

Understanding Regeneration

A short history for Radix Big Tent

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INTRODUCTION

Regeneration is one of the big issues for discussion at the Big Tent Leaders' Summit and Ideas Festival 2022 being held in Bristol this June. To fuel discussion on the day, this paper:

- Provides you with some **background briefing** on the topic; and
- Invites you to **think in advance about the questions** we will address on the day.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Inequality between places has been a "striking feature of the UK" for several decades, despite the overall prosperity of the country as a whole.¹

2.4 million people live in neighbourhoods in England that are categorised, using official data, as **'left behind'**.² People living in these neighbourhoods experience **multiple disadvantages because of where they live.**

Economically, there are fewer jobs, earnings are lower, and the local economy is less productive and innovative than the rest of the country. For example, the most productive city in the North West of England, Preston, is still 30% less productive than London.³

Socially, people are less likely to get good grades at school, and more likely to be victims of crime and to suffer serious and long-term illnesses. Men living in the most deprived areas of England die 9.7 years younger than men living in the least deprived areas.⁴

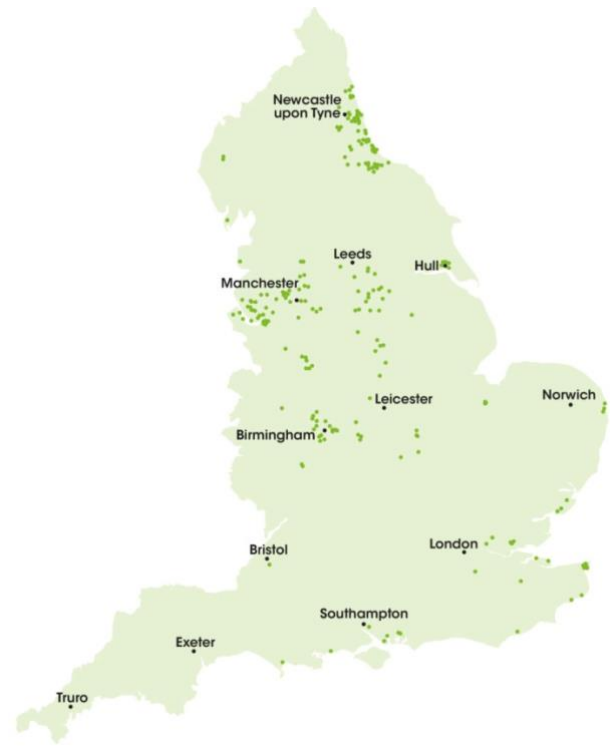
Environmentally, there are fewer civic assets, less infrastructure, and a lack of quality green spaces.⁵

The combination of factors varies from place to place. Urban areas are more likely to suffer from high rates of crime. Places which relied historically on certain industries and sectors, like former mining communities and seaside towns, have higher levels of unemployment.

Some communities are more concentrated in deprived neighbourhoods. This includes people from some BAME communities. For example, people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage are three times more than likely than people of White British heritage to live in 'left behind' areas.⁶

Spatially, problems are particularly acute in parts of Wales and Scotland, the North and Midlands of England, and areas of inner London. Nearly one in six neighbourhoods in the North East of England is classified as 'left behind'.⁷ One area of Bristol, Hartcliffe and Withywood, is classed as 'left behind', as shown in the map below.

Map of 225 'left behind' neighbourhoods in England]



WHAT HAS BEEN DONE ABOUT IT?

UK governments have had specific policies and programmes for tackling place-based disadvantage since the launch of the Urban Programme in 1968. Different policies since then have reflected different interpretations of the problem.

Some policies have focused on **social need** and sought to improve public services and empower local people. Sure Start was an example of an intervention that sought to improve early years support for low-income families in particular.

Other interventions, often driven by the Treasury, have prioritised the need for **economic revitalisation** in deprived areas. To this end, the

coalition government established Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) to encourage private sector growth and speed the delivery of new homes and jobs.

A third strand of interventions has focused on **fixing the housing market and delivering physical improvements**. Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders were introduced under New Labour and were designed to tackle the problem of over-supply and dereliction in the North and Midlands of England.⁸

Some programmes have attempted to **tackle these problems together**. The New Deal for Communities (NDC) was an attempt to deliver 'holistic' regeneration. 39 neighbourhoods, including Barton Hill in Bristol, received around £50m each over ten years. The impact of the programme varied markedly from area to area depending on a range of factors.⁹

WHAT WORKS?

