

BIG IDEAS REPORT²



BRISTOL 2022



"THE BIG TENT IDEAS FESTIVAL WAS A MEGAPHONE FOR BRISTOL'S STRENGTHS AND AMBITIONS, HELPING CITY VOICES TO BE HEARD IN WESTMINSTER, WHITEHALL AND BEYOND. WE HAD SPACE TO DISCUSS THE CHALLENGES FACING US ALL AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS. THE FESTIVAL ALSO PROVIDED THE PERFECT STAGE FOR US TO ANNOUNCE SECURING £95 MILLION OF INVESTMENT IN TEMPLE MEADS AND TEMPLE QUARTER AT THE START OF THE WEEKEND."

MARVIN REES, MAYOR OF BRISTOL

BIG IDEAS REPORT II

THE LEADERS' SUMMIT ON REGENERATION

- A 'devolution revolution' giving elected mayors powers similar to the Mayor of London.
- Investors need to feel able to invest to promote net zero and support levelling up.
- New forms of finance for new developments and equity release mortgages are needed to decarbonise existing housing.
- Walking and connecting with others in the neighbourhood and elsewhere is an essential ingredient for the growth of social capital.
- More 'Imagineers' to work on the design and engineering challenges and match what's needed with what's possible.

TO A NET ZERO ECONOMY

- Transform the market for hydrogen by tweaking the regulations.
- Include information about the cost of climate damage whenever people invest in pensions or the financial markets.
- Increase interest in climate change amongst black and disabled people by working towards their increased representation in public life.

- Tax the production of plastic – and use the proceeds to clean the oceans.
- Pump dust or water particles into the atmosphere to slow the progress of global warming.
- Discuss the real issues that matter to people instead of abstract climate, like better public transport.

TO BETTER CONVERSATIONS AND CREATIVITY

- Bristol is a queen of culture and doesn't need a crown - but it should apply to be the City of Culture for 2029.
- Hold many more citizens' assemblies, and then invite the politicians and officials to take part.
- Politicians and businesspeople need to talk to each other more – starting with talking about procurement.
- Give refugees Digital Identity Wallets so they can hang onto documents.
- Trust the forms and process by which free speech decisions are made, and give everyone equal access to that process.

TO A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY

- Use Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) for more affordable and sustainable housing.
- Give 100 per cent of the 'neighbour share' of any Community Infrastructure Levy on regional developments to local communities.
- The creative economy can revitalise our town centres – if we let it.
- Any organisation in a position to lobby for support must be transparent.
- Fine restaurants and supermarkets for the food they waste.
- Unlock the skills of migrants and refugees by letting them work after six months in the UK.

TO BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES

- Link Tesco records with health data, to help us predict who will get ill and why.
- Help children learn how to blend screen time with socialising in person.
- Give everyone the right to manage their own health data.

BETTER BUSINESS

- Launch an ISA to fund start-ups.



PHOTO CREDIT:
Rahil Ahmad @stolenoranges



FOREWORD

Ben Rich

Chief Executive, Radix Big Tent

This is a record of some of the ideas that emerged from what was a wonderful, sweltering weekend of debate and discussion in Bristol's Queen Square.

Bristol is a very mixed city, with areas of great affluence alongside some of the poorest and most diverse wards in England.

This is reflected in the diversity of Bristol's politics: it is in some ways the capital city of new thinking and new ideas. So it was very appropriate to set up there – and to take our places for our leaders' summit, on the regeneration of British cities, not just in Bristol, but across the nation.

The hundreds of people who came along to our Big Tent festival the following day were treated to a smorgasbord of policy discussion – without rancour or political hang-ups – led by some of the leading politicians in the UK, like George Freeman, Science Minister and Big Tent founder and COP26 president Alok Sharma, Thangam Debonnaire and Anneliese Dodds, and Ed Davey and Vince Cable.

One of the most extraordinary people I met during the days we spent there was Anika Mistry, Bristol's youth mayor. She was just 14 but she was bright and articulate – she had something to say and she knew how to say it.

She confessed during the questions for one session that she had never come across – either the phrase – 'imposter syndrome' before.

I found that hopeful and rather moving. That, uniquely, Anika had never had to worry that she was out of her depth in public, or having to act a role, fears that beset so many people in public life. And she was only fourteen.

So that, once again, George Freeman and Baroness Morgan's original vision for the Big Tent came alive in Bristol, despite the way that political ideologies have been driving everyone apart across the world. For two days, ideas and innovations – wherever they came from – ruled.

I want to thank my amazing team at Radix Big Tent, and our donors and sponsors, for making the event work so smoothly. Also, Marvin, the Mayor of Bristol, and other officials, from as far a field as Spain, for coming along too. I shan't thank anyone for the weather, but I can – and I will thank everyone who came along. It could not have happened without you.

To all of them, plus the volunteers and the speakers – all the members of Parliament who took time out from their busy lives to be photographed making smoothies by cycling – and to all of you who made our two days in Bristol – thank you so much.

Please come again next year and keep alive the many conversations sparked into life at Big Tent.

BIG IDEA:

We need a 'devolution revolution' to give elected mayors powers similar to the Mayor of London.

Neil O'Brien MP, Levelling Up minister, in conversation with **Jo Phillips**, broadcaster, writer and community relations adviser.

How can cities lead regeneration?

Levelling up minister Neil O'Brien MP told the Big Tent Leaders' Summit that we need a 'devolution revolution' to give elected mayors powers similar to those of the Mayor of London.

Moderator Jo Phillips pointed out that Bristol had just voted to do away with an elected mayor. Still, the minister insisted metro mayors are an excellent model, pointing to the £95 million investment in Bristol Temple Meads.

Forthcoming legislation will also make it easier for local authorities to compulsory purchase land, enable shops to be let to the highest bidder and retain measures introduced during Covid, like pavement cafes.

Lessons must be learned from previous regeneration, and local leaders should co-operate with their local government, keeping an eye on what is in it for existing residents, like creating apprenticeships for locals.

What about left-behind rural and coastal areas? The minister says we must 'radiate out' growth; better transport and more investment are needed. And Jobs? Neil O'Brien argued that commuters bring back wealth.

Jo Phillips posed the problem of beautiful places being full of second and holiday homes, with no homes for those on lower wages who need to live in the area for work.

The minister says the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill will enable a tax precept on second homes.

Neil O'Brien saw devolution as the Government's solution to protecting the countryside and developing within cities. Cities are growing less fast than elsewhere. The minister argues for developments like Kings Cross with a combination of government and private sector investment.

Plans must be strategic and long-term. We must move away from numerous funding pots with different rules and consolidate funding.

The minister said power should be moved out of London SW1: the UK is too centralised.

Local authorities will get more powers, and the Levelling Up Bill proposes local control through street votes on planning.

The Big Tent
Leaders'
Summit

BRISTOL:
FRIDAY 9 JUNE 2022

BIG IDEA:

Investors need to feel able to invest to promote net zero and support levelling up.

MODERATOR: Vicky Pryce, economist and commentator; with:

Ashok Gupta, Chair of Financial Systems Thinking Innovation Centre (Finstic).

Faith Ward, Chair of the Institutional Group on Climate Change and Chief Responsible Investment Officer, Brunel Pensions Investment Fund.

Magda Polan, Senior economist and Chair of Radix Fellows.

Nick Silver, Actuary and economist, director of Callund Consulting, advising governments on developing social insurance, pensions and capital markets.

Releasing new capital for impactful investment

Investment should be made more attractive to companies so that they invest to promote net zero and support levelling up, a break out session on impactful investment heard.

Britain would then see more long-term, productive and sustainable investment if investors did not seek to maximise revenue by ploughing money into low-risk, high-return secondary financing – which damages the economy, society and the environment.

But to change things around, companies need incentives, politicians need to be educated about the problem and there needs to be a shift in attitude. These were some of the findings made by investment researchers at New Capital Consensus, bringing together financiers and other experts to “shine a spotlight” on the investment system and explore ways of making it more sustainable.

Economist Vicky Pryce told the session: “We have a financial system not fit for purpose. There are not suitable products in our pension funds. There is market failure and we cannot let the world carry on the way it does.”

Panellist Ashok Gupta, chair of the Financial Systems Thinking Innovation Centre (FINSTIC), agreed that the private sector urgently needed to play its part in helping to solve today’s social and economic problems. This required

“far more capital than the Government is willing to provide.”

“Primary investment contributes more to society. Secondary investment shares are unproductive but realisable almost at will. Too little finance goes into primary investment.”

Educating politicians would be one way of shifting the mindset to long-term growth, economist and Radix fellows chair Magdalena Polan, said: “We have to help politicians understand what is going on in the financial systems... We need more sophistication, to improve the skills not only of pension fund managers but also of the trustees, who make decisions.”

She said macroprudential regulation – a post-financial crisis set of targeted rules to seek to reduce instability across the whole financial system – affected the whole economy and had led to short term investment.

She was backed by actuary and economist Nick Silver, author of Finance, Society and Sustainability, a new book about the politics of money-creation, who argued that: “An IFA indexed tracker makes sense for you but not for the economy. It just isn’t working. Impact investment is messy and runs up against the barriers but is the only way forward.”

