

# Levelling up: five principles for success

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November 2021





# Contents

Foreword by Matthew Farrow .....	p. 1
Introduction by Peter Hogg.....	p. 2
Executive summary.....	p. 3
Recommendations.....	p. 5
Levelling up is a challenge across the country .....	p. 6
The evidence shows it can be done if the policy mix is right.....	p. 8
Five principles for success .....	p. 10
The capability deficit needs to be fixed .....	p. 12
The areas in greatest need of levelling up most lack the institutional capacity to make it happen.....	p. 12
Ending a siloed approach to funding .....	p. 14
Consultancy expertise to help fill the gap .....	p. 14
Nationwide collaboration networks to share resources .....	p. 18
Appendix.....	p. 25
Endnotes.....	p. 28

## Foreword

The number one topic on the lips of both organisers and attendees at this autumn's Conservative Party Conference was levelling up. As well as plenty of discussion – including at our own Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) event – there were also a multitude of largely unanswered questions around delivery.

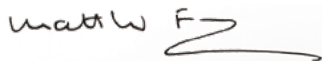
The reality is that this is not just a practical issue for Government, but a political one. Voters in the left-behind places, many of whom may have voted Conservative for the first time in 2019, will want to see tangible progress before the next general election. Given how personally invested the Prime Minister is in the agenda, he will want to see action as soon as possible too. Indeed, this is likely to be the reason behind the creation of the new levelling up department.

This is certainly not the first report on levelling up to have been written. Given the importance of the topic to our political and economic future, it is unlikely to be the last. It is, however, the first from the consultancy and engineering industry to explore how best to use its unique blend of expertise in strategy development, placemaking, masterplanning and urban design, to help deliver government ambitions on levelling up.

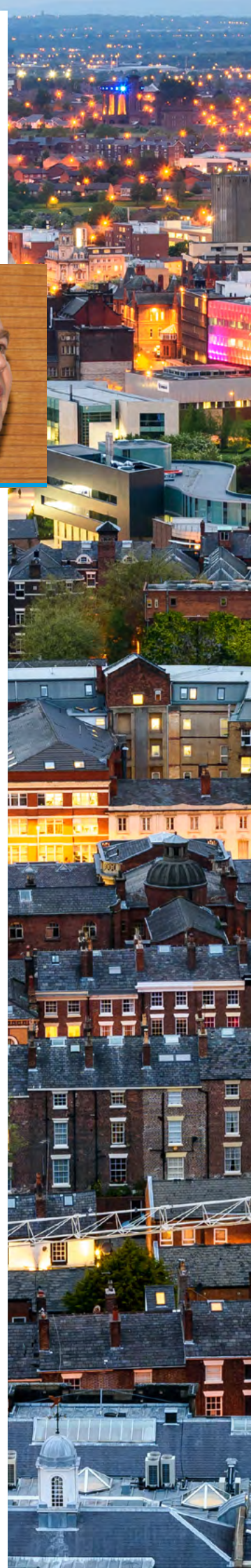
Furthermore, with resource stretched local government increasingly working in partnership with consultancies to deliver levelling up aims, our sector has a growing experience upon which to draw. With this in mind, we were fortunate to be able to tap into the knowledge of our levelling up taskforce with representatives from across the country and from different sections of our diverse industry. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for sharing their time, input and expertise.

Coupled to an overarching long-term view on policymaking, investment in the built environment and the use of place-based approaches, ACE's levelling up taskforce has put forward five principles to make levelling up a success. Places will need to 1) build a solid evidence base, 2) work out how they will become famous, 3) build on what they have got, 4) organise delivery around people's needs and 5) ask the hard questions around capacity and capability.

As the delivery partner of choice for government – at both a national and local level – our members offer a unique perspective and plenty of practical experience. It is time for us to come together to cut through the noisy political rhetoric around levelling up and start to turn it into reality.



**Matthew Farrow,**  
Director of Policy, ACE.



# Introduction

I'm delighted to present to the industry and policymakers the first output of the ACE Levelling Up taskforce.

You might be wondering what more can be said about levelling up? With the levels of political noise, the campaigning from metro-mayors and local authorities across the country, hasn't enough been said? While there is now a broad consensus around it as a concept, as we move towards wider economic recovery it is vital we actually start to see tangible progress.



Given our industry's role as the partner of choice for government, it was only natural our taskforce explored delivery. As well as outlining our five principles for levelling up, we looked at the types of places where levelling up would apply. Many will automatically think of the post-industrial heartlands, but the truth is that coastal, rural and urban communities are all candidates for levelling up, as the map on page seven demonstrates.

While very different in many respects, they share many common characteristics. For example, they all have a strong legacy of industrial buildings, a large inheritance of commercial buildings and most are experiencing town centres in decline. There is still plenty to differentiate them too – connectivity is vital for rural areas, for example, and investments in roads and digital infrastructure is key.

