flag the bad ones; and 'investing £50m from the Safer Streets Fund every year of the [Spending Review 21] period […] to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour'…);
- 'Empower local leaders and communities' (for example through 'trailblazer deeper devolution deals with the West Midlands and Greater Manchester'; further mayoral combined authorities; 'new County Deals'; and a 'new independent body' that will somehow 'strengthen transparency for local people and publish rigorous, compatible data on performance'…).

The vast list is incredible, because each of the huge mountains of issues are to show change by 2030. True, there are few measurable performance targets ('by 2030, public transport connectivity

across the country will be *significantly closer* to the standards of London'—emphasis added). It really is great stuff, but this government is making rods for its own back—will the Conservative Party, the Houses of Parliament, and the people embark on this Long March with Michael Gove, and at this speed; and what if the 'red wall' turns red or some other colour than blue? The whiff of a new social democratic political alignment gets stronger.

For those whose lives are stuck in a bad way, and for whom the only way is up, this White Paper is full of wonderful prospects. Although it is so very long and will be read by few of us, it is stimulating and uplifting.

For everyone else it will depend whether this sounds like rocking the boat too much, too fast. The evidence, as presented, is burning bright: we need to get rocking.

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Notes

1 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*. Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

2 *Planning for the Future*. Planning White Paper. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Aug. 2020. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future — and see D Lock: 'Unnecessary trouble'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2020, Vol. 89, Sept./Oct., 292–96

3 Andrew Haldane was the Chief Economist at the Bank of England, for whom he worked from 1989 to 2021, and is the Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts, on secondment for six months to the newly named Department. Wikipedia, for which thanks, suggests this man from Guisely in Leeds is very special — see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andy_Haldane

4 See footnote 2 in 'Unnecessary trouble' (see note 2) and D Lock: 'Radical reform at last?'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2020, Vol. 89, Feb./Mar., 51–54

5 The 11 eminent members are listed on page 157 of the White Paper. Mostly economists, about 50% are academics. Notable in the list is David Skelton, Director of Renewal, which is a campaign group aiming to widen the working class and ethnic minority base of the Conservatives. He argued clearly how the working class vote was for up for grabs as far back as 2013, and is yet another former heavyweight from Policy Exchange. Catch the current zeitgeist with his book *Little Platoons: How a Revived One Nation Can Empower England's Forgotten Towns and Redraw the Political Map* (Biteback Publishing, 2019), and *The New Snobbery: Taking on Modern Elitism and Empowering the Working Class* (Biteback Publishing, 2021). Political tectonic plates are shifting fast, although the consequences are not necessarily as Skelton may wish

communities for ukraine

Lee Shostak sets out how the TCPA could play a central role in welcoming refugees to communities across the UK

As I write, we are still learning about the crimes against humanity and genocide in Ukraine that started in February 2022. By late March the UN refugee agency was reporting that over 4,000,000 people, mainly women and children, had already left Ukraine, with well over half of this number crossing into Poland. And in response to the Secretary of State's 'Homes for Ukraine' invitation, some 200,000 of our fellow citizens in the UK have already offered to provide temporary accommodation for Ukrainians.

You might be one of these generous people. You might have donated to the charities providing aid, or even have followed David Cameron's example and driven a lorry full of supplies to Poland. By the time you receive this issue of *Town & Country Planning* (Volume 91, Number 2) some refugees will have arrived in the UK. Perhaps tens of thousands more UK families will have offered rooms.

From despair…to leadership

Many of us watch the destruction of Ukraine with a sense of powerlessness and despair. We know that others are organising the delivery of humanitarian aid, and there is an emerging network of organisations matching refugees with UK families. With all this, is there anything else that members of the TCPA, and the TCPA as an organisation, could do?

Yes. Say 200,000 households (say 600,000 refugees) take up temporary accommodation in the UK. It might be many more, or less. In due course, some will want to return to Ukraine or move elsewhere. Many others will want to remain and make their new lives in our country—provided they feel welcome, and our government allows them to do so. Building on our strengths, this is where the TCPA could play a vital role—if we want to.

A TCPA effort might include three main components. First, working with partners who focus on the needs of refugees, the TCPA could build a **national consensus** that all Ukrainian refugees would be welcome in the UK for as long as they wish to stay.

Joel Carillet / iStock

Humanitarian crisis—Ukrainians fleeing the war carry their luggage across the railway tracks in Lviv in Western Ukraine

This would mean recognising that refugees will want to move from their temporary housing with families into permanent homes for rent in their community. It would also mean the government commissioning Homes England and inviting national registered providers to invest resources in support.

Second, the TCPA could encourage local authorities across the UK to sign up to a new protocol, say the **Communities for Ukraine Charter**. This would set out how these local authorities could make permanent homes, education, and social support available. Such action might feature purchasing homes from private developers and/or planning to build new social housing, offering the new homes to existing tenants in their community, and then allocating the vacated homes to refugees.

Then, the TCPA could help a group of exemplar local authorities and registered providers to **demonstrate best practice** in delivering the Charter and then publicising these lessons.

Our past; our future

In considering whether the TCPA wants to work with partners to lead such an effort, please take our history into account. By the end of the Second World War, it was estimated that at least 40 million people had been displaced from their home countries. The refugees included former prisoners of war, those released from slave labour, and survivors from concentration camps.

As the war was coming to an end, the European refugee crisis was well publicised. However, in common with most (but not all) of 'civil society' in post-war Britain, the TCPA did not appear to have considered whether the UK could help. Perhaps understandably, Volumes 12 and 13 of *Town & Country Planning*, in 1944 and 1945, respectively, concentrated on rebuilding our bombed cities, density, the location of industry, and meeting housing needs, partly through new towns. 'Crisis' was on the cover of *Town & Country Planning* in 1944, but that crisis was the housing shortage facing the UK, not the refugee catastrophe facing Europe. Incidentally, Volume 12 included an article written by an architect from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna and another by a professor from the University of Cracow; neither mentioned the Holocaust or refugees.

As members of the TCPA, and as an organisation, we can repeat our history—we can fail to rise to the challenge of Europe's worst humanitarian crisis since the Second World War. Or we can take our mission seriously: the TCPA works *'to challenge, inspire and support people to create healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone'*. In the 21st century, 'fair for everyone' includes welcoming refugees to our communities when they have been displaced from their own. Today, the choice is ours; it really is.

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assessing the levelling up white paper

Tim Marshall looks at the ideological and policy approaches of the Levelling Up White Paper and considers the prospects for progress on delivering greater fairness and equality across the country

What sort of policy statement is the Levelling Up White Paper?[1] It is no good imagining that a White Paper has an unchanging essence. One idea is surely old hat: that it represents a deeply considered analysis of an issue and fully developed ways of addressing that issue, likely to lead in most cases to legislation, as well as other government action. If we had in recent years ever thought that, the flimsy nature of the Planning White Paper of August 2020 should have put an end to such thinking.[2] This article starts with a review of the nature and fate of that White Paper,[3] before analysing the recent governmental statement, which makes a major contrast to the planning effort.

The Planning White Paper and after — a contrast

The Planning White Paper was a mixture of back-of-the-envelope thoughts and more considered lines of policy development. In the latter category was the policy stream on design and 'beauty', because it did at least have the benefit of a Commission which had worked on the theme for some time. In the first category was most of the rest of the package proposed — introducing a zoning system (picked up from a kite-flying Policy Exchange publication), an infrastructure levy (long discussed, but still not properly analysed), and digitalisation strategies (an emerging reality, but still not considered in a comprehensive and serious manner, certainly by 2020).

All these contents of the 2020 White Paper were driven from the top of government, by Boris Johnson and his then top policy advisor Dominic Cummings; they were not aberrations, the result of some glitch in the governmental machine or a rogue Minister

(however Robert Jenrick may be characterised). They were complemented by parallel measures pushed through by secondary legislation or administrative measures, including, above all, sweeping extensions of permitted development and changes in the Use Classes Order, plus a rejigging of the standard method used to establish new-housing requirements in local authority areas.

We now know that this package was to face a very uneven fate. The permitted development changes were driven through, by August 2021 transforming the planning system in many ways which we will only see work out over a number of years. The change to the standard method was rejigged again in December 2020, to put the pressure back on major urban centres (rarely run by Conservative authorities, who had objected strenuously to the new numbers being imposed on them, especially in the Wider South East). How that rejigging works out is very much a political work-in-progress.

Parts of the White Paper are clearly surviving at the time of writing, including the design and beauty agenda, now being implemented in various ways, the digitalisation drive, and the proposal for a national Infrastructure Levy (NIL?). Neighbourhood-ism is in fashion again, strengthened, it appears, from 2020 (Levelling Up Secretary of State Michael Gove is keen) — in part as a way to continue undermining local government.

The Amersham and Chesham June 2021 by-election defeat for the Conservatives in their heartland is credited as being a major factor which led eventually to the dropping of a separate Planning Bill and the probable abandonment of changes to the plans

The White Paper acknowledges that spatially tuned policy-making has been weak in the UK

system. However, there are still references in the Levelling Up White Paper to the need to speed up or streamline the Local Plans system, so changes may still be expected. Unfortunately, the development of proper strategic planning components looks like it will be dependent on the vicissitudes of local deals, rather than a reformed system (see the chart on page 140 of the Levelling Up White Paper — with no reference to planning).

The Levelling Up White Paper — some strengths

The February 2022 White Paper is a thoroughly different phenomenon. It is generally well written and illustrated, even if the proposals part (Chapter 3) has more of a programmatic or manifesto style. It is long (297 pages), which makes engagement not as easy as would be desirable for democratic purposes, although many pages are easy to move through, being maps or other images. The Executive Summary gives, in my view, only a partial idea of the character of the document, and so a fuller reading is needed. Further thought should have been given to this accessibility issue, perhaps taking a leaf out of the work of the National Infrastructure Commission, which has worked hard at controlling length, creating clear lines of logic, and using clear visual summaries.

This White Paper remains in some ways deeply ideological, in the same sense as the 2020 Paper; but in certain respects this is a different ideology. My reading of the whole document suggests an attempt to create a new policy narrative which can take up the high ground for the next decade or more. It is really not just a policy statement on levelling up; it is a social and economic programme for

Conservative governments to hold on to power for at least another term. It does this quite cleverly, by taking over an essentially liberal democratic political narrative, combining characteristic dependence on private sector forces with an ample grasping of the role of some kinds of central state interventionism. It was helped by drawing on academic support, however selectively, especially from the Bennett Institute at Cambridge University,[4] and by the idea of medium-term missions put forward by Mazzucato *et al.*[5] (see pages 58 and 118, respectively).

On reading Chapter 1, an analysis of the roots of the UK's uneven geographical development, and Chapter 2, a statement of the need for a new governing doctrine based on a package of missions, one can detect a somewhat eclectic or pick-and-mix blending of New Labour and Heseltinian Conservative philosophies. This is then further blended with a continuation of Cameron-Osborne-May initiatives, above all on elected mayors and deals, as the insistently repeated basis for 'devolution' (still a misnomer, given what is proposed). Incidentally, Policy Exchange's founding in 2002 was marked by a call for elected mayors in all big cities, so that has a Gove stamp on it too. All these ingredients have been glued together under the leadership of Andy Haldane (watch an Institute for Government interview with him on 1 March to get a flavour of his role[6]).

The omissions from such a narrative are obvious: no sign of capitalism and its continuous stresses and its forming of uneven development, decade after decade; nothing on class; no analysis of the City of London or the wider London mega-region — no sharp-edged regional political economy, as against

a kind of bland average geography.[7] While the return of talk of spatial policy and regions is very welcome, the idea that so much of the disastrous inequalities and the levelling-up challenge has been generated by quite deliberate government policy, especially by post-2010 governments, is nowhere to be seen.

What has been created in this foundation for the 2024 Conservative Party general election manifesto is therefore a new narrative, designed to cover the whole of the UK, as well as the whole of England, even if continuously pointing to some special notice for those parts of the UK map designated in the top-need category—see the final, geographical section of the White Paper, covering each English region and the other countries of the UK (with hardly a word about the devolved administrations themselves, invisibilised by Gove). This is somewhat reminiscent of the New Labour insistence on Regional Development Agencies for the whole of England, even if with much bigger budgets, as it turned out, for the North and Midlands.

The similarity goes further because New Labour famously sought the support of 'Middle England'—a part of the electorate that the Conservatives are very worried about losing, alongside their new clientele in the North and the Midlands.

So the programme must be all things to all people, as arguably it is in many ways. All this implies a Conservative capacity for 'shape shifting', a capacity evident for many years: we are clearly in a new round of it.

There are some positive signs…

Nevertheless, there is the beginning of engagement with the depth of the problems involved, and the start of thought on 'systems reform', as the Chapter 2 title calls it. Positives include the serious stress on overcoming silo government at the centre, and the institution of Levelling Up Directors, which might even look to some like Government Offices for the Regions 'lite'. Equally welcome is the commitment to build new data sources, so that the heavy post-2010 culling of data streams can be corrected and progress on levelling up can actually be monitored. (Anyone for Regional Observatories, that invention of the 1990s, designed to show what was changing in each part of the country?)

The promise to set up a Spatial Data Unit within the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (on page 151) gives cause for hope, based on the explicitly stated view that spatially tuned policy-making has been weak in Britain, and must be improved to give us far better knowledge of what is being spent where and for whom. The transport parts show genuine efforts to advance matters—on buses, for example, moving finally to Transport for London type controls (see pages 177-180). And there is even support for a 'strong planning system' (on page 227)—not the language of 18 months ago, and something that planners could try to hold Ministers to.

…but the White Paper has big problems

From the first two chapters, the White Paper could be characterised as centrist, with an analysis that will gain some cross-party and societal support. But two big holes open up against that judgement—on Unionism and on the adequacy of the response to regional disparity. Unionism permeates every page of the document, where Michael Gove, a passionate Unionist (and according to his biographer an even more passionate supporter of the Orange Order[8]), has clearly made his presence felt.

The programme of funding packages across every single governmental sector, reaching deep into the devolution competences of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, has to be read to be believed. The transfer of central civil servants to these three countries is going to be so great that there may in due course be more UK civil servants in Wales and Scotland than those employed by their own governments. This is the Conservative and Unionist Party in power with a vengeance—no New Labour approach or consensualism there.

Perhaps more fundamentally, Chapter 3, which goes some way to detail what is going to be done in the short term, and then in the medium term (set at 2030), fails to convince in terms of the depth and credibility of the response. This can be seen to have three components.

The first is again ideological in the deep sense, due to the commitment of the Conservative Party to a low-tax state. This must have expressed itself in a deep resistance in the Treasury and probably in the Cabinet as a whole to providing the sort of funding and deep interventionism which would be needed to have a chance of really addressing the challenges exposed in Chapter 1. There is no reference to the massive cutting back of the state since 2010, not a word on austerity. No new money is to be found, overall, for the purpose of levelling up. So this is an overall resources issue.

Second, there is the question of the public sector agents leading much of the work—in a sense another resource or capacity issue, but also one of process. The whole programme, or 'mission' set, is to be carried through very largely by the dramatically weakened governmental machine: at the centre, in the many weakened agencies, and locally by the austerity-hobbled councils, backed by some low-power mayoral or similar bodies to be spread across as much of England as can be persuaded to give up what autonomy is left in councils. This weakness is evident in international comparison. Research conducted in the preparation of the New Leipzig Charter, on local governments' capacity to act, showed that in the six case study countries just England and Hungary had clearly declining capacity at this government level, with, in the English case, the decline occurring ever since the 1980s.[9]

Thirdly, the unwillingness to change direction across so many policy fields—an unwillingness

Mike / Pexels

'We know that poor areas and poor authorities have got ever fewer public resources over the last ten years'

generally ideologically rooted—must surely make readers of Chapter 3 wonder about the basic commitment of a government that has shown its genetic make up to be deeply pro-inequality (whether spatial or non-spatial) to prioritising overcoming issues of inequality. The predominantly non-spatial forces of inequality are critical—income, class, race, benefits, and structural chasms in education, health, care, and housing. The Conservatives have rarely shown a willingness to tackle these forces.

In fact, we know that poor areas and poor authorities have got ever fewer public resources over the last ten years. Why should this change now, whatever special funds are listed, page after page? There are certainly hopeful passages about re-setting the distribution of resources to localities—presumably going back to some sort of allocation of money to places by need. But there is surely a credibility and commitment issue here.

Ideology and politics in tandem this time?

As I argued in my 2020 book on the way to analyse planning (and other policy fields),[10] it is essential to combine ideological and political analysis of public policy: the long-run conviction force of ideological complexes and the day-to-day and month-to-month insistent pressure of politics—of MPs, councillors, pressure groups, and party-funders. My article in the September/October 2020 issue of this journal[3] suggested that the Planning White Paper was largely driven by ideological pressures within the Conservative political world, emerging from strands of work pushed by Policy Exchange for over 10 years, and intensified by the transformation of the Conservative Party by its takeover by Brexit forces since 2016. The same forces pushed for the parallel reforms on permitted development, allied to the practical pressures applied politically by some of

the Party's main supporters and funders in the development industry.

Ideology and politics meld together more successfully in the Levelling Up White Paper than in the Planning White Paper, but they are just as present. Essentially, the Levelling Up White Paper is a foundational programmatic statement, and is a blend of centrist narrative-making with certain Conservative ideological red lines (Unionism, Treasury fundamentalism), along with carefully calibrated political budget and process juggling, to hit 2022–24 requirements.

I have said little about this process element ('devolution', etc.), but it is clearly central to the programme. In some ways it is easy to put the accent on deals, new mayors, and so on, as against making basic differences to social and economic life-chances. This plays well to certain political needs, especially over the next two years. Alongside the substantive problems identified above, Chapter 3 must be read equally as a masterclass in shorter-term politics: how to convince opinion-formers and voters that the government is both doing something in key constituencies by 2024, and plausibly able to promise things for the 2024–2029 government.

Prospects

Will it work? It may work politically, as Jennings *et al.*[11] have suggested, in delivering 'a steady supply of governing spectacles', as well as in effectively managing Conservative divisions. But, no, the White Paper is nothing like sufficient to achieve real progress on its stated substantive objectives. A short article cannot give full justification for that judgement, but it rests on the limited nature of the changes proposed in so many fields, especially in local government, public spending, making planning work properly— and perhaps most fundamentally the expectation that private sector investment will deliver the scale of results needed, when the lack of such investment in the past has been a large part of what has generated the present massive failures. It is true that a get-out clause has been inserted at the start of Chapter 3, saying that not all the policy programme is there yet; more is to come (page 159). But the basic framing surely needed to be set out here.

One can point to many other elements which could be added, if the Conservatives would look to sources of policy ideas well outside their own tent. Valuable lines of work have been pursued by several big investigations over the last five years, which the White Paper might have drawn on far more. Examples are the two IPPR-led Commissions on Economic Justice (2018) and Environmental Justice (2021)[12] and the continuing work by the UK2070 Commission.[13] All of these studies would help in filling one big gap in the White Paper, which is to bring much more to the forefront net zero and deep green programmes. References are there in the White Paper (on pages 169 and 170, for example), but these issues are

hardly given the weight and urgency of resources needed, above all in the Chapter 3 programmes.

So, this is a deeply important government policy statement. It may not say much on planning in the more specific sense (some of that may have emerged by the time this article is published), but the overall ideological and political direction of travel needs to be engaged with, supported where it is potentially useful, and critiqued in all the areas where it falls short. Planners may not necessarily see much of the content of the White Paper as their home turf, but I would argue that they ignore this stream of policy-making at their peril. They may have been partially let off the hook from that 2020 maelstrom of attacks on planning, but the overall direction of state policy-making is what is really going to make the long-term difference to social, environmental and economic outcomes.

'The overall ideological and political direction of travel needs to be engaged with, supported where it is potentially useful, and critiqued in all the areas where it falls short'

For that, sooner or later, a more fundamentally critical narrative is going to be needed, tying together the quite basic transitioning needed, environmentally and economically, out of the high-carbon society, with the change to far lower levels of social inequality, based on a new grasp of systems—above all of how capitalism works. Little in Chapter 1 of the White Paper would meet the needs of such an improved analysis.

But even in the immediate term, if we were to take Chapter 1 as adequate, I would see the need for sweeping changes of state policy direction, including root-and-branch changes of Treasury neoliberal ideology (notwithstanding Covid exceptionalism), the genuine rebuilding of local government capacity and autonomy (not this tiresome 'deals' disease, which makes every council leader in the UK a supplicant), and the making of a new environmentally and socially attuned planning system. Then there might be some chance for some real levelling up (greater fairness and equality across the country) to get some effective traction.