BIG IDEA:

New forms of finance for new developments and equity release mortgages are needed to decarbonise existing housing.

MODERATOR:

Karen Barrass, policy and research lead, UK100, with:

Prof. Greg Clark, chair, UK Cities Climate Investment Commission (UK CCIC).

Financing net zero - how do we meet the costs of decarbonising our cities?

Partner



Urban populations are growing faster than rural ones, and over 500 cities worldwide are at risk of flooding due to the climate emergency – if we fail to meet the target of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Decarbonisation is not just about energy but about sustainable building and circular waste. So how will we finance our path to net zero? The problem is that we know how to cost reaching net zero, but not how to finance it.

Professor Greg Clark said that redevelopments like that at Temple Meads in Bristol need new tools, smart integrated systems, innovation from the start and a combination of top-down and bottom-up input.

He set out some of the issues and proposed solutions. We need a national pipeline of bankable project proposals with a similar template, combinable projects. Bank and insurance companies also need to innovate to provide blended finance models.

One potential solution is to cross-subsidise projects. Long-term investment funds could buy decarbonisation projects once they are going. Institutions don't like local innovations, so projects like Ambition Lawrence Weston's proposed wind turbine take a long time to finance. There are no dedicated funds for smart local energy.

There is a Catch-22 situation getting finance where only well-financed projects can attract finance.

Finance must be long-term as results are not fast and must consider co-benefits like cleaner air, lower bills, better productivity, and improved mental health. When planning infrastructure, the Government should consider savings in health budgets.

UK local authority pension schemes can now invest in local assets; and some of the most prominent investors have been foreign pension schemes. Yet banks still perceive green tech as risky.

Traditional finance does not work. Small companies can be critical to solutions, but traditional banking fails to meet their needs. There is a need for seed capital for green tech. The UK Infrastructure Bank may pool risk and cost with angel investors.

There is too much faith that the market will solve the problem. There is a lack of finance for less bankable projects, and small enterprises cannot access finance.

TPXImpact raised the need to retrofit cities' built environments, decarbonise and provide housing and growth. The policy framework is too slow-moving. We need to incentivise green tech and focus on net zero.

Prof Clark hopes that banks will soon offer mortgages, secured on the property but not tied to income, to install new boilers, windows, insulation or what is needed to decarbonise the property.

There is too much focus on housing as assets, not amenities. There should be more public participation in building homes. Reform is needed in national and local policies.

Where the labour market is vital, there is more opposition to homebuilding. Working from home may ease the problem, but we must overlap homes and jobs.



How can we improve Bristol's health and wellbeing through regeneration?

BIG IDEA:

Walking and connecting with others in the neighbourhood and elsewhere is an essential ingredient for the growth of social capital.

MODERATOR: Anna Turley, former MP for Redcar and chair, North East Child Poverty Commission; with:

Cllr Ellie King, cabinet member for public health and communities, Bristol City Council.

Cllr Nicola Beech, cabinet member for strategic planning, Bristol City Council.

Stephen Baker, Managing director, Goram Homes.

Andrea Kellegher, Associate director, Turley.

Richard Blyth, Head of Practice and Research, Royal Town Planning Institute.

Partner

Turley

There are huge health disparities in Bristol, just as there are across the rest of the UK. Yet, it is a young and growing city, a place where people want to live, with a phenomenal amount of community activism.

As such, it is leading the way in prioritising and maximising the reach of health and well-being initiatives. But there is still a long way to go. If regeneration is going to improve the lives of everyone, including those living in the poorer areas, we have to loosen the grip of confrontational systems dominated by ultra-competitive, headline grabbing forms of short-term decision-making.

Turning bricks and mortar into social capital and thus into health and well-being will require long-term strategies that foster shared resources, trust, and expertise.

Also, to provide the conditions in which people can be born, grow, live, work and age well, the voices of communities need to be integrated into the conversations between the private and public sectors.

For example, removing a road is not often considered by planners and developers but might be a popular option for residents.

This all needs to happen at the earliest possible opportunity to make informed plans for more homes and healthier, family friendly places. From this starting point everything else will flow. Examples of Bilbao and the Pro Bono planning system in Preston were recommended.

Putting heads together and prioritising the long-term social issues involved will be crucial for discovering what we need to do to push forward innovative approaches that increase the value and role of social capital, particularly of those living in poverty.


The discussion moved on to possibilities for building more family friendly spaces and to the 'European Charter for Equality of Men and Women in Local Life', to which both Bristol and Bilbao are signatories.

The Charter reminds us that the right to 'liberty of movement' cannot be freely or equally exercised if women feel unsafe or insecure in the private or public domain.

In certain areas of Bristol they do feel unsafe, particularly after dark. Walking and connecting with others in the neighbourhood and elsewhere is an essential activity for the growth of social capital.

Women play a major role in nurturing inclusivity in community life and walking itself promotes their health and wellbeing.

Regeneration must make it a safe thing for women to do in this great city, wherever they live (See '50 Ways to Better Walking by the Bristol Walking Alliance'.)



How can the Government expand, strengthen and maximise local innovation ecosystems to support levelling up?

BIG IDEA:

We need more 'Imagineers' to work on the design and engineering challenges and match what's needed with what's possible.

MODERATOR: Vicky Pryce, Economist and Commentator, with:

Phil Taylor, pro vice-chancellor for research and enterprise, University of Bristol.

George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation.

Caroline Norbury MBE, CEO, Creative UK.

Partner



"We need a research and development economy to get us out of debt, with the high-growth centres of tomorrow driving opportunity into the regions that have been left behind," said George Freeman.

This will require "partnering and complementary skills exchanges between industry and academia and other stakeholders....(built on the) present strengths in Bristol which include a sense of social justice within the private, public and third sector organisations."

Specialisation and co-operation is key and more opportunities will come from innovations where science and the arts are working together. Creativity and artistic design are imperatives.

We also need more 'Imagineers' to work on the design and engineering challenges and to match what's needed with what's possible.

Levelling up will mean communities having equal access to *"money, markets, networks, skills and ways to get through the gatekeepers,"* said Caroline Norbury of Creative UK.

Local start-ups and 'spin-outs' by small social enterprises could ensure that the local community is more than just a bolt on. Investment in science research and innovation, however, is far greater than government support for culture, creativity and the arts and there has to be significant shifts in the education system whereby creativity attains a *"parity of esteem"* with science in the curriculum.

Other radical changes are needed, such as place-based developments, the decentralisation of power and an end to the tyranny of top-down finance.

The question arose as to whether there can be an actual eco-system within the city limits, or must it by nature involve a wider reach?

There is a very positive case for mapping clusters of research and development practice and promoting them, places where people are taking risks in search of good opportunities. These clusters have the potential to be globally recognised and to pull in investments.

There will, quite understandably, be competition – for example, every local authority wants the best opportunities for their young people.

Even so, it is hoped that levelling up will bring forth a more mature attitude in the regions whereby they can tell the world what they are good at and, if they are not, they can still join in and collaborate with those who are.

This is all the more likely if we unlock a system that blocks grand innovations by expecting them to be faster, cheaper and new. Instead innovation can be better, slower and more in tune with health, social and environmental considerations.

BIG IDEA:

Transform the market for hydrogen by tweaking the regulations.

MODERATOR: **Tristan Cork**, Bristol Post; with:

George Freeman MP, Science and former Transport Minister.

Sir Vince Cable, former Business Secretary involved with social enterprise bus company in Bristol.

Cllr Emma Edwards, local Green councillor.

Prof Valeska Ting, University of Bristol.

The Big Tent Festival

BRISTOL: SATURDAY 10 JUNE 2022



Transport for net zero

Big Tent founder George Freeman MP believes the UK can provide the technology needed for the necessary net-zero and agricultural revolutions.

In fact, he told a meeting at Big Tent Bristol that people should be given the facts they need about how net zero relates to them. A family, school or village should be able to see if they score green, amber or red.

George argued for a framework in which we incentivise, support and encourage people towards greener choices.

Sir Vince Cable told us that 99 per cent of the sector uses hydrocarbons, and over a quarter of our emissions come from transport. He is a director at a company that takes green hydrogen from wind farms with a surplus, private wire companies or anaerobic digester plants, which convert the methane into hydrogen. Their customers are heavy-goods vehicle companies, including council refuse vehicles.

But there is a chicken and egg problem: hydrogen producers won't install converters until they are satisfied there's a market. The lorry owners and makers won't convert to hydrogen fuel cells until they're confident there's a regular supply. His company acts as a go-between and is establishing the necessary infrastructure.

Hydrogen combustion engines are not classified as zero-carbon because of possible NOx emissions, but an additive can remove this problem. Removing that regulation would transform the hydrogen market.

Unfortunately, some people are afraid of hydrogen, said Cable. Public education on the safety of hydrogen is needed.

Cllr Emma Edwards advocates for the 15-minute city, where you can get your essential food, goods and services within a 15-minute walk of your house and access the rest of your city within 15 minutes by public transport or active travel.

Emma also praised multi-transport hubs where you can switch between forms of transportation, including rental bikes and e-scooters. She believes the way to encourage and reward active transport is to make routes safe. Secure storage for bicycles is an issue that councils must address.