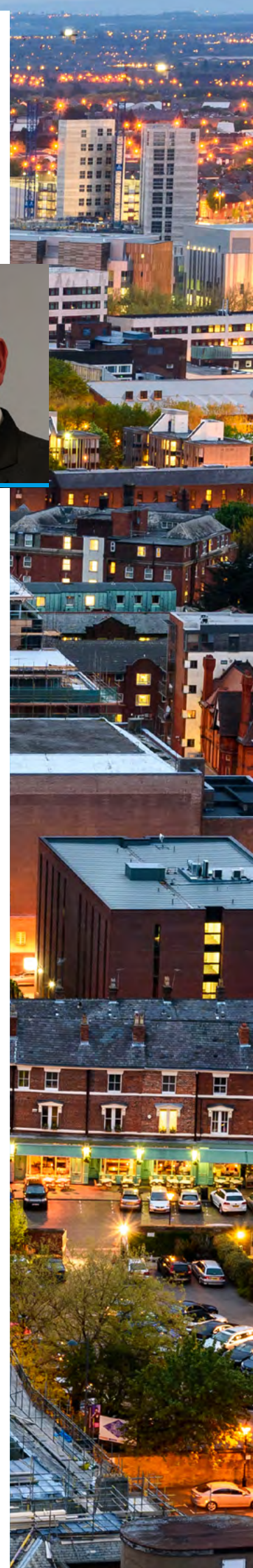
Our report shares a range of case studies from across the UK from which we can all learn. The key takeaway being that for cash-strapped local authorities, our members can provide the extra knowledge, skills, experience and capacity to unlock projects which make a real difference to the lives of local people.

I know from the work and projects we are involved with at Arcadis, that government increasingly sees our sector as true delivery partners turning the noise of levelling up into tangible change and improvements on the ground for their citizens. With new funding opportunities unlocked thanks to the National Infrastructure Bank and the Levelling Up Fund, there are more councils looking to deliver levelling up projects and programmes than ever before.

The political noise has been almost incessant, what has been lacking, however, is a plan to turn this enthusiasm into a project plan at a local or regional level. This report, reflecting our unique industry-wide approach to levelling up, focuses on delivery and provides a blueprint for government at any level.



**Peter Hogg,**  
Arcadis and chair of ACE's places group and Levelling Up taskforce.



## Executive summary

Levelling up the United Kingdom's regional disparities of opportunity and quality of life is one of the biggest challenges facing this generation. Huge amounts of political capital and public money look set to be spent over the coming years in response to public demand for change.

International evidence suggests that levelling up is achievable if pursued through consistent, long-term policy that can survive changes of government. There is also a growing consensus, supported by the Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE), that regeneration strategies adapted to the characteristics of the locality ('place-based regeneration') is the only way to ensure levelling up investment actually makes a real difference to people's lives.

We have drawn on the extensive collective experience of the group convened to produce this report, ACE's Levelling up taskforce drawn from its places group, to identify five principles for delivering successful place-based regeneration.

The last principle is perhaps our greatest concern. This is one of several recent reports which highlights that public sector capacity and capability is extremely stretched. Unfortunately, smaller local authorities, often in areas with the greatest long-term levelling up needs are amongst the worst affected by a lack of resources, putting them at risk of further decline. The consultancy sector is stepping up to help plug this gap and stands ready to do more. The case studies showcased in this report demonstrate how we bring a unique mix of strategic, technical and project delivery skills to projects and programmes across the UK.

New ACE analysis carried out for this report also indicates the potential for mitigating some of this capacity shortfall by facilitating more collaboration between Local and Regional Authorities and their consultancy partners in different parts of the country, where they face similar challenges. The problem here is that these places may be in rural Devon, Northumberland and Mid-Wales, hundreds of miles apart, under different administrative hierarchies and have little history of joint-working. We believe this is an opportunity to do something new and valuable.

The success of levelling up will rightly be measured by hard economic indicators. But feeling left-behind is also an emotion. If we can encourage a greater sense of connection and common purpose across the country, we will have achieved something of lasting value.

### ACE's levelling up taskforce

A special taskforce created to support ACE's activity in this space featuring members from its places group, as well as representatives from the ACE North West, Midlands, Scotland and Wales groups.

ACE would like to thank them for their expert input and time.