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Notes

1 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*. Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

2 *Planning for the Future*. Planning White Paper. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Aug. 2020. www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future

3 T Marshall: 'The White Paper's ideological core'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2020, Vol. 89, Sept./Oct., 304–306

4 See, for example, *Measuring Wealth, Delivering Prosperity*. Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge, Jul. 2019. www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/publications/measuring-wealth-delivering-prosperity/

5 See, for example, M Mazzucato and G Dibb: *Missions: A Beginner's Guide*. UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose. Dec. 2019. www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/public-purpose/publications/2019/dec/missions-beginners-guide

6 'In conversation with Andy Haldane: how to make levelling up work'. YouTube video. Institute for Government, Mar. 2022. www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GuuxSDNs0s

7 See this quote, from D Massey and M Rustin: 'Whose economy? Reframing the debate'. *Soundings*, 2014, Vol. 57, 170–190:
   'A further effect of the dominance of finance has been the ever-more yawning disparity between London-and-the-South-East and the North and West. Given the geographical propensies of finance, the North-South divide cannot be seriously addressed without challenging the dominance of the sector in its current form.'

8 O Bennett: *Michael Gove: A Man in a Hurry*. Biteback Publishing, 2019 (see pp.92–94)

9 *Local Governments' Capacity to Act: A European Comparison*. Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR), Federal Republic of Germany, 2020. www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/sonderveroeffentlichungen/2020/handlungsfaehigkeit-dl-en.pdf;jsessionid=12DD2C1E8C9CB03850E69A1301787782.live11294?__blob=publicationFile&v=2
   Readers may also find the New Leipzig Charter of interest, as it makes a clear case for 'empowering cities to act in the common good', making a narrative quite distinct from this present UK one being assessed — see *The New Leipzig Charter: Synthesis and Focus*. BBSR, Jul. 2021. www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/EN/publications/SpecialPublication/2021/new-leipzig-charter-synthesis-focus.html. These are EU documents, agreed by EU-wide working groups, but prepared under the 2020 German Presidency, and so published by the BBSR

10 T Marshall: *The Politics and Ideology of Planning*. Policy Press, 2020

11 W Jennings, L Mckay and G Stoker: 'The politics of levelling up'. *The Political Quarterly*, 2021, Vol. 92(2), 302–11. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-923X.13005

12 *Prosperity and Justice. A Plan for the New Economy*. Final Report. IPPR Commission on Economic Justice. Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), Sept. 2018. www.ippr.org/research/publications/prosperity-and-justice; and *Fairness and Opportunity. A People-Powered Plan for the Green Transition*. Final Report. IPPR Environmental Justice Commission. IPPR, Jul. 2021. www.ippr.org/research/publications/fairness-and-opportunity

13 *Make No Little Plans: Acting at Scale for a Fairer and Stronger Future*. Final Report. UK2070 Commission, Feb. 2020. http://uk2070.org.uk/2020/02/26/uk2070-final-report-published/

levelling up neighbourhoods— back to the very local future?

The UK government's continuing attachment to 'the neighbourhood', exhibited again in the Levelling Up White Paper, calls for careful consideration of what is achievable at the neighbourhood scale and what levelled-up neighbourhoods might look like, say **Gavin Parker**, **John Sturzaker** and **Matthew Wargent**

The Levelling Up White Paper (LUWP), published by the UK government on 2 February 2022,[1] covers a plethora of issues concerning place inequalities, with varying degrees of depth. One topic that has gone somewhat under the radar in the ensuing analysis is the persistence of 'the neighbourhood' in central government's policy imagination: references to it recur over 50 times throughout the White Paper. The idea of planning at the neighbourhood scale, with its familiar and cosy connotations, remains an attractive evocation for government Ministers, coupling warm words about local control with the long-standing liberal suspicion of big government and big planning.

Over the past decade, various tools have been deployed in an attempt to engage the neighbourhood in planning for place across the UK.[2] Of course, attention has long been paid to the neighbourhood as an active scale for planning, stretching back over a century.[3] Here, we are concerned with the implications for neighbourhood-scale planning in the context of planning reforms and the levelling-up agenda in the UK. As government renews its promises toward neighbourhoods — including a mooted review of neighbourhood governance — what is needed now is a frank conversation about what is achievable and what levelled-up neighbourhoods might look like in the context of wider efforts to rebalance the UK's economic geography.

Emerging policy for a renewed emphasis on the very local

Whether one agrees with what has been proposed in 2022, or indeed in the Planning White Paper of 2020, there is clearly renewed interest from the UK government in the idea that neighbourhoods should play a more active part in shaping local priorities. It is well established in the academic literature that the neighbourhood concept does important work in creating spatially-bounded units and mobilising 'active citizens' who are supposedly ripe for partnership within the complex world of policy and place governance. This scale is also a convenient, if romanticised one through which to play on a sense of local identity and bridge the problematic gap between state and community.[4]

The Big Society agenda that spawned the post-2010 brand of localism built on New Labour's interest in the neighbourhood as an idea, as much as a geographic scale.[5] In now familiar rhetoric, this sought to provide 'genuine opportunities [for communities] to influence the future of the places where they live'.[6] Sue Brownill in this journal recently

argued that interest in localism had been renewed, but noted that the efforts of the past decade have not reached those that need it most.[7] While attention on the English neighbourhood planning experiment is understandable given its statutory footing, there is much less consideration of similar initiatives in the UK's other constituent nations. Not enough is known about the limitations and possibilities of these varying forms of community planning, but what is known raises serious questions about simply assuming that they can play a significant role in levelling up if we take this to mean reducing local inequality.

Here we should add a point of further caution: that too often the matters that are most in need of attention are absent or peripheral from policy debates at the very local scale. Questions of social, economic and environmental urgency are displaced, in England at least, by a combination of rhetoric, resources and support that focuses on the number of plans made, sites allocated in those plans, and the housebuilding that results from it. We hope therefore that the LUWP's commitment to 'widen the accessibility of neighbourhood planning' (page 216) means more than simply more plans, but indicates an engagement with issues of representation, inclusivity, and social and environmental sustainability goals.

To its credit, the LUWP does discuss principles for a 'Strategy for Community Spaces and Relationships' (page 214). This is underpinned by talk of making it easier for people to set local priorities and shape their neighbourhoods. The White Paper also appears to recognise difference across communities, under the banner of 'every community matters', with an acknowledgement that funding and other support will have to reach those most in need. There is an indication, too, that local agencies and planning authorities will need to be better at listening to communities and engaging with civil society to identify priorities, assets, and the policies and other actions needed to strengthen 'community infrastructure'. These recognitions are crucial, but, as ever, the devil will be in the detail concerning how this is delivered.

In the confines of formal planning we must also recognise the critical importance of the quality and forms of exchange between neighbourhoods and local authorities.[8] The establishment of durable platforms for communities to sustain their involvement is reflected in the LUWP, with the government looking at the role and functions of parish councils in England and considering how to make them quicker and easier to establish[9]—a positive aspiration in our view.

So the LUWP makes some of the right noises. Then again, it says so many things, so how could it not? As one of us remarked a decade ago, the 'genie is out of the bottle' on community engagement in planning at the neighbourhood level,[10] and it would be brave for any government to back away entirely.[11]

Reflecting on where we are now, if we want to harness social action at the neighbourhood level, then,

'We need better evidence on what communities strive for when engaging in community-led planning, and to see how this chimes with the levelling-up agenda'

counter-intuitively perhaps, we need to recognise its limitations. These include the limits on both voluntarism[12] and the ability of community-led participation to address with the deep structural issues that produce place inequalities. For instance, the jury is still out as to how, or indeed whether, planning at this scale productively engages with the persistent, new, and ongoing challenges of social and environmental justice. There is a clear need to reflect on the implications of the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda for neighbourhoods, including the design of participation, as well as its implementation and related oversight, to ensure that it meets an agreed set of quality criteria. More than this, we need to establish whether the 'genie' of community engagement aligns with wider ambitions to solve regional economic inequalities. How can we support neighbourhoods? And what can we reasonably expect, and what can be reasonably expected from them?

In line with this, we need a better understanding of 'what works' in and for neighbourhoods. Central government acknowledges that this will require evidence to understand better how to support communities, and engage with levelling-up challenges. In our recent research,[13] we argued for the need to persist with neighbourhood planning while also widening its accessibility. There are further important lessons to learn from a decade of neighbourhood planning and from similar initiatives across the UK if we are to foster engagement with important matters beyond housebuilding.

Perhaps there is still more optimism to be mined out of the LUWP; a rather grand-sounding review of neighbourhood governance in England is promised. It seems that the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on neighbourhoods[14] have coalesced around fashionable concepts such as the 20-minute

neighbourhood[15] (or its 15-minute competitor), to create an exciting moment for neighbourhoods and a re-commitment from government about the political credit to be realised from persisting with this governance scale. This is even as questions persist over the efficacy and justice of existing planning activity at this level. We need not only to know what works in planning at the neighbourhood scale, but develop the focus on its 'just' credentials in terms of access, process, content, and outcomes.

Conclusion

It is hard to know what levelled-up neighbourhoods might look like. There is a distinct possibility that the neighbourhood agenda will get lost amid the new focus on regional inequalities. The government's commitment, set out on page 214 of the Levelling Up White Paper, to develop 'strong community infrastructure and social capital' and the recognition that this is often weakest 'in the most deprived places' is to be welcomed; however, more worryingly, the desire to put communities 'in the driving seat to level up' echoes the rhetoric of the early 2010s, when many communities came to believe that they were oversold on neighbourhood planning powers.[16]

We need better evidence on what communities strive for when engaging in community-led planning, and to see how this chimes with the levelling-up agenda. Clearly more research is needed to provide a detailed account of just what makes it into community plans, why, and to what effect. The resilience of neighbourhoods needs to be accompanied by improved understanding, objectives, resources, and support, too.

Let us assume for now that community-led planning can be an important vehicle to aid levelling up; what we need is a clearer idea of what a just neighbourhood looks like, before we repeat past mistakes of concentrating on superficial measures of success.

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Notes

1 *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*. Levelling Up White Paper. CP 604. HM Government, Feb. 2022. www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom

2 Neighbourhood planning was introduced in England under the Localism Act 2011. In Scotland, Local Place Plans were introduced under the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, and these are supposed to provide a framework for communities to take forward community actions themselves. In Wales, Place Plans were introduced in 2015 and authored by local communities — they require local planning authorities to work with communities to prepare the plan as Supplementary Planning Guidance. The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 placed a statutory duty on councils to engage with communities to produce Community Plans

3 For a history of the neighbourhood concept, see E Talen: *Neighborhood*. Oxford University Press, 2019

4 See, for example, M Tait and A Inch: 'Putting localism in place: conservative images of the good community and the contradictions of planning reform in England'. *Planning Practice & Research*, 2016, Vol. 31(2), 174–94. www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02697459.2015.1104219

5 See M Wargent: 'Localism, governmentality and failing technologies: the case of Neighbourhood Planning in England'. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 2021, Vol. 9(4), 571-91

6 *A Plain English Guide to the Localism Act*. Department for Communities and Local Government, Nov. 2011, p.12. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf

7 S Brownill: 'Localism is dead — long live localism'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2021, Vol. 90, Nov./Dec., 364-67

8 See J Sturzaker, O Sykes and B Dockerill: 'Disruptive localism — how far does clientelism shape the prospects of neighbourhood planning in deprived urban communities?'. *Planning Theory & Practice*, published online Nov. 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649357.2021.2003425

9 It is notable that the largest gaps in coverage of English Neighbourhood Plans are in those areas without parish councils, illustrating the importance of such bodies

10 G Parker: 'Neighbourhood planning: precursors, lessons and prospects'. *Journal of Planning & Environment Law*, 2012, Vol. 40, 1-20

11 Although the *Planning for the Future* White Paper (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Aug. 2020) appeared to downplay neighbourhood planning, it was to be retained amid the proposed radical shake-up — however, it was never established how communities' plans might interact with the 'growth, renew, protect' zones espoused in the White Paper

12 See G Parker, M Dobson, T Lynn and K Salter: 'Entangling voluntarism, leisure time and political work: the governmentalities of neighbourhood planning in England'. *Leisure Studies*, 2020, Vol. 39(5), 644–58

13 G Parker, M Wargent, K Salter, M Dobson, T Lynn and A Yuille: *Impacts of Neighbourhood Planning*. Final Report. University of Reading, for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, May 2020. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/929422/Impacts_of_Neighbourhood_Planning_in_England.pdf

14 See M Wargent and E Talen: 'Rethinking neighbourhoods'. *Town Planning Review*, 2021, Vol. 92(1), 89–95. https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/90872/1/Wargent%20and%20Talen%202020.pdf

15 See, for example, *20-Minute Neighbourhoods — Creating Healthier, Active, Prosperous Communities. An Introduction for Council Planners in England*. TCPA, Mar. 2021. www.tcpa.org.uk/the-20-minute-neighbourhood; and F O'Sullivan and Laura Bliss: 'The 15-minute city — no cars required — is urban planning's new utopia'. *Bloomberg Business Week*, 12 Nov. 2020. www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-11-12/paris-s-15-minute-city-could-be-coming-to-an-urban-area-near-you

16 G Parker, T Lynn and M Wargent: 'Sticking to the script? The co-production of neighbourhood planning in England'. *Town Planning Review*, 2015, Vol. 86(5), 519–37. https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/41465/1/Parker%20et%20al%202015%20TPR%20Sticking2Script.pdf

developer contributions for affordable homes and infrastructure —

anglo-scottish comparisons and lessons

part two: scotland and england compared — a three-stage story?

In the second part of a two-part article on developer contributions for affordable housing and infrastructure in England and Scotland, **John Boyle**, **Tony Crook**, **Stefano Smith** and **Christine Whitehead** look at what the two countries can learn from each other to make the contribution systems work better, and they consider whether infrastructure levies are an appropriate way forward

Once upon a time—back in the early 20th century— developer contributions were a local prerogative in a world without the national planning systems that we have today. Local authorities could negotiate contributions with developers, usually for on-site mitigation purposes; transport and infrastructure investment were generally entirely separate decisions.

Until the late 1960s, local authorities in England needed central government approval before using contributions, but, after this requirement was removed, they started to see the potential for delivering affordable housing through the planning system, as well as the infrastructure needed to make developments acceptable in planning terms.[1] In Scotland, unlike in England, there was growing use

Both England and Scotland are seeking ways to use developer contributions to help to meet the regional infrastructure funding needs arising from development

Jackson Hayes on Unsplash

of planning conditions, which required developers to provide site-related infrastructure before they could start work.

Evolution of the role of developer contributions

In England the big change came in 1990 with the Town and Country Planning Act. This consolidated the rules into what became known as Section 106 agreements, and planning policy introduced affordable housing as a material consideration, while formalising the requirement that contributions pass the rational nexus test. In Scotland similar rules were introduced in the 1997 Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act.

At this point, the formal legal framework for what we are calling stage 1—enabling site-specific infrastructure and mitigation, together with affordable housing—was in place. The rationale for the approach was generally strong—requirements had to be clearly site related or there had to be an evidenced shortage of affordable homes. Thereafter, the policy became more embedded, and in both countries (despite complexities and concerns about the negotiation process) it was increasingly accepted by all parties.

The policy was framed as an instrument aimed at ensuring that developers would contribute to the costs of infrastructure and affordable homes. Who would actually pay was not part of the discussion, but, because developers generally address additional costs by paying less for land, developer contributions are actually a de facto means of capturing land value from landowners. This aspect has become more central to the debate, particularly because it implies that, as long as the development remains viable and the landowner is prepared to sell, there is no negative impact on output.

At this stage there was already a perceived need for what might be called stage 2—the capacity to

require contributions to meet multiple-site, local and sub-regional infrastructure needs consequent on the development. Meeting these needs was seen as making the planning permission acceptable to the local community in planning terms.

Again, this was addressed initially by local authorities pushing the boundary. In England pooling contributions was enabled and, in 2010, the government introduced the Community Infrastructure Levy. This formalised an approach to enabling local authorities to raise funds for the broader infrastructure needs of the local area and its sub-region, directly related to the scale of development. Scotland, however, did not follow these approaches and so had to find other ways of taking account of these broader needs.

Now, at least in principle, we are entering stage 3— which, in both countries, addresses the question of whether and how developers can help to fund more wide-ranging regional infrastructure needs arising from development. The approaches to be employed are somewhat different (and still not entirely clear), but the problem to be addressed is the same: how to ensure that the infrastructure is put in place in a timely manner, and how to fund that infrastructure.

In this article, which follows on from our article in the preceding issue of *Town & Country Planning* surveying the story in Scotland in detail,[2] we examine each of the three stages—the first two in terms of the mechanisms actually employed, and the third by looking at what we know of the current proposals. We ask two questions: can the two countries learn from each other and so make the current systems work better; and are infrastructure levies an appropriate way forward?

The existing systems—learning from one another

Stage 1: Site-specific mitigation and affordable housing

Since the 1990s, developer contributions have made an increasing contribution to both site mitigation and affordable housing. Regular assessments in England and now in Scotland have shown growing numbers of agreements and higher contribution values.[1-4] Moreover, the approach has become increasingly accepted by all parties, despite concerns about complexity, the costs of negotiation, and issues of relative power.

Site mitigation

Site mitigation in both countries is designed to ensure that proposed developments are acceptable in planning terms and that developers contribute to the costs of any mitigation needed to make it so—for example contributions to the provision of off-site infrastructure such as local roads. In both countries such mitigation must be clearly related to the development in question.

In both countries this works reasonably well, provided that local development plans are clear, up to date, and followed through and implemented

consistently. Where they are not, especially where plans are out of date or not followed, developers have difficulty in estimating what to pay for land, and so they, rather than landowners, may end up paying part of these costs, which impacts on their preparedness to build. Many developers now seek to reduce these risks by using options agreements which defer land price agreements until all the contributions are agreed with local authorities. Even so, this adds to risk. In both countries site mitigation is more challenging on large and complex sites where there are several developers and lengthy build-out timescales over which market conditions and costs often change.

In Scotland, unlike in England, significant use is also made of planning conditions to secure site mitigations by requiring developers to ensure that specific infrastructure is provided before development can commence. How this is done and financed is a matter for developers, because conditions may not directly identify financial payments. The evidence from our research showed that the use of conditions in Scotland, where legally enabled, is accepted, well understood, and can help to speed up the provision of infrastructure and assist in getting development on permitted sites under way.[3]

In England, the range of contributions has continued to be extended to cover more general community infrastructure—which has sometimes been regarded as 'mission creep'. This trend has been much less obvious in Scotland, where there has been more emphasis on maintaining the site-specific rules. Importantly, in Scotland, recent court and reporter decisions have further restricted this creep.[2]

Affordable homes

The central role of affordable housing in developer contributions, particularly on-site provision of that housing, formalised in planning policy before and after the 1990 and 1997 Acts, could be argued to be inconsistent with the principles of developer contributions, in that they are not a consequence of the specific development. Rather, it is enabled by an evidence-based assessment of the need for affordable housing identified in local development plans.

In both countries developer contributions contribute significantly to providing new affordable housing. In this way, landowners who get the benefit of planning consent contribute to the costs of providing new affordable homes, especially in areas of high house prices, where low-income households are often priced out of market homes. Significant amounts are secured and delivered through these contributions, although the amounts depend on having clear policies in adopted plans and implementing them consistently (and also, in Scotland, on having long-term partnerships between housing providers and private developers).

While acceptance of the approach is high in both England and Scotland, in England affordable housing numbers tend to be the first thing cut during negotiations over viability, especially on large sites

Developer contributions have long played a major role in the provision of affordable housing

with multiple developers and long build-out times and when market conditions change, to protect site and wider infrastructure contributions. In Scotland, partly because of the availability of grant, the provision of affordable housing in almost all schemes is sacrosanct in high-valued areas, notably Edinburgh. In areas where there is less land value available, there is often less room for manoeuvre.

The biggest difference between the two countries is with respect to the types of homes provided. In England, there is considerable emphasis on shared ownership rather than rental units and on affordable rent rather than social rent. The dwellings are also generally quite small. A far bigger proportion of the total provided in Scotland is in the form of social rented homes. Moreover, the variety of sizes is greater and reflects local needs more directly.

An important reason for this difference is that, in Scotland, the availability of grants for affordable housing providers makes it possible to reduce the contributions required of developers (and thus also feeds through into higher land values). In England, on the other hand, there is a zero-grant default for new homes secured through planning obligations—although there are numerous exceptions.

Stage 2: Other community needs and non-site infrastructure

Not surprisingly, over the years there have been many pressures to extend the range of developer contributions as a means of funding necessary local infrastructure. Three distinct issues have been addressed to varying degrees:
- how to fund infrastructure which arises because of the cumulative effect of developments;
- the provision of infrastructure for community services which can be seen to be related to changes in demand arising from development in general; and
- the provision of broader-based sub-regional or even regional infrastructure.

Scotland has faced problems in dealing with the cumulative impact of small-scale developments, as, legally, resources cannot be pooled in this context. England, on the other hand, has addressed these issues by fixed tariffs and the legal capacity to pool contributions from a number of developments. Experience suggests that this type of problem is therefore reasonably easy to solve in ways consistent with general principles.

With respect to community services, developers have increasingly made contributions to education, wider transport services, open spaces, play and leisure facilities, and, increasingly, health facilities. Developers have concerns around 'scope creep' in what is required, which they see as impacting on viability and making it difficult to estimate appropriate land prices. Other requirements—such as obligations in England to secure biodiversity net gain on all developments needing planning permission—are raising similar concerns.