Prof Valeska Ting said that academia and industry are working to develop technological solutions to decarbonise transport. There are solutions, and now we must adopt them.

Valeska believes hydrogen is essential, but it isn't the only solution. We need a mix of technological solutions to use where appropriate and be flexible. The choice must be available, accessible, acceptable and economically competitive.

When questioned about train fares, the panel stated that train travel should

be cheaper, but raised the importance of buses to more of the population, especially outside cities. Public transport needs to move away from fossil fuels and requires subsidies.

Hydrogen can fuel long-distance buses and trains and be locally manufactured to release us from the link to foreign fuel prices.

George proposed regional railway companies with long-term franchises and re-integrated track, train, and passenger shareholders. Technology can help predict when buses are needed, and trials are in place in Norfolk.

One questioner said the market was a 'proven idiot'. But Vince Cable warned about being ideological about markets' evils or wonders: he said that we need a combination of markets and municipal, community and national investment.

"We must not let the best be the enemy of the good," he said. For example, electric and hydrogen vehicles are not carbon-free but a cleaner, greener alternative to fossil fuels.

Planners should consider the chance to walk or cycle; peripheral developments require motorised transport to access cities.

Lift sharing is an option that removes a million cars from the roads. Bikes are an equitable mode of transport, but the infrastructure is inequitable.

BIG IDEA:

Make sure that information about the cost of climate damage is included whenever people invest in pensions or the financial markets.

MODERATOR: Deborah Cohen, former executive editor Science Radio at BBC; with:

Cllr Asier Abaunza, head of regeneration for the City of Bilbao.

Sir Ed Davey, leader of the Lib Dems and former Energy Secretary.

Mark Pepper, local green activist, responsible for wind turbine to power local estate.

Delivering on COP, locally, nationally and internationally

Gaining the trust of people to help meet green targets locally – alongside long-term government strategies – is the key to delivering on COP 26, a Radix Big Tent ideas session heard.

At the same time rules should be brought in to make sure the cost of climate damage is included whenever people invest in pensions or the financial markets.

Winning people's confidence – and 'stealth' – had been behind the success of a scheme to persuade one of Bristol's communities to fund and take on the running of England's largest wind turbine. It was now producing enough electricity to supply 3,000 homes as well as selling energy back to the grid. Installed without government aid, it is expected to bring in at least £100,000 a year.

To community leader Mark Pepper, this is "delivering climate by stealth".

"It's not the wind turbine they want, it's the money it will generate," he explained. They think: 'Well, there's money in this green energy lark. We've improved landscape, re-installed ancient orchards and an abundance of things without ever mentioning the word 'climate.'"

"You have to gain the trust of people, who do not much care for the ice-caps melting – they are more worried about the ice in their freezers melting because they can't keep the electricity going. Instead of them thinking we are 'eco-warriors' and that climate is a swear word, we get engagement through 'gorilla gardening'.

"People want a more beautiful area, so we say 'use these plants instead for biodiversity'. We get them to deliver an action plan. It's climate but they don't realise it."

His argument was supported by a councillor from the city of Bilbao in northern Spain, who had used similar tactics to help regenerate what was once the most polluted city in Europe.

Cllr Asier Abaunza told how sending officers into the community to offer support and technical help to people had resulted in the regeneration of many of the city's older houses. "We work with them to convince them 'You should do this' and we then work to convince the entire neighbourhood. We have quite an elderly population but we tell them 'we can help you'."

Lib Dem leader and former Energy Secretary Ed Davey pointed out that councils and local people working together had resulted in huge successes, such as all-electric bus fleets where the council had a role in cities' transport. Or the scheme to harness human 'poo' power to heat 2,000 council houses from a sewage treatment plant in Kingston Upon Thames.

The reason that communities were sometimes awarded funding for environmental projects, only to find that there was no one with the skills to set them up, was because the Government had run a series of 'stop-start' programmes.

"The solution is to have a long-term strategy that you have the discipline to stick to - but this Government has NIMTO (not in my term of office) and we have gone backwards so much with these NIMTO targets."

"We have to link the needs of people to the needs of the planet. The last decade has seen a radical change. The cost of renewables has fallen dramatically. The right-wing press will tell you it is expensive – they're lying. The truth is we're seeing massive developments such as pump hydro and interconnectors."



Can Bristol's journey to net zero be fast and fair?

BIG IDEA:

Increase interest in climate change amongst black and disabled people by working towards their increased representation in public life.

MODERATOR: Sandy Hore-Ruthven, former CEO Creative Youth Network' with:

Jack Richardson, Conservative Environment Network.

Clir Martin Fodor, Green Party Redland ward, Bristol.

Rosina Al-Shaater & Ruth Nortey, Bristol Black and Green ambassadors.

Emma Green, Community Climate Action co-ordinator, Bristol Disability Equality Forum.

Partner



Disabled people are twice as likely to die in natural disasters caused by climate change, and black people often feel 'blamed and shamed' for not using environmentally friendly products.

At the same time, electric vehicle subsidies help wealthy people buy a new car and unaffordable homes are built that only suit developers.

These were some of the examples of how action on climate change could broaden existing social divides unless barriers between communities are broken down and everyone is included, the Big Tent debate on 'how to make the journey to net zero fast and fair' heard.

Solutions included setting up 'green ambassadors' to advise black, brown and disabled communities on green skills, and making a city-wide pool of electric cars available to everyone through an electric vehicle car club.

Bristol Black and Green ambassador Ruth Nortey told the debate: "Fair and fast is possible but we need increased representation to make that transition, sharing power."

Fellow ambassador Rosina Al-Shaater said: "There is often a misconception, for example, that black people are not interested in climate change. We have to change these misconceptions. Looking around ten years ago I did not see a lot of people who looked like me – people were working in silos but we will get there faster if we work together."

Emma Green, of Bristol's Disability Equality Forum agreed. "Bristol is a diverse city so all communities must be

inspired so they don't feel pushed out," she said. "We need to consider how we can do the work so it is fair for all the community and break down the barriers for the disabled community. It's not complicated or costly in fact they will save money and bring the value of the purple pound to the city."

Bristol councillor Martin Fodor said that "tiny but inspiring" ideas such as living roofs and community food gardens could speed up the "painfully slow" pace at which we were moving. As a Green, it has to be fair – everyone must be involved, he said. "Just doing more of the same won't get us there. We have to design the solutions thinking of who will share the positives," he said.

"We need new skills, we need local people for maintenance, volunteers, they are all of benefit, to prevent flooding rather than build diesel pumps. Can a new building have a living roof or grow food? The community must buy into that. People will have a safer home that's not going to flood or food you can pick at the end of your street."

"Whatever housing model we have now, it is broken," he added. There is a lot of building going on but not housing people can afford. A lot of money is going into construction because that is what suits developers."

He called on politicians to work together to agree 15- to 20-year plans and make agreements that aren't overturned at the next election. "We are never going to get rid of day-to-day combativeness, but we need a long-term plan that the next party has to stick with," he said.

BIG IDEA:

Put taxes on the production of plastic – and use the proceeds to clean the oceans.

MODERATOR: Nicky Hawkins, director of communications, On Road Media; with:

Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Minister of State, President of COP (by video).

Kerry McCarthy MP, former shadow Defra minister and member of the APPG on ocean conservation.

Sue Ranger, social science lead, Marine Conservation Society.

Hugo Tagholm, chief executive at Surfers Against Sewage.

Partner



Why aren't we healing the ocean?

Oceans provide half the oxygen we breathe. Yet only one per cent of them are monitored, trawlers continue to dredge the seabed and raw sewage and plastics pollute their waters.

We should be making the oceans an urgent priority for climate action but instead politicians' lack of courage, and not wanting to be seen to do unpopular things, results in 'paralysis', 'lip service' and half-hearted attempts to heal them, the Big Tent debate on 'Why aren't we healing the ocean?' heard.

There should be taxes on plastic production, marine areas should be 'highly protected' – not simply 'protected' – and dredging must be stopped as soon as possible.

"We need a system change," Surfers Against Sewage chief Hugo Tagholm, told the debate. *"Governments aren't going far enough or fast enough... just like whalers who were up in arms about their business in 1984."*

COP 26 president Alok Sharma said the government regarded decarbonising key sectors from power to transport as *"an urgent business"*. He said the UK has led 30 x 30 Global Oceans Alliance to turn at least a third of the global ocean into protected areas.

And the UK's £500 million Blue Planet Fund to support developing countries to protect the marine environment and reduce poverty was among the Government's *"ambitious plans"*.

But Mr Tagholm said we should not be deceived by the notion of *'protected marine areas'* that are *'not protected at all'* and still contain plastic and sewage.

Dredging should be banned as soon as possible, but we should avoid *"throwing the baby out with the bath water"*, while permitting smaller, artisan fishing vessels to operate. *"We need to be bold, ambitious and hopeful and make sure nature wins, not a monoculture of business."*

He was backed by shadow Defra minister and all-party Ocean Conservation Parliamentary Group member Kerry McCarthy, who said UK marine protected areas were nothing but *'paper parks'* if they still allow dredging and industrial-scale fishing. Fishing had become *"totemic"* since Brexit but we should still ask ourselves: *"Do we see oceans as there to plunder? We should only take what is sustainable."*

"You can't put it on the back burner – the time to act was decades ago. Lack of courage and not wanting to be seen to do unpopular things was holding the country back. Greenpeace has over a million signatures on plastics but we should be using taxes to stop people producing so much plastic in the first place."