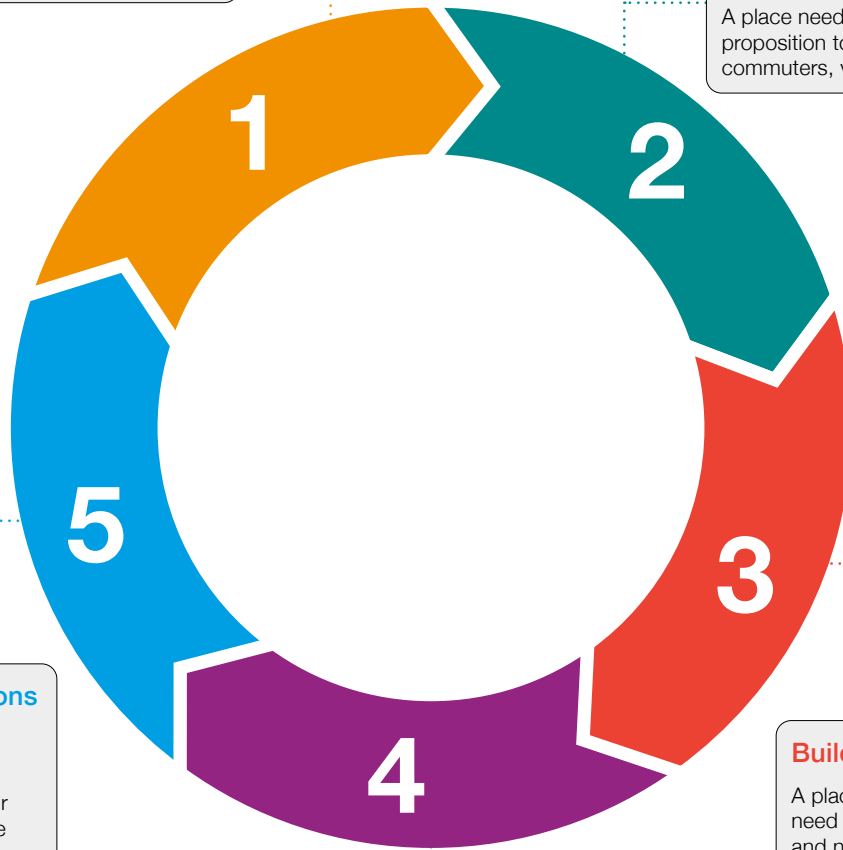
**Peter Hogg (chair, Arcadis), Sean Keyes (Sutcliffe), Ruth Jeffs (Waterman Group), Giles Perkins (WSP), Eimear Moloney (Hoare Lea), Sarah Peterson (Harley Haddow), Piers Burroughs (Burroughs)**

**Build a solid evidence base**

Levelling up needs to be based on a robust analysis of local context. This should include an area's existing buildings and infrastructure, its geography the planned infrastructure investment pipeline for the area, local skill sets, demographic data, and the results of deep engagement with stakeholders and the local community about their needs.

**Work out how you'll become famous**

A place needs a strong and achievable proposition to put to its residents, commuters, visitors, and investors.



**Ask the hard questions about your capacity and capability**

Assess if local public sector institutions and their private sector partners have the capacity and skills to develop and execute your strategy – you may need to amend plans or find new sources of support.

**Build on what you've got**

A place's proposition does not need to be completely original and not every place can be world class in everything. What is important is a proposition's fit to the area's particular conditions opportunities and personality. Leverage these advantages and avoid chasing funding pots or trends for their own sake

**Organise delivery around people's needs**

Levelling up demands joined-up solutions to broad strategic challenges. Public and private sector alike need to organise around people and their needs and not their own technical disciplines or internal structures. Delivery plans should be based on bundles of interventions that join the dots between transport, energy, environment, education, employment, and everything else important to a place.

# Recommendations

These recommendations target the barriers to making progress with levelling up and the opportunities for acceleration identified in the body of this report. The UK Government's White Paper on levelling up is expected imminently and should be judged against the extent to which it incorporates these points.

- **Send a clear message that levelling up will respect place and reflect need**  
The White Paper must send a clear message that government will invest in locally led regeneration strategies where they are grounded in evidence-based analysis of each place's opportunities and the needs of its people. The White Paper is also an opportunity to reinforce that levelling up applies to rural and urban areas and all four nations of the UK.
- **Strengthen the link to Net Zero by prioritising leveraging-off the existing Built Environment**  
80% or more the buildings and infrastructure of 2050 already exist. The White Paper should explicitly explore how it links to the recently published Net Zero Strategy, and criteria for accessing levelling up funding should prioritise the reuse of existing structures over new build. This will make a large contribution to the UK's Net Zero targets. It can also help break the link between a declining built environment, poor mental health, and low productivity.
- **Consolidate funding and reduce the use of competition and ringfencing**  
The White Paper should acknowledge the findings of this and other studies that indicate that creating multiple, ringfenced competitive funding pots distorts place-based regeneration. By shifting an area's focus from its own assessment of its needs and opportunities, it sucks up scarce resources and discourages joined up thinking. The National Infrastructure Commission's recent proposal that county councils and unitary authorities receive five year, needs based funding settlements for local transport infrastructure would be a step in the right direction.
- **Tackle barriers to small towns and rural areas taking advantage of levelling up**  
Government should provide resources and incentives to support the consultancy's plug capacity and capability gaps that are preventing smaller local authorities developing and executing strategies, building business cases, and creating viable regeneration projects.  
  