In Scotland, there has been some push-back, notably with respect to health facilities, which some developers think should be paid for by central government rather than by them. In Scotland, local authorities also face challenges in co-ordinating the spending of contributions where the infrastructure provider is outside the local authority, although less so where the provision is made by the local authority collecting and indeed spending the contribution.

Sub-regional and regional infrastructure

The principal problem facing both countries is that of securing contributions for infrastructure which is not directly related to mitigating the site-specific impact of new developments. How to secure contributions towards the wider infrastructure needed to support all new development, especially when this involves more than one local authority, is a major challenge. Indeed, the legal requirements that contributions exacted under Section 106 (England) and Section 75 (Scotland) agreements must be directly related to developments is often interpreted as preventing their use for broader infrastructure.

The funding problem was addressed in England through the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This enabled local authorities to secure funding for off-site infrastructure where the rational nexus did not apply. Developers were required to pay a charge based on net additional square metres provided, to be used to pay the costs of defined infrastructure programmes. A mayoral CIL in London was also set up to help fund Crossrail, and there are intentions to enable the mayors of combined authorities to introduce similar levies to fund cross-boundary infrastructure.

However, CIL has not been as successful as had been hoped, especially for large and complex sites. Many developments are exempted from the charges; and, in contradiction to the intent of CIL, some of the funding also has to be used for very local, parish level spending. Many authorities have not adopted a CIL on viability grounds, especially those wanting to protect affordable housing contributions in relatively weak markets.

Moving on to stage 3: Infrastructure levy approaches

Traditionally, larger-scale infrastructure was paid for by central government grants, but these are clearly limited. So it is not surprising that governments in both countries are seeking to find new sources of funding. Equally, it has been argued that there is plenty of potential for increasing developer contributions, which can still be paid for out of land value increases arising from granting planning permission. What is less clear is whether the rationale is still consistent with the original objectives of developer contributions or whether it is simply a land value tax by another name.

In this context, each country has proposed some more radical approaches based on introducing infrastructure levies, but each with rather different objectives—Scotland to address sub-regional infrastructure needs, and England to replace the existing Section 106 and CIL arrangements which are seen to cause delays and to be administratively burdensome.

Following commissioned research,[5] Scotland put a potential infrastructure levy on the statute book in 2019, although the government has yet to implement it. The intention now is to introduce legislation in 2023–24. The levy is intended to 'capture a proportion of land value uplift, so that there can be public benefit from the value created by planning decisions and public sector investment'.[6] The proposed levy would 'support the provision of infrastructure and services which will benefit and incentivise the delivery of development across a wider area, and help to unlock sites planned for development'.[6] It would be collected by local authorities and spent by them on a defined list of infrastructure which covers a wide range of potential needs, including community (for example schools and health) as well as other kinds of infrastructure (for example roads, water, energy, and flood prevention).

To date, no decision has been taken as to the form the levy would take—for example either as a contribution towards defined costs (such as CIL in England) or as a charge on the value of the development created (as proposed for the Infrastructure Levy in England).

England is also considering a mandatory Infrastructure Levy, not as an additional mechanism but rather as a replacement for Section 106 agreements and CIL as part of a broader planning reform (although the latter now looks unlikely to happen). The intention is to replace the cost-based contributions of Section 106 and CIL with a levy based on the sales value of developments.

The Infrastructure Levy in England would be collected only above a value threshold based on the costs of development and an allowance for some

land value.[7] It would replace the complexity and uncertainty of the current arrangements with a much simpler and more predictable approach and reduce the lengthy negotiations, which are seen as particularly problematic for SME (small and medium-sized enterprise) developers. The stated expectation is that this proposed system will raise at least as much funding as is currently delivered, including as many new affordable new homes, mostly still to be provided on site, as is the case under Section 106 agreements. Others see the potential for it to raise much more and become the equivalent of a quasi-hypothecated land value tax on new development.

The levy would be paid on the value of completed development when it is occupied. To ensure that the infrastructure necessary to make development acceptable in planning terms can be provided in a timely manner, local authorities will be able to borrow against anticipated revenues.

Although the simplicity and predictability of the proposed system is to be welcomed, it will not be without complexities. A preliminary assessment of the proposal, based upon modelling its impact on funds secured, showed that a national rate would be unlikely to achieve the government's objectives because it would either secure too little in southern England or (if it were to avoid this) it would make developments elsewhere unviable. Hence regional or sub-regional rates would be required.[8]

> **'An obvious three-pronged approach might distinguish different types of sites: smaller sites; larger, more complex sites; and major developments. This would primarily build on and develop existing developer contributions practice'**

The government has subsequently indicated that it would give local authorities the power both to set rates (which would almost certainly have to vary within an authority) and to collect and spend levies. The hoped-for simplicity is therefore unlikely to be realised. While it may well prove simpler and less risky for developers (although they lose their contractual Section 106 right to ensure that their contributions are used for infrastructure), it is likely to prove riskier for local authorities, and deciding on local levy rates and threshold levels will be challenging. An obvious concern, with respect to current government policy, is that without a mechanism for redistribution between areas, the levy is likely to be inconsistent with the levelling-up agenda.

Looking forward — learning from experience in England and Scotland

The experience in both countries, as well as the current proposals for change, raise a number of issues about how developer contributions might be better handled. In particular, can raising developer contributions through a single approach covering all types and sizes of developments work, given the complex variety and range of sites and circumstances involved? Additionally, should the amounts secured be related to the costs of provision — a fundamental principle of the original developer contributions approach — or to the value of the development being created? This is a choice which raises the more fundamental question of whether these policies are now being designed explicitly to capture land value increases or to secure developer contributions to infrastructure costs (with land value capture being an outcome but not an explicit objective, as in earlier developer contribution policies).

Depending on final decisions we may have two different levy approaches. The levy in Scotland may proceed as a cost-based approach, despite policy stressing this as a means of land value capture — whereas the English levy, as proposed, is to proceed as a value-based approach unrelated to the costs of mitigations and infrastructure. Each country will doubtless want to see how these different approaches work in practice and if there are lessons to be learned.

Based on our research in both countries, an alternative approach could be to have systems that are appropriate to the types of sites involved, because each site (or at least each type of site in terms of characteristics) is different. Such an approach would still depend on local authorities having clear and regularly updated local development plans; carefully identifying sites for development within these plans, clarifying how each would be treated in terms of developer contributions; and further clarifying how 'windfall sites', not allocated in plans but brought forward by developers, would be treated.

An obvious three-pronged approach might distinguish different types of sites: smaller sites; larger, more complex sites; and major developments. This would primarily build on and develop existing developer contributions practice rather than putting in place completely fresh approaches, which inevitably take time to bed in and thus risk undermining the implementation of new development (at least for the time it takes for new practices to evolve).

For small sites with short build-out times, including those where on-site provision of new affordable homes is not sensible, one could envisage a simple tariff. This could be based on floorspace or numbers of homes to be paid by developers towards the costs of site mitigation and the extra community needs generated by such developments, which cumulatively can be substantial. In England, use could also be made of planning conditions to achieve new infrastructure, building on the experience of Scotland.

For larger sites, including those with long build-out times and perhaps multiple developers, something along the lines of negotiated contributions to the infrastructural and community needs generated by these developments over time would be more appropriate than a fixed tariff. Even so, there might be a case for indicative rates, allowing for changes as conditions, revenues and costs change over the construction period.

For major developments, such as new villages, significant urban extensions, or substantial urban regeneration sites, one could envisage more partnership types of approach, taking account of the models set out in the Letwin Review in England[9] and the masterplan consent areas now provided for in the Scotland Planning Act of 2019. These can involve several landowners and developers working in partnership and, within a clear developer contributions policy, set out what is required and shape the land value expectations of landowners whose land is to be acquired. The partnership would thus acquire land in a way that fully reflects the required contributions and realises the value inherent in the proposed new development when it is built out, helping to fund the infrastructure and community facilities needed.

Such an approach would be more acceptable than changes in compulsory purchase compensation that would mean only existing-use value would be paid to landowners whose land was acquired (as has often been proposed). Instead, clear policy on developer contributions would mean both partnership and private sites would get the same market value, one that had taken account of these required contributions.[10]

Conclusions

In both countries, there has been general acceptance by all parties of the principles of developer contributions for site mitigation, for community needs related to new development and for affordable housing provision; but there has also been acceptance that they cannot easily and effectively provide for infrastructure requirements needed for wider development. The reasons for introducing these new levies are not simply that levies might be better at raising funds than developer contributions, but that new approaches are needed not only to secure funding for non-site-specific infrastructure but also to ensure greater co-ordination, including the timing of all new infrastructure.

However, there are risks for both countries in introducing something brand new in terms of the proposed levies, which is why we suggest that there might be merit in thinking of adapting the existing systems. Introducing change within the current frameworks of policy and practice by clarifying, in particular, how they can simplify processes and be used for all three elements — site mitigation, community needs, and non-local infrastructure — might be less disruptive.

We also note that all new infrastructure, however funded, benefits existing residents and businesses, as well as the occupiers of the new developments. There is thus a much wider question as to whether we need better mechanisms than our existing land and property taxation framework to ensure that they too pay for these benefits.

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Notes

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making planning and places deliver for climate change

Based on his presentation to the TCPA's Annual Conference at the end of 2021, Lord Deben, Chairman of the Climate Change Committee, argues that the imperative to fight climate change must, and can, go hand in hand with building a cleaner, greener, kinder world

Planning is going to have to play a very important part in the way that we reach net zero emissions. But before considering the specifics of planning, it is worth revisiting the nature of the climate change problem. The natural balance by which we live is such that all life—human beings, animals, and plants—make emissions. Those emissions used to be balanced by the ability of the world to sequestrate carbon—after all, that is how the planet became cool enough for human beings to emerge. But over the last 200 years we humans have taken the oil and coal which laid down the carbon that was sequestrated and thrown it back into the atmosphere. It is not surprising that if one mechanism, pulling carbon from the atmosphere, cooled the world, doing the opposite heats the world.

It worth returning to that very simple concept because when we talk about 'net zero' both words are essential. We cannot have zero emissions because human beings are alive, and, just as we sometimes blame animals for the problems we have, because they belch, so we are animals, and in living we emit. So we need to recover that balance of nature. And that is why when we talk about things such as pollution of water or air, or the need to recover the fertility of the soil or prevent a loss of biodiversity, we are not discussing things that are *sidelines* of climate change; we are talking about the very things that we need to attend to in order to battle against the climate change that we have created.

That is why the insight of the Pope in his great encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, is so important. He talks about climate change being the symptom of what we have

done to the world. And the disease, of course, is that pollution, that lack of fertility, that reduction in biodiversity—that is where the disease is, and that is what we must cure if we are to fight climate change.

And it is also important not only to think about the balance of nature, but also to recognise that in fighting climate change we are building a cleaner, greener, kinder world. Because the things that we have done to the world have had very direct effects on our health, on our happiness, on our wellbeing, and on the way that we treat other people. Fighting climate change is thus an uplifting concept. We must remind people that, although the battle is hard, although it is an existential battle that we have to win, at the same time in fighting the battle we will be building a better world.

We also have to remember that while human beings have brought climate change about, the responsibility lies with those of us in richer countries in particular. It was Britain that started the Industrial Revolution; and the rich countries have grown rich through activities that have polluted. And that is why, in the global picture, we have to pay for the remedy. Many of the countries most affected by climate changes have actually contributed least to them. The nearer you get to the Equator, the more climate change is already destroying lives and damaging families. But for the most part those are not countries that have polluted the world. And that is why the richer countries' role in paying the cost of cure of the real disease becomes so important.

But we have to start at home; and here, for all that there some things on which I don't agree with the

Jonathan Ford on Unsplash

'It is going to be tough living with a changed global climate of temperatures 1.5°C higher than pre-industrial levels, but we can do so. Move much above that, and we will see changes that will be extremely difficult for people to encompass, and with which to live'

government, I have to celebrate the fact that the UK government has set the toughest targets in the world—because they are necessary if we are to play our part in getting temperature rises to stay below 1.5°C. That is the key point. It is going to be tough living with a changed global climate of temperatures 1.5°C higher than pre-industrial levels, but we can do so. Move much above that, and we will see changes that will be extremely difficult for people to encompass, and with which to live.

So we know what the battle is. And the aim has been set by government not only in promise, but by law. The Climate Change Committee has, of course, set those targets, the UK government has accepted them, Parliament has voted for them, and we now have to achieve them. The UK government's Net Zero Strategy has been widely welcomed—and welcomed by the Climate Change Committee—as a very good first step in the important matter of delivery.

But we on the Climate Change Committee had to say that two things were missing: first, any proper plan for land use; and, second, any acknowledgement of the need for behaviour change. Of course, we are all changing our behaviours in any case. For example, one of the effects of Covid-19 has been that many of us have learnt that holding meetings on Zoom and Teams is a pretty easy thing to do. These meetings are not always as good as meeting personally, but in many cases they are. As a result, people are not going to rush around the world for business to the same degree that they did. And they are not going to move constantly from one office to another as they did. They are going to live differently.

Many of us are going to work perhaps two or three days a week in the office rather than for all five days—and that will make a huge difference to the way in which people live at home, and, indeed, within their community. People who used to go on a long journey every day in order to commute will do that less often, and their connection with their locality will change.

So there is already an enormous amount of behavioural change, and the fact that the government is so afraid to discuss the need for such change, lest it be accused of promoting a 'nanny state', is a sad thing, because we have to recognise not only the changes that are happening, but also the changes that we need to *make happen*.

That brings us to land use and land use planning. At the moment, our planning system is extremely ill-prepared for net zero. As a nation we have signed the international climate change agreement in Paris, and we have made it legally necessary to reach net zero. We have accepted the programme and the plans and the detailed budgets to reach net zero, but there is nothing in the planning system to enable us to promote it. And unless we change the planning system fundamentally, we are not going to be able to deliver net zero.

There are some crucial changes that we need to make. First, no planning decision, however small, should be made without considering its effect on the climate. In other words, we will achieve our ends only if every single decision that we make is thought of in that way, and seen through that lens. That has got to be at the heart of any planning changes.

Secondly, it has got to be possible for planning authorities to make decisions absolutely, directly and immediately about proposals that are going to make it more difficult to meet net zero. Cumbria County Council ought to have had a planning framework within which it could say right from the beginning that there would be no possibility of agreeing to a new coal mine, because we are not going to dig out coal, or extract oil or gas, any more than we are doing at the moment, since we have committed ourselves, legally, to use no more fossil fuels for generation after 2035, and we already have the resources that we need up to that point. That has got to be part of any new Planning Act when it emerges, so that people do not get themselves into the difficult position that would otherwise obtain.

In plan-making, the government needs to make it clear to Planning Inspectors that their primary function is to make sure that the Local Plan faces up to the realities of both climate change adaptation and mitigation. Climate change has to become their central issue, as it has to become the central issue of the planning system itself. It also worries me that some local authorities do not seem realise how quickly this change is needed. This is a hugely urgent task: we have to do it *now*, because we do not have the time to do it otherwise. It will not be convenient to do it now; it never is. But it is absolutely necessary.

Faced with this necessity, we should bear in mind two very simple ideas. First, *optimism*; because we *can* do it as long as we are optimistic about it. But the other is *apocalypse*; because if we don't do it we destroy the planet. This sense of urgency will be the most important part of planning reform — to make it clear to local authorities that every month lost in not doing the things we need to do is a serious matter for the whole of the community.

Thirdly we have to recognise that planning has got to make it easier, all the time, for people to do the right thing. We cannot have new homes that will need to be retrofitted for energy efficiency in the future. Government must bring forward as rapidly as possible its plans for future homes, and they have to be tough — and they have to work immediately. There is no point in suggesting that the usual approach will suffice — that the new Building Regulations will not apply to anything that already has planning permission or is already under construction. New regulations and requirements will have to come into force at once, and housebuilders will have to apply for any exemptions, and prove that the house has already been built to such an extent that it cannot be retrofitted on the spot.

'We need to recognise (and we need the planning system to recognise) the importance of locality'

It has been one of the scandals of our time that housebuilders have passed on to more than a million families the cost of retrofitting their homes, because the scrapping of the proposed zero-carbon homes policy in 2015 meant that they could go on in the old way, building houses that are not fit for the future. We need a planning system that never allows that to happen again. There are many systemic changes that we need to make to the way we build, but such changes can be made only if government sets standards and refuses to listen to the industry when it says they cannot be met — which is what some housebuilders argued in 2015. In fact, some housebuilders *were* ready to make the change, but

were stopped by competitors who were determined not to.

We need change, too, in how the planning system approaches the wider questions of place. Here, central government has got to learn how to partner effectively with local government. For example, in recently launching an important programme for the future, Birmingham City Council sought a partnership with central government. Interestingly, it was asking, not for more money, but for more control over the money it had, and for a better way of relating and doing things together. That is hugely important: the traditional way of top-down discussion from Whitehall departments has got to go. Central government has to be much better at working with the nations, with the regions, and with local authorities. And, in turn, local authorities also ought to remember that, for example, parish councils matter. Local authorities are often much in favour of subsidiarity, but that often ends with them. A bit more subsidiarity is needed, right down to very local level, as much of the work that is necessary will have to be done street by street and almost house by house.

The community is going to have to be seen as much more important than it has been. The 'five-minute' society, in which people can get to important places within five minutes and most places within quarter of an hour, by travelling on foot, will be crucially important. There should be no more extensions to towns or large estates without any hearts; no more believing that transport, personal and public, is the answer. We need to live in communities, and we need to recognise (and we need the planning system to recognise) the importance of locality.

I am lucky in that I can walk to my local village, which offers almost every possible service — and I hope that increasingly we will add what we have not already got. It makes for a community. But it also makes for a *sustainable* community, and that is what really matters. Current changes in behaviour are going to make that easier, because many people will be at home for longer and will want those services nearer — and they will be part of the community, which so many who have commuted in the past have failed to be. I think that is very exciting.

The world that we are going to have to build, and the ways in which we are going to have to build it, are not only challenging, but exhilarating. If we fix our eyes on building a greener, cleaner, kinder, better world, the battle against climate change will become much more exciting and much easier. Our job is to make sure it is also a battle which is fought *fairly*, so that all are able to benefit and none are asked to pay more than they can. That part of it will also be helped if we get the planning system right.

● **John Gummer, The Rt Hon. The Lord Deben**, is Chairman of the Climate Change Committee and a Vice-President of the TCPA. This article is based on his presentation to the TCPA Annual Conference, 'Beyond Beauty: Building Hope for the Future', held on 25 November 2021. The views expressed are personal.

seeds to solutions

Pam Warhurst explains why the small local actions of groups in the Incredible Edible network can make a huge difference to our response to many of the major global issues that we face

Clifford Harper

This article is a story—a story based on real people doing real things that are making a huge difference, not only in their communities, but across the planet.

In 2008 a few folks in a northern market town decided that it was about time they started doing some things differently, so they kicked off an experiment that came to be known as Incredible Edible. Over the past 13 years those of us involved in that experiment have experienced some great things, and some not so great things. But just as important, if not more important, are the things that we *could have done*, as ordinary citizens in our own townships, if the national rules had been different; if policies and laws had actually put wind under our wings rather than trying to clip them.

Thirteen years ago we began to demonstrate that it is possible—without shed-loads of lottery funding or qualifications, and without permission from above—for people to get up in the morning and start to make the place that they live in and love a

stronger, kinder and more confident community— simply by planting food and sharing it. We are only part way along our journey: we have learned a lot, but we also know where we still need to get to. And we know the changes in policies and laws that we want to see to enable everyone to be 'incredible'.

The experiment started in Todmorden—but not because Todmorden is particularly different. It is a typical northern market town, situated in the Manchester-Leeds corridor, but it is the place that I call home. It faces all the struggles typical of so many places; things that are not news stories and are familiar to all of us—searching for identity and purpose, meeting aspirations and supporting good health, and providing jobs and reviving a failing local economy. But if you're going to try to start a revolution, where better than in the place where you live? Todmorden became the birthplace of a grassroots movement that has used growing food as a Trojan horse to demonstrate that we, the people, can

change the spaces of our lives ourselves, can connect and learn new things ourselves, and can start to believe in our own gifts—not because someone has given us a policy directive but because we evidence all this as every day we plant, share and buy food.

Todmorden can be a bit grey and windy, and it is not necessarily the place you might think of as the site of a food revolution. We most certainly could not guarantee sunshine, but what we could come up with was the idea of 'propaganda gardens'—places (very public places in the middle of towns and neighbourhoods) where people get inspired to do a bit of growing on a patch of ground near to them; where friends can get together and strangers can be introduced to each other, and then remember how grandma used grow or cook, smell herbs that they had not smelled for ages, or remember what they used to do in homelands that may be many miles away. They are places where some people take what they need, but most folks are just inspired to grow what they know how to grow.

We could have called them 'guerrilla gardens', but that seemed a bit too full of testosterone—so we called them propaganda gardens because they are places where conversations about different futures could take place.