She said the Conservatives had a poor record on sewage, but that Rachel Reeves had pledged £28 billion a year in climate measures to protect Britain from disaster.

Asked how we should deal with climate change-sceptic politicians, she argued that the media, who often called on them for 'balance', should not be airing their views.

Marine Conservation Society social science lead Sue Ranger said dredging should be stopped because it releases carbon stored in the seabed. Instead, people should be looking for *'reciprocity'* by re-seeding oyster beds, for example, as oysters clean water for us. Investing in the healing and reciprocal benefit was one way to support the connection between us and nature.

But though she remained hopeful, she believed the only way of breaking the paralysis was for us to experience *'the grief, fear and loss'* of the oceans.



BIG IDEA:

Pump dust or water particles into the atmosphere to slow the progress of global warming.

MODERATOR: Deborah Cohen, former executive editor Science Radio at BBC; with:

Dr Peter Irvine, lecturer in Climate Change and Solar Geoengineering, UCL.

Inderpaul Johar, founder, Dark Matter Labs, Building next generation institutions for climate transition.

Prof Matthew Watson, Professor, Volcanoes and Climate, Bristol University.

We could stop climate change early, but should we?

Hate is a natural response to climate engineering, according to a scientist leading research into ways of cooling the planet. He understands people's reaction – he is just as alarmed at the potential consequences of his research as they are. But the results may be better than the catastrophic effects of failing to act.

"This stuff terrifies me – it's so 'sci-fi' – but we have to compare it to what will happen if we do nothing," Matt Watson told a Big Tent debate on ways to stop climate change early. *"We have to ask ourselves, what will climate change look like in 50 years time?"*

Prof Watson, the leader of a government-funded project into how sunlight could be reflected back out to space by mimicking volcanic eruptions cooling the planet and returning us to pre-industrial temperatures, said the technology could save coral reefs but could also trigger more volcanoes and might do *"more harm than good"*.

"We can mitigate the effects of climate change, but should we? Do we have the right?" he asked. He feared the issue becoming a political football between green groups and natural scientists. *"It has been patented, but comes with 'socio-psychological challenges because it crosses a line,'"* he said.

Prof Watson, a volcanologist at the University of Bristol, studied how water particles could be sprayed into the stratosphere, possibly carried aloft by pipes linked to giant, tethered balloons. The theory is that this would mimic the effect of major volcanic eruptions, which temporarily lower the global average temperature by emitting huge clouds of sulphur particles that reflect sunlight.

His arguments were supported by climate change and solar engineering lecturer Dr Peter Irvine, who told the debate: *"A decade and a half of research has gone into this. High-flying jets could do this – we would have to redesign them at a cost of tens of billions of dollars but less than what it costs to decarbonise the planet. We could slash the climate change effect overall because it reduces temperatures."*

But he warned that, currently, only few individual countries such as the USA and China were rich enough and had the engineering know-how to do this. He also warned that the technology did not *"give us an excuse to continue burning fossil fuels"*. And the particles only last a year before warming comes back. *"You could be stuck with it for decades at billions of pounds per year,"* he said.

Inderpaul Johar, founder of Dark Matter Labs, which seeks technical solutions to climate breakdown, argued that there was no political body empowered to take climate engineering decisions and feared the technology could be weaponised.

"Who makes this decision? Where does global authority come from? We don't have an institutional framework for this. Where are they for this type of decision? Do we have the mechanism to deal with it?" he wanted to know. Asked whether we would ever see the technology used in the future, he replied: *"Yes – but as a weapon."*



BIG IDEA:

It is vital that we encourage people to discuss the real issues that matter to people instead of abstract climate, like better public transport.

MODERATOR: Jo Phillips, broadcaster; with:

Dr Louise MacAllister,
Involve.

Robin Webster,
Advocacy Communications.

Manu Maunganidze,
Bristol Green Capital Partnership.



Climate conversations

Partner



Many communities have real world issues that are greatly impacted by environmental issues – but we have to explain the consequences in order to take action.

That was the main message of the Big Tent's symposium on climate conversation. Sometimes there does need to be direct government action - the smoking ban in pubs was highly effective, for example – but it is important to discuss the real issues that matter to people instead of abstract issues like climate change, we need to talk about better public transport.

We need to ask people what they want to be different in their life - that's a good way of getting their buy-in. A majority are worried about climate change, but how important is it to people? Where does it appear on their list of priorities?

To get permission to discuss climate change, first you need to gain trust and buy-in by discussing the most relevant local topics. *"We can't just tell people 'never fly, wear a hair shirt, live in squalor,' said one questioner. 'Doomsterism isn't going to help.'"*



BIG IDEA:

Hold many more citizens' assemblies, and then invite the politicians and officials to take part.

MODERATOR: Andrew Kelly, former director, Bristol Ideas; with:

Tom Brake, CEO Unlock Democracy and former deputy leader of the House of Commons.

Anika Mistry, Bristol Youth Mayor.

Claire Hazelgrove, Community and Political Engagement Director at TPXImpact.

Jo Phillips, Broadcaster, writer and community relations adviser.



Better conversations

Partner



Former Carshalton MP Tom Brake revealed how, when he was an MP, the police had to go around to visit his neighbour to talk about the death threats he had made to Tom's family.

"My experience as a member of Parliament for 20 years is that the tone changed towards the latter period of that," he said. "To have better conversations, first of all you need to trust the politicians taking part, and the tone of the conversations are also going to have to change."

The man lived "literally around the corner," said Tom. "I'm resilient, but – when you're in Parliament and the threat was made to your spouse and children – then something has to change."

Claire Hazelgrove from TPXImpact suggested that we need to hold citizens' assemblies as widely as possible, like the one they organised in Blackpool.

"I'm not talking about referendums that divide," she said. "What I am talking about is approaches that bring people together to learn, to share and to decide and to prioritise together about the places they love."

She suggested that people get together and launch a process that enables people to have a discussion – and then bring in the politicians and their officials.

"It is very rare that they will turn round and say: no, you can't do this."

Tom warned that citizens' assemblies need to be funded and given time if they were going to work.

Anika Mistry, the 14-year-old Bristol Youth Mayor, talked about the role of young people. *"I think many people underestimate children and they think they aren't capable of understanding what needs to happen."*



We need to build up the confidence of young people and inspire them to follow their interests and to do what needs to be done, she said.

"Politics as we know it has become poisoned at the well of Westminster," said broadcaster Jo Phillips. We are now in crisis because people say; 'a plague on all your houses'.

"When that happens, democracy withers – and when it's gone. It's gone!"

Mexico City is a good example of what should happen, said Tom Brake. People there wrote their own constitution in 2018. Chile votes soon on its new constitution, written by a citizens' assembly.

New media - where next?

BIG IDEA:

Social media needs to be more transparent about its rules and how it is enforcing them.

MODERATOR: Martin Booth, editor Bristol 24/7; with:

Bruce Daisley, Former head of Twitter EMEA.

Giles Derrington, Senior UK government relations and public policy manager, TikTok.

Qazzally Ali, Babbasa trailblazer, local youth channel.

Ellie Placide, Babbasa trailblazer and aspiring youth worker.

Nick Tyrone, Spectator columnist and author of the Pop Star Jihadi a novel about fake news.



What should we be doing to support people we are seeing intimidated on social media?

That was what Frances Scott from 50:50 asked the session on new media – pointing out that women in politics get three times the abuse on social media compared to men.

“I couldn’t agree more,” said Bruce Daisley, who worked for four years at Youtube and then eight at Twitter. *“We cannot wait for the whim of billionaires to decide what the rules should be. We have to take things into our own hands.”*

“If people knew how many people were dealing with their complaints!” he said rhetorically. *“Reviewing it in Budapest or the Philippines, where English isn’t their first language...”*

Ellie Placide, from the Babbasa youth channel, said that she consumed no traditional media at all.

The question is: how do we prepare young people for the crazy world of new media, said her Babassa colleague Qazzally Ali.

Giles Derrington said his company TikTok – a four-year-old company with a billion users – had really invested in transparency. *“Things like how many posts we took down, and how long it took us.”*

Nick Tyrone, a *Spectator* columnist and former Radix director – also the author of the novel *Pop Star Jihadi* – said that “old school publishing” was really in a mess.

“My book took ages to get published. Lead times are insane,” he said.



BIG IDEA:

Bristol is a queen of culture and doesn't need a crown. However, it should apply to be the City of Culture for 2029.

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Samir Savant, CEO, ST George's;
Angie Belcher, comedian;
Suzanne Rolt, CEO, Quartet Community Foundation;
and **Sheila Hannon**.

THE REGIONAL ROLE OF BRISTOL AS A CITY OF CULTURE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO CREATIVE INDUSTRIES:

Clare Reddington, CEO, Watershed,
Mel Rodrigues, founder and CEO, Gritty Talent.

WAYS TO DEMOCRATISE DECISION MAKING AND BUILD OWNERSHIP OF ARTS AND CULTURE:

Carolyn Hassan, CEO,
Knowle West Media Centre.