This could be done through using the National Infrastructure Bank's advisory role to include funding specifically to allow smaller local authorities to 'make or buy' additional expertise. Government should also ensure that administrative process like the calculation of Benefit Cost Ratios do not disadvantage these areas, for example by penalising them for having lower land values (and potential uplift).
- **Help areas with similar needs and challenges collaborate more effectively**  
Government should work with ACE, and local authorities, through bodies such as ADEPT, to develop new mechanisms to allow groups of authorities in different parts of the country to share resources, take advantage of economies of scale and share learning.



# Levelling up is a challenge across the country

The UK suffers from some of the largest geographic disparities in economic performance in the developed world.<sup>1</sup> These disparities are complex, deep rooted and go well beyond a North/South divide.

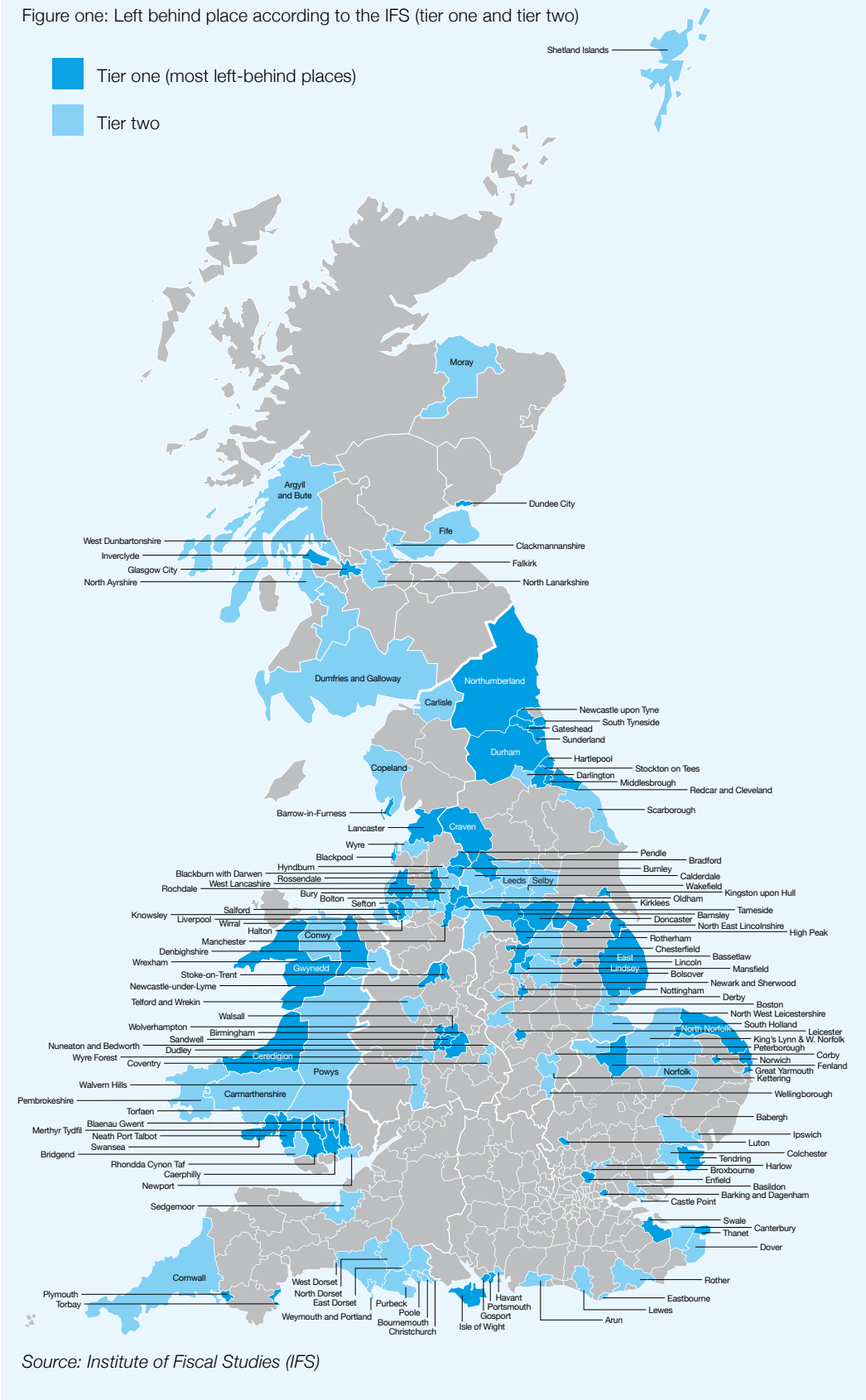
First, while certain parts of the UK are particularly badly affected – analysis by Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) shows that Wales, North West England, and North East England account for more than 45% of the most ‘left-behind’ local authority areas<sup>2</sup> – disparities within regions are often greater than those between them. For example London, while over-represented at the top end of the income distribution, is also over-represented at the bottom.