But those propaganda gardens are just the start of a story—and in bringing about change a good story is really important. This Trojan horse of food-growing is actually a way into empowering each and every one of us to do our bit when it comes to the big changes of the present and the future, whether on immediate issues around health or on long-term issues around climate change. We started Incredible Edible because we believed that it was time that people were enabled to play their part in finding their own pieces of the jigsaw to put into that big climate change crisis picture—time to say that we are not victims and we are not going to wait for permission to do things; we are not going to be 'done to' and we are going to do things for ourselves.

Incredible Edible's 'three plates'

After the promises of the Rio Earth Summit, and the excitement when the world's leaders struck a deal to do things differently for people and the planet, we were all encouraged to think globally and act locally. It looked promising. But after the further summits of Kyoto and Copenhagen, and the total lack of leadership, both nationally and internationally, on recognising our over-use of resources, we were sleepwalking into the climate crisis; and sadly there certainly seemed to be a lack of trust in people-powered solutions.

But then, in 2008, leaving a conference in London at which Tim Lang, a professor of food policy, was addressing these big issues, it suddenly became clear to me that we could either become incredibly depressed about it all, or we could start thinking about what we can do in the place we call home to show that we are up for change; to demonstrate that we are not going to be seen as people that need solutions presented to them. It occurred to me that when it came to food—growing it, sharing it, and nurturing our communities—we, the people, could do that for ourselves.

On the train home, in the run from London to Manchester, drawing on a Virgin serviette I invented an action-based model which came to be known as Incredible Edible. The model I drew up on that serviette is based on three spinning plates (see the illustration below), and these three plates—of 'community', 'learning', and 'business'—are at the heart of the story, and that story can be understood by everyone, whether or not they think about peak oil or know what to do about their carbon footprint.

When we spin our Incredible Edible plates we automatically start to live our lives in a different way.
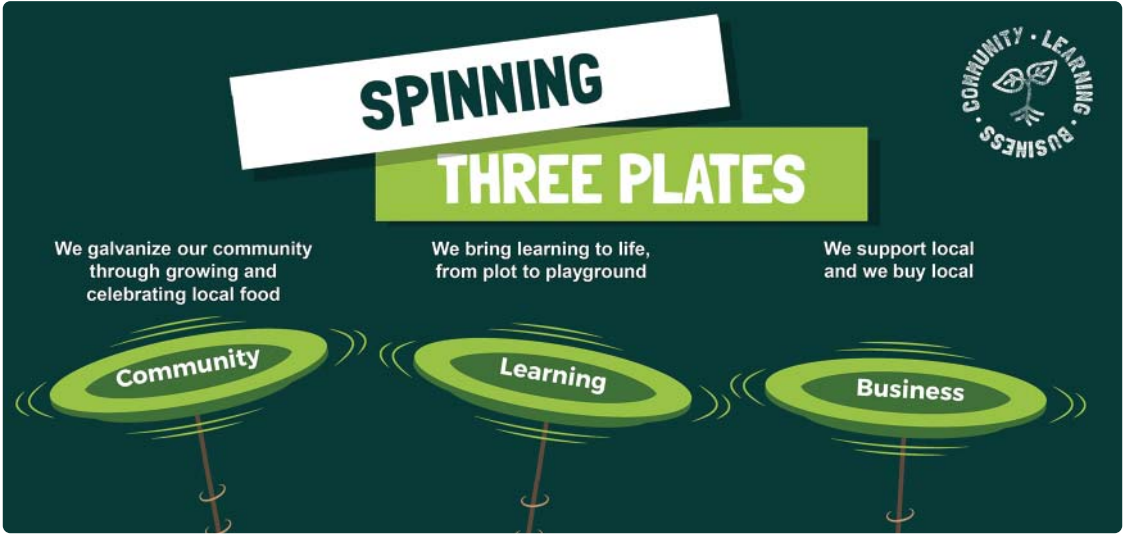
Incredible Edible's 'three plates' model

With the 'community' plate, we create propaganda gardens everywhere — on grass verges, in planters, and in neglected spots, turning horrible dog toilets into herb gardens. Sometimes we ask for permission; and sometimes we don't — and nobody has been sued. But each and every one of us involved is giving to our communities what we've got, whether that is big or small.

Despite our focus on edible landscapes, we know that many people do not know how to grow, and many do not know how to cook — and if they don't know how to cook, would they want to plant food? This is where the 'learning' plate comes in. Instead of thinking about how to draw up a Big Lottery bid (a process that can all too often stymie innovation), we seek out people who can bottle and pickle and grow tomatoes and potatoes and graft a tree. And we get them to spread their knowledge to others. And this, too, helps to create community through food.

The third, 'business', plate is perhaps more clearly something of an experiment. It goes like this. If someone is walking through edible landscapes every day of their life, and if they are starting to pick up on how to do things with the food that they see growing there, and are tasting the raspberries and smelling the rosemary, then they may be more likely to spend their money in support of a local food producer than they would be to rely, without further thought, on the local supermarket. They might stop buying those beans in their plastic bags that have been flown half-way across the world, clocking up carbon emissions, and which would be much better used in feeding people where they were grown. They might just go to the local food market and talk to the people from a farm up the road who are producing their own meat or cheese. It was worth a go.

So I took the idea to my friend Mary, and around her kitchen table we decided to invite local folks to a meeting in a café to explain the model and what it could mean to the town. We were going to plant food everywhere and see what happened. Wherever people were, we would plant food to share. We would create signs that encouraged, and we would cook what we grew. We were going to search out local people who could cook, grow, pickle, bottle, and graft. And we were going to spend any pound in our pockets in support of local food — not in the supermarket, but in the local market.

We would define the future we wanted by the actions we were taking in the present — in community spaces, reviving lost arts, and producing and buying local food. The three plates would be kept spinning through an act of will and passion. They would not only put on a great show, but act as a framework to involve, empower and enable action, helping everyone to think differently about the future. The universal language of food would be used to begin a journey to live in harmony with the many species with which we share this planet. It was all an experiment. Who knew if it would work? But the folks at the meeting we held loved it.

The three plates of Incredible Edible reflect how we live our lives. And it is the simplicity of the message — essentially about health, happiness, and kindness — that people seem to love. There are now around 150 groups spinning these plates all over the UK, telling their own stories and redefining their community spaces to create edible landscapes.[1] The idea took off in France, in New Zealand after the earthquake, and all over the world wherever people gave a damn about the wellbeing of their family and community, but were uncertain about what their first step should be. The answer was simple: plant food.

'We would define the future we wanted by the actions we were taking in the present'

Sometimes groups start with business — the interested restaurateur who starts to put little signs on his plates: 'Everything on this plate was grown within ten miles of this business.' Or things might begin with people who want to extend learning beyond the school gate, growing and cooking to give kids the chance to find out what great food tastes like, rather than going home to a Pot Noodle — and then maybe encourage mum and dad to do a bit of growing themselves.

But, more often than not, people start with the community plate, because it gives the fastest return. It creates a buzz, it redefines the greenery of your community, it starts to bring back bees and pollinators — in fact it does all sorts of things that might never have been thought of. Apathy has dragged so many of us down, but there is nothing like purpose to get you going in the morning, not least if that purpose is to do what you can for the place you love and the place you call home.

As we turned out to plant those first propaganda gardens, we were doing so much more than putting cabbages in the ground. We were actually redefining our public realm. We didn't start with that fancy concept, but wherever the Incredible Edible groups are — on the Isle of Bute or in the middle of Lambeth — they are redefining their public spaces themselves, without feeling they are beholden to somebody else to let them do it.

And the impact has been tremendous. The images at centre top in the illustration on the following page show a very simple example of how actions can still be very powerful even when they are small: in Ulverston an unloved back alley has been taken over by people who are growing beans, kale, and all manner of things to share. In the Marshland area of the East Riding of Yorkshire they grow in wheelbarrows using abandoned telephone boxes for storage. All over the world we grow in what we've got.

Examples of Incredible Edible in action

In the early years in Todmorden we turned our canal corridor into an edible canal corridor, impressing the Prince of Wales on a visit and causing the Chair of was what then British Waterways to observe that it would be great if everywhere was like this. Outside Todmorden police station there was a strip of hard surfacing that was calling out for raised beds. When we asked the police (we do ask on occasions), they told us we could go ahead as long as we didn't ask for money and as long as they didn't have to guard over what we did. We created raised beds growing sweetcorn and salad crops (also shown above), and 13 years on they are still there and still loved. This has created great conversations between citizens, and the police themselves have noted a reduction in environmental damage in the town, as people do not seem to vandalise food in the same way that some have vandalised daffodils — another of those interesting unanticipated spin-offs.

Food growing and health

Health is a particular area of interest. We noted early on that much of the grounds around Todmorden Health Centre had been planted up with prickly plants. At the time the NHS was running an 'eat five vegetables day' campaign nationally, at the cost of millions. There seemed to be an illogical contradiction there, so we asked if we could remove the prickly plants and plant food, so that people could walk into a health establishment while seeing what good, healthy food looks like. Again, the Health Centre agreed as long as they didn't have to plant and fund it. We created an apothecary garden so that the nurses could pick chamomile and mint on

their breaks, and we grew apples, raspberries, strawberries and other soft fruit so that children could taste them fresh, and so be encouraged to want to do the same thing back home.

And because of what we did in Todmorden, the Chair of the Clinical Commissioning Group in Halifax invited us to turn his surgery into an edible surgery. Within months, dozens of local residents and patients were digging and planting in an edible health centre. In Wales, Incredible Edible Porthmadog created an edible corridor linking the health centre, schools and the station, to encourage people to walk around the town rather than drive.

The impact that such initiatives are having in bringing demonstrations of paths to good health back into the NHS is something that we should be shouting about from the rafters. Of course, we have lived through two years of what has been a terrible time for many people, and it is probably not going to be the last time that we are hit by a virus in this way. We will need a huge push on population health if we are going to be able cope with the next virus that our changing planet brings us.

It also does not take a genius to work out that, as 20% of visits to the GP are related to loneliness (and who knows what percentage is lifestyle related — and we, the people, are going to have to take back some of the responsibility for our wellbeing), policy-makers need to encourage the creation of great places in which to live and work — places that put green edible spaces at centre stage and encourage us all to be more active and better nurtured. There is no better way to do this than by changing the rules to help make edible town centre landscapes the norm.

Incredible Edible's 13 years of experience lead us to ask for three key changes in health policy. First, NHS estate policies should be changed to ensure that food-growing is always factored into the design of hospitals, health centres, and surgeries. That could be simply through small but carefully designed tubs, or it might be though providing raised beds that the community and patients can look after, or using land within the site for an orchard. Whatever the approach, people should be steered through well maintained sites of good healthy food-growing as they walk up to our NHS buildings.

Secondly, we need to associate health with good cooking, and one way of doing this would be, where possible, to create community kitchens within or adjacent to our NHS facilities. There are hospitals that are already looking into this and working out what they can do within their resources to make it possible to bring together patients, doctors, nurses and the wider community to share meals that have been grown on-site. Leicester Partnership Trust comes to mind here.

Finally, NHS institutions should look at how to bend their big procurement budgets to make a step-by-step transition into the procurement of local food — which would not only offer greater quality assurance, since sources would be locally known and more easily monitored, but would encourage the creation of more local jobs that give people a chance to do something meaningful in helping to improve the population's health.

Towards a new normality of a kinder prosperity

But, as important as it is, Incredible Edible's concerns extend beyond health. At heart, we want a new normality — a kinder prosperity. We have demonstrated that we, the people, are prepared to do the things that we can to deal with the crises that we face. But to fully bring that new normal about we need policy to shift with us, providing a new framework within which we can operate: we need a change in some of the rules, with the three Incredible Edible plates as touchstones for a sustainable investment pattern that enables us to live within planetary boundaries.

First, we need a re-purposed public realm, opening up the many pieces of land in the hands of local government, the NHS, housing agencies, even the utilities, to a citizen's right to grow food — from the town square right through to the rural hinterland. Our lived experience at Incredible Edible is that people are ready and willing (or ready and willing to learn how) to responsibly grow food, respecting and nurturing the soil and each other. And we know that, desirable as a fully thought-out national food strategy is, doing things *to* people does not work half as well as letting people get on and do things *for themselves*, if the obstacles are removed from their way.

Then we need our structures to be designed — bringing all that we know from the STEAM subjects of science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics — so that we can grow food up, across and on top of our buildings. There are all sorts of things we can do, through hydroponics, through aquaponics, to make our settlements 'edible' if we are creative and innovative. And we need to make sure that every house that is built has at least a patch of open space in which people can grow food.

And thirdly we need to invest in the next generation of urban farmers, and in our markets, market halls, and local supply chains — they are all going to be key to how we live well and prosper in the future. In Todmorden, after getting people talking in propaganda gardens, after spreading food-growing and cooking skills, cafés and restaurants in the town are now putting local food on the menu. Our market hall is busier than ever before, more business is being done with local farms and producers (with the bonus that we are more likely to see more local jobs in that sector), and more people are moving to Todmorden or coming there to shop because they are attracted by the local food and they like the idea of 'sticky money' that stays in the area where the spending happens. The same is true for markets and towns across the network, from Radcliffe, Bury to Southall, Greater London.

But while decision-makers waver over the need to urgently embrace these changes, at Incredible Edible we are just going to keep on doing things for ourselves — collectively spending thousands of hours growing every single week, sharing, and challenging. And we are going to continue to tell our stories, to show that together we can change the look and functions of our towns and cities, investing in the green infrastructure needed to ensure that we can nurture ourselves. We have demonstrated the amazing gifts that our citizens bring to their communities as they become part of the solution to living within our means. It is not such a stretch to ask those with responsibility for the public realm to re-purpose it, take away obstacles, and trust the people to build kinder futures through the power of small actions.

The American anthropologist Margaret Mead said it all: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.' Believe in the power of small actions. They are far too often belittled, but they are the building blocks of a more self-sustaining future.

● *Pam Warhurst CBE* is Co-Founder of Incredible Edible and Chair of Incredible Edible CIC, and Chair of Todmorden Town Deal Board. The is article is based on her 2021 Sir Frederic J Osborn Memorial Lecture. The views expressed are personal.

Note

1 See the Incredible Edible website, at www.incredibleedible.org.uk/what-we-do/
See also P Warhurst and A Sikking: *Seeds to Solutions: The Power of Small Actions*. Incredible Edible, 2021. Available from www.spsquare.org/product-page/seeds-to-solutions

planning rapid transit for urban recovery

Calls for greater equality or levelling up can never be met without long-overdue changes in the way that we plan and deliver local infrastructure such as integrated transport systems, says Nicholas Falk

A Nottingham Express Transit tram in Nottingham city centre

The government's decision to change direction on the plan for High Speed 2, which left major cities such as Bradford out in the cold, is enabling fresh thought to be given to how to connect up disadvantaged places and boost urban recovery. Britain's provincial cities not only lag far behind their continental equivalents in economic terms, but also lack the integrated transport systems that make getting around European cities much easier, as reports from the Centre for Cities have highlighted.[1] Two-thirds of people can reach the centres of the big European cities in which they live by public transport within half an hour, compared with only two-fifths in their UK equivalents. Now that cities are starting to draw up plans for tackling climate change, it is ever more important to improve public transport, not only to cut pollution and hence improve public health, but also to give a boost to poorer areas and the people who live in them.

What makes a successful city region?

Transport is key to success in building successful city regions. What matters to most people is not the speed of getting from one city to another, but the reliability and cost of getting around the place in which they live and work. However, spatial planning in Britain is weak because development, transport and finance operate in separate silos, and depend
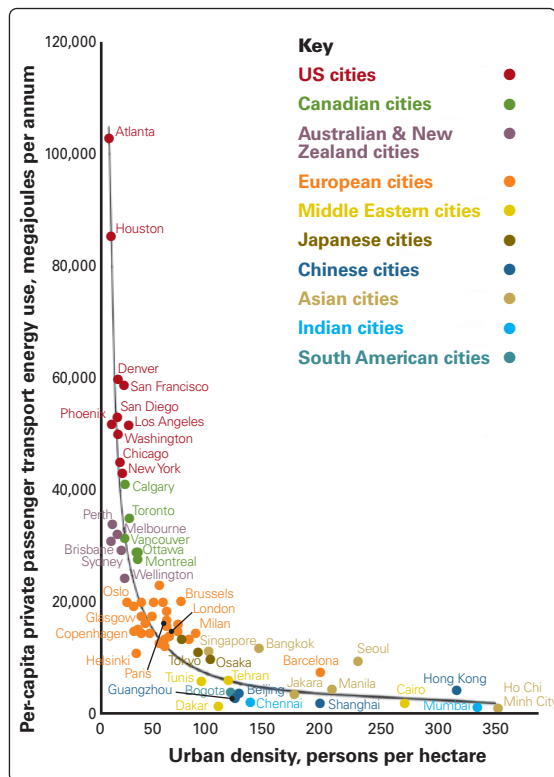
Fig. 1 Per-capita private passenger transport energy use and urban density in global cities

Source: P Newman: 'Density, the sustainability multiplier: some myths and truths with application to Perth, Australia'. *Sustainability*, 2014, Vol. 6 (9), 6467–87

too much on central government. Few see the city as a whole and over the longer term. Higher-density areas consume less energy and hence create lower carbon emissions, as research reveals (see Fig. 1), but British cities are also hampered by low-rise buildings and sprawling suburbs — any expansion will lead to increased congestion and will be capped by the impossibility of increasing road capacity to meet the increased demand. Consequently, their future depends on reducing traffic, not on the introduction of electric or autonomous cars.

To make urban recovery or transformation viable, we need to rebuild at higher densities around railway stations. Under-used land on the edge of town centres can provide ideal homes for those looking for their first or last homes, as international models in good cities such as Vienna and Copenhagen demonstrate.[2] As I have argued in a series of articles in *Town & Country Planning*,[3] this calls for different approaches to spatial planning, as well as measures to tap into land value uplift to help fund local infrastructure.[4] Simply reacting to proposals from developers will never turn the tide.

Planners are now being asked to consider the impacts of their decisions on climate change as well as on 'levelling up', and the options before

them are ever more complex and of uncertain outcome. Meanwhile, shortages of both finance and capacity are creating interest in financial tools such as land value capture, and even potential reforms to property taxation.[5]

The *City Investment Analysis Report* report produced by the Climate Investment Commission, backed by the Core Cities, London Councils and the Connected Places Catapult, rightly calls for 'place-based investment demonstrators […] public-private partnerships [and] more detailed planning to secure investment'.[6] Interestingly, the contribution that rail could make is virtually ignored, although there is a reference to the Brentford-to-Southall scheme, which Jonathan Manns and I originally promoted as part of a concerted effort to reshape West London.[7] However, without a focus such as a transport corridor, appropriate delivery mechanisms, and opportunities for investors to share in the uplift in land values from development, it is hard to see how the finance that is potentially available for 'green investment' will ever be tapped, or carbon emissions cut.

How rapid transit can help

The best way of reducing traffic and pollution in the centre of cities is to upgrade the quality of mass or public transport. That allows traffic to be taken out of the centre, and space to be given over to active travel, whether walking or cycling. Public transport needs to be frequent, regular and affordable to compete with the appeal of private cars. To find out how successful cities have funded and organised rapid transit systems, the Academy of Urbanism held an online seminar that highlighted four leading examples — the solutions it demonstrated included upgrading suburban rail, as with DART (the Dublin Area Rapid Transit), building overhead metros, as in Copenhagen, and even street-running trams, as in Aarhus, Nottingham, and Dublin. The full conclusions are set out in a report and series of particularly insightful videos,[8] but some of the highlights are outlined below.

Light rail systems or tramways can work much better than buses because they offer better performance and carry many more people in comfort. They also have a permanence that will encourage developers to invest. A tramcar follows the narrow street-based path that its rails take it on, and can go round tight corners. And a steel wheel on a steel rail is much less polluting than rubber tyres. The upfront investment is usually greater, but needs to be evaluated as part of a total makeover of the city centre or the regeneration of an isolated area. This is because much of the infrastructure cost goes in upgrading underground utilities and remaking the street (French tramway proponents define this approach as 'façade to façade').

Trams have a particular contribution to make in historic cities, where densities are high, and where there are lots of tourist and students to pick up. Yet

even though cities such as Oxford and Cambridge lag behind comparable cities such as Grenoble or Heidelberg, there is no funding for proper feasibility studies to assess options, let alone pilot projects. URBED's report on a seminar held with experts from University College London in 2015 highlighted the gaps.[9] A startling chart (see Fig. 2) showed that while Germany had maintained its large number of light rail systems, and France had rebuilt rapidly over the preceding 20 years, Britain had lagged far behind. It is no coincidence that French provincial cities have grown much faster than Paris, with Montpellier being an outstanding example — turning a sleepy university town into the fastest-growing French city, based on a technopole and an extensive tram system.