LaToyah McAllister-Jones,
executive director, St Paul's Carnival.

Emma Harvey,
Trinity Community Arts.

CLOSING STATEMENT:

Edson Burton and
Emma Harvey, CEO,
Trinity Community Arts.

CLOSING PERFORMANCE:

Power of Moving in Synchronicity,
Lottie Ball.

How can culture drive change in Bristol?

Partner

TRINITY

The talented children and young people from Hype Dance opened the session with two performances demonstrating the importance and joy of dance.

Emma Harvey from Trinity Community Arts said that Bristol is a city of culture that doesn't need any prizes to tell them that. Edson Burton told the audience that this session would celebrate the city's creativity and give a sample of how Bristol, as a City of Culture, would look.

Samir Savant described hundreds of concerts and events at and around St Georges, including the first BBC Prom in Bristol. The learning and participation programme engaging with children and young people is vital because regular active music-making can transform educational outcomes.

Suzanne Rolt from Quartet Community Foundation stressed the power of arts and culture to support and drive change. The arts are essential in education but are under threat.

She highlighted the 'Mural for Social Change' at Eastern Community Centre, created by 30 disabled artists and asylum seekers. Bristol has given a residency to Chineke!, an orchestra championing black and ethnically diverse musicians.

Sheila Hannon from Show of Strength said that schools need to encourage imagination. After her walking tour in Bath celebrated Mary Shelley writing Frankenstein, a plaque was erected, and a visitor attraction opened, proving that art and culture can transform cities. Her walking tours enable people to engage with people and places.

Bristol's city poet Caleb Parkin celebrated matriarchs of Bristol and beyond, reciting his poem Bristol Queen.

Mel Rodrigues from Gritty Talent, which promotes under-represented talent, came to Bristol to get a law degree but embraced the social and cultural opportunities and instead embarked on a creative career.

Carolyn Hassan of The Knowle West Media Centre spoke of the public art strategy and how the fuel, housing and cost of living crises impact the arts. We need to communicate the benefits of the arts better, she said.

LaToyah McAllister-Jones, director of St Paul's Carnival, spoke about growing the skills for carnival within the community. We must democratise culture, she said.

Emma Harvey of Trinity Community Arts celebrated the everyday creativity that makes us human and spoke of the importance of locally accessible cultural opportunities. For example, homeless people and ex-offenders have been able to contribute to society through community arts centres.

Does Bristol need the crown of 'City of Culture'? Caroline Hassan believes the journey and what remains afterwards are more important than winning. Bristol should work to include everyone and interrogate what culture and the arts mean.

The speakers and the audience supported Bristol's desire to be the City of Culture in 2029. LaToyah said: "Bristol is a city of culture, that's why people come to the city. That's why people stay".

Whilst supportive of the application, Emma says: "We don't need the crown; we are a city of culture."

Bristol Ideas are pitching for Bristol to celebrate its 650th anniversary with an artist in every ward initiative, enabling people to take action about things that matter to them with the help of artists.

Desperate Men emphasised the importance of a critical voice in art in addition to participation and entertainment. Comedy, politics and activism can find expression in the arts.

The session ended with dance therapist Lottie Ball, who believes dance can bring about positive social change.

BIG IDEA:

Politicians and businesspeople need to talk to each other more – starting with talking about procurement.

MODERATOR: Aun Abdi,
Book Talk Today; with:

Joe Zammit-Lucia, author of
New Political Capitalism.

Darren Jones MP, chair of the BEIS
select committee.

Tilly McAuliffe, owner and director of Think
Publishing and Lib Dem party treasurer.

Can business and politics learn to love one another?

Business and politics don't understand one another, Joe Zammit-Lucia told the meeting.

He has worked to explain political knowledge to businesspeople, but business has kept up a fiction - and has believed - that it was apolitical: this worked in the 1990s, when the Overton window was narrow (globalisation good, liberal capitalism good, end of history-style stuff).

"But politics means deciding what sort of society we live in, and nobody can be exempted from that," he said.

Darren Jones said that, as a society, we rely on business to create jobs, and bring prosperity – the relationship is symbiotic, with politics providing the framework by incentivising good things and punishing poor behaviour.

Tilly McAuliffe said: *"It's a mad idea that business and politics don't work well together - they do, and society would be better if they worked more harmoniously together. Businesspeople should be in politics and politicians ought to better understand business."*

Unfortunately, the civil service has a poor understanding of business, which means that the quality of regulation is often very poor. When business interacts with politicians, it is usually through lobbyists rather than directly, and it's generally for their own interests and essentially for the photo op.

Businesspeople often don't want to have the risk of interacting with politicians sometimes, said Darren Jones. Business needs to be comfortable around politicians and Parliament. In many cases, SMEs simply don't have the time to get involved, but they could make a very valuable contribution.

The panel agreed with a member of the audience that governments are often too willing to claim business successes as their own, but blame business when things go wrong.

"The world in which business operates has changed, and business must always try to adapt (mostly since 9/11), and ESG is part of that," said Joe. "This started out as a good idea, but is now basically a checkbox that companies tick off for the sake of looking good, rather than in an attempt to change with the times."

Tilly McAuliffe quoted Joe's book: *"If you're not interested and engaged in politics, you're not interested and engaged in life and society."*



BIG IDEA:

Give refugees Digital Identity Wallets so they can hang onto documents.

MODERATOR: Neil Midgley,
ex-Telegraph journalist, director of communications at Poland Welcomes, a charity to support Ukrainian refugees; with:

Emma Chemiavsky,
UK chief executive for UNHCR.

Layla Moran MP,
Lib Dem foreign affairs spokesperson.

Dr Melanie Garson,
Cyber Policy Lead for Europe, Israel and Middle East in the Internet Policy Unit, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

How do we talk about Ukraine?

The visa system for getting refugees from Ukraine into the UK is too bureaucratic, says Layla Moran, who is hosting a Ukrainian refugee. The hurdles continue after they reach the UK too.

Members of the audience confirmed the problems and frustrations experienced, such as long delays and separate sections of the Home Office dealing with Visa applications from children and adults from the same family.

Melanie Garson said that tech companies are fundamentally solutions-oriented optimists who like challenges. They believe in the power of tech to do good. For example, to assist refugees, we need to rethink digital identities. So, tech companies are working on digital wallets that can travel with refugees.

These could make sure that people don't lose access to services or documents like birth certificates, enabling them to access the documentation they need when moving and settling in new places.

More controversially, some start-ups are exploring cryptocurrencies that wouldn't be tied up in a bank account when people move to a different location.

Every cloud has a silver lining and Melanie believes that crises and shocks will lead to better tools for the future enabling people to move with dignity across places.

When we think of tech, we tend to consider the big things like communications, infrastructure and cyber security defences. Yet this exciting niche area could enable refugees to move with dignity.



BIG IDEA:

We need to trust the forms and process by which free speech decisions are made, and we need equal access to that process.

SPEAKERS: David Goodhart, journalist, writer and head of the Demography, Immigration and Integration Unit of Policy Exchange.

In conversation with **Marvin Rees**, Mayor of Bristol.

Cancel culture - right or wrong?

David Goodhart asked Marvin Rees about the Colston statue. Marvin said: *"Having a statue of a slaver up in the centre of the city that was called a 'wise and virtuous son of the city' is a problem to me. Not because I have chosen to be offended or on the left, but because there is a chance that Colston owned my ancestors. As elected mayor of the city, it's not just that I didn't approve of how it was removed; I couldn't approve."*

"Part of the defence in court was that the city had done nothing. That is untrue: there was a building called Colston Hall, but it's no longer called that. We did it in an orderly way with a consultation. It's renamed Bristol Beacon. There has been work about employment, recruiting magistrates, and work at City Hall, all about race."

"If I listed priorities to tackle racism, I'd probably put housing at the top, then education and next mental health. Where would I put the statue? I'm not saying the statue isn't important, but with a finite amount of time and capital, how much time do you put into taking a statue down?"

"I am the first black mayor in Europe. How many black people would put ropes around the statue in front of cameras, pull it down and then have the cojones to demand a crown court trial? Maybe there was a degree of white privilege on show. It was problematic for other black people and me to hear some of that self-righteous commentary around it."

"There was a counter rally at the cenotaph. I arranged to meet one of the organisers. He talked to me about working-class history in Bristol. Working-class people have had their voices suppressed. He had been screamed at for being 'racist scum', but his wife was black. The counter-protesters felt like they were losing their city. I said they are losing it to house prices. In the end, he posted on the counter-rally page, 'Marvin understands us'. It wasn't just about race; there was complexity."

"White privilege is real, but my white mum from a Welsh mining background did not grow up in privilege. I can respect white working-class people's stories."

David Goodhart argued that the Labour party used to be a broad movement on behalf of the underdog. Yet over the last 20 years, the progressive movement has become narrower, more identity politics based, and concerned with language and gestures like taking the knee, and it's a real obstacle to winning power.

"Marvin says that the world is complicated," said Goodhart. *"He doesn't feel he has any ultimate authoritative truth on cancel culture; it often seems people claim to represent those whose voices have been squashed in society, like Piers Morgan and Nigel Farage. They are the wrong answer to the right problem."*



They perpetuate the problem.