These interventions have turned some deprived areas into popular and prosperous neighbourhoods. We can learn from these **examples of success** and start to understand 'what works'.

In the introduction to 'How to Regenerate', Ben Rich and David Boyle highlight **three award-winning exemplars of effective renewal**: The Eldonians in Liverpool; Glasgow housing co-operatives; and Coin Street Community Builders in London.

These examples share a number of common characteristics:

- They each involve the **transfer of assets**, in the form of houses and buildings, from local government to an organisation run and led by local people. The Barton Hill Settlement in Bristol is another example of an asset run and managed by and for the local community.
- Ownership and management of these buildings has **empowered the community** to make decisions for themselves.
- The community has been able to generate further income from the buildings, becoming **financially self-sustaining** and not reliant on stop-start government grants.
- This has allowed each initiative to **think, plan, and act for the long term**. To take just one example, Coin Street Community Builders was formed in 1984.¹⁰ This longevity is a reminder of the old dictum that **‘regeneration takes a generation’**.
- Over time, each project has delivered an **holistic package of locally tailored interventions**: refurbishing buildings, reducing crime, improving health, creating jobs, and more. Unlike the central government policies described above, they have not had to focus on one part of the problem.

Bristol also offers example of places which have changed significantly over time. Wapping Wharf was partially derelict following the closure of the traditional dockyard industries, but is now the focus of a long-term programme to create a mixed commercial-residential development.¹¹

WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

For every success story, there are other left behind places where **repeated attempts to turn things around have had limited impact**. The What Works

Centre for Economic Development conducted an evidence review in relation to estate renewal programmes from the UK and other OECD countries.¹²

The review found that the **programmes “tend to have a limited impact** on the local economy in terms of improving income or employment” and similarly limited impact “on the local area in terms of reducing crime, improving health, wellbeing or education.”

There is also an important debate about **gentrification**.¹³ Gentrification can happen when improvements to an area result in the displacement, through housing demolition or ‘pricing out’, of lower-income households.¹⁴ Some regeneration projects, especially those in London, have been criticised on this basis.¹⁵

In summary, too many previous attempts at regeneration have **not delivered deep, structural social and economic change**.

WHAT IS LEVELLING UP?

The Government aims to tackle area deprivation **by levelling up the UK**.

Levelling up means two things. First, it means **narrowing or closing completely the gap** in quality of life and long-term life prospects between the poorest areas and the rest of the country. Second and simultaneously, it means **delivering greater prosperity everywhere** so that, in the words of the Prime Minister, there is no “cutting down the tall poppies, or attempting to hobble the areas that are doing well”.¹⁶

The government produced the White Paper ‘Levelling Up the UK’ in February 2022, publishing the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in May.¹⁷ The Bill sets out **four broad national objectives**:

- Boosting **productivity, pay, jobs and living standards** through private sector growth.
- Spreading **opportunity** and improving **public services**.
- Restoring a **sense of community**, pride and belonging.
- **Empowering** local leaders and communities.

The emphasis on empowering localities reflects the government’s **critique of previous policies**.

Specifically, that previous programmes were bureaucratic and overly prescriptive. As set out in the White Paper, **the government wants to “slash away” bureaucracy** so that “local leaders will be empowered to direct funding towards their own, **locally identified priorities**”.¹⁸

In practical terms, the government aims to deliver levelling up through:

- **Enshrining in law the commitment** to level up, with government bodies required to report regularly on progress.
- New national **funding streams**, including the £4.8bn Levelling Up Fund, the £2.6bn UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the £2.4bn Towns Fund.
- **Changes to the planning system** to make it easier to assemble sites for regeneration, re-use brownfield land, and take action to revitalise high streets and town centres.
- **Devolving further powers to local areas** through a new wave of ‘devolution deals’.

- **Re-directing government activity and expenditure**, including support for research and development (R&D), out of London and the South East.
- **Michael Gove**, Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, plays a **cross-government co-ordinating role** in trying to focus all departments on the agenda.

WILL LEVELLING UP WORK?