All the cities in these success stories put particular effort into engaging with communities to overcome possible opposition. Schemes were developed in phases so that people were won over. Partnerships were set up to pool resources, starting with public land in the case of Copenhagen. The uplift in land values from building the new town of Ørestad on the route to Copenhagen Airport was enough to fund the first line of the city's Metro. The public development company used to build Ørestad has gone on to redevelop redundant dockland, accompanied by the implementation of a second line. In Aarhus, Denmark's second city, the local authority acquires land far in advance of future development so that the community can control what happens and fully benefit from public investment.

Financing rapid transit

Because tram systems are expensive, they require major up-front commitments from local authorities. Many of the costs relate to the relocation of underground services and upgrading the public realm — which are not necessarily transport costs. It is hard to reduce costs, although economies can be made by buying systems such as ticketing off

the shelf rather than designing them afresh. However, once completed, most systems make a small operational profit:

- In Dublin initial funding for the Luas light rail system came from the Irish government, plus a loan from the European Investment Bank. When lines running outside the city centre were constructed, developers funded 50% of the cost through a planning levy.
- In Copenhagen the funding for the first line of the Metro came from loans raised by the Copenhagen City and Port Development Corporation, which were secured against the increased value of the land along the line after it had been re-zoned for development.
- In Aarhus the funding came largely from the city council, with other authorities sharing a quarter of the costs. In some cases developers have funded a new station and a section of a line.
- In Nottingham, central government provided 65% of the funding and local sources 35%. The Workplace Parking Levy (the first of its kind in the UK) brings in £10 million a year and is paid by every employer with more than ten staff.

Trams provide a classic opportunity for land value capture. The construction of new lines leads to an increase in property values around stops, and when this uplift is captured it can cover a significant proportion of the costs. Denmark offers the best models and shows how investment in transport can boost urban regeneration and economic growth, as well as creating happier and less polluting cities.

Developing light rail in Britain

Achieving similar results in Britain will be difficult — although land value capture was used in financing the public transport infrastructure developed by the London Docklands Development Corporation, and the Docklands Light Railway offers a precedent in terms of powers of land assembly and funding. Unfortunately, the 'stop-go' and Punch and Judy
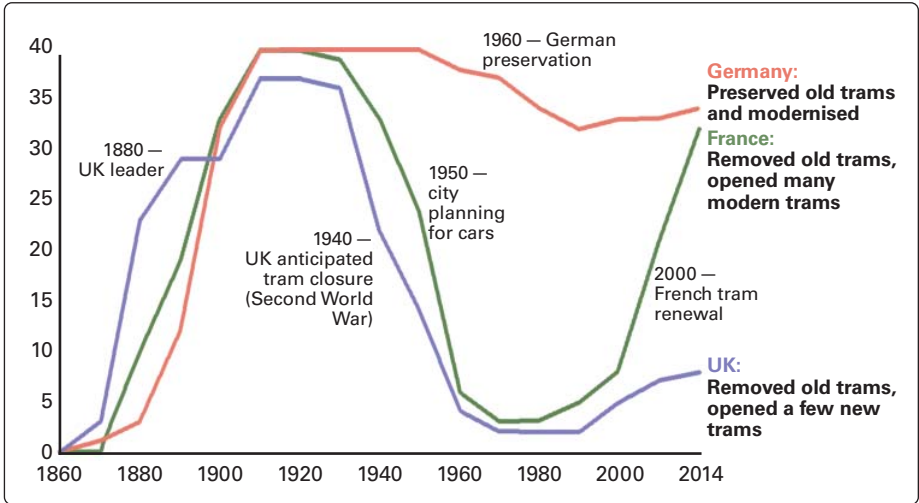
Fig. 2 Number of urban areas in France, Germany and the UK with a tram system (urban areas with more than 200,000 inhabitants — about 40 cities)

Source: S Hasiak and C Richer: *Appraising the Spatial Impacts of Tramway Systems: Phase 2: Comparative Analysis of Six Peripheral Tramways and Conclusion.* CTE Nord Picardie, 2014

Chart labels:
1880 — UK leader
1940 — UK anticipated tram closure (Second World War)
1950 — city planning for cars
1960 — German preservation
2000 — French tram renewal

Germany: Preserved old trams and modernised
France: Removed old trams, opened many modern trams
UK: Removed old trams, opened a few new trams

Nicholas Falk

The Aarhus Metro—Denmark offers good models of land value capture, and demonstrations of its benefits

system of British politics renders long-term planning difficult, making it almost impossible to develop the markets and expertise found on the European mainland. This leads to unfeasible proposals such as those found in Cambridge and Bristol, where underground tunnels have been proposed as a way of overcoming opposition. Hope is placed on ingenious and impractical ways to cut costs, rather than on integrating transport and development plans and funding.

Building new light rail systems is an excessively lengthy process in the UK, typically taking 15-20 years, during which time plans are all too often hit by political swings and financial upsets. This is where cities should make the most of the public transport infrastructure that they have inherited, and go first for interim solutions, rather than waiting for an ideal system that never gets built. To help revitalise our suburbs, Reg Harman and I devised what we call 'Swift Rail', modelled on the *Stadtschnellbahnen* systems found in many German and Swiss cities. This involves operating high-performance urban trains with rapid acceleration on existing (in Great Britain, Network Rail) lines. Swift Rail could also operate on new and re-opened sections of line, with new urban stations—as proposed for the Cowley freight line in Oxford and possibly even for the old route between Oxford and Witney. Studies suggest that the costs could be covered from the uplift in land values.[10]

Voluntary agreement may be possible. The Witney branch route may be funded from agreements made with the four main adjoining landowners, who stand to benefit from a substantial uplift in the value of their land that such a rail service would bring. However, a Development Corporation is probably needed to focus the work and package funds from interested

organisations over the time needed for implementation, and to avoid what economists call 'free riders'.

The foreseeable financial position in the UK should encourage planners and politicians to rethink local finance, especially given the unfairness of current property taxes and the need to raise funds from those who benefit most from investment, who largely live outside the cities.

For example, the central belt of Hertfordshire has a population of about one-quarter to one-third of a million. It forms a key commuter belt but is also economically strong in its own right, and has high levels of traffic within and between its many towns and local centres. There have long been suggestions for a transit across this area, and Hertfordshire County Council is currently engaging with the public on a possible scheme. Transport planner Reg Harman has set out a project for a 'Herts Orbital Transit' tramway, combining existing and abandoned railway trackbeds with on-street running through the main towns.[11] This has been supported by a major local landowner, Gascoyne Estates, and was discussed at a charette held in September 2021.[12] Hertfordshire County Council is working on the development of a cross-county transit system as part of its published transport strategy (although no specific mode has yet been defined).

Planning for transformation

Despite the cutbacks in the national rail system during the 1960s there are still 2,500 stations, many close to town centres, but often poorly integrated with other forms of transport. Some of the cities that face the greatest growth pressures, such as Bristol and Oxford, have spare rail capacity thanks to modern signalling systems, and freight lines that are only

occasionally used. Most have space for new housing near existing stations, as Brian Love and others have argued compellingly.[13] A few cities, such as Coventry and Preston, are considering the potential of ultra-lightweight trams. While each place is different, and therefore requires a particular solution, all could learn from the experience of how mid-sized cities with populations of under 250,000 elsewhere have tackled the difficult and lengthy process of planning, development and finance. This should be a priority in implementing the Levelling Up White Paper.

The Academy of Urbanism online seminar[8] noted five stages associated with success:

- **Vision:** Start by clarifying the challenges for urban recovery or growth and how the social, physical and economic aspects of the locality are interrelated. Time must be invested in generating the ambition for transformational change.
- **Practical options:** Identify the best opportunities for making impacts in the short, medium and longer terms through a mix of transport interventions. GIS should help in assessing against multiple criteria.
- **Organisation:** Bring together the main stakeholders in partnership to plan how improvements can be resourced. Updated Development Corporation powers would help to reinforce local capacity and help in tapping land value uplift.
- **Funding:** Raise finance from different sources for each stage and for each element, making use of the uplift in land values to supplement public funding. Green bonds are an obvious option, and there are ample institutional funds waiting to be tapped.
- **Stewardship:** Deliver and promote improvements in ways that win ongoing community support from property-owners and employers, as well as from residents who will benefit from greater prosperity and wellbeing. The long-awaited reform of council and possibly other property taxes should help here.

Calls for greater equality or levelling up require long-overdue changes in the way that we plan and deliver local infrastructure projects, as the TCPA has long argued. An alliance is needed to share experience and avoid repeating mistakes, which could start with Bristol and Leeds, two core cities that lag far behind their continental competitors. Instead of staggering from crisis to crisis, causing social services and maintenance to be cut, development to stop and plans to be scrapped, we should look to rapid and integrated transport to offer a practical way of tackling both climate change and levelling up. Surely the time is ripe for sharing experience and for organisations such as the National Infrastructure Commission and the Connected Places Catapult to work together with transport organisations and planners to make the available funding go much further?

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Notes

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5 N Falk: *Applying Land Value Capture Tools: Lessons from Copenhagen and Freiburg*. Urban Maestro. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 2020. https://urbanmaestro.org/example/applying-land-value-capture-tools/

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11 See R Harman: 'Transit through the Metropolitan Belt'. *Tramways & Urban Transit*, 2016, Sept., No. 964, 344–46. Available at www.lrta.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/344-346_TAUT1609_Herts-Orbital.pdf; and *Transport for Hatfield in Central Hertfordshire*. Gascoyne Places, 2021. www.gascoynececil.com/literature-2/

12 *Mass Rapid Transit*. Gascoyne Estates, autumn 2021. Available at www.gascoynececil.com/news/post-charrette-paper-hertfordshire-rapid-transit/

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securing a regenerative and just planning system

Amy Burnett considers the benefits and possible organisation of a more regenerative and redistributive planning system that not only reduces our environmental impact but also seeks to restore and replenish resources

BsWei / iStock

A regenerative system aims for a society that not only mitigates and reduces environmental impact but also fosters ways to incentivise the restoration and replenishment of resources, now and in the future

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to calls to 'build back better', a slogan echoed by activists and government alike.[1] But building back better requires connections to be made between the plan-making process, net-zero ambitions across government, and effective translation to the local scale.

Research has found that, as individuals, we tend to veer towards the path of least resistance—without counteracting incentives, people tend to choose the most-flexible and least-expensive option in any course of action.[2] The planning system has often been geared towards incentivising the wrong kinds of outcomes, favouring viability over inclusion or positive environmental impacts, for example; and it has not been sufficiently tied to emerging and transformative policy and governance architecture. For instance, as the TCPA's Hugh Ellis and Jessica Fieth have pointed out, there have been serious missed opportunities

to re-work the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) towards meeting the UK's legally binding Carbon Budget, despite the planning system's role as 'the gateway test' for many significant energy projects and in facilitating the creation of 'energy-positive places'.[3]

Monitoring and accountability to deliver on net-zero — going further

HM Treasury's Green Book already provides guidance on how to appraise and evaluate government policies, programmes and projects (including, among other things, how to assess land values and life and health impacts, and how to undertake place-based analysis).[4] But the Climate Change Committee[5] is also calling for a mandatory net-zero test, which would ensure that all government policy, including the framework for planning decision-making, contributes to meeting the UK's emissions targets. This test would complement expectations in other sectors, including those relating to financial investments, where, under the Sustainable Disclosure Requirement, financial investment companies need to communicate and label climate risks and opportunities. The forthcoming UK green taxonomy is expected to enable a shared understanding of what economic activities and investments are 'green'.[6]

Accountancy giant PricewaterhouseCoopers[7] argues that such moves are resulting in an unprecedented amount of emerging regulation and mandatory carbon-reporting.[8] The Climate Change Committee is also suggesting mandatory reporting for all infrastructure sectors in the government's next wave of climate change adaptation reporting.

All this is encouraging actual and proposed measures to promote greater accountability and to start to embed organisational and cross-sectoral responses to the challenge of net zero, but such measures do not go far enough — despite the Green Book's advice that the 'key specialisms in public policy creation and delivery […] must work together from the outset to deliver best public value'.[4] This article outlines an integrated proposal to cultivate a more *regenerative* planning system that both helps to break down silos within local authorities and actively pursues collective, inclusive and redistributive development. A regenerative system seeks to create a society that not only mitigates and reduces our environmental impact but also fosters ways to incentivise the restoration and replenishment of resources, now and in the future.

Integrating social and environmental value in the planning system — tools and sustainability platforms

The Social Value Portal[9] aims to bring rigour to the measurement, management and reporting of social value — and so help realise the goals set out in the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012, which came into force in January 2013 and requires those commissioning public services to consider how such services deliver social, economic and environmental benefits. The Act allows planners to request that developers submit a Social Value Statement as part of developments. However, this requirement is not mandatory and is therefore often overlooked. The Social Value Portal argues that, although social value should be at the heart of the planning system, it is rarely effectively accounted for.[10] This means that potential additional social benefits that could be sought from developers go unrecognised — and so undelivered.

Integrating social value through additional mechanisms such as a Social Value Statement, used as a form of a contract, can also help to situate development firmly within an understanding of local needs (as has been the case with developer First Base's application of this approach to the Soapworks site development in Bristol and the Edward Street Quarter development in Brighton).[10]

Embedding effective tools to set, monitor and evaluate targets for social value outcomes (such as the National TOMs — Themes, Outcomes and Measurement[11]) can help to hold developers to account for delivery through a development's lifecycle. More generally, frameworks such as the National TOMs can help to integrate social value within local authority procurement, as Salford City Council and Knowsley Council are seeking to do.[12] The Social Value Portal estimates that communities are missing out on an addition £30 billion of social benefits since social value is not effectively integrated into the planning process.[13] The RTPI's 'Measuring What Matters' initiative[14] has also created tools to quantify planning's contribution to meeting place-making aspirations and delivering social, economic and environmental value.

In addition to the National TOMs framework and its emphasis on social value, there are a wealth of tools to capture environmental land use management impacts on natural capital, such as the Excel-based Nature Assessment Tool for Urban and Rural Environments (the NATURE Tool).[15] The tool also quantifies physical and mental health benefits and can be used within any development application, complementing other tools to measure net biodiversity gain, such as the Biodiversity Metric 3.0.[16] There are also various knowledge portals that offer good practice advice in a one-stop shop, such as the UK Green Building Council's (UKGBC's) Solutions Library[17] and the Good Homes Alliance's Knowledge Base,[18] intended 'to facilitate the development of sustainable homes and communities'.

Another promising avenue is the Connected Places Catapult's Net Zero Navigator[19] — a tool (within a digital platform) to help UK local authorities refine and report on net-zero plans, measure and incorporate co-benefits, and integrate peer-to-peer learning. The emergence of such platforms is a promising sign of a potential solution to connect

Cornwall Council's decision-making wheel, used for the Saints Trail active travel route
Source: Cornwall Council. www.cornwall.gov.uk/media/43hpmphv/decision-making-wheel-flier.pdf
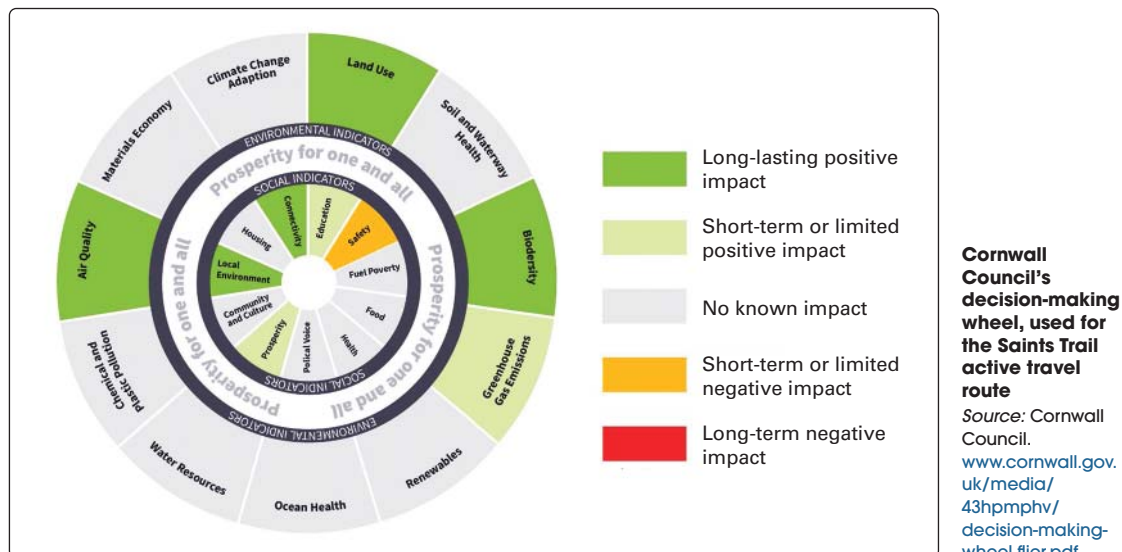
local authorities, enterprise and communities to drive action on net-zero.

In addition, an increasing focus on the need to consider our lifestyles in the context of planetary boundaries is reflected in Kate Raworth's concept of 'doughnut economics',[20] which has been described as a 21st century 'compass',[21] mapping out social foundations and ecological ceilings. Since 2019, the doughnut approach has been applied to help Cornwall Council shape environmentally sensitive decision-making processes during project, policy or service design, as well as in commissioning, procurement, and budget-setting. The council now uses it in all significant decision-making and in its Covid-19 responses (see the example 'decision wheel' diagram above). There are plans to automate the decision-making process further, for example in identifying whether a project should or should not go ahead, linking social and environmental factors to the council's carbon inventory, and to annual reporting on decisions and progress against climate reduction targets.[22]

Incentivising a regenerative and just planning system through a multi-sectoral approach

As well as using tools that emphasise measurement and accountability, we also need to integrate attractive incentives that encourage people to act sustainably—but not in ways that compromise intrinsic motivations to act that way.

A 2020 Local Government Association survey found a significant appetite among local council officers with a remit on sustainability for further incentives to encourage green behaviours—in areas such as sustainable transport, localised energy networks, tree planting, ecosystem services, procurement practices that do not contribute to biodiversity loss, and carbon taxes or incentives to businesses to reduce their emissions.[23] Many of these factors have a direct relationship with the

existing remit of the planning process, while others, such as a carbon tax, have the potential to be embedded further into how planning decisions are made within an overall whole-systems focus. However, preliminary results from a survey undertaken to explore how responses to climate and ecological emergencies are being monitored and evaluated[24] showed that 60% of respondents (mainly parish and town councils) felt that incentives were not an important or desirable feature of a sustainability reporting framework.

Incentives are important since they can encourage individual and collective action; but when integrated into the wider governance architecture across every sector their impact is multiplied. The UKGBC's recommendations to achieve just net-zero transitions within development recognise the multiple impacts across policy and practice domains within a systems approach, of which planning is a part.[25] They also reflect an increasing shift found in many sectors towards embracing circularity, fostering multiple changes aimed at increasing sustainability within procurement and governance. In March, the UKGBC also launched a guide on delivering social value across the construction lifecycle.[26] Meanwhile, climate emergency declarations are leading to new forms of environmental governance, such as sub-groups formed within local authorities that include non-governmental stakeholders (such as community groups, social movements, academics, and the private sector).

Yet planning's contribution to avoiding climate feedback 'tipping points'—environmental thresholds that, when reached, can cause reinforcing negative feedback loops—has not yet been quantified. And generalised net-zero local authority ambitions do not always translate into actual planning policies, at least not immediately, often as a result of how data sources are married up, or not.

Planners also need to be held accountable for how they are disclosing their contribution towards meeting the net-zero goal, which Simmons[27] has suggested requires regular reporting against targets. A patchy approach to data management may result in lost opportunities to scale up common approaches and so fully capture planning's contribution on a range of societal and environmental impacts. There is a question of how to scale out and systematise circularity across different networks, so that sustainability becomes the driving force in every decision that is made—not just by councils but in wider supply chains, becoming effectively integrated into both the planning process and how society and the economy are structured.

Moving towards a redistributive future through 'regenerative value'

If the planning system is to be truly 'regenerative', relationships within the planning process need to be based upon trust and mutual understanding.[21] Many of the more progressive policies and monitoring processes considered above can be integrated into community decision-making fora, such as Neighbourhood Plan processes, local climate assemblies, and digital platforms that can define and make transparent a community's contribution to sustainable development and how it ties in with local government priorities.

'New forms of social and environmental exchange and currencies can potentially have a major impact in promoting sustainability and inclusive, just development'

If we are to develop a shared framework for net-zero transition, new and innovative ways to raise resources for climate change action will be needed. Indeed, there is potential to incorporate radical measures that fundamentally shift how we understand 'value' and its exchange. Examples of such mechanisms in action are found in the principle of biodiversity net gain (encouraging net environmental benefits through development) and in feed-in tariffs (policy incentives rewarding the installation of renewable energy with a guaranteed financial reward over a specific period). There are also emerging ideas such as 'eco-coins' as a form of sustainable currency, and the integration of non-financial and financial forms of value within community 'banks',[28] or green bonds that link investment and the exchange of value associated with green outcomes or behaviour. These types of

measures offer a more value-based, redistributive model of development.