"People have a right to say what they want; people have a right to say offensive things, and people have a right to talk foolishly. People have a right to say, 'I don't want you to have a right to say that.' That's the debate."

"Some people say things attached to plans or movements that lead to real evils. We have to say, at some point, you can't say that. There must be a process with integrity and fairness. If it's done on a whim or you can't trust the authority, then it's dangerous."

David Goodhart said we already have hate speech and libel laws. So did Marvin feel they are insufficient?

Marvin said it's how they are used, and not everyone has equal access to those laws, particularly the vulnerable.

Should Keir Starmer take the knee?

If he wants to, yes, but Marvin argued that *"all movements like that should have a time limit, but I like the idea that there are allies who will take a stand on what is acceptable and not acceptable."*

Marvin says some of the solutions we need to pursue will negatively affect some people. If we want politics that gets us to solutions, we must have the space to put imperfect solutions on the table without being slammed.

"Journalism serves up conflict because that's what the public click on. Politicians want publicity, so they serve up conflict. I think it's hazardous that so many people are chasing the clicks on social media."

Marvin argued we need to trust the forms and process by which free speech decisions are made, but we need equal access to that process.

"I don't mind a little bit of wokeness because I think that words matter. But sometimes people have misused movements for their own emotional needs rather than for the outcomes that movement is there to deliver."

"I think it is essential to tackle poverty. It's tough to do reconciliation when people are desperate and when people feel that they can't meet their basic needs."

"If they struggle, it's much harder for them to cope with change because that change is too often associated with loss. By tackling poverty and the housing crisis, we create the conditions in which it is most possible for people to connect across differences."



BIG IDEA:

We need to use Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) for more affordable and sustainable housing.

MODERATORS: Jez Sweetland and Jessie Wilde, Bristol Housing Festival; with:

Cllr Tom Renhard, cabinet member (Housing Delivery & Homes) at Bristol City Council.

Steve Dale, CEO, Bristol Community Land Trust.

Graeme Culliton, managing director, BoKlok UK.

Zoe Metcalfe, client director, Local and Central Government UK, Atkins.

TO A MORE EQUITABLE SOCIETY

Fixing the housing crisis together

Partner



Jez Sweetland of Bristol Housing Festival highlighted the urgency required to deal with those not in permanent accommodation. We must meet the challenge around social justice in housing and deal with environmental and ecological challenges too, he said.

The Bristol Housing Festival was set up in 2018 to engage with the local authority, industry and the public to build trust in the process and explain the complexity and nuance of fixing the housing crisis.

He believes Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) can play a significant part.

MMC is where homes are manufactured at a facility off-site, enabling standardisation and delivering more affordable and sustainable housing. Jez believes we need consideration of the Social Value Act in viability decisions of small brownfield sites.

We must look to the future, not just consider costs today, said Jez. He also raised the problem of land supply, too often being controlled by the big PLCs.

Graeme Culliton shared how BoKlok (a partnership of Ikea and Skanska) aims to provide MMC housing for the average wage earner. Their homes are manufactured off-site and can be erected quickly. When used for social housing, MMC housing enables people in temporary accommodation to be in their own homes two years earlier than waiting for a traditionally constructed home.

MMC regenerates capital at twice the speed and is more sustainable. But the current finance model isn't working. We have the technology to provide zero-energy homes, but lenders don't recognise the value of future energy savings.

Steve Dale, CEO at Bristol Community Land Trust, advocated community-led housing with involvement

from acquisition through planning, specification and construction. This approach gives more, greener, and better homes often built on sites unattractive to traditional builders. The community is also established even before the homes are created due to the partnerships.

Councillor Tom Renhard said Bristol has 16,000 on the waiting list for social housing. Bristol City Council is investing in 9,000 new council homes, supporting community-led housing and has opened the Advanced Construction Skills Centre at City of Bristol College to address the problem of the ageing construction workforce. The average age of a UK construction worker is 54.

Zoe Metcalfe admires Bristol Housing Festival for doing things differently. When building homes, we must consider health, wellbeing, mental health and nature, she said. Lockdown showed us the importance of access to outdoor space. Suitable housing has many layers of value and can deliver co-benefits.



BIG IDEA:

We need to give 100 per cent of the 'neighbour share' of any Community Infrastructure Levy on regional developments to local communities.

MODERATORS: Anna Turley, former MP for Redcar; with:

Gabriel Chanan, expert in community empowerment.

Melissa Mean, director, We Can Make/ West Knowle Neighbourhood.

Toby Lloyd, chair, No Place Left Behind Commission. Housing specialist and Number 10 adviser.

Building communities

The best way to make sure that no-one is left behind, and more people have a say about what happens in the places where they live, is to first help strengthen communities.

Social capital grows when people are connected and have opportunities to experience relationships based on trust and solidarity, Gabriel Chanan told the meeting.

"The white paper cites community involvement and 'strengthening communities' as relevant to the process of levelling up, but, resources have so far been used to make physical improvements and to usurp the local capacity building required for the development of new social capital."

Granularity, the notion that inequalities are more concentrated the more local you get, is referred to in the white paper. The realities of health and wellbeing disparities are deeper and starker when reviewed at the estate or street level, and become diluted or hidden in the statistics covering wider,

more generic areas like districts or towns.

Defining solutions from a national vantage point is therefore inappropriate to levelling up, as are "top-down capital infrastructure projects, buildings, that are decided upon by central government, with communities competing with each other, with no concern for climate change or the structural causes of inequality, and with no investment in the soft social infrastructure," said Melissa Mean.

Central and local government, voluntary organisations, think tanks of all colours, citizens, residents and even drop-outs from society – all the players, agree that empowering communities is a good thing. If that is so, it has to be too unconvincing as a concept to be useful.

If its application threatened anyone with real changes there would surely be opposition to it somewhere, at some point. *"Community means place. A place people identify with as their own patch. Every community has qualities unique to*

itself and issues that are hyper-local. They are complex social organisms and are never cohesive," said Toby Lloyd.

Outsiders know very little about the specific changes that would make the place more liveable in. Money empowers and if levelling up is going to happen, communities need more of it under their control.

The Regeneration Bill suggests 25 per cent, a 'neighbour share', of the Community Infrastructure Levy on regional developments should go to communities - and 75 per cent to the local authority. This is a practical and sensible idea, but an even better one would be to give 100 per cent to communities?

It would be a game changing opportunity for local communities to prosper and begin to combat inequalities.



BIG IDEA:

The creative economy is a real thing and it can revitalise our town centres – if we let it.

MODERATORS: Rebecca Trevalyan
co-founder of Platform Places and of the
Library of Things; with:

Anna Farthing, executive director of
engagement at Arts University, Bournemouth.

Cllr Kemi Akinola, managing director of
Brixton People's Kitchen and deputy leader of
Wandsworth Council.

Mark Robinson, co-founder of Ellandi and
chair of the High Streets Taskforce.

The future of the high street

Partner

Platform
Places **ra**

High streets are key to bringing people and money into communities and councils, Kemi Akinola told the meeting. A lot of issues stemming from the pandemic – fewer people going out, hybrid working, delivery services, and so on – have not helped.

The way to look at it is by looking at the high street as a 24-hour place: night-time strategy is key, she said.

Mark Robinson, chair of the government's High Streets Taskforce, said that things are very bad, due to retail monoculture, which has squeezed out all of the things that made our high streets special and has created monotowns.

This was an overly complicated process to change – because towns were anchored by department stores rather than community spaces.

Anna Farthing said that big anchor stores are a problem, as it's tricky to change their use.

But there are ideas around - someone who bought a shopping centre and Debenhams had artist Stuart Semple take top three floors. Then they worked with new department store owners to have a floor of the department store to be a gallery.

'Meanwhile' spaces with short or very short leases - as much as five years to as little as a month or so - are potentially quite valuable, said Kemi. It means that empty shops can be used until someone for a long lease can be found.

It is beneficial for communities to be high street anchors: places where communities are in some cases taking on the ownership, and management, of these high streets.

What is the role of major retailers in regenerating the high street, someone in the audience asked?

"They obviously play a key role – but we need to make them more friendly and accessible. Shops are the best approach to last-mile logistics."

One member of the audience pointed to financialisation as the cause of monotowns – when landlords only accept tenants with strong balance sheets, rejecting small independents.

"Nobody wants to drive to a clone-town – they want the small independents, with art and all the other things."



BIG IDEA:

Any organisation in a position to lobby for support must be transparent.

MODERATORS: Duncan Hames, director of policy Transparency International; with:

Thangam Debbonaire MP, shadow leader of the House of Commons.

Layla Moran MP, Lib Dem foreign affairs spokesperson.

Cllr Peter Golds, Conservative councillor in Tower Hamlets Council.

ACCESS ALL AREAS:

Whose voices are heard on policy and development?

Partner



More safeguards and transparency are urgently needed around public money to prevent politicians side-stepping rules under the pretexts of national emergencies – or rewriting them to suit their needs, a Big Tent debate on transparency heard.