Second, this is not just an urban issue. The IFS analysis, which is based on a basket of economic, health and education indicators, indicates the worst performing areas are a mix of coastal, remote rural and post-industrial areas as well as large towns and cities, See figure one overleaf.

Third, levelling up is required across all four nations of the UK. The Chancellor Rishi Sunak recognised this when launching the Levelling Up Fund in March 2021, noting that: “local areas across the UK share similar needs, so the fund will be delivered in partnership with local areas across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.”<sup>3</sup>

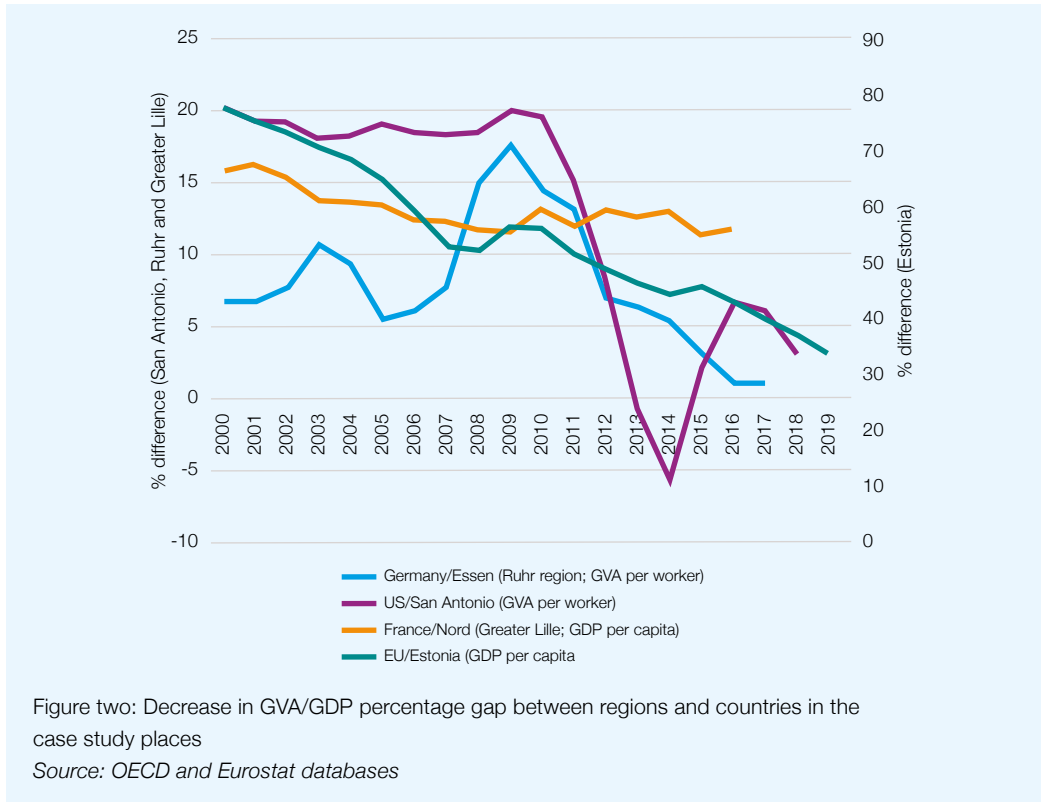
While there has been some criticism from devolved administrations of the UK Government’s approach, there is a consensus on the need to reduce regional inequalities. Indeed the IFS data shows that over 20% of the most “left behind places” are in Scotland and Wales (the analysis does not cover Northern Ireland).<sup>4</sup>

Figure one: Left behind place according to the IFS (tier one and tier two)



## The evidence shows it can be done, if the policy mix is right

The experience of previously left behind places in other advanced economies provides grounds for optimism. A 2021 study by the Industrial Strategy Council (ISC),<sup>5</sup> chaired by Andy Haldane, leader of the UK Government's levelling up taskforce, analysed the factors behind the long-term improvement in economic performance against the national average in four previously struggling areas of Estonia, France, Germany, and the USA. See figure two.



Building on the ISC study are a number of others, including one from the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) which highlight three factors in particular:

- **Long term approach** – Success in levelling up requires sustained long term policy approaches which outlast changes in political leadership, and include good collaboration between national and local government.
- **Infrastructure investment** – While not the only type of investment that matters, changing the economic performance of an area is difficult without improving its built environment
- **Taking a place-based approach** – Calibrating the mix of policies and investments to ensure the best fit with the existing strengths and character of a locality.

Some progress can be seen across all these factors. In terms of having a consistent approach, levelling up has become a broad priority across the Government's agenda, with the Prime Minister emphasising the need to tackle a situation where: "talent, energy, enthusiasm and flair are evenly spread across the UK, opportunity is not."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, there is reasonable cross-party support for the aims of the policy.

