



PLACE

POLICY REVIEW



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‘Place matters. Many people are rooted to their local area because of its civic identity and their social and family connections: over 40% of workers have only ever worked in the same local area as they were born. But there are parts of the country where people feel left behind, that they are not getting fair access to jobs, wages and skills opportunities, and that their local priorities are not being delivered on by government.’¹

1) Introduction and Definitions

This policy review summarises the existing policy discussion with regard to Place. There are several themes, such as the salience of the Local, the importance of economic factors, and the role of Levelling Up, that emerge throughout and they will be discussed in the course of the review. This Introduction will also discuss definitions and the concept of Place.

What is Place? As a concept, and in the sense we are using it here, Place can be defined as a specific position, location, or area in space. As an area, it is by implication bounded, with a border and boundary delineating its extent; the former with regard to what is outside and the latter to what is within, denoting a territory or bounded space of almost any size. These are social constructions evolving through complex socio-political processes. It is those dimensions of being a territorially-bound location that contextualises definitions of what is ‘devolved’ and ‘regional’. The first is a location where a governing entity has greater powers devolved to it from the centre. In the second instance, regions exist in a space between the local and the national, devolved or otherwise, and often have areas within them that are, themselves, subject to urban mayoral and/or other arrangements.

Other aspects inform ideas about Place: language, identity, nation, and the ideal of a homeland all graft comparatively neatly onto it as a territorially-bound location and aspects of all of these apply as readily in parts of England as they do in the devolved nations. These are worth considering carefully because they underpin arrangements locally that are likely to be specific. Good examples are the role and importance of the Welsh language in Wales, or pride in a national identity in Wales, Scotland, and in Northern Ireland. Language and identity are also factors in Cornwall and a consideration for policy there. Other local identities lead to pride of place in locales and regions across England.

The following sections of this review report will consider themes arising from the academic literature, such as space and identity, before going on to the discussion of the Policy environment. That discussion will cover the following themes: Place in Central Government: the development of Place Policy and the Levelling Up Agenda; Place in Devolved Administrations outside England; Place in Regional Government, Pan-Regional Entities, and Freeports; Place in Combined Authorities; Place in Local Government; Thinking about Place beyond the State: The Private and Third Sectors; and Place in Policy as a problematising factor. The Conclusion will discuss the changing character of Place.

2) Literature

The literature relating to place is vast and the themes associated with it are many and varied. This section will look at some of that literature to illustrate its breadth and vision and will identify themes that will run throughout this report.

Perhaps the first thing to consider is how to consider the relationship between Place and space. After all, they seem at first sight to be very different. If Place is a locale, then space is the opposite, namely the absence of place or, indeed, anything; a space at the end of a sentence; space in my calendar; space on my bookshelf; space for storage; outer space, and so on. A Place to think and space to think are clearly not quite the same thing. But we quickly run into other notions of space being Place, of a sort, for example safe spaces or enclosed or open spaces. There are further questions: one can imagine safe or enclosed spaces as Places, but open space? How large or small does open space have to be before it is a Place? How can we best conceptualise Place in clear and consistent contradistinction to space?

A useful way to do this is through a consideration of communication and interaction. Harrison and Dourish offer a way through, writing:

‘... a focus on spatial models is misplaced. Drawing on understandings from architecture and urban design, as well as from our own research findings, we highlight the critical distinction between “space” and “place.” While designers use spatial models to support interaction, we show how it is actually a notion of “place” which frames interactive behaviour. This leads us to re-evaluate spatial systems ... the critical property which designers are seeking, which we call appropriate behavioural framing, is not rooted in the properties of space at all. Instead, it is rooted in sets of mutually-held, and mutually available, cultural understandings about behaviour and action. In contrast to “space”, we call this a sense of “place.” Our principle is: “Space is the opportunity; place is the understood reality.”’²

¹ HMT - Build Back Better: our plan for growth, CP 401, March 2021, page 69, [Build Back Better - our plan for growth \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92441/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth.pdf).

That understood reality has its own materiality, power and geography and is an intrinsically human Place.³ It is this humanity that gives Place so much of its meaning in the context of this report. It is reflected in thinking about community, culture, and heritage,⁴ and there is a strong emotional attachment, too:

‘... emotions are not just a new topic for geographical study. They trouble yet inspire its very existence just as they trouble and inspire individuals. Without passions, sentiments, and their affects there would be no geography worth the name. Phenomenologist, feminist, psycho-analytic and non-representational geographers have all recognized this and have consciously tried to situate themselves in this interstitial no-man’s land, dissolving the absolutism required by inter-related dualisms between thought and world, male and female, reason and emotion, culture and nature.’⁵

Identity emerges both alongside and integral to this process, yet we should be wary of assuming that the way people identify Place, identify themselves, and identify themselves with specific regard to Place are always the same. Greg Myers, for instance, demonstrates that they are not, stating that: ‘people can identify places in different ways, in geographical or relational terms, and in different levels of scale.’⁶ This is an important nuance and it informs the way policy with regard to Place can be received, understood, and appreciated. It also has consequences for the role of the policy regarding Place and aspects of identity, heritage and culture in that context will appear throughout this report.

Related to this is the idea of Place as home, both in the context of a community in which to live and a home as, for example, a house. In the UK, the idea is a particularly compelling one and there is, as we shall see, particular resonance to strategy put in place by the MHCLG, now DLUHC, and echoed by the recent Levelling Up White Paper. Hazel Easthope’s 2004 review article on Place as a concept and the relationship it has to housing research is, in this respect, particularly noteworthy, as well as being as relevant now as when it was originally written.

‘Yet, at the present time - a time of increasing migration, expanding urbanization, and swelling investments in place-construction (ranging from individual real-estate sales to city and regional re-developments) - the importance of the concept of place for housing researchers has come to the fore. The literature on ‘place’, especially the literature which sees ‘home’ as a particularly significant type of place, provides insight into the relationship between places and people’s identities and psychological well-being; the dynamics of conflicts surrounding home-places; and the political-economy of home places. It also points to the need for a more integrated approach to housing research that looks beyond the scale of individual households to the regional, national and international scale.’⁷

What of the economic relationship with society in Place? Ashley Lenihan and Sharon Witherspoon’s *The Place to Be: How social sciences are helping to improve places in the UK* throws some light on this question.⁸ Overall, the report ‘draws on 24 case studies to illustrate what university-based social scientists are already doing to make places in the UK better – to ‘level up’ economic and social outcomes in different parts of the UK.’⁹ The role of social scientists in this process is quite wide-ranging and involve research and interventions, for example, to help: ‘local businesses to improve their productivity and economic prospects’; ‘Cities to plan for better retail shopping and better local transport’; ‘Cities to plan better and more flexible housing for people as they age’; ‘Local authorities to plan their services better and more efficiently by understanding their local populations’; ‘Health authorities to deliver better results in preventative health work’; ‘Local schools to achieve better educational outcomes for pupils’; or ‘Local police forces to address issues such as knife crime, crime hot spots, domestic violence, paramilitarism and crime’.¹⁰

² Steve Harrison and Paul Dourish – ‘Re-Place-ing Space: The Roles of Place and Space in Collaborative Systems, CSCW ’96: *Proceedings of the 1996 ACM conference on Computer supported cooperative work*, November 1996 Pages 67–76, <https://doi.org/10.1145/240080.240193> Quotation from Page 67.

³ Kevin Hetherington – ‘In Place of Geometry: The Materiality of Place’, *The Sociological Review* Vol. 45, No. 1, 1998, pages 183-199; Robert D. Sack – ‘The Power of Place and Space’, *Geographical Review*, Vol. 83, No. 3, (July, 1993), pages 326-329.

⁴ See, for example, Lee Cuba, David M. Hummon – ‘A Place to Call Home: Identification With Dwelling, Community, and Region’, *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 1, March 1993, pages 111-131, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1993.tb00133.x>.

⁵ Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron, and Liz Bondi (Ed.s) – *Emotion, Place and Culture*, Routledge, 2016, page 10.

⁶ Greg Myers – ‘Where are you from?: Identifying place’, *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, Vol. 10, No. 3, June 2006, pages 320-343, DOI/10.1111/j.1360-6441.2006.00330.x. Quotation from page 20.

⁷ Hazel Easthope – ‘A place called home’, *Housing, Theory and Society*, Volume 21, Issue 3, 2004, pages 128-138, DOI/10.1080/14036090410021360. Quotation from page 128.

⁸ Ashley Lenihan and Sharon Witherspoon – *The Place to Be: How social sciences are helping to improve places in the UK*, The Academy of Social Sciences, Sage Publishing 2021.

⁹ Ibid. Page 2.

¹⁰ Ibid. Pages 2 and 3.

It is noteworthy that the importance of Levelling Up was acknowledged before the White Paper came out: 'Social sciences matter for 'levelling up'; using social science makes a difference to 'levelling-up' plans and outcomes.'¹¹ Relatedly, the report aligns universities' civic missions with that agenda: 'University-based social scientists often do this work as part of the civic mission of their university, a role that universities take seriously and which many fund themselves to make their areas better.'¹²

Elsewhere, the report discusses 'long-term partnerships'; 'clear and stable funding'; the provision of 'complex data' to inform policy; the need for 'co-ordination in support'; 'and more learning about what works'.¹³ In sum, it is clear that: 'The examples [from the universities, cited in the report] are not about broader social science research or policy prescriptions but practical efforts to work with private sector businesses, local authorities and local health and education bodies and others to improve area-based disadvantage in the UK.'¹⁴ These are important messages.