Lib Dem Foreign Affairs spokesperson Layla Moran said she was deeply concerned at how national emergencies were being used as pretexts for evading rules designed to protect democracy. The cost-of-living crisis was already being used as an excuse to “roll back on net zero” by climate sceptics such as Tory MP Steve Baker. *“I think we should be worried,”* she said.

Sunlight was the best disinfectant, she added. More transparency was needed to prevent lobbyists *“getting their hands on the tiller and influencing what’s happening in government”*.

A recently published public accounts report suggested politicians were deciding where to grant funds, then creating principles afterwards to justify the allocation. *“It suggests a huge amount is going wrong and our fears around ‘pork barrel politics’ are founded.”*

Duncan Hames, policy director of anti-corruption watchdog Transparency International, said that investigations around PPE procurement contracts had revealed ‘systemic bias during the pandemic’ and even a ‘VIP lane’ (for procurement) had been identified by the audit office.

“Decisions about public money should not be distorted by those with an interest in the outcome,” he told the debate.

Some rules were inadequate, such as the Prime Minister having to authorise an investigation into his own conduct. But even when rules designed to safeguard democracy worked, politicians had attempted to rewrite them retrospectively as in the recent Owen Paterson scandal. *“Corruption doesn’t just happen in hot countries,”* Duncan said.

Safeguards had also fallen into disrepair in many councils in the country. Some people held positions as councillors whilst working for property developers. A recent report showed one fifth of donations to the Tories were made by people with interests in property.

“Attempts to rewrite the rules undermine trust,” Shadow House of Commons leader Thangam Debbonaire told the debate. *“Since 1695, there have been rules against lobbying getting stronger until last October when the government took a handbrake turn and went back on them because it didn’t suit them. You should be able to believe in democracy and trust that, if there is a system, it can pick rotten MPs up. At the moment, I’m not convinced you can.”*

Conservative Tower Hamlets councillor Peter Golds called for compulsory registration:

“Any organisation in a position to lobby for support must be transparent. We must know who lobbyists are. There are over 7,000 councillors in this country – some of us are thoroughly decent people trying to do a good job for our residents, but the complaints procedure is often so burdensome that only the well-resourced can engage with it. Governments should not be afraid of their decision-making – it should be open.”



BIG IDEA:

Restaurants and supermarkets which should be fined for the food they waste.

MODERATORS: Zander Woolcombe, the Eleanor Crook Foundation; with:

Kemi Akinola, community food activist, Lambeth.

Kerry McCarthy MP, former shadow DEFRA minister.

Andy Street, Fareshare SouthWest.

Food poverty, security and malnutrition

“Food equality exists when all people, at all times, have access to nutritious, affordable and appropriate food, according to their social, cultural and dietary needs. They are equipped with the resources, skills and knowledge to use and benefit from food, which is sourced from a resilient, fair and environmentally sustainable food system.”

One City Food Equality Strategy, Bristol.

The food system is broken, use of food banks is growing and – with the war in Ukraine, the climate emergency and other disasters – it seems we are going to see long-term change in food distribution, the meeting heard.

We urgently need to know what is working well and where we can do better. In the UK, food waste is a major problem. Producing, distributing and getting rid of it has massive implications for the environment.

Charities intercept and redistribute only 15 per cent of the perfectly fit for purpose food that is left unused by restaurants and supermarkets which should be fined for the food they waste.

Bad food is too cheap – like the “£1.99 chicken and chips fiasco” – it leaves people feeling full but is extremely unhealthy. Shops selling it should not be allowed to open near a school. The ‘urban growing’ movement is a welcome development but will never be enough.

Each borough in the country needs a food equality strategy to combat food deserts in tandem with dynamic procurement policies such as using flexible shorter term bulk buying arrangements that can help to control the production and distribution of bad food.

Indications are that the Government is unwilling to halt the undesirable activities of the powerful food lobby.

It will be up to community activists and local authorities to commit to investing in solutions to food poverty, listening to and communicating with local people and making a stand for food justice.

And to take fresh food directly to the food deserts!



BIG IDEA:

We should unlock the skills of migrants and refugees by letting them work after six months.

MODERATORS: Paulette North
chair, Ujima Radio; with:

Fuad Mahamed, chief executive, ACH.

Sunder Katwala, chief executive,
British Future.

Stephen Kinnock MP, Shadow Minister
for Immigration.

TO BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES

Where did all the workers go?

Britain's workforce has lost around a million workers since Covid and Brexit as a result of changing migration patterns. But could we have claimed to have been an inclusive, welcoming Britain anyway?

There is no question that the reputations of migrants and refugees over this last decade has been severely damaged by a volatile and polarising immigration debate, led by a predominantly hostile and emotive tabloid press.

"Migration need not be a negative concept, refugees and migrants are just people with skills and talents like everyone else," said Faud Mohamed.

We need an honest, serious and generous conversation, for example, about why so many left after Covid and how we can invest in the reform and modernisation of the various application systems.

"Migration data has been hard to collect on who left, who stayed and who came back since Covid," said Sunder Katwala.

Further than that, said Stephen Kinnock MP, *"the application process for asylum seekers stopped at the start of the pandemic and no information has been forthcoming from the Government as to why."*

The cost of housing asylum seekers in hotels is running at £4 million a day. Why not invest in the processing now and get the successful applicants out working and paying taxes? We need a labour market and the immigration system working in tandem, a nuanced system.

For example, why not unlock the skills of migrants and refugees and let them work after six months? It will require both a degree of flexibility by employers and the confidence and consent of the public. But there is evidence that, since Covid, public opinion has become more pragmatic, attitudes have changed and there is a wider understanding of the positive aspects of immigration, such as the contributions it makes to the functioning of the NHS.

From the perspectives of migrants and refugees, English language skills are everything, nothing is as important for children and adults alike. Direct action to provide them with informal tutoring is a vital step forward for their citizenship aspirations and for welcoming them to the country.



BIG IDEA:

We need to try linking Tesco records with health data, to help us predict who will get ill and why.

MODERATORS: Lord Lansley, former Health Secretary; with:

Prof Stephen Smith, former chief executive of the East Kent Hospitals Trust, author of *The Best NHS?*

Axel Heitmueller, senior associate fellow, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

Miriam Levin, Health and Care Programme director, Engage Britain.

Dr Anya Skatova, Turing Fellow, Bristol Medical School, University of Bristol.

Lessons from Covid for the NHS

"What the NHS does well is focus on one thing at a time," said Stephen Smith. During Covid, the focus was on tackling infectious disease in hospitals, resulting in other issues getting neglected.

To avoid this in future, organisational change is needed to clearly separate 'planned care' from 'acute care'. The NHS in Covid did make changes quickly, for once suspending all the rules, and realised that they could not do it on their own.

It paid off to have a national system, compared to other countries and it meant data and information was held centrally, which proved to be a bonus during the global pandemic.

We would have benefited from a more balanced approach to resourcing acute care and preventative care, and other countries which do, such as Germany, were able to mobilise more 'community capital'.

We need to change our mindset about health: *"It is not about spending money, it is an investment in people and the economy. But the Treasury still sees it as a cost, not a benefit,"* said Axel Heitmueller.

People love the NHS as an idea but, as patients inside it, they often feel lost. They report that they feel they are not treated as a whole person, that they often had to repeat themselves and that departments did not talk to each other.

"You need to be middle class and have pointy elbows in order to find your way through the systems within the NHS," said Miriam Levin.

There are also cultural differences between health researchers and practitioners.

Any lack of transparency about how data will be used causes suspicion.

Experience during Covid increased public support for sharing data: they saw how useful it was in protecting us.

"We need to build diagnostic capacity using new technology. If you were to link Tesco records with health data, for example, we would be much better at predicting who will get ill and why," said Anya Skatova.

Covid also increased the democratisation of health. People administered their own lateral flow tests. They took care of themselves and each other. If we don't prevent, the worst gets worse and we will spend larger and larger slices of the cake on hospitals.



BIG IDEA:

We must make sure children learn how to blend screen time with socialising in person – because we owe this generation of young people for sacrificing so much to keep us safe.

SPEAKERS: Stacey Olike,
Creative Diversity Coordinator, Channel Four.

Alexander Losad, policy lead, Digital Government Unit, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

Elizabeth Gilpin, Headteacher.

Paul Finnis, chief executive of the Learning Foundation and head of the Digital Poverty Alliance.

Transforming education

Partner



Swift, radical transformations occurred in schools right from the start of Covid, the final meeting in the public services strand heard.

What the staff pulled off was amazing and they protected thousands of children. Although mental well-being became an issue for some, the pandemic inspired among young people more resilience, hunger for change, creativity and the desire for a better, fairer society.

Remote learning was not possible at first, but schools played a vital role in holding the community together by spreading messages like: “we are isolated but not alone.”

Digital poverty became a central issue, 50 per cent suffered from slow broadband connections at home – including teachers. Many did not own devices and the laptops that were distributed came without adequate skills support.

“Inequalities in the system were disclosed and teachers did adapt fast. The ‘art of the possible’ changed, along with the belief in our ability to use technology in education,” said Alexander Losad.

In Scotland, digital literacy was recognised and commitments were made for every school child to have a device.

“Technology has subsequently become part of the portfolio that schools use for education but, unfortunately, given the massive amount that teachers have to do anyway, schools have not made the long-term changes that could have happened,” said Paul Finnis.