However, it is essential that flows of funding and resources towards these aims are mutually supporting. New forms of social and environmental exchange and currencies can potentially have a major impact in promoting sustainability and inclusive, just development. While the doughnut economics model is a major step towards assessing and addressing impacts within planetary boundaries, it could be extended further. Innovative socially and environmentally beneficial ideas and outcomes could stimulate the transfer of resources from the traditionally resource-rich private sector to community groups, and could help to raise resources to improve local government capacity in delivering sustainable outcomes at the local level—such as delivering net-zero affordable housing, for instance. Such an approach could also ensure that local actors work towards a common framework that both avoids unsustainable outcomes and builds community cohesion.

For example, the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements—or their eventual successor(s)—could be tied to common measurements of social, economic and environmental value that can be compared across different areas and actors (such as planners, public services, parish and town councils and community groups, and the private sector). Common means of quantification would also mean that, should policy measures such as carbon taxes be introduced, there would be a way to effectively link the value and distribution of such measures at different scales, including the contribution from development. To encourage equity, there should be a redistributive element, so that those who can most or least afford to contribute do so fairly.

In addition, penalties (such as the introduction of financial penalties suggested by the Local Government Association in cases when developers do not build to agreed timescales) could be reframed to encourage positive net-zero ambitions (such as an increase in the number of 'green lease' schemes[29]), as well including more punitive elements (to provide both carrot and stick).

A new form of sustainability 'currency' would be helpful: as set out in a forthcoming paper by the author,[30] 'regenerative value' is proposed as:

'A form of value that is produced when other value dimensions act in tandem to produce sustainable outputs or outcomes, calculated and circulated through linked governance mechanisms that promote the common good.'

Systems based on regenerative value could reduce carbon emissions, rejuvenate local economies and drive action by circulating exchange within the local economy and influencing national GDP to become more sensitive to environmental and social

Box 1
Proposed elements of a regenerative and redistributive planning system

- The doughnut economics model should be embedded into planning policy and decision-making.
- Indicators of regenerative value should be integrated into planning applications and the monitoring of outcomes. Applications should be scored against metrics that look beyond cost-benefit analysis to consider how the development would contribute to environmental, wellbeing and other social values.
- CIL and Section 106 payments should be linked to quantifiable impacts on various types of capital/ value measurements, perhaps using a 'traffic light' type of system that could be standardised across local authorities.
- Local and Neighbourhood Plans should be scored, within a publicly accessible database, against net-zero indicators, applicable to all planning and local authority policies.
- Monitoring and evaluation practices within planning departments (and in the wider local authority context) should consider the complexity of how planning decision-making and its outcomes affect wider-system net-zero and regenerative opportunities (including avoiding negative tipping points).
- Development outcomes should be assessed against wellbeing metrics, such as the happiness of the population arising from the development and its design and end-user satisfaction.[A] Assessment should also include environmental and social evaluation of construction companies and their supply chains.
- The focus on 'competition' within the NPPF (as in Section 6, 'Building a strong, competitive economy') should be revisited to emphasise circular economies that promote stewardship, encouraged through financial incentives that cultivate measurable contributions towards regenerative development.
- Local government should be given greater powers to inhibit landbanking.
- A minimum percentage of developer profits should be invested into a green construction and environmental protection fund (over and above CIL and Section 106 agreement funds).
- A Regenerative Resourcing Bank should be set up to leverage and collectively distribute sustainability resourcing, drawing on both financial (i.e. local, national and international markets) and social (for example time-banking and community materials) resourcing schemes for net-zero development and place-making.[B]
- Construction workers should receive at least a specified minimum level of certified sustainability training, paid for using a regenerative value distribution fund. Such a fund should also resource robust sustainability platforms that safeguard community and local interests.

A See the Centre for Thriving Places' Thriving Places Index webpages, at www.thrivingplacesindex.org/
B A Merritt and T Stubbs: 'Complementing the local and global: promoting sustainability action through linked local-level and formal sustainability funding mechanisms'. *Public Administration & Development*, 2012, Vol. 32(3), 278–91

dimensions (see Box 1). Such an approach echoes the greening of municipal social activism pioneered by the US city of Cleveland, Ohio, and the approach of 'community wealth-building' (a term coined by the US think-tank Democratic Collaborative) in Preston in the UK, in which partnerships with 'anchor institutions' are cultivated to keep wealth in the local area. Local actors could have a collective decision-making role in deciding both the allocation of regenerative value dividends (accrued from certain types of development) and how the corresponding projects would benefit local communities.

However, this requires our institutions and spaces for engagement to be fit for purpose. There needs to be a reflective evaluation of multi-stakeholder engagement in order to determine what political-institutional arrangements are required to deliver an integrated economy that is redistributive and gives incentives for greening. Such arrangements must enable greater information-sharing among stakeholders on sustainability gains, offer incentives to promote climate action, match stakeholder needs and interests to maximise sustainability impact, and be the result of a reconsideration of the notion of 'value' in political and planning systems.

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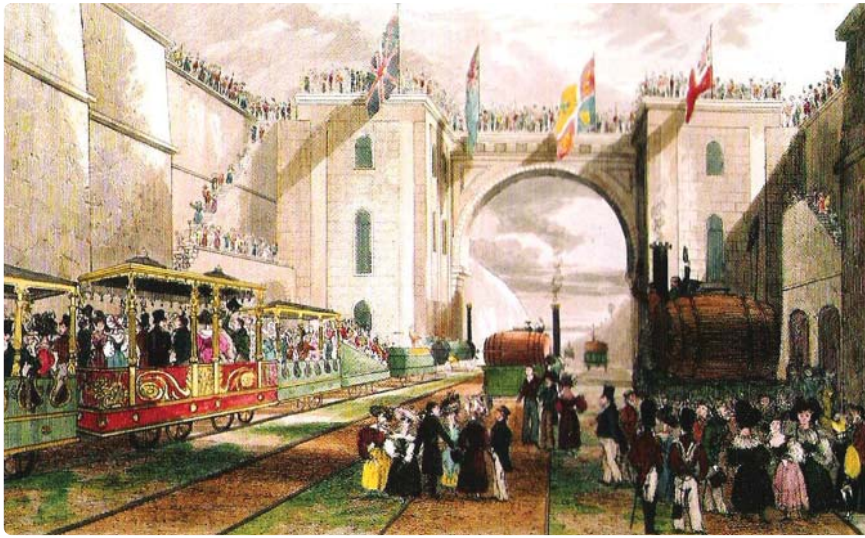
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4   *The Green Book: Central Government Guidance on Appraisal and Evaluation*. HM Treasury, updated Dec. 2020. www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-governent

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6   'New independent group to help tackle 'greenwashing''. News Story. HM Treasury, 9 Jun. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/news/new-independent-group-to-help-tackle-greenwashing

7   'Enabling transformation through radical and responsible change'. Webcast. PricewaterhouseCoopers, Nov. 2021. https://event.webcasts.com/starthere. jsp?ei=1507090&tp_key=7a5efc2b26

8   'Chancellor sets new standards for environmental reporting to weed out greenwashing and support transition to a greener financial system'. News Story. HM Treasury, 18 Oct. 2021. www.gov.uk/government/ news/chancellor-sets-new-standards-for-environmental-reporting-to-weed-out-greenwashing-and-support-transition-to-a-greener-financial-system

9   See the Social Value Portal website, at https://socialvalueportal.com/

10 G Battle and P Dennis: 'Planners and developers working together to bring community benefits'. Website Article. Social Value Portal, Aug. 2021. https://socialvalueportal.com/resources/insight/ social-value-enhancement/planners-and-developers-working-together-to-bring-community-benefits/

11 See the Social Value Portal's 'National TOMs' webpages, at https://socialvalueportal.com/solutions/national-toms/ The National TOMs framework can be used to measure and report social value consistently through a set of financial 'proxy values', developed to help organisations measure the value delivered and quantify the wider value created for society. The framework is endorsed by the Local Government Association and aligns with HM Treasury's Green Book

12 See Salford City Council's 'Social value in Salford' webpage, at www.salford.gov.uk/socialvalue, and Knowsley Council's Social Value Framework, at www.knowsley.gov.uk/knowsleycouncil/media/ Documents/Knowsley-Social-Value-Framework-(2).pdf

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Nov. 2020. www.rtpi.org.uk/research/2020/november/ measuring-what-matters-planning-outcomes-research/

15 See the NATURE Tool website, at https://nature-tool.com/

16 See Natural England's Biodiversity Metric 3.0 webpage, at http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/ 6049804846366720

17 See the UK Green Building Council's Solutions Library, at www.ukgbc.org/solutions/

18 See the Good Homes Alliance's Knowledge Base, at https://kb.goodhomes.org.uk/

19 See the Connected Places Catapult's Net Zero Navigator webpages, at www.oneplanet.com/netzero-navigator

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24 The author launched a survey, which planners and ecologists were invited to complete, in order to capture which tools and approaches they are using to account for sustainable outcomes in plan-making, planning policy, and development control. The survey was advertised in recent TCPA membership and Green Infrastructure Partnership newsletters. For a summary of findings, see https://express.adobe.com/page/ TyM7eOfNYmmxH/

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26 *A Guide for Delivering Social Value on Built Environment Projects*. UK Green Building Council, Mar. 2021. www.ukgbc.org/ukgbc-work/a-guide-for-delivering-social-value-on-built-environment-projects/

27 R Simmons: 'A green planning system?'. *Town & Country Planning*, 2021, Vol. 90, Jan./Feb., 16–18

28 A Merritt and T Stubbs: 'Complementing the local and global: promoting sustainability action through linked local-level and formal sustainability funding mechanisms'. *Public Administration & Development*, 2012, Vol. 32 (3), 278–91

29 Green leases provide a framework to help landlords and tenants to secure energy efficiency and other sustainability goals during a lease term, in order to improve a building's economic and environmental performance — see Better Buildings Partnership's Green Lease Toolkit, at www.betterbuildingspartnership.co.uk/ sites/default/files/media/attachment/bbp-gltk-2013_0.pdf

30 A Burnett: 'Incentivising 'regenerative value' to improve sustainability outcomes'. In G Vélez-Cuartas and O Romero-Goyeneche (Eds): *Transformative Metrics: Contributions to the Studies for Monitoring and Evaluating How Science, Technology, and Innovation Can Address Social and Environmental Challenges*. University of Antioquia, Medellin, Colombia, 2022 (in press). The term 'regenerative value' is also used by NOW Partners, although defined differently — see the NOW Partners website, at https://now.partners/ regenerative-value-creation/

rocket 200

David Thrower and **Ian Wray** argue that the coming bicentenary of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway could become the catalyst for a multi-faceted regeneration plan

Opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway, in September 1830
Original artist unrecorded; reproduced in R Gibbon: *Stephenson's Rocket and the Rainhill Trials*. Shire Books, 2010

Started on site in 1826 and completed in 1830, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway was the world's first inter-city passenger and goods railway. If only we could build at that speed these days. Of course, there had been other early railways, of which the Stockton and Darlington is the best known. But it was the Liverpool and Manchester Railway which set light to the fire. Engineered to high standards, it was a hugely ambitious mega-project, with an almost straight alignment (found today on new high-speed railways), gentle gradients (early engines were not powerful) and thus advanced engineering in tunnels, massive earthworks, the first stations, deep sandstone cuttings, and daring innovation in crossing the notorious Chat Moss bog.

Recently electrified, increasingly busy, and thus easily overlooked, the line is a tribute to the brilliance of its engineers — and, more than that, to the workers who built it, mostly using raw muscle power, picks, shovels and wheelbarrows, and to the women and families who supported and fed them. Few of the railway navvies lived beyond their 40s — such was their hard life.[1]

The railway connected Manchester, widely regarded as the world's first industrial city, with Liverpool, Britain's greatest imperial seaport. Its leading engineer, George Stephenson, whose Rocket was selected as its first motive power at the famous Rainhill Trials, has found a place in the history books. Its development and financing was closely woven with the best and the worst of Britain's 19th-century global role, as an engineering innovator and a colonial power, part of whose elite wealth was generated by the cruel trade of slavery, abolished in 1833. Some of the men who financed the railway were beneficiaries of the slave trade.[2] Arguably, 21st-century Britain needs to know more about both these subjects. We cannot build a new future for ourselves unless we understand where we have come from, both the good and the bad.

In 2011 the UK government considered a review of potential World Heritage Sites, including a proposal for six sites across the North of England which embraced the Liverpool and Manchester Railway terminal in Manchester. The review concluded that from its launch there was universal recognition of the benefits of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway:

'The railway was to become the single most important technological, social and economic

Ian Wray

Train crossing Chat Moss — as trains pass, the ground gently quakes, presumably on its original 1830s brushwood mats and foundations

force that shaped the nineteenth century, global in its impact and in the advantages it conferred on humankind. The railway unified the markets of the world, spanned continents, forged nations. It became the first form of transport accessible to the common people… the evolution of land transport from its pre-industrial form into the era of cheap mass transport for people and goods […] was the key to worldwide industrialisation and urbanisation.'[3]

Writer Christian Wolmar sees the Liverpool and Manchester Railway as a far more significant milestone than the Stockton and Darlington:

'The Liverpool & Manchester was conceived as a freight railway but in fact developed its passenger business far more quickly, demonstrating the huge latent demand for travel which, it seems, nearly two hundred years later we have yet to satisfy.'[1]

Railways are not about the distant past, a 19th-century technology built on dirty steam engines and an old-fashioned industrial work ethic. Steel wheels on steel rails have a bright future across the world. Powered by electricity from sustainable sources, with regenerative braking systems, trains can be fast, comfortable, and completely carbon-neutral. It is easy to work, read and relax on a high-speed train. Electric trains do not emit fumes, and they do not have rubber tyres which emit polluting micro-particles. Regenerative braking does not release polluting particles from brake shoes.[4]

Electric cars may not need oil, but they will remain polluters — and electric HGVs may never arrive. By contrast, trains are safe, efficient movers of people and goods, and do not require vast car parks or freeway systems or cause congestion. Railways

support regenerating cities — and cities support railways. Throughout the world, not least in China, the newly rising world power, there is massive investment in high-speed rail. The Chinese have built more high-speed rail lines than the rest of the world put together — over 25,000 kilometres by 2017, and they plan to reach 38,000 kilometres by 2025.[5] Conventional railways are being built elsewhere, especially in Africa, as part of China's 'belt and road initiative'.

Truly, the invention of railways was Britain's gift to the world. In short, this is a story as much about the future as the past, with global interest, global dimensions, and, if handled professionally, global tourist and image potential.

Built fabric, assets, and opportunities

These days, the Liverpool and Manchester Railway serves a scarred post-industrial landscape. The route passes through (or by) some of the most deprived communities in UK,[6] in six different districts between Liverpool and Manchester city centres — Liverpool, Knowsley, St Helens, Wigan, Salford, and Manchester.

Amazingly, a huge amount of the original historic fabric is still there, including earthworks, tunnels, viaducts, bridges, stations, and cuttings; but some of it is in poor condition and does not reveal its history, or in some cases its splendour. Historic stations are sometimes under-tenanted and under-used. Others are in run-down condition with little more than a 'bus shelter' and ticket office, despite the recent electrification. This is still a very busy but somewhat tired railway, with commuter and long-distance traffic (although possibly without sufficient passing places to ensure that fast trains do not get stuck behind slow ones).

The main components of the line's historic fabric and archaeology include:

- the disused Wapping Tunnel and Cavendish cutting at Edge Hill and the site of the original Liverpool station at Crown Street;
- the site of the original great Moorish Arch (the arch is gone, although fragments of stone steps remain);
- the Olive Mount sandstone cutting (much wider these days than the original);
- the colossal Roby embankment, adjacent to the M62 motorway;
- historic stations, including Edge Hill, Rainhill, Earlestown, and Newton-le-Willows;
- the sandstone Skew Bridge at Rainhill (famously carved as a model from a turnip by George Stephenson, to illustrate the form to his junior engineers);
- the Sankey Viaduct and the Newton Viaduct, and many elegant original over- and under-bridges elsewhere, including the Irwell Bridge;
- the Huskisson Memorial, commemorating the world's first railway passenger fatality;

- the great Kenyon cutting and the whole of the original alignment, including the stretch over Chat Moss, apparently still resting on Stephenson's brushwood mats; and
- Liverpool Road Station in Manchester, now the site of the Science and Industry Museum, where much investment in the original fabric has taken place and more is needed.

These are some of the most important historic engineering structures in the world, although a passer-by would not know it. There is a major audit and restoration project here — understanding and interpreting the archaeology; restoring, cleaning and in some cases floodlighting the structures and stations; and associated environmental improvements for the towns. All of this would contribute to re-imaging and tourism, and to regenerating some of the poorest places in the UK, strengthening the local communities, and making them more attractive to new young families and to housebuilders. It could help to reshape the future of these 'left behind' places.

In addition, there are large numbers of paintings, drawings, photographs, documents and objects, both large and small, in collections and museums — including the original Rocket locomotive.

Objectives and projects

There were previous celebrations of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway (and the Rainhill Trials) at the 100th anniversary in 1930 and the 150th anniversary in 1980.[7] But these celebrations appeared to concentrate on single events, featuring a cavalcade of historic trains, rather than focusing on the engineering structures, local communities, and the railway itself. A cavalcade of trains has its place, but the prospectus for a celebration set out here envisages a much bigger project over longer timescales, rather than a single event, or events, during a short period. With the right leadership, whole communities could become involved. We suggest the following objectives:

- **Levelling up:** Regenerating some of the poorest communities in the North.
- **Understanding Britain's past:** Probing the UK's industrial and imperial history.
- **Growing international trade:** A rail exposition focused on high-speed rail.
- **Developing tourism and image:** Celebrating events of world significance.
- **Showcasing science and engineering:** Putting UK engineering on a global stage.
- **Boosting morale:** An engineering equivalent of the Olympic Games opening ceremony.

Grouping potential project ideas around these objectives suggests the following possible components (this list is purely illustrative):

- **Levelling up:**
  - Restoration, floodlighting and improvements to stations, towns, historic buildings, viaducts, etc.

Ian Wray

Sankey Viaduct — the world's first inter-city railway viaduct is a massive and resilient structure that would benefit from cleaning, repair, and lighting

  - Involving local communities and people (including the railway staff).
- **Understanding Britain's past:**
  - Researching connections between empire, slavery, and the Industrial Revolution.
  - Builders — the roots of engineering excellence and the lives of the navvies, travellers, and customers.
  - Related lectures and exhibitions in galleries and museums (and online resources for schools).
- **Growing international trade:**
  - A high-speed rail trade fair, alongside historic celebrations.
- **Developing tourism and image:**
  - A festival held across both cities.
  - A cavalcade of historic high-speed locomotives in Liverpool.
  - Special trains running between Liverpool and Manchester, hauled by record-breaking locomotives.
  - An exploration of Liverpool's industrial archaeology.
  - Re-enactments of historic events, books, and TV series.
- **Showcasing science and engineering:**
  - The use of virtual and augmented reality technology to explore industrial archaeology and bring historic scenes back to life.
  - A lecture series on engineering and the future.
  - A replica Rocket in steam and the original on display.
  - An international high-speed rail exhibition (including representation from China).
- **Boosting morale:**
  - Major artistic and cultural events related to the theme of high-speed rail.

Making it happen

To move things forward, several things are needed: political support, a business plan, staff time, and money. But first someone needs to adopt the project and lead on it. That institutional lead could come from a number of places. One location (or locations) might be the Combined Authorities and Metropolitan

Ian Wray

Olive Mount cutting — excavated by hand, with a little help from gunpowder; subsequently widened and recently electrified

Mayors for Greater Manchester and Liverpool City Region, who have the lead responsibility for local transport. Alternatively, the City Councils of Manchester or Liverpool, with their respective museums, might be well placed to bring everyone in.

The good news is that since an earlier draft of this article was first circulated as a discussion document, early in 2021, several key partners have expressed positive interest in the project, led by the two museums — in Manchester the Science and Industry Museum (part of the Science Museum Group, which includes the National Railway Museum), and in Liverpool National Museums Liverpool. Not least in significance is Network Rail, which has expressed enthusiastic support at high levels. Both Liverpool and Manchester City Councils are involved in early discussions, and a scoping study is to be commissioned early in 2022.

The bicentenary may seem a long a way off, but there is much to do. There will need to be an initial base with some immediate institutional back-up. A project officer will be needed — as will soon be a chair and project director and a business plan, as well as marketing, and the co-ordination of applications for grant support and sponsorship from among the following potential sources:
- the National Lottery Heritage Fund;
- government 'levelling up' funds for physical regeneration;
- local authorities;
- Network Rail and the Department for Transport, particularly for station and rail infrastructure improvements;
- Historic England;
- sponsorship from, especially, rail-related businesses;
- various national museums and heritage charities, plus universities;
- HS2; and
- volunteer and charitable assistance (for example from preserved railways).

Alongside institutional leadership and steering arrangements, it would be very helpful to establish an advisory board, including project enthusiasts, especially those in high places.