The centrality of place was also crucial to the EU's thinking about economic geography. As Fabrizio Barca put it in April 2009:

"The policy model is the starting point of any change. Indeed, as the Report argues, without such an initial discussion to establish a mutual understanding of the rationale of a place-based development policy, there can be no meaningful debate on reform. A *place-based policy* is a long-term strategy aimed at tackling persistent underutilisation of potential and reducing persistent social exclusion in specific places through external interventions and multilevel governance. It promotes the supply of integrated goods and services tailored to contexts, and it triggers institutional changes.

In a place-based policy, public interventions rely on local knowledge and are verifiable and submitted to scrutiny, while linkages among places are taken into account. The Report argues that this strategy is superior to alternative strategies that do not make explicit and accountable their territorial focus, or even hide it behind a screen of self-proclaimed space-blindness, fail to integrate services, and either assume that the State knows best or rely on the choices and guidance of a few private actors. The lessons of the recent crisis [the 2008 Financial Crash] reinforce this argument.'¹⁵

There are strong echoes here in the Levelling Up White Paper over a decade later. This is not to say that the Levelling Up White Paper would have been written with specific regard to Barca's Report but there appear to be family resemblances at the level of place that suggest that some degree of subsidiarity is essential for policy to be successful. With such an emphasis on the local, what about Place and the role of the Third Sector?

The work of Doreen Massey¹⁶ has been both key and framing for colleagues engaged in research the role of the Third Sector and its relationship with Place. Indeed, the role of the Third Sector in the discussion of Place is relatively new, in many respects post-dating Massey's writings, and has emerged in ways that demonstrate how essential it now is to the Literature, a development of which she most likely would have approved. Moreover, there is the capacity of the sector to take on a variety of functions in the local delivery of the Place Agenda. As Potluka et al have put it:

'Only relatively recently, place leadership has become an important debate in the leadership studies and public administration literatures. From a place leadership perspective, there is clearly a potential role for third sector organisations and the voluntary engagement that citizens can play for places through different activities, such as for example social innovation, public services provision, volunteering, civic engagement, advocacy, enhancement of the quality of life, strengthening of social bonds and social cohesion. However, the topic of civil society and third sector organisations is still neglected in research and public policy debates on place-based leadership.'¹⁷

This is part of a new and emerging literature, where new data is being collected and analysed in order to capture the dynamics of the Third Sector and its relationship with Place.¹⁸

¹¹ Ibid. Page 3.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. Page 4.

¹⁴ Ibid. Page 6.

¹⁵ Fabrizio Barca - *An Agenda for a Reformed Cohesion Policy: A place-based approach to meeting European Union challenges and expectations*, Independent Report prepared at the request of Danuta Hübner, Commissioner for Regional Policy, April 2009, page vii. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/regi/dv/barca_report_barca_report_en.pdf.

¹⁶ See Doreen Massey - 'The Political Place of Locality Studies', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, Volume: 23 issue: 2, February 1991, pages 267-281, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a230267>; Doreen Massey - 'The Responsibilities of Place', *Local Economy*, Volume 19, Number 2, pages 97-101, 2004, DOI: 10.1080/0269094042000205070; and Doreen Massey, Human Geography Research Group, Sophie Bond & David Featherstone - 'The Possibilities of a Politics of Place Beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey', *Scottish Geographical Journal*, Volume 125, Numbers 3-4, 2009, pages 401-420, DOI: 10.1080/14702540903364443.

¹⁷ Potluka, O., Sancino, A., Diamond, J. and Rees, J. (2021) 'Editorial: Place leadership and the role of the third sector and civil society', *Voluntary Sector Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 3-12, DOI: 10.1332/204080521X16106633884165. Quotation from page 3.

¹⁸ James Rees, Alessandro Sancino, Carol Jacklin-Jarvis and Michela Pagani - "You can't Google everything": the voluntary sector and the leadership of communities of place, *Leadership*, Leadership and Place Special Issue, Sage Publishing, 2021, DOI: 10.1177/17427150211057993, pp1-18.

The ideas coming through these literatures, such as: space, emotion, identity, home, community, partnership, and sectoral involvement are all themes we are going to encounter in this report. This is no accident, as they are intrinsic to Place, to our understanding of it, and to our involvement with it. These themes also run through the following Sections and recur throughout the discussions taking place.

The next part covers the policy environment and considers: the position of Place in Central Government, notably the development of Place Policy and the Levelling Up Agenda; Place in Devolved Administrations outside England; Place in Regional Government, Pan-Regional Entities, and Freeports; Place in Combined Authorities; Place in Local Government; Thinking about Place beyond the State: The Private and Third Sectors; Place in Policy as a problematising factor; and the changing character of Place.

3) The Policy Environment

The emergence of Place in Policy has been an interesting journey. It is more than the transition between the old Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the new Levelling Up Agenda (DLUHC), which is only a small part of the story. Place as a Policy concept has developed across all levels of UK Government activity and Policy structures are also important hooks upon which to hang Impact and Engagement with regard to Place, which has such an important role in the toolkit in this Report. This part will look at Place in those Policy areas, as well as discussing Policy with regard to other sectors.

a) Place in Central Government: The Development of Place Policy and the Levelling Up Agenda

Before the release of the Levelling Up White Paper, the notion of Place as an underpinning concept in Central Government thinking and planning had been best articulated in the Treasury's *Plan for Growth*¹⁹, which has taken over from the now-archived Industrial Strategy. This new Strategy has three Pillars of Growth: Infrastructure, Skills, and Innovation. These will enable the Policy deliverables of Levelling Up, Net Zero, and Global Britain. This section will consider the Plan for Growth and its antecedents before going on to Levelling Up White Paper.

From where does the idea of Place in Central Government thinking manifested in the Plan for Growth come? The centrality of Place has emerged from two main strategies: the 2017 Industrial Strategy and the 2018 Civil Society Strategy.²⁰ In the former, Place was a key Foundation, one of five, of the Strategy. Several themes emerged in the Strategy that are worth highlighting here: the first is that there is a clear acknowledgement that progress was best done at the local level,²¹ paving the way for a multiplicity of smaller strategies.²²

The second aspect is partnership with business through local mechanisms, such as Local Enterprise Partnerships or other regionally-focused groups like the Midlands Engine.²³ The third aspect is the Shared Prosperity Fund,²⁴ which was envisaged to have been the successor to EU Structural Funds²⁵ and a vehicle for disbursement of funding under the now-archived Industrial Strategy and which is discussed in more detail under Funding, below. Finally, the perspective on Place taken by HMG in the Industrial Strategy was seen as applicable across the whole of the UK, with Central Government working with the Devolved Administrations.²⁶

The discussion of Place in the 2018 Civil Society Strategy²⁷ is very different to that in the Industrial Strategy and there are three characteristics that explain why this is. The first is that the Civil Society Strategy was written for England, rather than the UK. Secondly, it is a product from the Cabinet Office, rather than BEIS, with obvious differences of emphasis, which the Strategy recognises.²⁸ Thirdly, where the Industrial Strategy has been archived, the Civil Society Strategy has not been.

Place in the Civil Society Strategy²⁹ has a number of aspects that are worth considering. The first is that there is an acceptance that the local is absolutely central to national activity.³⁰ This is a perspective shared in the Industrial Strategy and it is apparent that any discussion of Place in this context relates to a kind of localism agenda; a de facto subsidiarity.

¹⁹ HMT, March 2021, Op Cit.

²⁰ BEIS - *Industrial Strategy*, Cm 9528, November 2017, page 10, [Industrial Strategy: building a Britain fit for the future \(print-ready PDF\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674441/Industrial-Strategy-building-a-Britain-fit-for-the-future-print-ready-PDF.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

²¹ 'Local' in this context is really at the level of a Combined Authority.

²² Industrial Strategy Op Cit, page 220.

²³ Ibid. Pages 223 to 226.

²⁴ Ibid. Page 228.

²⁵ See Institute for Government - *European structural funds: the UK Shared Prosperity Fund*, 21 July 2021, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/structural-funds>.

²⁶ *Industrial Strategy* Op Cit, Page 237.

²⁷ HMG - *Civil Society Strategy*, August 2018, [Civil Society Strategy - building a future that works for everyone.pdf](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/744441/Civil-Society-Strategy-building-a-future-that-works-for-everyone.pdf) (publishing.service.gov.uk)

²⁸ Ibid. Page 51.

²⁹ Ibid. Chapter 2.

³⁰ Ibid. Page 51.