We are also reaching the limits of what the design of our schools allows us to do and significant physical and policy changes will be needed to ‘bust the constraints on technology inclusive education.’

Dealing with Covid also encouraged a more flexible, team-teaching approach to education and this needs to be carried on. The values of education were confirmed during the pandemic as essential to uphold – “the education of the whole person to be fully alive, to value justice, to be organised and equipped to deal with the unexpected,” said Elizabeth Giffen.

Concern was expressed about what might be awaiting secondary schools now, after what primary children went through during Covid. They missed out on key pieces of development and social relationships. We know that being online too much can foster anxieties. Screens will be part of our children’s future at home and at school. We must make sure they learn how to blend screen time with socialising in person as one way of showing our gratitude to this generation of young people for sacrificing so much to keep us safe.



BIG IDEA:

Give everyone the right to manage their own health data.

MODERATOR: Camilla de Coverly Veale, policy director of the Coalition for a Digital Economy (Coadec), with:

George Freeman, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation.

Martin Carkett, policy lead, Tony Blair Institute for Global Change.

Dr Catherine Howe, chief executive, Adur and Worthing councils.

Mevan Babakar, CEO, the Democracy Club.

The case for big data

Partner



The three biggest challenges for the world, according to George Freeman MP – Big Tent founder and minister for science, research and innovation under Boris Johnson – are healthcare, agri-tech (“feeding 9 billion mouths”) and finding ways of living efficiently and sustainably in cities. Big data is the solution for all three, he said.

“If we are going to modernise government, we need to empower consumers and citizens,” he said. “Digitalisation is a profoundly empowering technology.”

The first thing that can be done is to make data available to people. “A lot of entrepreneurs just like to know what government is doing already,” said George. Opening up the Met Office data had led to a whole range of small start-ups and innovations.

But all the speakers agreed that health data was the priority. *“We are running the NHS on paper and cardboard,”* said George.

Though he also mentioned net zero: *“We haven’t got a prayer of meeting net zero unless we have data about which approaches are successful.”*

The pandemic had shown up a key problem here. *“All the traditional metrics on health economic resilience showed that us and the USA had the highest health economic resilience, when we had actually the least,”* he said. And the highest turned out to be wired, data-rich Estonia.

The key to tackling health data was to *“make the system dance to the tune of the patient, not the convenience of the administrative siloes running the health system,”* said George.

Martin Carkett said that, until a year or so ago, the NHS was the biggest purchaser of fax machines anywhere in the world.

“The really big opportunity is in electronic health records: 70 per cent of NHS trusts have electronic versions of your health records,” he said. *“It is incredibly inefficient. They are also not completely interoperable – I come from Devon and I work in London – if I am hit by a car in Bristol, how do they make sure they have all my health information in the ambulance? The technology is now there – we now need the cloud-based infrastructure we can rely on. We just need the investment.”*

Mevan was deputy director of Full Fact, the fact-checking charity. She said there wasn’t good data in many countries, openly available.

It was also important to be sure they were measuring the right things.

“Underneath all that is a huge infrastructural problem,” she said. *“It is almost as if we are talking about the big shiny trains and all the things that they will be able to do, But we still haven’t laid the tracks down for them to run on...”*

Health data is clearly transformational, said Catherine Howe. *“But it is really shocking that we know much more about people than they know about ourselves. If people don’t have access to own data, it feels a bit wrong.”*

“It is easy for people to lose sight of themselves in the data,” she warned. *“One of the dangers is that we go down the path towards technocracy and we lose the ability to do anything for ourselves.”*

“Personally, I also carry a lot of rage about how much of my own data is locked up in proprietary legacy systems,” said Catherine.

George Freeman said: *“The only thing I don’t like about his topic is the title: big data.”*

Who wouldn’t be terrified of the phrase ‘big data’. I like small data, local data, data which works for us.”

BIG IDEA:

We should launch an ISA to fund start-ups.

MODERATOR: Tilly McAuliffe, owner and director of Think Publishing; with:

George Freeman MP, Minister responsible for Science, Research and Innovation.

Darren Jones MP, chair of the BEIS select committee.

Matt Cooper, co-founder, CapitalOne Bank and chair of Octopus.

Tim Barnes, CEO of the Centre for Entrepreneurs.

Andy Rice, co-founder of Adjivo.

Hadley Diest, investment manager at Ascension.

PITCH TENT

What entrepreneurs need from politics

To unleash the talent of the younger generation, we need to embrace - and invest in the technology of tomorrow, said George Freeman MP.

We are no longer subject to state aid rules post-Brexit, so there are opportunities for procurement, he said. We should be going for a race to the top in terms of tech regulation. It was time to connect the City to our nation's tech bases.

SMEs make up 99.9 per cent of businesses in the country, turning over £2.3 trillion. There are 600,000 start-ups a year on average, but one in five of them fail in the first year, and 60 per cent fail in first three years, said Tilly McAuliffe. The key is to understand the scale of what entrepreneurs contribute to our economy.

Reform is needed, Darren Jones agreed. But, most importantly, we need to support and incentivise business. Start-ups so often struggle to grow because they are bought out by overseas companies.

We should be investing in scaling up good, big British businesses - not just unicorns but sustainable growth ones. We should continue to build on visa schemes, but also adult education programmes.

George Freeman agreed that we need to change the culture in schools and get teachers to recognise the new economy, but he was sceptical of the idea that the government should play an overly direct role.

"The real key is the local geography: clusters are key to growing opportunities," he said.

Class still plays a major role, said Darren Jones: poor kids tend not to have the chances to start businesses. *"They don't feel like it's for them, they can't afford the risk and the costs, and they are not taught anything about the culture of it."*

Tim Barnes was challenging. *"There are things we know to solve absolutely all of these problems, but politicians always shoot them down - why?"*

When Darren Jones asked whether R&D tax credits were really driving innovation, Tim replied: *"R&D tax credits are fantastic, one of the best things the government does. There's a reason that other countries are copying it."*

George Freeman suggested launching a start-up ISA. *"The real challenge isn't a lack of ideas,"* he said. *"It's changing the culture of politics so that politicians start to understand that this isn't a side issue: it's the economy."*

Inside government, we made a pledge to be a 2.4 per cent R&D economy, said George. *"We're at 1.7, Israel is at 4.6. Need to get \$100bn of private investment, very doable provided we do some stuff on R&D tax credits, and so on."*

"Bristol has done a great job in recent years in building a local ecosystem," said Darren. But people often still feel the need to go abroad or to London.

Successful entrepreneurs are key to building clusters and building up innovation in their local area, said George. We have to be willing to reward places or businesses for improving things.

But building separate ecosystems is *"an utterly stupid idea,"* said Tim. People need to be willing to travel 90 minutes on the train. *"Bristol being part of the London ecosystem isn't a bad thing. Silicon Valley is huge."*



NEW IDEAS REPORT

RADIX BIG TENT

Our political system is failing. Political debate has become polarised and short-sighted leading to a loss of trust not just in politicians but democracy itself. Traditional parties exclude millions, the media is no longer independent, while many think tanks are too narrow in focus and too dependent on corporate sponsorship to promote systemic change.

It is time for a revolution of empowerment to enable us all to take part in political discussion and to shape our responses to the challenges of the future. Radix Big Tent is our answer.

Radix, the think tank for the radical centre and Big Tent, which creates space for non-partisan discussion about big policy issues, are coming together to change the conversation and reframe and revive meaningful political debate. Together, we aim to provoke, develop and promote new conversations about and ideas for the regeneration and renewal of our society.

ABOUT RADIX PUBLICATIONS

Radix exists to challenge established notions and to re-imagine societies. As such, we welcome the opportunity to publish original papers which promote political, economic and social system change. The opinions expressed within any Radix papers are those of the named authors and publication does not imply agreement by the Radix Group Ltd or any of its Trustees with specific conclusions or recommendations. We hope nevertheless that all our publications provoke more informative, intelligent and thoughtful debate.

©Radix Group Ltd. The moral right of David Boyle (editor), Lesley Yarranton, Martin Simon, Morag Wilshire and Jake Field-Gibson, to be identified as the authors of this work is asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988. Some rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or photocopying, recording or otherwise for commercial purposes without the prior permission of the publisher. A CIP catalogue for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN (Print) 978-1-912880-75-1

ISBN (ePub) 978-1-912880-74-4

Radix Brand and Layout:
Mark Huddleston - talktohuddy.com

CONTACT US

RADIX BIG TENT,
14 Sandringham St, York, YO10 4BA

hello@radixuk.org
events@bigtent.org.uk

Published in September 2022
by Radix Group Ltd

www.radixuk.org
www.bigtent.org.uk

"AT THE BIG TENT FESTIVAL,
THE IDEAS – GOOD AND
BAD – ALL HAVE THE
POTENTIAL TO INSPIRE
INNOVATION AND CHANGE."

BEN RICH,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE,
RADIX BIG TENT

RADIX



THINK
TANK
FOR THE
RADICAL
CENTRE

www.radixuk.org
www.bigtent.org.uk
hello@radixuk.org
events@bigtent.org.uk

14 Sandringham St., York YO10 4BA

Registered Education Charity
1167393