This needs to be a big, international and multi-faceted effort — and it deserves to be. Otherwise, a point made by one of our consultees could ring true: beware a 'levelling up' project that is all about superficial celebrations, about bread and circuses, which neglects the underlying economic and regeneration issues. We are optimistic: it can be done. Indeed, the train has already left the station.

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Notes

1 C Wolmar: *Fire and Steam: A New History of the Railways in Britain*. Atlantic Books, 2007

2 The Curatorial Team at the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester advises:
    'In 1833, Parliament abolished slavery in the British Caribbean, Mauritius and the Cape. The negotiated settlement granted £20 million in compensation, to be paid by British taxpayers to the former slave-owners. The UCL Legacies of British Slave Ownership project has assembled a list of all recipients of this compensation. The database provides a snapshot of all those who were owners of enslaved people at the time of partial abolition, as well as their financial interests. The database offers an insight into some of the links between enslavement and the development of Britain's early railways. The names of several important figures in the Liverpool and Manchester Railway appear on the list as owners of enslaved people and recipients of compensation, including Chairman and investor Charles Lawrence, Deputy Chairman and investor John Moss, as well as investors Robert Browne and Charles Turner. The LMR was made possible in part by investments by individuals who made money from the ownership of enslaved people and who received government compensation when slavery in the British Caribbean was abolished.'

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wider windows on wolverhampton

Peter Jones considers the role of brownfield development within the focus on levelling up regional economic inequalities

As the train from Stafford approaches Wolverhampton, two signs catch the observant traveller's eye. Out of the left-hand windows a sign heralds the National Brownfield Institute, while out of the opposite windows the sign on the new offices of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, billed as the first new government headquarters outside London, is clearly visible. In some ways, this bilateral juxtaposition of signs evokes a seemingly new political spirit of economic and social regeneration — the National Brownfield Institute is under development, and the long-awaited Levelling Up White Paper was published in February 2022. This short article outlines, and reflects on, brownfield development and the concept of levelling up.

Brownfield land and the National Brownfield Institute

The National Planning Policy Framework refers to brownfield land as 'previously developed land', and defines it as 'land which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land […] and any associated fixed surface infrastructure'.[1] This definition excludes land that is, or was last, occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings, land that has been developed for mineral extraction or waste disposal, residential gardens, parks, recreation grounds and allotments in built-up areas, and land that was previously developed but where the remains of a permanent structure or fixed surface structure have blended into the landscape.

While all local authorities are required to publish an updated list of brownfield land under their jurisdiction annually, the occurrence, accuracy and frequency of publication varies considerably, and there is no definitive measure of the amount of brownfield land in England. Recent estimates of the extent of brownfield land vary. The National Housing Federation, for example, has reported that in 2018 there were some 18,000 brownfield sites across England covering 25,000 hectares of land,[2] while Sustainable Build has suggested that there are currently some 66,000 hectares of brownfield sites in England.[3] Geographically, brownfield land is found throughout England, but the main concentrations are in London and in the South East, North West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humberside regions, and the vast majority of brownfield sites are in urban, rather than rural areas.

The National Brownfield Institute is to be housed at the University of Wolverhampton's new Springfield Campus. Its vision is to 'create a world-class brownfield regeneration industry cluster through multi-sector partnership'.[4] More specifically, the Institute's goal is to 'realise the city's vision of becoming an International Centre of Excellence in brownfield regeneration, sustainable construction and circular economy', by 'securing the city's position at the forefront of construction and brownfield development nationally and internationally', by 'bringing new skills, innovative technologies and new policies for remediation and regeneration of brownfield sites', and by 'contributing to the 'levelling up' and green growth agendas'.[4]

Levelling up

The ambition to 'level up' — i.e. to address and remediate significant local and regional inequalities without a consequent detriment to outcomes in prosperous places — was one of the pledges in the Conservative Party's manifesto for the 2019 general election. Since then, the term seems to have passed into popular usage and has been taken up enthusiastically by the Prime Minister, but the ideas behind it are not new. Newman,[5] for example, has suggested that reference to levelling up has appeared intermittently in parliamentary records since the 19th century, particularly about the relative

positions of the Anglican and Catholic churches in Ireland, and that in the 20th century the term was used in relation to equality in government funding — and that, under the so-called New Labour government, levelling up was primarily used to refer to social policy, and more particularly to school funding.

After the current Conservative government was elected in 2019, levelling up became a more central political commitment to tackle regional inequalities in regional productivity, with a focus on transport, broadband, and research and development investment.

However, there is little detailed consensus about what levelling up means, and McCann and Ortega-Argiles[6] claim that 'levelling up narratives are inherently mutually contradictory'. Tomaney and Pike,[7] arguing that the current debate about levelling up primarily concerns how the Conservative government might consolidate its electoral gains in Wales, the Midlands and the North of England, go so far as to claim that nobody really knows what is meant by the term.

Jennings et al.[8] argue that levelling up 'is not primarily concerned with redistribution between social classes, or even between regions, but rather targets communities that feel they have lost their centrality and standing'. Newman[9] claims that 'levelling up is a vision of a post-Brexit Britain in which there will be greater state investment, educational opportunity, regional equality, and regional independence'. King and Ives,[10] writing out of the Centre for Policy Studies, suggest that levelling up puts 'the emphasis on the devolution of power, so that local government can play a more active role in the local economy, and on a private sector which is incentivised to invest and operate in those areas which need it most'.

At a more practical level, for some commentators levelling up implies investment in education, training and apprenticeships, and support for small businesses and enterprise; for others it involves more local decision-making and giving areas more control over investment; for others it involves a wide-ranging approach to harnessing both the public and private sectors to create sustained progress for communities; and yet others have described it in terms of the old chestnut of providing a level playing field for the UK's regions.

Despite this apparent uncertainty, in September 2021 the government announced that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was to become the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities 'as the government delivers on its central mission to level up every part of the UK'.[11] At the same time the government announced the establishment of a Levelling Up Taskforce, 'to deliver a programme of tangible improvements in every part of the UK'. In the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' second headquarters in Wolverhampton, there will, for the first time, be a regular Ministerial presence outside London.[12] The *Levelling Up the United Kingdom* White Paper, published in February 2022, says that levelling up 'means giving everyone the opportunity to flourish. It means people everywhere living longer and more fulfilling lives, and benefitting from sustained rises in living standards and well-being.'[13]

Reflections

The extent to which brownfield land will continue to contribute to social and economic regeneration, and how levelling-up policies will be played out, remain very much to be seen, but a number of issues merit attention.

For some commentators, brownfield land should have an important role in the levelling-up process.

Carl Beech on Unsplash

While brownfield land is widely seen as having a major role to play in regeneration and levelling up, much of the nation's remaining brownfield sites require significant levels of remediation and decontamination

In arguing that 'brownfield development is vital to levelling up', the Environmental Industries Commission,[14] for example, has argued that 'increasing brownfield development holds the key to levelling up. It will unlock the land needed to meet the housing crisis, make regional economies more productive, boost local construction firms, and help create more attractive environments for communities to enjoy and businesses to locate in.'

It also claimed that brownfield development can provide the land needed for increased housebuilding, for closing regional productivity gaps, for boosting the regional construction sector, and for enabling place-making. On the latter, for example, the Environmental Industries Commission suggested that increasing the proportion of brownfield development can increase community wellbeing, protect the Green Belt, and reduce air pollution.

In a similar vein, the CPRE—The Countryside Charity[15] has suggested that 'our plentiful supply of brownfield land […] is an opportunity to develop the homes we need, where we need them, without destroying green fields. Harnessing this resource for housing development means that our precious countryside and green spaces can continue to provide crucial services for nature and the climate, as well as for people's health and wellbeing.'

However, Fothergill and Gore[16] have argued that in the North of England 'developing brownfield land […] is rarely commercially viable', and McGuinness *et al.*[17] have suggested that, following the development of many of the brownfield sites first identified as suitable for development between 1997 and 2007 ('the lowest hanging fruit'), the 'remaining brownfield sites often have more intractable problems, such as contamination, that require de-risking or are not of a scale to be attractive to volume housebuilders'.

In a similar vein, Fothergill and Gore[16] suggested that 'the problem is negative land values—the cost of cleaning up and site preparation exceeds the value of the completed development-ready site. In these circumstances the private sector fails to bring the site to market.' They note that public sector funding was required to make it worthwhile for the private sector to invest in brownfield sites. In November 2021, under the levelling-up banner, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities[18] reported the allocation of some £60 million from the Brownfield Land Release Fund to support new housing development and new roads and infrastructure across over 60 local authority areas.

However, CPRE—The Countryside Charity[15] argued that despite the government funding available for brownfield redevelopment, particularly in terms of contributing to levelling up, planning policy lacked a 'truly 'brownfield first' approach', which effectively meant that 'much of our green spaces and countryside are built on before brownfield land is considered'.

More specifically, while it welcomed the new government brownfield development funding, it emphasised the importance of ensuring that the funding is properly directed to make a genuine contribution to levelling up, arguing that 'the crucial next steps for the effective levelling up of housing on brownfield land in the midlands and north will require the translation of this political will into actions and national planning policies […] This will mean overcoming the challenges and barriers which have restricted the development of brownfield land in the past, allowing for a comprehensive brownfield first policy which harnesses this regenerating resource and can be relied on as an aid in levelling-up.'

Concerns have also been expressed about how the relationship between levelling up and planning will develop. A report by an independent group of planning researchers, practitioners and academics[19] has suggested that 'given that the Levelling Up agenda is now enthroned in the core rhetoric, if not the practice, of almost all government departments, it is both tactically and strategically important that the relationship between planning and Levelling Up is understood'. The authors argue that while 'good planning is important for the Levelling Up agenda (if taken seriously), because good planning is needed everywhere in England, at all levels', planning also matters in two additional ways in those places and areas most in need of improvement:

● first, because of planning's capacity 'to integrate across key agenda fields: well-being via incomes and good housing, addressing environmental issues, linking diagonally so that improvement works up and down from neighbourhoods through to regions'; and

● secondly, because of the need for 'the capacity for planning to operate democratically, returning control to councils working with communities'.

Finally, there is the wider question of levelling up and sustainable development. One of the most consistent messages in all the government's statements about levelling up is that it does not imply the 'levelling down' of some areas—rather, it is most enthusiastically expressed in terms of driving growth throughout the country, epitomised, for example, in the Government's *Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc* policy paper.[20]

Setting aside concerns that promoting growth in what many might regard as one of the more prosperous and economically successful parts of the country might only serve to exacerbate regional inequalities, there are arguments not only that continuing economic growth is incompatible with sustainable development, and more specifically with lasting environmental improvement, but also that the need to move towards more genuinely sustainable consumption is becoming increasingly pressing. Such arguments emphasise that economic

growth, dependent as it is on the continuing depletion of the Earth's natural and social capital, is the antithesis of sustainable development, and runs counter to sustainable consumption, and that, as such, while political commitment to levelling up might have popular appeal, it is essentially unsustainable.

That said, there is little popular, commercial or political enthusiasm for an economic system that does not promote growth or that espouses zero growth.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that brownfield sites can also provide a range of ecosystem benefits and can be an important driver for sustainable development.[21]

Conclusion

The government's levelling-up agenda, and perhaps to a lesser the continuing development of brownfield land, seem likely to be important policy elements in future social and economic regeneration. As such, planners in the private sector may play an active role in helping to drive the levelling-up agenda. While their counterparts within local authority planning departments may be looking to ensure that the agenda is consistent with strategic and Local Plans, it remains to be seen whether they will have the resources or political support to fulfil that role as they might wish.

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are we really heading for conservative communitarianism?

To what extent can the Conservative Party represent the views of its *communitarian* wing? That is the question at the heart of what localists might feel about the new Levelling Up White Paper. It is also something that the Conservatives have shown few signs of doing since the days of Margaret Thatcher. But, after Tony Blair's quick abandonment of his 'third way' communitarianism ideas, and little interest from the Labour Party since, has the way been left open for the Conservatives?

In a comment in the *Guardian* the week after the publication of the Levelling Up White Paper, Julian Coman quoted the former Labour theoretician Jon Cruddas, harking back to a different tradition of Labour policy:

'*To me with hindsight, 1996 is a story of paths not taken, of missed opportunities. [The result] was a sense of powerlessness that people feel, of exclusion and estrangement, a lack of participation; a lack of virtue in our institutions and our politics.*'[1]

The problem for Labour is that Coman is wrong about the distinction he makes between '*I*' policies and '*we*' policies. There is nothing intrinsically left-wing about *we* — and nor, in fact, is there anything right-wing about individualism. I don't believe either Hitler or Mussolini were keen individualists (except, of course, about themselves...).

Perhaps the most important question is why so much of what has been achieved before by communitarian initiatives — by the Eldonians in Liverpool, by the Glasgow housing co-ops, or at Coin Street on London's South Bank — has been so quickly forgotten. Whose fault was it that recent governments have shown so little interest in community-driven, bottom-up regeneration?

Traditionally, many have blamed the political right, and it is true that the Thatcher government was not very interested in sharing power with impoverished communities. But the conventional left now faces an equal share of the blame — they are so nervous about appearing populist or Trumpist, and we are not supposed, any more, to doubt what the 'experts' (or state officials) say; but most community development has to start precisely with that kind of scepticism. We need to remember that people and communities have some reason for scepticism about conventional regeneration — the idea that somehow all we need to do is to persuade cities to specialise and then build motorways and IT superhighways, and hey presto!

It could therefore be the political right that takes the necessary leap of imagination. When Michael Gove launched a report at the Conservative Party conference last September, called *Trusting the People,* published by the New Local think-tank and the New Social Covenant Unit, and written partly by Danny Kruger, Gove's new parliamentary aide, and other 'red wall' MPs, it sent a shockwave through those communitarians who have assumed they were more at home among the leftists. It surprised them because it talks about the next stage of conservatism, which is to 'to put power and trust into the hands of the British people'. It hardly needs saying that the 'free market' think-tanks — the Adam Smith Institute, the Institute of Economic Affairs, and Cato — are none too happy about it.

So here are some challenges that any government will need to confront before it takes on the community agenda:

● ***Is it prepared to give up a narrow, doctrinaire version of economic freedom?*** Almost nobody wants to go back to the pre-1970 age of building upwards by targets, launched by Harold Macmillan as Housing Minister, which led directly to a new generation of slums and to the collapse of Ronan Point in 1968. But, equally, it seems to me that the Thatcherite approach adopted by Chancellors Geoffrey Howe and Nigel Lawson to let the market alone decide clearly hasn't worked

either. In fact, it has raised land and property prices to disastrous levels.

- *Is it able to think 'small'?* Governments must be aware, above all else, that small businesses now contribute 51% of value added in the UK economy. They should therefore be getting a similar proportion of the business investment available in the UK. That they are not is a sign of serious market failure, and we need to provide the intermediaries and institutions which could make this possible.

- *Is it prepared to vest real power in local institutions?* If changes result in just another block grant from Whitehall, no doubt allowing variations, but also with strings attached, then local institutions will simply be boxed into a corner as delivery agents for central government.

'Would Joseph Chamberlain have been satisfied with such a client relationship? He would have started wrestling with the question of what he needed to do to take some measure of control over his city's economic destiny'

Ask yourself this: would Joseph Chamberlain — who wrested control of Birmingham in 1873 from a group of councillors meeting weekly in the Woodman's Arms pub — have been satisfied with such a client relationship? I think he would have swept aside those grants and contingent promises and municipalised the local gas company. He would have started wrestling with the question of what he needed to do to take some measure of control over his city's economic destiny. He would never have simply accepted that the Treasury would decide economic policy on Birmingham's behalf.

- *David Boyle* is co-founder of the New Weather think-tank and Radix Big Tent, and is the author of Tickbox: How It Is Taking Control of Our Money, Our Health, Our Lives — and How To Fight Back! (Little, Brown). The views expressed are personal.

Note

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covid-19 — biodiversity's code red for humanity

As the world begins to breathe more freely as the Covid-19 pandemic apparently starts to ease, attention is beginning to turn to the prevention of future zoonotic pandemics. The much delayed face-to-face UN Biodiversity Conference — officially the Fifteenth Convention on Biosocial Diversity (CBD) — is due to open in Kunming, China, on 25 April, having been postponed twice from its original date in October 2020.

If the Covid-19 pandemic really is shifting into something we have to learn to live with, like a more dangerous version of seasonal flu (an optimistic interpretation, when 40% of the world's population have yet to receive a single Covid-protecting injection), then the rescheduling of the conference is timely.

While there have been some wild theories about Covid-19 being a 'lab escape' from a virology research centre in Wuhan, China, the consensus is that Covid-19, like its dangerous predecessors, Sars, Mers, Ebola and HIV, are all zoonotic in origin, the result of pressures on wild animal habitats leading to diseases jumping species to humans.

One particularly powerful piece of research, undertaken by Professor Aaron Bernstein at the Harvard School of Public Health and his international team and published in *Science Advances*,[1] takes a critical view of the current international public policy responses to Covid-19. It argues that funding for prevention rather than cure is money well spent; indeed, that it would be likely to cost at most just one-20th of the cost of clearing up the mess

Renaldo Matamoro on Unsplash

Calling a halt to the destruction of nature is crucial

afterwards. The abstract of their research paper sums up this view:

'Prominent policymakers have promoted plans that argue the best ways to address future pandemic catastrophes should entail 'detecting and containing emerging zoonotic threats'. In other words we should take action only after humans get sick. We sharply disagree.'

Strong words coming from scientists.

What do Bernstein and his colleagues suggest? Their argument is that stopping the destruction of nature is the key, because acts of destruction bring humans and wildlife into greater contact (as, for example, when people enter tropical forests to clear them for agriculture or timber, to build roads, or to work in mines) and results in 'spillover'. Their critique is that current approaches by global bodies and governments focus only on preventing the spread of new viruses once they have infected humans, rather than tackling the root cause. They calculate that 3.3 million people die annually from viral zoonotic diseases and estimate the economic value of those lost lives at a minimum of $350 billion a year, with a further $212 billion in direct economic losses.

Their argument is that with around $20 billion per annum investment in 'primary pandemic prevention' these losses of both human life and economic potential could be avoided, and that the investment could provide substantial co-benefits. Their public health perspective on the solutions to the crisis will sound familiar to practitioners engaged in climate and biodiversity mitigation and restoration.

First, being public health professionals interested in prevention rather than cure (they take aim at both the World Health Organization and the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board — a G20 high-level panel for financing pandemic preparedness which doesn't mention spillover in its strategies), they argue for better surveillance of pathogens that may spill from animals to people, especially through putting more vets into 'spillover hotspots' to monitor for emerging diseases in both wildlife and livestock.

Better management of the wildlife trade and hunting is the second step. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is identified as a key agency whose budget and personnel need substantial beefing up and enabling, to conduct the research, monitoring and enforcement needed to reduce risky trade.

Third, they argue for a significant reduction in deforestation, particularly in the tropics and especially in Amazonia. Smaller forests close to densely populated settlements are another major cause for concern. Unsurprisingly, this leads on to a call for significant reform of agricultural practices to reverse land conversion and reduce the demand for 'less sustainable food' — a reference, no doubt, to large-scale cattle ranching.

Professor Aaron Bernstein and his team link all these issues to rapid and unplanned urbanisation and climate change, which together are shrinking habitats and pushing animals on land and sea to move to new places, creating opportunities for new pathogens to enter new hosts. And they argue that the measures they suggest will help to avoid carbon emissions, conserve water supplies, protect indigenous people's rights, and conserve biodiversity — those previously mentioned co-benefits.

When the UN Biodiversity Conference wraps up in mid-May it will be interesting to see how seriously COP15 has taken these points. Biodiversity is complex and all-encompassing — human life and indeed all life on Earth relies on it, but the salutary experience of Covid-19 and the need for prevention of future pandemics is biodiversity's 'code red for humanity'.

● *Martin Stott is an independent sustainability practitioner — see www.martin-stott.com. The views expressed are personal.*

Note

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design matters

Matthew Carmona considers the place-based intervention factors that could help to guarantee a future for our high streets

high streets — what future? part 1: the sun model
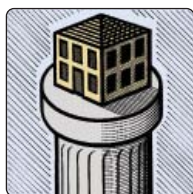
As the carnage on our high streets acquired rocket boosters during the Covid-19 pandemic, it became even more apparent that we need to be thinking differently about these critical urban spaces. So what are the key place-based intervention factors that can help to guarantee a future for our high streets? This is the question I asked in a recent study, discussed in this and the next 'Design Matters' column.

Beyond a movement economy and centrality paradigm

Traditional shopping streets often go back centuries, fed by what Bill Hillier christened 'the movement economy'. As people moved along natural movement corridors, the optimum position of some land parcels in an emerging urban street network allowed the establishment of functions that relied on passers-by and the business opportunities they presented. Over time, these functions were reinforced, and

commercial streets emerged, with some becoming destinations in their own right.

While the growth of car-based urbanisation in the second half of the 20th century and of the internet in the 21st has progressively challenged this place-based movement economy, it was the arrival of the pandemic in 2020 that broke it (at least temporarily). Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that in 2020 alone e-commerce grew from around a fifth of total sales to over a third. Society quickly found that technology could be used to sustain people in their homes, allowing many to work, shop, eat out (at home), entertain themselves, and even access many public and health services without ever venturing beyond their front doors. These trends have the potential to significantly undermine the dynamics that have driven urban growth for centuries, including on our high streets.