The second aspect is that Place is seen as a combination of community empowerment and an environment for investment.³¹ The former is understood to be a part of an ongoing process of 'onward devolution' and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) are seen, to some degree, as being able to facilitate and expedite that process.³² Thirdly, the investment side of things chimes clearly with the Industrial Strategy, for example on the role and importance of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).³³ Resonance with the Industrial Strategy is clearly evidenced in the three case studies, covering the Greater Grimsby Town Deal Proposal, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, and the West Midlands Combined Authority.³⁴

Place also has salience in the MHCLG Planning the Future White Paper, where it underpinned development, infrastructure, sustainability, and connectivity.³⁵ This salience is important, as it underpins Central Government's appreciation of optimal town planning and it does so in a way that chimes with the role of Place in Government thinking. As the Prime Minister makes clear in his Introduction: 'And, above all, that gives the people of this country the homes we need in the places we want to live at prices we can afford, so that all of us are free to live where we can connect our talents with opportunity.'³⁶ This remains important in light of subsequent developments, as will be seen.

As is clear from the above, at that point as now, Place continued and continues to have been envisaged through the prisms of other strategies, rather than having one of its own and it is necessary to understand the onward coverage of place in this regard. A Place Strategy was promised and discussed in the January 2021 UK Research and Development Roadmap,³⁷ a full two months before the Treasury's *Plan for Growth* was released. This is, to some extent, as unsurprising as it is inevitable, due to the unfeasibility of centring so much of the nascent strategy within the Treasury's remit.

Under the heading of 'Investing in Places', we have the clearest articulation yet of what a Place Strategy variously could or would entail:

'Our Place Strategy will set out how we will invest research and innovation in places around the UK and align this with devolved priorities and initiatives. This could include building on the Strength in Places Fund, where the strong projects we are funding represent just a handful of the great ideas out there – and where further funding could unlock opportunities tailored around local economic strengths in more places. Evolving the programme would support our economic recovery by protecting and backing our most promising regional R&D clusters.

We must also ask whether our existing, core funding schemes deliver sufficient economic benefit to places across the UK. And we must carefully consider the case for developing new schemes and initiatives in consultation with place-based representatives to achieve our ambitions – new forms of funding, new investments, new partnerships.

We will also work with devolved administrations, businesses, academics, universities, charities and local leaders on how we can ensure that more parts of the UK are attractive to private investment – including from overseas – to unlock their full potential for R&D [research and development] growth. This might include support for onshoring and learning from the experiences of existing localised initiatives such as Sci-Tech Daresbury and the Cheshire Science Corridor. We will look at the place-focused innovation offer both from the UK and devolved perspective, and whether it could be improved to provide holistic innovation and growth support to emerging clusters of innovative businesses.'³⁸

Clearly, the remit was intended to have been a broad one and the agenda to further it was equally clearly intended to have been a dynamic one, affording opportunities to policy. How has the foregoing thinking on Place been reflected in the Levelling Up White Paper?

If we are to take the Levelling Up White Paper³⁹ as an instrument that addresses Place, there are three broad ways it does so: firstly, there is English devolution dimension; secondly is the dimension of Place Strategy; and thirdly is the built environment dimension. All other considerations in the White Paper flow from these three dimensions, whether they relate to relative deprivation, urban geography, funding flows or anything else.

³¹ Ibid. Missions 4 and 5 in Chapter 2.

³² Ibid. Pages 52-56.

³³ Ibid. Pages 58 and 59.

³⁴ Ibid. Pages 61-66.

³⁵ MHCLG – *Planning for the Future*, White Paper, August 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/958420/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf

³⁶ Ibid. Page 6.

³⁷ BEIS - UK Research and Development Roadmap, 21 January 2021, [UK Research and Development Roadmap \(webpage\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/958420/MHCLG-Planning-Consultation.pdf)

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ DLUHC – *Levelling Up the United Kingdom*, White Paper, CP 604, 02 February 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

The word 'place' appears in various guises over 500 times in the White Paper, more than once a page. One telling aspect is that, for the most part, it appears synonymous with the word 'locale', which is clearly indicative of the devolutionary approach taken and the conception of Place in terms mirroring subsidiarity, a theme that keeps recurring. The authors of the White Paper appear far more likely to see things that way than at scale, say, regionally. The result is that the approach expected for the England Devolution White Paper has been wholly subsumed into the Levelling Up White Paper. This is a helpful articulation of the direction of travel and has, as we shall see below, implications for going forward.

A Place Strategy has been promised for some time, with the expectation that it would build upon the UK Research and Development Roadmap. It would appear to be the case that the Levelling Up White Paper is the instrument of strategizing Place, rather than requiring any additional strategy. This seems more compelling when one considers the relative absence of utility of another free-standing document in addition to the vision already articulated in the White Paper. The White Paper also articulates that position, but does not proclaim it up front. It states:

'The establishment of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in September 2021 signalled a fundamental shift in the UK Government's approach to place. With a coordinating role for Levelling Up, the department will place local opportunities at the heart of government policy making – working with places themselves to understand and act on the local implications of national policy.'⁴⁰

This would appear to represent a significant change in Whitehall, as the Place agenda shifts to DLUHC bringing with it historic antecedents hitherto under BEIS.

The White Paper goes on to discuss the means by which it will do so, and is worth citing in full:

'To support this, a new **Levelling Up Cabinet Committee** has recently been established. It is tasked with embedding levelling up across central government policy design and delivery. The committee will also work directly with local leaders to improve the clarity, consistency and coordination of policy. The new Cabinet Committee is chaired by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. It will:

- a. **embed levelling up policies** across government, ensuring these reflect the needs of places and people, and align with the missions;
- b. **work directly with places**, putting local ideas and innovations at the heart of government and supporting local leaders to tackle their local challenges;
- c. **deliver measurable change**, by monitoring progress on policies that contribute to delivering against the missions, including the policies in this paper and those developed subsequently; and
- d. **drive forward the new framework for devolution**, by empowering local leaders and communities and improving accountability mechanisms.

This new approach to place must also extend beyond committees to mean real people, with a profound understanding of their communities, to support the shaping of policy and delivery in their areas. Central government will therefore seek to improve the coordination of its collective efforts at the local level, its understanding of local issues and opportunities, and the scale and seniority of its local resourcing. To do so, the UK Government is pursuing **a new approach to places through Levelling Up Directors**. Working with local actors, these roles will have the following objectives:

- a. building local capacity and capability, especially where it is thin;
- b. improving the evidence base for local decision-makers, working with the ONS, and evaluating what works using data, statistics and analysis;
- c. catalysing local change and championing local ideas within government;
- d. bringing strategic coherence, coordination and flexibility to government intervention in places;
- e. forming a key bridge between local actors and central government; and
- f. acting as champions for their places.

Levelling Up Directors will act as a single point of contact for local leaders and a first port of call for new and innovative local policy proposals. They will be based in the areas they have responsibility for, while recognising the different institutional landscapes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Levelling Up Directors will bring together government policy and delivery, aligning decisions and funding to support local and national strategic objectives.

(cont. on next page)

⁴⁰ Ibid. Page 124.

It is also important the levelling up missions are reflected in the day to day running of UK Government departments and public bodies. To that end, a requirement for public bodies to have an objective of reducing geographical variations in the outcomes relevant to their business area is being established. This requirement will be further developed through the Public Bodies Strategy that is being developed by the HM Treasury and Cabinet Office led Public Bodies Reform Programme.⁴¹

Clearly, the re-alignment of policy positioning and ownership is both significant and wide-ranging.

Another aspect of Place in Levelling up is the specificity to which it is referred in the twelve missions to level up the UK. It is only mentioned specifically in one; the ninth. This states: 'By 2030, pride in place, such as people's satisfaction with their town centre and engagement in local culture and community, will have risen in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.'⁴² This is important, and reflects core definitional aspects of Place, as we discuss under definitions in the Introduction to this Report, above. The Levelling Up White Paper goes on to say:

'There are three elements that will support the delivery of this mission:

- a. regeneration;
- b. communities; and
- c. culture, heritage and sport.'⁴³

There are strong resonances to Civil Society, Built Environment, and Planning policy antecedents here. For example, the notion of beautiful homes in the White Paper⁴⁴ is a clear reflation of the MHCLG Planning the Future White Paper mentioned above. A good example of this is the following:

'Building on progress to date, wider changes to the planning system will secure enhanced social and economic outcomes by fostering beautiful places that people can be proud of; improving democracy and engagement in planning decisions; supporting environmental protection, including support for the transition to Net Zero; and securing clear benefits for neighbourhoods and local people.'⁴⁵

Indeed, the recent DCMS Select Committee inquiry, entitled *Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda*⁴⁶ is a good example of the salience of Place and its connection to the Levelling up agenda. The inquiry concerned:

'The role that culture might play in delivering a Government commitment to level up the country is the focus of a new inquiry launched today, Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda.

The DCMS Committee's inquiry will consider funding for cultural initiatives and how well the current model ensures that distribution goes to areas that might be missing out.

MPs will also explore how harnessing local creative talent and businesses could help bring back footfall to high streets and town centres, enlivening commercial buildings and protecting them against closure.'⁴⁷

Clearly, Levelling Up is now the primary vehicle through which Place is being conceptualised by the UK Government. The White Paper also has a focus on England, which reflects the ubiquitous incorporation of what was once to have been the England Devolution White Paper. How is Place being seen elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

⁴¹ Ibid. Page 125.

⁴² Ibid. Page 207, and *passim*.

⁴³ Ibid. Page 207.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Pages 227 and 228.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Page 228.