Infrastructure investment is also part of the Government's plans. Recent ministerial speeches have been littered with references to schools and hospitals, transport and digital connectivity, high streets and sports facilities, renewable energy, and electric vehicle infrastructure.

This rhetoric has also been backed by pledges for cash. In March 2021, Government announced a new £4.8bn levelling up fund, designed to support high street regeneration, local transport schemes and heritage and cultural assets. This sits alongside a rolling programme of city and town deals between local and national government and will build on the previous Town and High Street Funds. The UK also has a 10-year *Infrastructure and construction pipeline* comprising £650bn of public and private investment which Ministers have hailed as, "the foundation on which we build back better and level up the country."<sup>7</sup>

Developing place-based approaches is the most complex challenge of the three, but there is an emerging consensus that it is the way forward. In a July 2021 keynote speech, on levelling up, the Prime Minister stressed the diversity and idiosyncrasy of the UK's economic geography. Subsequently, the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA), the government's in-house centre of excellence on projects, has added flesh to these rhetorical bones. Its new *Roadmap to 2030* argues:

"Our places, be they villages, towns, cities or regions, are diverse and unique. They are shaped by their location, connections, natural surroundings, history, culture, economies, and the people who live, visit and work in them. Our interventions in the built environment do not sufficiently recognise the importance of local context, or the complexity of interconnected built and natural systems and the changing needs of the people that use them. This reduces their impact and leads to suboptimal outcomes."<sup>8</sup>

It advises public bodies that to escape this trap they need: "A holistic and data-enabled understanding of place and space, bringing together robust and accessible data on the local population, economy and environment, with insights and priorities from local stakeholders, to create the foundation for better decision-making and more impactful interventions."

# Five principles for success

The previous section identified the three factors common to successful levelling up: long term policy approach, investment in the built environment, and the use of place-based approaches. Levelling up will fail, and the capital and political effort being spent will be wasted, if these approaches are not properly applied.

ACE convened a member taskforce to develop practical insights into making levelling up a success. It has identified five principles for delivering successful place-based regeneration:

## 1. Build a solid evidence base

Levelling up needs to be based on a robust analysis of local context. This analysis should include an area's existing buildings and infrastructure, its geography the planned infrastructure investment pipeline for the area, local skill sets, demographic data, and the results of deep engagement with stakeholders and the local community about their needs.

## 2. Work out how you'll become famous

A place needs a strong and achievable proposition to put to its residents, commuters, visitors, and investors.

## 3. Build on what you've got

A place's proposition doesn't need to be completely original and not every place can be world class in everything. What is important is a proposition's fit to the area's particular conditions opportunities and personality. Leverage off these advantages and avoid chasing funding pots or trends for their own sake

## 4. Organise delivery around people's needs

Levelling up demands joined-up solutions to broad strategic challenges. Public and private sector alike need to organise around people and their needs and not their own technical disciplines or internal structures. Delivery plans should be based on bundles of interventions that join the dots between transport, energy, environment, education, employment, and everything else important to a place.

## 5. Ask the hard questions about your capacity and capability

Assess if local public sector institutions and their private sector partners have the capacity and skills to develop and execute your strategy – you may need to amend plans or find new sources of support.

**Case Study:**  
**Plugging capacity gaps to revive town centres**

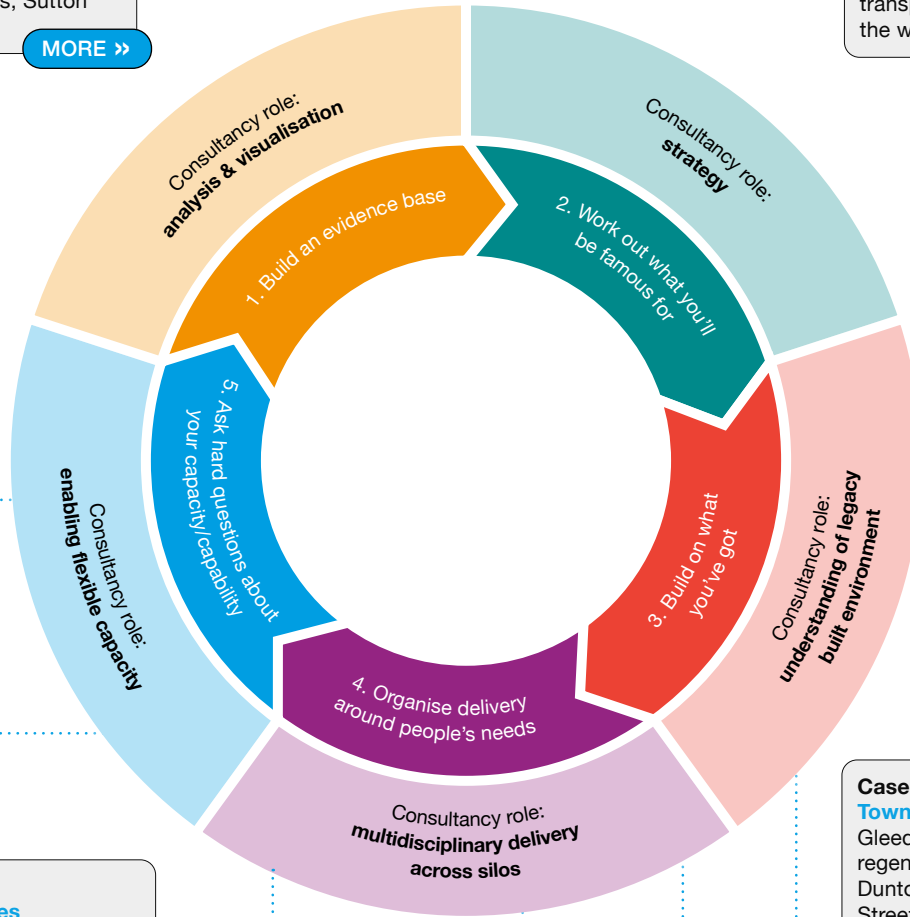
Gleeds are helping Ashfield District Council to regenerate ex-industrial centres, Sutton and Kirkby.