Responses to the levelling up agenda have been varied. Some of the attention has focused on the **very wide range of ideas and proposals** that have been put forward. The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Left Behind Areas noted that “over £250bn and 120 different policies” were mentioned in the White Paper.¹⁹

Many organisations have **welcomed the scale of ambition but queried the practicality** of what is proposed. The Institute for Government expressed concern about the lack of focus and prioritisation in the White Paper.²⁰ In its response, the Institute for Fiscal Studies said it was unclear how “the policy levers that lie directly within government control” would be used to deliver the government’s “enormous” ambitions.²¹

Some organisations have focused on **the question of who has the power** to deliver levelling up. The Local Government Association called for **further and faster devolution** to give councils the powers and resources as a precondition for making levelling up a reality.²² In a similar vein, Locality welcomed the White Paper but called for more “community power to drive it forward”.²³

Other organisations have been **more critical of the government’s proposals**. The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) argued that that the “White Paper lacks the focus and finance to get to the root of the problem” and that it said too little about “addressing wealth inequality or poverty”.²⁴ CLES advocates ‘community wealth building’, arguing that such a new approach is needed because “traditional economic development practice and developer-led regeneration are failing to address the economic challenges of our time.”²⁵

While debates about levelling up will continue, it vital to remember that **national policies and programmes are only one part of the bigger picture**. The largest pot of ‘special funding’ is a modest percentage of what is spent locally.

SOME EARLY THOUGHTS FOR RADIX BIG TENT

Radix Big Tent’s response to the White Paper is set out in **Community Involvement in Levelling Up: From Gesture to Structure**, written by Gabriel Chanan. Radix Big Tent has also produced **How to Regenerate**, a collection of essays inspired by our last Leaders’ Summit in November 2021. The essays make a number of important recommendations for delivering deep and lasting change. They include:

- Attracting new investment to regions and subregions through **partnerships of research and industry**, especially at the frontiers of new technology and green industries.
- Enabling communities to **retain some of the savings which result from effective action to tackle poverty** and deprivation, for example from reduced healthcare costs.

- Channelling the benefits of **regional growth to disadvantaged neighbourhoods**.
- Improving the capacity of communities, local businesses and community enterprises to work on social and economic issues by strengthening their links with regional institutions and companies and **encouraging co-production**. A Co-Production Unit should be established in each region, working to Levelling Up Directors, to support this.
- **Transferring assets from local authorities to community-led groups** so that community capacity is measured by activity rather than the number of institutions.

From Gesture to Structure and How to Regenerate can be downloaded from www.radixuk.org

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Radix Big Tent events are all about asking the big questions and developing brave and bold ideas that will transform society, the economy, and our democracy. Here are some questions that we will explore further on the day:

- **How do we deliver deep and lasting change** to people and place?
- **How do we empower people** living in the poorest neighbourhoods so they are the ones making decisions?
- **How do we tap into assets and wealth from all sources** – public, private, philanthropic – to resource sustained and sophisticated interventions?
- **How do we link up empowered communities and sustainable resourcing** to support a more radical, long-term approach to regeneration?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF REGENERATION

1968 – Creation of the Urban Programme following the “re-discovery of poverty” and recognition that post-war slum clearance had not delivered the “New Jerusalem”. Focus on “urban areas facing acute social problems in the fields of education, housing, health and welfare”.

1970s – A switch in emphasis from social problems to place-based schemes focused on economic development in response to the de-industrial revolution. White Paper on the Inner Cities in 1977 and creation of Inner City Partnerships in last few months of the Labour administration in 1978.

1980s – Strong focus on private-sector led economic revitalisation. Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) established in 13 areas to regenerate large ex-industrial sites. Formation of Housing Action Trusts (HATs) to redevelop housing estates, involving transfer of the stock out of council ownership. Creation of 22 Inner City Taskforces and initial funding for the Estate Action programme to test out localised, holistic interventions through the Priority Estates Project.

Early 1990s – Rationalisation of funding streams to encourage greater efficiency and interventions that were “comprehensive, combining economic revival with physical renewal and social welfare.”²⁶ Launch of City Challenge and Single Regeneration Budget.

1997 – 2010. Initial emphasis on long-term, holistic, localised interventions to “narrow the gap” between the poorest 10% of places and the rest of the country. Launch of National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal and flagship £2bn New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. Sharper emphasis on economic regeneration after 2007 transfer of power from Blair to Brown.

2010 – today. Big Society agenda launched under the Coalition with an emphasis on empowering communities to fix ‘Broken Britain’. Abolition of regional government and formation of Local Enterprise Partnerships. Emphasis from 2016 on ‘left behind’ places.

Poorer parts of the UK also received a proportion of European Regional and Structural Funds while the UK was a member of the EU.

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