⁴⁶ DCMS Committee - *Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda*. *Reimagining where we live: cultural placemaking and the levelling up agenda - Committees - UK Parliament* The deadline for submissions was Friday 18 February 2022.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

b) Place in Devolved Administrations outside England

Devolved Administrations are able to articulate a discussion of Place at the level of the Nation. This makes any discussion of Place at the local level easier, both due to the relative size of the administrations but also due to the relative proximity of the local to the seat of Government.

In Scotland, the idea of Place is articulated in the 2019 Place Principle. The Principle states that:

‘The Scottish Government and COSLA [The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities] have agreed to adopt the Place Principle to help overcome organisational and sectoral boundaries, to encourage better collaboration and community involvement, and improve the impact of combined energy, resources and investment.

The principle was developed by partners in the public and private sectors, the third sector and communities, to help them develop a clear vision for their place.

It promotes a shared understanding of place, and the need to take a more collaborative approach to a place’s services and assets to achieve better outcomes for people and communities. The principle encourages and enables local flexibility to respond to issues and circumstances in different places.’⁴⁸

The local elements are clear from COSLA’s involvement and the ownership role of the Housing and Social Justice Directorate indicates a similar direction of travel to the Civil Society Strategy discussed above. Like Place in Policy in England, Place in Scotland sits within another structure and the principle goes on to state that: ‘The Place Principle supports the National Performance Framework’s collective purpose for Scotland.’⁴⁹

The Framework in which the Place Principle sits is very different from the Industrial Strategy in which Place sits or the Treasury’s Plan for Growth. This is clear from the Framework’s aims:

‘The framework is for all of Scotland. We aim to:

- create a more successful country
- give opportunities to all people living in Scotland
- increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland
- create sustainable and inclusive growth
- reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress’⁵⁰

Indeed, the outcomes of the Framework show quite clearly the different appreciations of Place between England and Scotland:

‘The outcomes:

- reflect the values and aspirations of the people of Scotland
- are aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- help to track progress in reducing inequality

These national outcomes are that people:

- grow up loved, safe and respected so that they realise their full potential
- live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- are creative and their vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
- have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
- are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
- value, enjoy, protect and enhance their environment
- have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone
- are healthy and active
- respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination
- are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally
- tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally.’⁵¹

⁴⁸ Scottish Government - *Place Principle: introduction*, 10 April 2019, *Place Principle: introduction - gov.scot* (www.gov.scot)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Scottish Government – *National Performance Framework: An Overview of the Framework, What it is* | *National Performance Framework*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The Framework also actively scores performance against 81 separate criteria and so the quality of living in a Place and aspects of the economic performance of that Place are seen as targets in ways they are not in England.

‘We recognise that:

The principle requests that:

We commit to taking:

While aspects of Place here are clearly local, there is also a very clear articulation across the Framework and the Principle of what it means to live in a place, to belong in a place, and to identify with a place. While joined-up thinking and collaboration are very much in evidence, there is little resonance here with the Industrial Strategy, which would have been current at the time the Place Principle was originally written.

The Welsh Government likewise does not have a Place strategy. That said, aspects of their policy writ large contain elements of it. A good example is Communities and Regeneration, where there is a strong community cohesion element. Building and Planning are also rooted in Place, as are Business, economy and innovation and Farming and the countryside. While all these relate to community, space, economic improvement, and aspects of tourism, none fits to a Place Agenda as in England or Place Principle in Scotland.

The reason why Place as a policy objective is so different in Wales may be due to several reasons. The first of these is that Wales has a different constitutional arrangement with England to that of Scotland and Northern Ireland. This may lend itself less to a removed association with policies like the Industrial Strategy and more to a greater degree of latitude to develop its own Civil Society identity, especially as the Civil Society Strategy applies only to England. The aspect of language is likely to exacerbate that difference. The notion of Place also underpins aspects of Welsh tourism, which is a different economic perspective to that in the UK in general and England in particular.

⁵² Place Principle, *Op Cit.*

c) Place in Regional Government, Pan-Regional Entities, and Freeports

There are nine English regions, namely: the North East, North West, Yorkshire and The Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, London, South East, and the South West. These administrative units date from 1994 and form the largest administrative areas in England. The three devolved nations also take the form of regions, making twelve administrative units in total. This Section will cover the nine in England.⁶⁰ The regions differ considerably in terms of their cohesiveness, the size of their respective populations, their wealth, and by GDP.⁶¹ They were the largest units of administration in England below that of the nation.

Prior to the Coalition Government and its successors, the regions were each administered by a Government Office (GO) and each had a Regional Development Agency (RDA). The former sponsored the latter and were the combined vehicle for all Whitehall policy. With the increase in local autonomy since 2010, and the abolition of the GOs, the imperative to administer regionally has largely given way to sub-regional structures of varying size, such as combined authorities.⁶² Regions do, however, remain as administrative structures for assigning Freeports and for the collection of information by the ONS, for example.

Regions now come under the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, at the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG). The Minister's responsibilities include:

- Local government engagement, policy & finance
- Devolution and the Devolution White Paper
- Levelling up
- High streets
- Climate change
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund
- Mayoral Combined Authorities
- Pan-regional growth bodies
- Local digital
- Freeports
- Planning casework⁶³

This reflects well the Whitehall-based functions of the GOs, while at the same time being rooted in Central Government strategy. It is also easy to see areas of natural synergy here.

It is also worth noting that the largest non-administrative state employer in England, the NHS, is organised nationally into seven regional teams, thus:

- East of England
- London
- Midlands
- North East and Yorkshire
- North West
- South East
- South West⁶⁴

The rationale for this is that the Teams 'support the identity and development of sustainability and transformation partnerships and integrated care systems'.⁶⁵

An aspect of this type of organisation that is worth considering here is the combined region as Place. The NHS is not the only organisation to do this. The Midlands Engine, which is a 'partnership bring[ing] together public sector partners and businesses to complement the activity of local and combined authorities, LEPs, universities, businesses and others'⁶⁶ is a good example of this. As a Place, the combined Midlands region has an economy the size of Denmark,⁶⁷ a population greater than Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland combined,⁶⁸ and has two Freeports.⁶⁹ As individual regions assume less authority in the face of local and combined authorities, a combined region as Place is a natural way to assume a greater centre of gravity.

⁶⁰ ONS – England: Detailed information on the administrative structure within England, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/geography/ukgeographics/administrativegeography/cngland>.

⁶¹ ONS - *GDP: UK regions and countries*: October to December 2020, 3 August 2021, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/gd-pukregionsandcountries/octobertodecember2020>.

⁶² Adam Mellows-Facer - *Government Offices for the Regions Standard Note*: SN/EP/2126, 9 November 2010, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN02126/SN02126.pdf#:~:text=The%20Government%20Offices%20%28GOs%29%20for%20the%20English%20Regions,%26%20Enterprise%20Directorate%20of%20the%20Department%20for%20Education>.

⁶³ Ministerial Role - *Minister of State* (Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government), *Minister of State (Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government)* - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

⁶⁴ NHS – *Regional Teams* - [NHS England » Regional teams](https://www.nhs.uk/about-us/regional-teams/).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ The Midlands Engine – *The heartbeat of Britain's economy*, <https://www.midlandsendengine.org/>.

⁶⁷ The Midlands Engine – *Levelling up the Midlands*, September 2020, page 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ The Midlands Engine - *Two out of eight English Freeports to be located in Midlands Engine, plus important Towns Fund announcements*, 03 March 2021, <https://www.midlandsendengine.org/in-todays-budget-statement-announces-two-out-of-eight-english-freeports-to-be-located-in-midlands-engine-plus-important-towns-fund-announcements/>. This is reflective of HMT – *Budget 2021*, HC1226. Op Cit.

This is the same for the Northern Powerhouse and the Western Gateway. In the case of the former:

'Building a Northern Powerhouse is about boosting the local economy by investing in skills, innovation, transport and culture, as well as devolving significant powers and budgets to directly elected mayors to ensure decisions in the North are made by the North. We are backing business growth right across the North, and giving our great cities the power and resources they need to reach their huge untapped potential.'⁷⁰

There are considerable opportunities in the combined region accruing from this, in both England and Wales. The centre of gravity mentioned earlier is also rooted in Place in the Northern Powerhouse and the salience of Place is clear on its website, where it has its own section:

"PLACES

The North of England and Wales offer an outstanding quality of life, which attracts tourists, businesses and investors from around the world. That's why we're investing in things that bring people closer together, from superfast broadband to world class cultural venues. The success of the Northern Powerhouse will be defined by the people who see its potential, so we're increasing connections to help attract and retain the best talent and ensure sustainable growth for future generations.'⁷¹

The discussion of 'Places', as opposed to 'Place', in the above is worth considering for a moment. 'Place', as used in this Report, gains salience because it refers to a given location, with all that entails. The use of 'Places' here has slightly different connotations, none of which are exclusive to the single form. 'Places' implies a greater gravitational pull that is the product of several locations. It is also an effective way of dealing with the inevitable question of polycentricity. The term, then, allows a gravity commensurate with a single Place and it respects the individuality of a given Place while acknowledging that they are strong together.