We often perceive high streets as places that are all about the shopping. Yet a characteristic of traditional high streets is that they have evolved to become highly diverse places in which retail uses are only a part of a total mix that is spread both vertically up the buildings that front onto high streets and horizontally into the hinterland of the urban blocks. Retail, nevertheless, remains the 'public face' of high streets, often in the form of an active and

Horizontal mix

Vertical mix

Retail frontage

The desirable (often invisible) high street mix

The sun model — conceptualising shopping choices

Shopping online has become so convenient that tasks that previously would have taken hours are now just a few clicks away, saving time, cost, and hassle. This is particularly powerful for tasks viewed as necessities rather than optional tasks—which we choose to do because we want to. Convenience is perceived at every stage of online shopping—access, search, evaluation, transaction, and post-purchase possession

Any shop, even the largest department store or shopping centre, will be constrained by its physical limits. That is not a constraint faced by the internet, where choice in almost limitless, albeit at the potential price of indecision among shoppers

While a trip to physical stores will often carry the risk and uncertainty over whether the products(s) being sought will be unavailable or out of stock, on the internet, once something is purchased and delivery arranged, shoppers can be pretty certain that they have secured it. Exceptions can be found by using hybrid approaches, notably 'click and collect', but, arguably, once online, the battle to encourage physical shoppers into stores may already be lost

Cost gives online and immediate advantage, because whether online is or is not cheaper than physical shopping, perceptions are typically that it is. The reality may be more complex. While online retailers benefit from reduced fixed physical costs—rent, utilities, human payroll costs, and often advantageous tax regimes (such as reduced local taxation, registration in tax havens, etc.), they have to bear the cost of individualising shipping which is not really 'free'

Information flows in two directions. Even with the most sophisticated viewing systems, some products are best seen in person, and for physical stores customers' ability to see and touch directly is now a critical differentiator, along with the personal customer service and assistance that an informed sales assistant can give. This needs to be set against the ability to personalise the online retail experience by collecting data on consumers and ensuring that they see products most suited to them

As everyday necessity purchases become increasingly easy to make online, the major reason to go to the shops is a leisure one, with shopping linked to allied consumer, cultural or entertainment opportunities. For many, this leisure dimension represents the key selling point of traditional shopping streets, but the experience is determined by the journey there and the quality of the place, as well as by its offer. Collectively, these factors need to be more of a draw than online shopping, which increasingly also attempts to be fun

Physical shops still offer those without technological skills and resources the means to access goods and services in a traditional manner— physically and with cash. There remains a digital divide whereby less well-off, less-connected and less tech-savvy groups will have less opportunity to shop online. While this represents an opportunity for physical retail, it is a negative and shrinking one

While online delivery times have been dramatically shrinking, even the most efficient delivery systems cannot give immediate access to products like physical retail can. Further squeezing delivery times requires smaller, more local delivery hubs and carries a cost, economically and environmentally

Going to the shops has always represented an important social opportunity. From meeting friends, to keeping in touch and sharing gossip, to incidental contact with retail workers and other shoppers, such contact supports personal wellbeing (particularly for those unable to work), as well as learning and tolerance of others. The equivalent online—social network driven commerce—while driving huge sales volumes has none of the in-person social benefits of contact in the physical world and has been associated with distinct harms

Convenience

Choice

Certainty

Cost

Information

Leisure

Non-tech

Social

Immediate

The sun model — conceptualising shopping choices

continuous frontage. A move away from physical retail significantly changes the experience of these streets, removing, and in a sense privatising, many previously active frontages.

Moreover, access to good-quality shops seems to be particularly important in people's sense of pride and community, in the UK a factor that comes first among the issues considered to boost subjective wellbeing—although also first among local place factors considered most in need of improving. What seems clear is that, if the outlook for traditional shopping streets is to improve, a new basis for support may be required that is not dependent (at least not to the same degree) on movement and centrality.

**The sun model of shopping choices**

To develop this new basis for support, it is first necessary to understand the different reasons behind the shopping choices that people make. A review of discussions from a wide range of international blogs, fora, popular news reports and industry news sites revealed nine critical factors. These can be represented in a 'sun model' (see the diagram above) that conceptualises the relative significance of factors for physical and online shoppers.

Factors coloured yellow strongly inform the choices of online shoppers, and are the reasons why online has become such a powerful disrupter of traditional shopping habits. Factors in red remain influential in helping to retain a physical customer

base, although only two—immediate and social— are what might be seen as 'positive' factors (the non-technological engagement of some shoppers typically stems from necessity rather than choice). Factors in orange inform the decisions of all shoppers, but darker orange (leisure) is likely to be more important to physical shoppers. Cost, in lighter orange, is always a factor in any purchase decision, but by enabling shopping around with ease, cost drives consumers to shop online more often than it keeps them in bricks-and-mortar.

Examining the model, it is clear that no single outlet (as opposed to retailer)—whether online or not—can offer everything; and indeed no mode has a monopoly on any of the factors represented in the sun model. Instead, they offer combinations of qualities. At the same time, the areas of greatest strength for online outlets—the four 'C's (convenience, choice, certainty, and cost)—tend to be very direct and tangible, against which traditional retailers struggle to compete. In this respect, it is no accident that physical retail's advantages are reminiscent of a setting sun in the figure, albeit that the challenges encompassed are nothing new.

For decades before e-retailing took off, discussions focused on the perceived negative impact of out-of-town retailing on traditional high streets. Looking at them physically, those changes can be viewed as part of a journey from mixed, integrated and place-dependent urbanism to separated, disintegrated and non-place urbanism.

Online retail ⇐ Out-of-town retail ⇐ Traditional shopping street

The journey from mixed, integrated and place-dependent urbanism to separate, disintegrated and non-place urbanism
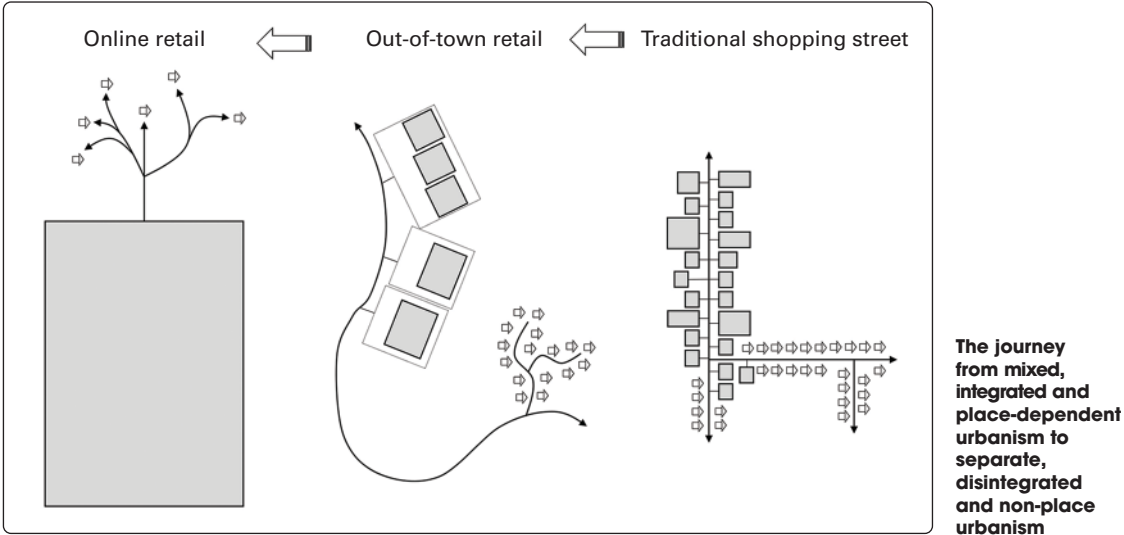
Thus retail boxes set among extensive free car parking on the edge of cities offered a stepping-off point towards the same four 'C's that define the online retail experience—convenience (for those with cars), greater choice (given the size of many of these units), greater certainty (given the stock on offer), and reduced cost (given their economies of scale, lower rents, and lower overheads).

Outlet versus place factors

Arguably these advantages have been supercharged in the online world, whose sun is relentlessly rising. Early evidence from UK shoppers in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated a preference for the car parks and larger, more spacious footplate formats of out-of-town retail over the more crowded spaces of town centres. In the long term, however,
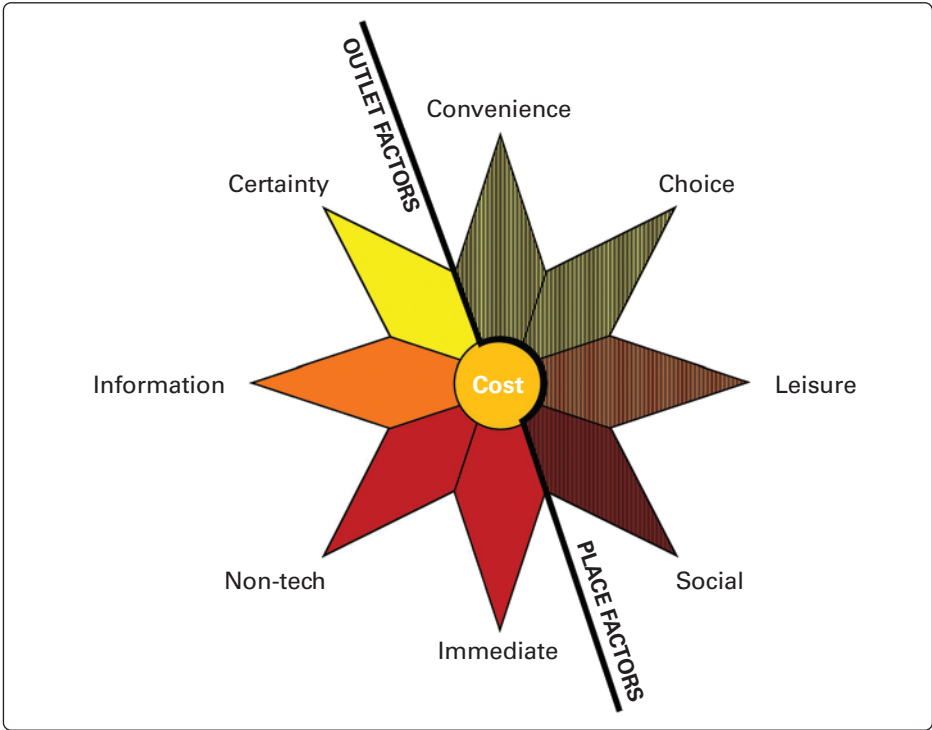
Outlet versus place factors

it may be exactly their place-based differentiation from the online model that will allow traditional shopping streets to adapt and survive. By contrast, out-of-town shopping, which is much closer in type to online, could suffer more severely in the ongoing cull of retail. Pre-pandemic evidence, for example, indicated that out-of-town retail was in a steeper decline than traditional high streets.

This reveals a critical conceptual distinction relating to the scale at which the factors and associated challenges of physical retailing need to be addressed. The sun model can be divided (see the second sun model diagram) between factors (on the left in the sun model diagram) that are predominantly determined within individual retail outlets (singular or chains) and those on the right in the diagram that relate to the particular marketplace—be that the internet at large, or the particular town or city centre. Setting taxes and incentives aside, it is within the latter place factors that the public sector (and large private retail investors—for example owners of shopping malls) can hope to influence the future of their particular marketplace. Outlet factors, by contrast, reflect either the simple realities of the channel used to shop (for example, you cannot touch things on the internet, but you can be certain to purchase most products with a few clicks of a mouse), or are factors determined by the particular retail model pursued (for example the employment of polite, helpful assistants versus the availability of good technical descriptors online).

Faced with this, governments (national and local) might adopt one of three strategies:

- the Darwinian strategy of letting the fittest survive, with natural evolution adjusting provision in line with consumer choices made within a free market;
- an interventionalist strategy in which fiscal incentives, active planning, public investment and collaborative engagement with private interests are used to proactively support physical retail; or
- a mixed model in which intervention is more limited and focuses largely on smoothing undesirable social and environmental impacts.

In England, where the aftermath of the pandemic has resulted in an estimated 25% over-provision of retail space nationally, current policy approaches, at different times, seem to support both the first and second strategies, although not yet as a coherent approach to the third. I explore these in the next 'Design Matters' column.

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TCPA Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 13 July 2022, 5.30 pm

The meeting well be held virtually, on Zoom

The Town and Country Planning Association will be holding its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Wednesday 13 July at 5.30 pm. To make the meeting as accessible to as many members as possible, we will again hold the AGM virtually, and all TCPA members are invited to attend.

There are five vacancies on the TCPA Board of Trustees and six vacancies on the TCPA Policy Council for 2022.

These places are for election by the membership of the TCPA, and any individual member of the TCPA or representative of a member organisation of the TCPA may stand for election. Existing elected members on both bodies who are due to retire have been informed and are eligible to stand for re-election.

Nomination forms are available (from 4 April 2022) from the TCPA website under the AGM section. All applicants require the nominating signature of another member of the Association (this can be done electronically).

Further information on the respective roles of the Board and the Policy Council is set out in the TCPA Articles of Association and in the TCPA Handbook, which are also available from the TCPA website.

Completed nomination forms must be submitted by email by Monday 16 May 2022. The email address to send them to is given in the forms.

The results of the Trustee and Policy Council elections will be announced at the 2022 TCPA AGM on Wednesday 13 July. We hope that you can join us.

connections

Paul Burall on climate tipping points, low-carbon social-rent homes, and assessing the benefits of water-powered heat pumps

Climate catastrophe

While it is natural for the attention of the media and the public to be focused on a current crisis—as I write, the tragedy unfolding in Ukraine—in the long run the crucial question should be: 'What is the key issue that will most affect our children and grandchildren?' A front-runner must be climate change, not least because the latest report from the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that we are now past the point at which many of the damaging effects of global warming can be reversed. The report concludes that humans and nature are being pushed beyond their abilities to adapt. 'Our report clearly indicates that places where people live and work may cease to exist, that ecosystems and species that we've all grown up with and that are central to our cultures and inform our languages may disappear,' said Professor Debra Roberts, Co-chair of the IPCC.

The new report looks at the causes and impacts of, and possible solutions to, climate change. It gives the clearest indication to date of how a warmer world is affecting 'all the living things on Earth', and shows that extreme weather events linked to climate change—such as floods and heatwaves—are hitting humans and other species much harder than previous assessments indicated. The study says that these impacts are already going beyond the ability of many people to cope, with growing numbers of people dying from heat.

Nature is already seeing dramatic impacts at the current level of warming. Coral reefs are being bleached and are dying from rising temperatures, while many trees are succumbing to drought. In the future, accelerating sea level rise will increasingly hit coastal settlements, pushing them towards 'submergence and loss'. Under all emissions scenarios, the IPCC expects a billion more people to be at risk from coastal-specific climate hazards in the next few decades.

Diseases will likely spread more quickly in the coming decades, say the study's authors. There is a particular risk that changing climatic conditions will aid the spread of mosquito-borne dengue fever to billions more by the end of this century. And, for the first time, the IPCC has linked climate change with mental health issues, including stress and trauma related to extreme weather events and the loss of livelihoods and culture.

Perhaps most alarming of all is the suggestion that rising temperatures could reach a tipping point at which feedback from the changes that it is inducing will trigger outcomes that will simply make matters worse. Specifically, the report suggests that, if the permafrost starts to melt, it will release vast quantities of methane, a considerably more potent global warming gas than carbon dioxide.

Markus Spiske on Unsplash

The latest IPCC report gives the clearest indication to date of how a warming world is affecting all living things on the planet

That could make it impossible to get below a 1.5ºC global temperature increase whatever action is taken in future, explained Linda Schneider, Senior Programme Officer for International Climate Policy at the Heinrich Böll Foundation in Berlin.

Commenting on the summary, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described it as an 'atlas of human suffering'. He has no doubt as to where the blame lies. 'The facts are undeniable. This abdication of leadership is criminal. The world's biggest polluters are guilty of arson of our only home.'

With global warming inevitable, the IPCC concluded that attention also needs to be paid to 'climate resilient development'. In terms of housing, this includes good ventilation; shading to prevent the sun from overheating internal spaces; and, possibly, providing enough thermal mass to better balance day- and night-time temperatures (which would, of course, also be beneficial in the winter).

In some circumstances, it may even be worth painting roofs white: climate scientists in Barcelona have concluded that this could reduce temperatures by nearly 5ºC during heatwaves.

Planting trees close to buildings is also useful, because of both the shading provided and the local heat reduction caused by transpiration. Increasing the number of plants in cities also provides a significant and rapid boost to biodiversity. A four-year study in Melbourne, Australia, found that, in addition to their other benefits, the greening measures that many cities are starting to take can make a huge difference to wildlife. Simply adding more indigenous plant species to a small green space can greatly contribute to positive ecological outcomes in a short period of time. The study looked at a small green space adjacent to a major road and surrounded by large buildings—200 square metres in size, the site had just two gum trees on a Kikuyu lawn; a year after adding 12 indigenous plant species there were five times as many insect species.

Wales leads

One initiative to tackle the challenge has been set out by the Welsh government, which plans to build 20,000 low-carbon social homes for rent by 2026. The hope is to tackle both a housing shortage and the nation's greenhouse gas emissions. Housing associations say that the initiative could lead to thousands of jobs and training opportunities. All the houses will meet what the government describes as 'bold, new quality and environmental standards'.

Some of these new council homes could even become miniature power stations, using green technology to generate more electricity than they need. This could then be exported to the national grid to supply other homes. One of the families that has moved into a low-carbon house has seen its monthly gas and electric bills fall from £250 to less than £20 since moving into its new home in January. They share the four-bed property in Bridgend with their three children, aged between 10 and 17. 'The house is amazing,' said Allyn. 'We have built up more than £250 in credit during the summer, which will be really helpful going into the winter.' A neighbouring family commented: 'The house is so well insulated that the temperature hardly drops below 20ºC. Even on some of the coldest days in winter we didn't need to put the heating on.'

Heat from the river

The government is encouraging a switch to heat pumps as a way to tackle climate change. Usually, pumps extract heat from the air, but there are other sources, as a scheme in Norwich demonstrates. The city is currently commissioning a £1.8 million water-powered heat pump that will provide heat and hot water for 85 homes using heat from the River Wensum, replacing a system that uses natural gas. The council said that it expected to save 270 tonnes of carbon dioxide from being emitted into the atmosphere a year, the same as absorbed by 12,854 fully grown trees.

Quite where the council got the unit of measure of a fully grown tree and designated its carbon-absorbing properties to such accuracy is unknown.
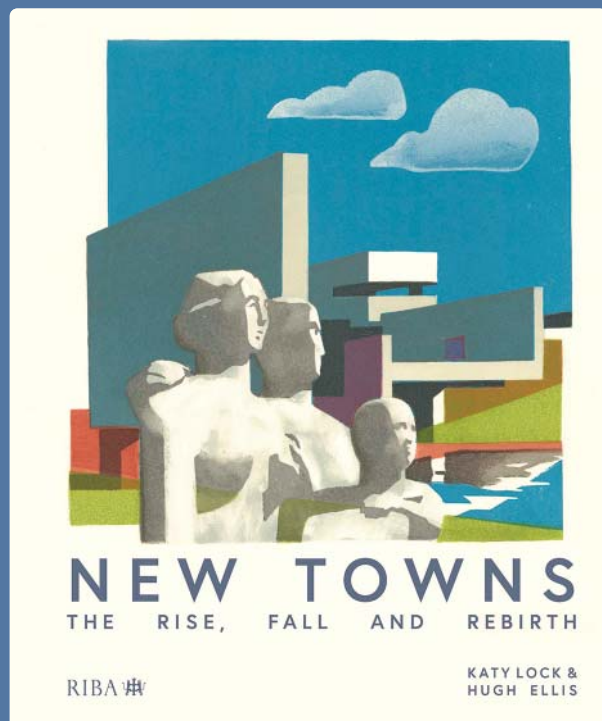
Odd fact

Mike Berners-Lee, Professor in the Environment Centre at Lancaster University, has pointed out that riding an electric bike is more climate friendly than an ordinary bike due to the calories consumed riding the latter.

● **Paul Burall** *is a freelance writer specialising in business, environmental and design issues. The views expressed are personal.*

new towns:
the rise, fall and rebirth

New Towns: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth
By Katy Lock and Hugh Ellis
Published by RIBA Publishing,
May 2020, HB, 192 pp
ISBN 978 1859469286, £40

Often misunderstood, the New Towns story is a fascinating one of anarchists, artists, visionaries, and the promise of a new beginning for millions of people. *New Towns: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth* **offers a new perspective on the New Towns record and uses case studies to address the myths and realities of the programme. It provides valuable lessons for the growth and renewal of the existing New Towns and post-war housing estates and town centres, including recommendations for practitioners, politicians and communities interested in the renewal of existing New Towns and the creation of new communities for the 21st century.**

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