[MORE »](#)

**Case Study:**  
**Making the most of industrial heritage**

Sutcliffe are spearheading Stanley docks' regeneration with the redevelopment of what was once the largest transportation warehouse in the world.

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**Case Study:**  
**Sharing resources between places**

Burroughs are supporting the Development Bank of Wales to identify pockets of unused urban land.

[MORE »](#)

**Case Study:**  
**Town centre regeneration**

Gleeds are helping to regenerate and repurpose Dunton and Nuneaton High Streets thanks to the strategic and project management support offered to local councils.

[MORE »](#)

**Case Study:**  
**Listening first, designing second**

Hoare Lea in partnership with Igloo Regeneration are collaborating to deliver a not for profit, sustainable housing scheme for Nationwide Building Society in Swindon.

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**Case Study:**  
**Achieving multiple levelling up benefits**

Waterman Group is working on a new transport hub, Dudley Interchange which is spearheading over £1 billion of investment in the town centre.

[MORE »](#)

**Case Study:**  
**Developing a strategy based on needs**

WSP have developed a mobility strategy for Transport for the South East which meets the needs of a diverse area.

[MORE »](#)

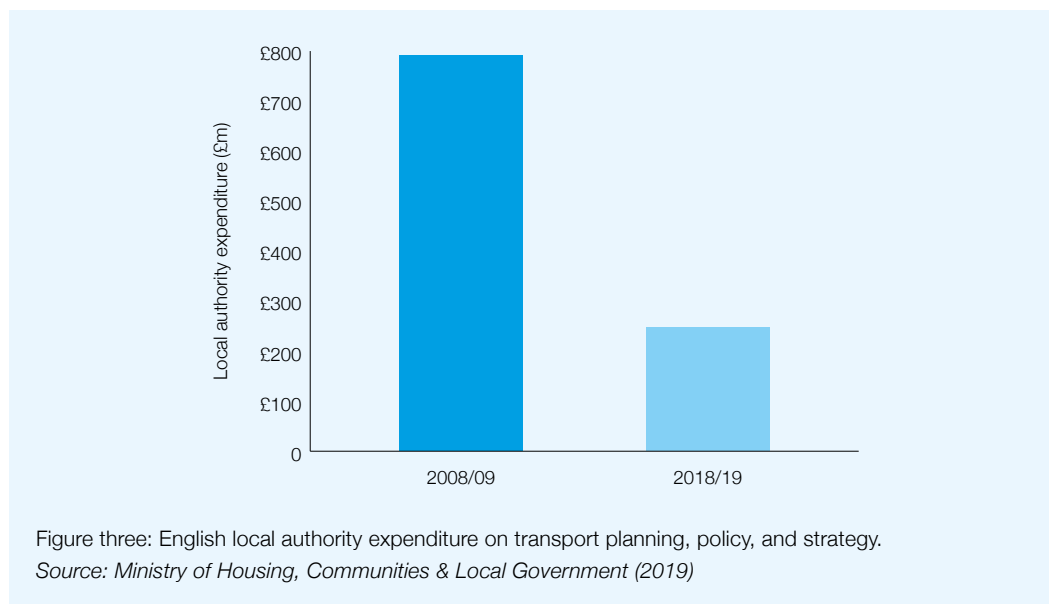
# The capacity deficit needs to be fixed

## The areas with the greatest need for levelling up are most lacking in the institutional capacity to make it happen

The first four principles depend on the fifth one – sufficient capacity/capability, and here ACE has real concerns. Institutional capability and capacity in the public sector to develop and execute these strategies is clearly a challenge in many areas.