The international pan-regionalism of the Western Gateway also reflects this, as its website states:

'The Western Gateway is a cross-border economic partnership of Local Authorities, City Regions, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Governments (in Wales and Westminster), working together to bring additionality to the areas existing strategies and structures.

Across Britain the economic map is being reshaped by devolution and the emergence of regional powerhouses. The Western Gateway goes one step further than 'regional'. Covering the core cities of Bristol and Cardiff, it stretches across south Wales and western England, from Swindon to Swansea, Wiltshire and Weston-Super-Mare to Tewkesbury. Our focus is inclusive and clean economic growth, where scale and collaboration can achieve more for our people and the wider economies of our countries than our constituent parts could achieve alone.'⁷²

The resonance to the Northern Powerhouses' 'Places' is abundantly clear from the above. This is, perhaps, not surprising, as the Western Gateway is a very new entity and the Northern Powerhouse is the only international pan-regional exemplar upon which to draw.⁷³

The centre of gravity question is also important for Place in its singular form. As mentioned above, the localisation agenda offers a degree of de facto subsidiarity. This begs the question of what structures and forms exist between the microcosmic locale and macrocosmic Central Government. Since the removal of many regional structures, targeted assistance through grants, Freeports and the creation of combined authorities have taken their place. The result has been the benefit of greater targeting and allocation of resource against a less cohesive regional structure.

As Places, regions have seldom been able to evoke the sort of pride of place that either local or national identities do. While Yorkshire and Humberside are able to represent the four Ridings of Yorkshire in a cohesive whole, other regions have been less able to do so. A good example of this is the South-West Region that, when it had them, had two Government Offices, one in Bristol and the other in Plymouth. Combined Authorities, where they exist, are perhaps better indicators of the value of Place than regions are and they are also more cohesive vehicles for the furtherance of policy in the areas in which they operate.

Another aspect of Place sits with the question of Freeports. As Places, they are going to have different characteristics, both from other ports and other towns and cities, and they relate specifically to the Global Britain deliverable in the Treasury Strategy. The position was set out in the 2021 Budget:

⁷⁰ The Northern Powerhouse – Introduction, <https://northernpowerhouse.gov.uk/>.

⁷¹ The Northern Powerhouse – Places, <https://northernpowerhouse.gov.uk/places/>.

⁷² The Western Gateway - <https://western-gateway.co.uk/>

⁷³ Ibid. *Publications*. The Western Gateway Prospectus came out in Spring 2020, followed by the Western Gateway Economic Position Statement in Spring 2021. <https://western-gateway.co.uk/publications/>.

'The Budget will position the UK to make the most of global opportunities after EU exit. The government will create eight new Freeports in England, areas where businesses will benefit from more generous tax reliefs, simplified customs procedures and wider government support, bringing investment, trade and jobs which will regenerate regions across the country that need it most. Freeports will benefit the whole of the UK. Discussions continue between the UK government and the devolved administrations to ensure the delivery of Freeports in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as soon as possible. The Levelling Up, UK Community Renewal, Towns and Community Ownership Funds will create well-paid jobs, revitalise places, and develop hubs of innovation in every part of the UK.'⁷⁴

There are also some advantages to being a Freeport area and there will be Tax Sites where the following help for businesses will apply:

- An enhanced 10% rate of Structures and Building Allowance;
- An enhanced Capital Allowance of 100%;
- Full Relief from Stamp Duty Land Tax;
- Full Business Rates relief; and
- Employer National Insurance Contribution Relief.⁷⁵

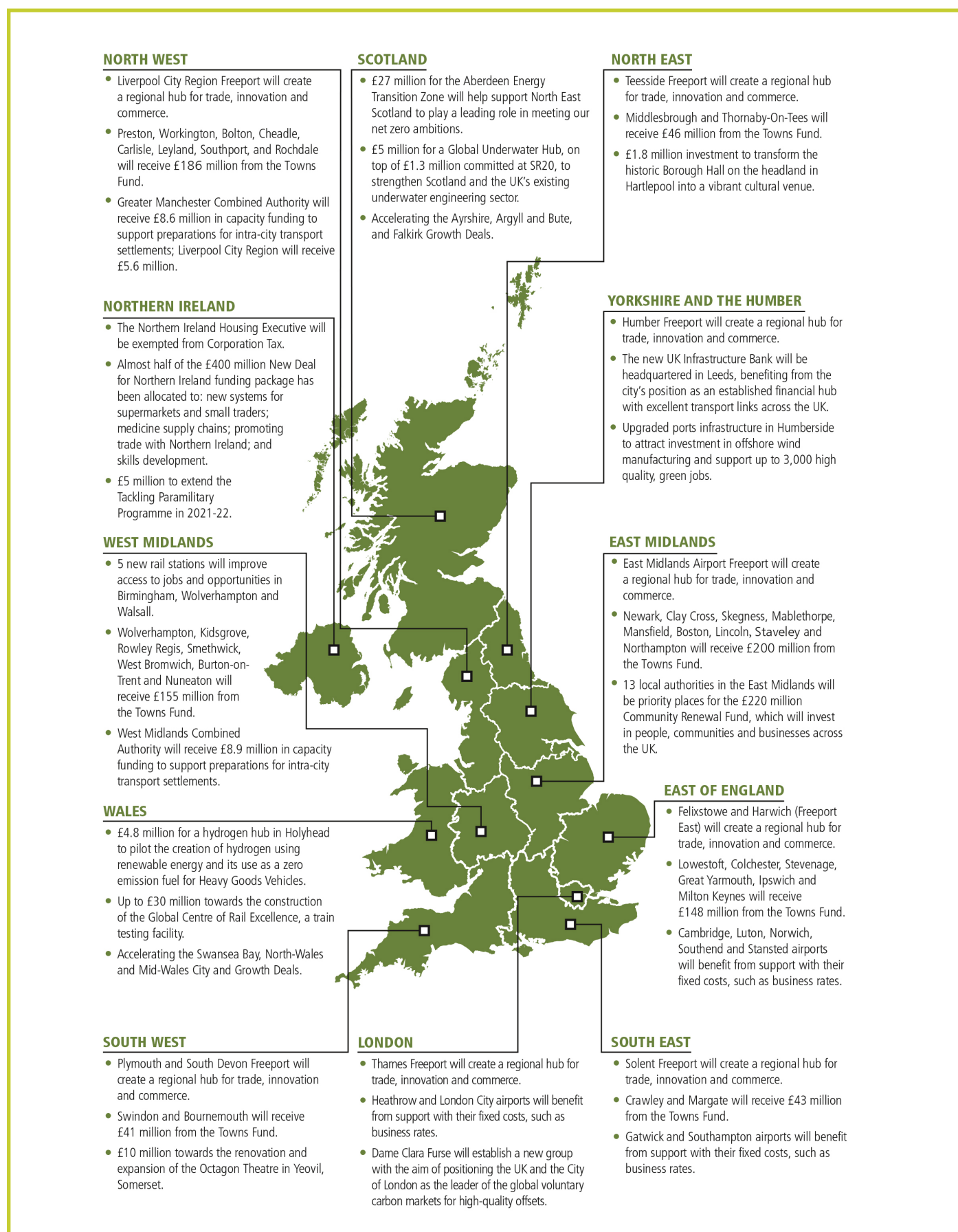
These advantages will only characterise Freeports as Place there, rather than in the Devolved Administrations. Any pursuant relative prosperity will further underline a given Freeport's identity as a Place. The Freeports are identified in Figure 1, on the following page.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ HMT – *Budget 2021*, HC1226, 3 March 2021, page 4, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/966869/Budget_2021_Print.pdf.

⁷⁵ Ibid. Page 58.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Page 56. A less detailed map is available in the more recently published BEIS - *UK Innovation Strategy: Leading the future by creating it*, July 2021, page 78, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-innovation-strategy-leading-the-future-by-creating-it>.

Figure 1 – Freeports in the UK



Freeports, then, are potentially strong mechanisms for economic development and will have a beneficial impact on Place.

d) Place in Combined Authorities

Combined Authorities are complex and sit between localities and regions. They vary in size and leadership. A good definition of a combined authority comes from the Local Government Association:

'A combined authority (CA) is a legal body set up using national legislation that enables a group of two or more councils to collaborate and take /collective decisions across council boundaries. It is far more robust than an informal partnership or even a joint committee. The creation of a CA means that member councils can be more ambitious in their joint working and can take advantage of powers and resources devolved to them from national government. While established by Parliament, CAs are locally owned and have to be initiated and supported by the councils involved.'⁷⁷

To date, there are ten Combined Authorities and all are based in England. They are as follows:⁷⁸

- Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
- Greater Manchester
- Liverpool City Region
- The North East Combined Authority (does not have a mayor)
- North of Tyne
- South Yorkshire
- Tees Valley
- West Midlands
- West of England
- West Yorkshire

It should be noted that London is not a Combined Authority.

The powers devolved to Combined Authorities can be quite wide-ranging. The West Midland Combined Authority is the biggest and examples of the sort of powers that it has are on: economic development; transport; road safety; housing; land regeneration; air quality; culture; and education and training.⁷⁹ It is not alone in this and many other Combined Authorities possess similar powers.⁸⁰ In considering the Combined Authority as Place, it is also worthwhile considering the question of the boundaries that encompass it. Section 4.1 of the House of Commons Briefing Paper on Combined Authorities is worth citing at length in this regard:

'Combined authority boundaries may not cross those of district or unitary authorities. However, they can cross county council boundaries. This allows combined authority boundaries to reflect 'functional economic areas', meaning that they are not bound by traditional local government geographies.

Some district councils have therefore sought to join combined authorities outside their county areas. The 2009 Act gave county councils a veto over district councils doing this. The 2016 Act removed this veto: so a county cannot now be prevented from joining by its district councils, and a district cannot be prevented by its county council.

Furthermore, where a district joins a combined authority but a county council does not, the 2016 Act also permits county powers for the district's area to be transferred to the combined authority. Similarly, the 2009 Act prevented combined authorities including 'exclaves' - i.e. areas that are geographically detached from the main body of the authority. This prohibition was also removed by the 2016 Act.

In practice, these flexibilities have not been used to date. In West Yorkshire, attempts to include some district councils within the North Yorkshire county council area have foundered on county opposition.⁸¹

⁷⁷ H Local Government Association – *Combined Authorities*, <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/devolution/devolution-online-hub/devolution-explained/combined-authorities#:~:text=What%20is%20a%20combined%20authority%20%28CA%29%3F%20A%20combined,an%20informal%20partnership%20or%20even%20a%20joint%20committee.>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ House of Commons Library – *Table of Powers for Combined Authorities*, CBP06649a, December 2019, Combined authorities - [House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Mark Sandford - *Combined authorities*, House of Commons Briefing Paper Number 06649, 17 December 2019, page 11, [Combined authorities \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk).

These legislative mechanisms have clear and, in some cases, potentially challenging implications for notions of Place, especially regarding exclaves.

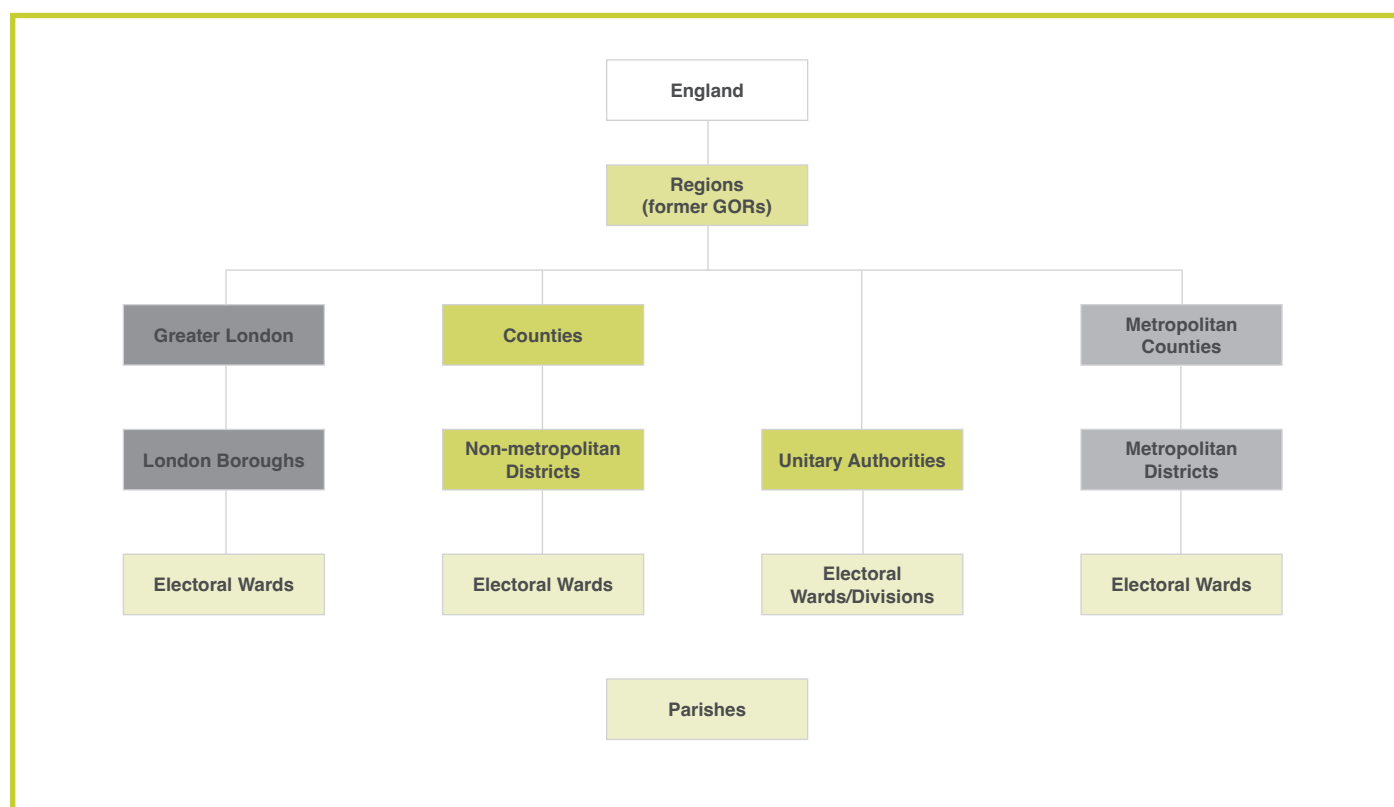
It is also important to consider aspects of identity and how they function in Combined Authority contexts. The example of district councils in North Yorkshire's reluctance to be considered part of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority is an instructive one in this regard. Given the strength of identity in these Combined Authorities as Places in their own right, this sort of thing would be likely to be replicated if it were to happen elsewhere.

Identity is such a strong aspect of Place it is important to consider how this functions in a specific case. The West Midlands Combined Authority is a good example of a Place with a reasonably clear identity. Whether one is in Birmingham or Wolverhampton, for example, there are signs of a common industrial heritage evident in the built infrastructure and architecture of the region, though it is recognised that this depiction would not necessarily apply to places like the Wyre Forest or Bromsgrove. Indeed, the area continues to embrace its legacy after having been 'the workshop of the world'. The advantages to business of engagement at this level are considerable.

e) Place in Local Government

Local Government is as much of a centre for the formation of identity and pride as is a Combined Authority. As the smallest group of units in the policy environment, Local Government is at the heart of the Place Shaping agenda. A diagram showing the sub-regional local structure of England is at Figure 2, below.⁸²

Figure 2 – English Local Administrative Structure



The locale is also crucial for the institutions within it, as they have a bond with its Place. Local Government, though, is complex and, before preceding further, it will be helpful to unpick the different levels at which it operates. There are 343 local authorities in England made up of five different types:

- county councils
- district councils
- unitary authorities
- metropolitan districts
- London boroughs

⁸² ONS – *Detailed information on the administrative structure within England* Op Cit.

The first two of these operate in 2-tier areas. Here, each county council area is subdivided into districts, each of which has an independent district council. The others are unitary, ie that there are no district councils beneath them. The number of each type of council is below.⁸³

‘Two tier

County councils	26
District councils	192

Single tier

Unitary authorities	55
Metropolitan districts	36
London boroughs	32
City of London	1
Isles of Scilly	1
Total	343

County councils provide services such as education, social services and waste disposal. District councils are responsible for local services, for example rubbish collection, housing and planning applications.

Unitary authorities provide all local government services in their areas. They are principally urban, although there are six shire county councils that are unitary.⁸⁴

There are also 36 metropolitan district councils which together cover six large urban areas, namely: Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire. These are responsible for all services in their area. That said, some conurbation-wide services, such as fire and civil defence, police, waste disposal and passenger transport, are provided through joint authorities, where districts act jointly.

Likewise, London boroughs provide nearly all the services in their area. Overall, though, the Greater London Authority (GLA) provides London-wide government. This includes special responsibility for police, fire, strategic planning and transport. Within London is the City of London Corporation. This ‘provides local government and other services for the ‘Square Mile’. These include economic development, education, environmental health, highways management, housing, libraries, the Barbican Arts Centre, policing, social services, waste collection and town planning.’⁸⁵

The Isles of Scilly have a different arrangement. ‘The Council of the Isles of Scilly is a unitary authority, but with some local government services being provided in conjunction with Cornwall Council. It also has its own water authority, airport authority and other powers, including running its own Sea Fisheries Committee.’⁸⁶

Operating below district councils and unitary authorities, there are 9,000 town or parish councils in England. ‘Parishes do not generally have statutory functions, although they are often responsible for smaller local services such as allotments, parks and community centres. They may provide other services with the agreement of the county or district council.’⁸⁷

As local places, the above are regulated as per the Local Government Act, 2000, which sets out the governance models to be adopted by local authorities. These are:

- ‘a mayor and cabinet executive
- a leader and cabinet executive
- the committee system
- or other arrangements approved by the Secretary of State

Local people can have a say on the governance model adopted by their local authority via a referendum in certain circumstances.’⁸⁸

⁸³ MHCLG – *Guidance: Local government structure and elections, 3 April 2019*, Local government structure and elections - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

⁸⁴ It should be noted that that term ‘Borough Council’ exists for some Unitary Authorities, such as Reading Borough Council and for some District Councils, for example Fareham Borough Council. In consequence, the term should not be used as a means of distinction. See HMG - *List of councils in England by type*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/791684/List_of_councils_in_England_2019.pdf.

⁸⁵ MHCLG – *Guidance: Local government structure and elections*, Op Cit.

⁸⁶ Ibid. For a comparator, see the Isle of Wight Council, Resident Services, <https://www.iow.gov.uk/residents/>.

⁸⁷ MHCLG – *Guidance: Local government structure and elections*, Op Cit.

⁸⁸ Ibid. See also *The Local Government Act, 2000*, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/22/contents>.

Another aspect of many local areas, as well as the Combined Authorities discussed above, is the presence of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). These are 'partnerships between local authorities and businesses. They decide what the priorities should be for investment in roads, buildings and facilities in the area.'⁸⁹ There are 38 LEPs and they are effective partnerships that have 'delivered a total of over £7.6bn of private sector investment; supported over 196,000 businesses; created over 180,000 local jobs; and helped to build over 93,000 homes'.⁹⁰ As organisations embedded in local areas, they provide further opportunities for collaboration.

A good example of the way that some councils are embracing their local areas is the development and emergence of local Place Strategies. The town of Cheltenham in the South West has a Place Strategy and a plan to deliver positive outcomes for the borough. There is a Place Vision, which is brought about by the Place Governance Group, itself responsible for delivery.⁹¹

The local area, then, is ideally situated for Place Shaping and the most recent iteration of thinking on the subject has emerged from the LGA's August 2021 *Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils*.⁹² Here, Place Shaping is one of several activities, as set out in the Figure 3 below:⁹³

Figure 3 – Place Shaping in LGA Planning and Delivery

Influence and respond	Place-shaping	Community activation	Service/asset delivery	Service/asset accountability
Comment on planning applications	Neighbourhood planning.	Co-ordinating volunteers	Community libraries	Allotments
Respond to principle authority consultations	Affordable housing	Support to community action (as in COVID-19 pandemic) and community support	Grounds maintenance	Bus shelters
Representing the town or parish at area boards	Running local events.	Befriending services	Sports facilities	Cemeteries and church yards
Influence service levels of principle authority contracts that affect their areas (eg grass cutting).	Encouraging local commercial activity eg pop up cafés at community events or seasonally	Grant and fundraising eg to support libraries	Minor highways functions (eg footpaths, signs and verges cleansing)	Community centres
	Vision for local parks, land and buildings	Economic development, including job clubs	Car park provision and management	Litter bins/litter picking
	Community shops	Climate change initiatives	Leisure and arts centres	Markets
	Community centres	Youth projects		Parks/open spaces
				Public conveniences
				Tourist information centres

A specific example of the Place Shaping Agenda is the now-ended grant programme entitled Shaping Places for Healthier Lives, which was established by the Health Foundation and Local Government Association. While the call has ended, the material is a very clear indicator of the type of activity supported by the Place Shaping Agenda. The programme aimed 'to create the conditions for better health by funding local partnerships to take system-wide action on the wider determinants of health' and had the following objectives, to:

- mobilise cross-sector action through sustainable system change at a local level
- support local authorities to facilitate and enable local partnerships for system change
- learn how to make changes that impact on the wider determinants of health so that learning can be shared.⁹⁵

Interestingly, the Place Shaping Agenda here had its basis in the 2010 Marmot Review, thus:

'The Marmot Review, 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives' released in 2010, built on years of research and experience. The review made a firm case to government that reduction in health inequalities requires action across all the wider determinants of health. It was also clear that action must be across all aspects of government and in partnership with other sectors.'⁹⁶

⁸⁹ BEIS - *Local Enterprise Partnerships: map*, 25 October 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-enterprise-partnerships-map>.

⁹⁰ The LEP Network – *The 38 LEPs*, <https://www.lepnetwork.net/about-leps/the-38-leps/>.

⁹¹ Cheltenham Borough Council – *Cheltenham's Place Strategy*, 2019, https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/info/19/corporate_priorities_and_performance/1392/place_strategy.

⁹² LGA - *Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils*.

⁹³ 11 August 2021, <http://lga-independent.local.gov.uk/publications/local-service-delivery-and-place-shaping-framework-support-parish-and-town-councils>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ The Health Foundation and Local Government Association – *Shaping Places for Healthier Lives*, November 2019, <https://www.local.gov.uk/shaping-places-healthier-lives>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

It is worth dwelling for a moment on this because another element of the Place Shaping Agenda, discussed in Section 7 below, from Wavehill and the Arts Council of England, had antecedents in the 2007 Lyons Inquiry and chime with the local prioritisation apparent in the Local Government Act, 2000.

Clearly, the imperative outlined in the call Prospectus, 'to engage leaders across education, economic planning and development, environment and open space, place based working and others as well as those directly working in public health'⁹⁷ is one of greater longstanding than the November 2019 date of publication would suggest.

The above structures are important because they give life and meaning to why place matters in the first place. The quotation at the beginning of this report illustrates the centrality of the locale, for 'civic identity', for 'social and family connections' and, for many, proximity to where they were born. The 'local priorities', given voice through the mechanisms of the Local Government Act, 2000, were also discussed in connection with the need for central Government to deliver on them.⁹⁸ Connected with this is the imperative to deliver the extension of opportunity through its three Pillars of Growth: Infrastructure, Skills, and Innovation.⁹⁹ The local, as Place, is central for all three.

f) Thinking about Place beyond the State: The Private and Third Sectors

As is clear from the text above, there are aspects of policy to do with Place that sit outside Government mechanisms but are nevertheless bound up with it. The presence of LEPs at the local level is evidence of Private Sector involvement and is essential for understanding Place at the economic level.

In any treatment of Place, private enterprise is essential to its prosperity. Factories, businesses, and shops employ people, whose taxes pay for local services. Aspects like entrepreneurship and innovation also play a part in the development of business, underpinning its prosperity and that of the locale in which it is situated. It also underpins the attractiveness of a Place to be if there are good shops and restaurants in the area, jobs to be had, and if the streets are clean. The involvement of the Private Sector in LEPs, Freeports, and elsewhere is crucially important in the development of thinking on Place.

The Levelling Up White Paper is replete with examples of opportunities to work with the Private Sector in Place. Section 3.2 in Chapter 3 is entitled 'Boost Productivity, Pay, Jobs, and Living Standards by Growing the Private Sector'¹⁰⁰ and the following is a good articulation of the way that working with the Private Sector is being seen:

'A vibrant, high wage, high skill economy requires above all unleashing private investment, encouraging enterprise and supporting a dynamic business sector that can create jobs, nurture skills and invest in innovation; secure adequate access to finance, particularly among rapidly-growing small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); and improve access to good infrastructure – physical and digital – allowing people to connect and collaborate.

Through this mix of human, physical, intangible and financial capital, the business sector generates productivity improvements, creates jobs and boosts local living standards.'¹⁰¹

The intention is to develop Place through interaction with the Private Sector. Examples of collaboration with the Private Sector include the automotive industry,¹⁰² the creative industries,¹⁰³ and shipbuilding.¹⁰⁴

The Levelling Up White Paper is an intersection of activities where the state is the largest actor. As we have seen, there are points of intersection between aspiration and opportunity for the Private Sector. This has not been the case for the Third Sector, which is not even mentioned in the White Paper. Charities come up in four places and in all are as recipients of Government largesse.

The Third Sector has a role, though, in Place. Beyond the role of the sector in literature, the salience of it in the local delivery of Place Shaping is apparent in the LGA's August 2021 Local service delivery and place-shaping: *A framework to support parish and town councils*¹⁰⁵ discussed above and illustrated in Figure 3.

⁹⁷ The Health Foundation and Local Government Association – Shaping Places for Healthier Lives prospectus, 20 November 2019, <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/shaping-places-healthier-lives-prospectus>.

⁹⁸ HMT - *Build Back Better: our plan for growth*, CP 401, March 2021, page 69. [Build Back Better - our plan for growth \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92441/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth.pdf).

⁹⁹ Ibid. Chapters 2 to 4.

¹⁰⁰ Levelling Up White Paper Op Cit. Page 160.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid. Page 165.

¹⁰³ Ibid. Page 167.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. Page 168.

¹⁰⁵ LGA - *Local service delivery and place-shaping: A framework to support parish and town councils*, 11 August 2021, Op Cit.

A closer look at the development of Place Shaping reveals the extent of Third Sector activity, such as volunteering, community shops and centres, leisure centres, and youth projects. These activities can be in addition to the work of the state at local level but are more likely to become displaced activity. It may be the case that, for Place, Third Sector displacement activity is necessary to make up for the shortfall caused by a diminished Private Sector, especially post-Pandemic. The lack of a proper discussion of the Third Sector in Levelling up is a policy omission, and one which leads neatly into problematising factors.

g) Place in Policy as a Problematising Factor

Conversely, Place can be a disruptive element in Central Government Planning and its presence can produce some asymmetric outcomes as other policies are re-worked in order to cope with it. As colleagues in Northern Ireland have made clear, Place is a problematic concept there. Are there other themes or areas where Place is fraught, contested, and problematic? Obvious recent examples are the Scottish independence referendum and aftermath, the BREXIT vote, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the problematic status of local historical figures no longer in favour and what that means for Place.

The former redefines the concept of Scotland as a Place and new adjectives are used to describe it in a potential future: 'free' and 'independent' Scotland would have a destiny of its own. Not only this, but both GB and the UK would look and be very different as a Place with no Caledonia in it. The UK would become a reduced GB if Northern Ireland were to follow the same or a similar path and any Welsh departure would leave England alone in Britannia. Interestingly, England has about 85% of the British population and this gives it a centre of gravity as a Place. The BREXIT vote was won with English votes. The UK as a Place is affected by BREXIT and has ramifications for notions of Place when one thinks of where the border of Northern Ireland for trade purposes would be. Differential responses to COVID-19 have also been problematic in assembling a united national response, although they have permitted a degree of devolved agility vis-à-vis prevailing circumstances. Post-election policies beg the question of whether and how to talk about the Red Wall as Place and what this would mean for regions like the North West of England, for example. Relevant aspects for Place could be things like: Brexiteer or remainer; red or blue; or perceived injustices under various historic COVID Tiers, for example. In Scotland, these could be added to in terms of whether someone were pro-independence or not.

In spite of these challenging aspects of Place, the concept of it remains a useful tool in identifying points of identity and commonality in a location. Place also remains a core element in Central Government Planning to be able to develop the state and the economy post-pandemic. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Treasury's *Build Back Better: our plan for growth*, CP 401, published in March 2021.¹⁰⁶

4) Conclusion: The Changing Character of Place

We have seen the role of Place in Policy to date, but what does the future hold in store for Place? Some aspects of Place are immutable and will never change. A Place will always continue to be delineated, for example, but other aspects are open to constant change, redefining our idea of what a given place is. Nowhere is this process of change more apparent than in Britain's cities and towns. Over time, our appreciation of what cities are for, for example, has developed considerably and the idea(l) of them as civic centres has evolved with it.

The main drivers of this process have been technological. While it is tempting to see the COVID-19 pandemic as a driver, it is argued here that it has merely accelerated existing trends. This section will discuss six of them, namely:

- Online sales and the decline of the high street;
- Urban living patterns;
- Commuting;
- Working patterns;
- Work life balance; and
- The city as a place to meet.

One characteristic of cities and towns that has always been there from the invention of the city in Sumer to the present day is the presence of shops. There have been shops for as long as there has been surplus to trade, which itself is part of the defining characteristic of the city. Several trends¹⁰⁷ have served to disrupt this and two are mentioned here. The first is the car, which led to out of town shopping, and the second was the internet, which allowed shoppers to make purchases from their own homes. Both have had damaging effects on the high street and these have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Shops with good websites were able to offset some of their relative decline. Those without them went out of business. The same happened to restaurants. Those with inefficient business models that did not permit them to be agile or deliver food went out of business, some household names going into receivership surprisingly quickly. Some businesses have bounced back with new investors but with fewer stores. It is worth noting that the future of the city could see a reduction in shopping sales not seen since cities were invented.

¹⁰⁶ BHMT – *Build Back Better: Our Plan for Growth*, CP 401, March 2021, [Build Back Better - our plan for growth \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/94441/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth.pdf)

¹⁰⁷ Daniel Thomas – 'Six reasons behind the High Street crisis', *BBC News*, 01 March 2018, [Six reasons behind the High Street crisis - BBC News](https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44844444).

Urban living patterns have also changed.¹⁰⁸ Circa 40 years ago, there was an increasing trend for those living in cities to move out of the centres and into the suburbs and beyond. Local Government authorities noticed three things: a decline in revenue raised from local taxation, fewer people in the high street, and an increase in crime at night. The response has been the inauguration of a plethora of schemes to attract people back into city centres, accompanied large numbers of change of use applications and new apartment blocks.

Related to these developments has been a significant amount of commuting, as those living outside towns and cities travel to them to work.¹⁰⁹ Commuting has also changed considerably over time. Commuting is also a comparatively new development in the life of the city and it has produced different types of city user: those living and working in city and town centres; those coming into cities to work and have meetings; and those coming into cities to shop. The second of these were not in existence, say, 150 years ago. Because of the pandemic, many of them are not there now, instead working from home. This has had a significant effect on the city.

The effect has been a change in working patterns, itself made possible by computerisation and digitalisation, as 15-20% of the working population do so from home. This would not have been possible for office workers during the Spanish Flu pandemic in 1918-19 and would have been all but impossible for more than a handful of people during the 2002-04 SARS outbreak. These comparisons are instructive because they reveal the extent to which changes in working patterns have been made possible by technology over time.¹¹⁰ It has also been possible over the last two decades or so to spot emerging trends in working from home, for example, where changes to facilitate work-life balance have become ever more possible, and permitted, than they were before. The result has been a complete change that has seen over a decade of advances in the way office workers work taking place in less than two years.

The work-life balance of those undertaking this work is also changing.¹¹¹ Some people have benefitted from the change and productivity in some areas of work has surged. Other people have not benefitted for a variety of reasons. These life experiences feed into ways that will inform new ways of working. What is clear is that office workers are unlikely to work there on a nine-to-five basis, five days a week.

The result of all this is the emergence of three interlocked trends. The first is that cities are increasingly likely to be places where people will meet, rather than work. The second is that some office blocks will start to become surplus to requirements. This may result in their being repurposed to provide housing. Connected with this are high office rents that companies will no longer be willing to pay. This leads to the second factor, as more people move back into cities they will want to have safe, clean, and enjoyable places in which to live and meet. The trends discussed above provide much of the hinterland to WM REDI's recent report on the State of the [West Midlands] Region.¹¹²

Under 'Supporting thriving places & communities', the report states that: 'Cities, towns and neighbourhoods will be connected, distinct and authentic to their communities.'¹¹³ This is a trend that seems likely to continue.

The availability of housing will help further that trend but the report makes it clear that this is not a simple matter, as supply and demand in the market have their respective effects:

'the region has seen significant housing growth, with a total dwelling stock rising by 16,863 between 2019 and 2020 in the 3 LEP area, the highest yearly growth since records began. However, affordability is defined by the prices of homes, and this has continued to rise for a number of years with the Midlands seeing some of the greatest increases which has continued throughout the pandemic. Wages are not keeping up with the pace of house price increase, this has meant that despite record house building nationally and in the Midlands the market continues to drive the prices making homes unaffordable.'¹¹⁴

Another factor involved with Place is the importance of green issues and the imperative of Net Zero. While these as a factor will make the West Midlands, or a given town or city within it, a better Place both *per se* and as a place to live, there is a cost to householders as a result.¹¹⁵ The increased burden to the low voltage part of the national grid will also need to be considered, as new charging points for electric cars become available. As one aspect of Place changes, there is an effect on others, as air is cleaner and pollution reduces.

Other factors involved in Levelling Up Place relate to tackling inequalities. For places to optimise their status as desirable places to be, ethnic, education, and health inequalities would need to be addressed.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ ONS - *High streets in Great Britain: March, 2020*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/highstreetsingreatbritain/march2020>.

¹⁰⁹ Department for Transport - *Commuting trends in England 1988 – 2015*, November 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877039/commuting-in-england-1988-2015.pdf.

¹¹⁰ ONS - *Technology intensity and homeworking in the UK*, 01 May 2020, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/technologyintensityandhomeworkingintheuk/2020-05-01>.

¹¹¹ Birmingham City Council – *COVID-19 Working from Home – Work/Life Balance*, https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50234/covid-19_staff_guidance/2147/covid-19_working_from_home/7.

¹¹² The West Midlands Regional Economic Development Institute (WMREDI) – *State of the Region 2021*, August 2021, <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/city-redi/wm-redi/state-of-the-region-2021.aspx>.

¹¹³ Ibid. Page 22.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Page 23.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. Pages 23 and 24.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. Pages 25 and 26.

Beyond the city, the countryside has also changed, with new ways of farming and new tools with which to do it. Local authorities are alive to this and the countryside has developed along the lines of the Scottish Place Principle or the Welsh tourism policies discussed above. One important interaction with the city has been the presence of second homes in rural areas that have served to increase house prices beyond the reach of those who were born and live there. This may emerge as a more salient issue than hitherto because, if 15-20% of the population encounter a fundamental change in their working habits, their living arrangements will change concomitantly. Provision may need to be made for this, either by the market or by legislation.

Taken overall, places are changing at an unprecedented rate over a very short timescale. In Policy terms, this offers real opportunities to develop Places to be the sort of environments where people would like to live, work, meet, socialise, and bring up their families. Levelling Up Place means building back better than what was there before. The policy salience of improved societal, educational, and health outcomes in Levelling up is evident in the WM REDI report and the roles of innovation and opportunity will place an increasingly central role in this process. Also evident is the role of Net Zero as a policy deliverable, alongside Levelling Up and Global Britain. These are given life through the three Pillars of Growth: Infrastructure, Skills, and Innovation.

Finally, it is fitting to end as this report started; Place Matters. It does so for more than where people work; it does for because of identity, where they are born, and from where their family hails. Place also matters because, where opportunity is offered and embraced, it forms the basis of national recovery and renewal.

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