In a September 2021 report *Infrastructure, Towns and Regeneration*, the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) backed a place-based approach but warned that local authority spending on transport planning, policy and strategy has fallen steeply since the 2008 financial crisis. See figure three below.<sup>9</sup>

Cross-referencing the NIC data with the places identified as left behind by the IFS, shows that the fall in resources has been greatest in the areas that need it most. This is making it much harder for local authorities to develop long term, evidence-based strategies and evaluate their impact.



Tier one (most left behind places) by region (excluding London)	2008/09	2018/19	Change
<b>East</b>	£1,456,000	£788,000	-£668,000
<b>East Midlands</b>	£4,118,000	£1,583,000	-£2,535,000
<b>North East</b>	£10,215,000	£5,542,000	-£4,673,000
<b>North West</b>	£12,939,000	£5,438,000	-£7,501,000
<b>South East</b>	£800,000	£2,895,000	+£2,095,000
<b>South West</b>	£3,435,000	£3,092,000	-£343,000
<b>West Midlands</b>	£5,987,000	£6,743,000	+£756,000
<b>Yorkshire and the Humber</b>	£5,490,000	£3,547,000	-£1,943,000

Figure four: Tier one (most left behind) expenditure on transport planning, policy, and strategy  
Source: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019).

Note on data: Figures are the combination of spend on 1) Highways, Maintenance planning, policy, and strategy 2) Public and other transport planning, policy, and strategy.

The NIC study focuses on transport planning, but it echoes wider concerns about public sector capacity shared by the ACE taskforce. The scale of the problem is by no means uniform across the UK. Big cities and combined authorities have retained and even enhanced their capacity to lead this strategic work. These areas also benefit from a rich eco-system of other public institutions and well-resourced private sector actors. As a result, public sector leadership in these areas tends to take the form of the “conductor of an orchestra” aligning stakeholders around a shared vision and facilitating access to opportunities.

This model is most well advanced in areas with long-standing metro-mayors, for example Manchester and the increasing maturity of mayoralities in other areas, and developments such as the creation of the East Midland Development Company, are creating similar conditions elsewhere.

Large county councils in rural areas also often have significant strategic capacity. These authorities can find themselves in a situation of “if we don’t do something, no-one will” and have a track record of taking a hands-on leadership role.



Elsewhere, smaller authorities, for example in second tier towns and cities, need more support. The IFS analysis has shown that smaller towns and rural areas have some of the greatest needs. In many of these areas there is a consensus on the problem, for example a failing high-street or badly configured transportation system. Unfortunately they often do not have the skilled people who can put together the strategies, business cases and pipelines of projects that can attract the investment to meet their areas levelling-up aspirations.

### Ending a siloed approach to funding

One action to address this would be for UK Government to wean itself off the habit of asking local and regional authorities to compete for multiple regeneration funding pots from different departments. The taskforce's experience is that this distorts place-based strategy making, shifting focus from actual needs and sources of competitive advantage and towards whatever pot of funds an authority is able to secure.

The bidding process also demands specialist expertise, creating a barrier to smaller authorities accessing funds, despite many small towns and rural areas being amongst the areas in greatest need of support.

Finally this fractured approach discourages the joined-up thinking within and between areas that can maximise the impact of levelling-up investment.

The creation of the National Infrastructure Bank (NIB) is an opportunity to address this systemic fragmentation. The Bank is aimed at helping finance projects in sectors including clean energy, transport, digital, water and waste.<sup>10</sup> but also has a role in broader regeneration. In addition, it has recognised capacity issues and says the fund “will add expertise and capacity to local governments and help them to realise their plans.” As part of this support, the NIB will establish an expert advisory panel to provide additional support.

The NIB should be a catalyst to join up a range of government interventions such as levelling up fund and the Town's fund. The Bank's advisory role should also include funding specifically to allow smaller local authorities to ‘make or buy’ additional strategic and delivery expertise.

### Consultancy expertise to fill the gap

The case studies in this report show how consultancy businesses are stepping up to fill this gap, taking on a wide variety of roles and exploiting their unique mix of planning, design, economic development, advisory and project delivery skills.

There is a clear trend of ACE members providing more support at the front end of regeneration projects, embracing a diverse range of activity including strategy development, placemaking, masterplanning and urban design, as well as helping with grant applications, creating investor prospectuses, negotiating supplementary planning guidance and other key enablers. In smaller towns and rural areas, consultancies are also entering into more partnership arrangements to provide access to delivery capacity when an authority's needs would swamp the local market.

## Developing a strategy based on needs

ACE member **WSP** has worked with **Transport for the South East (TfSE)** to develop a mobility strategy that can meet the needs of all the places that make up this extremely diverse region.

The approach is grounded in a granular, data driven analysis of the needs that all forms of connectivity allow local people to meet including access to employment, healthcare, leisure, and education. Crucially WSP and TfSE have taken time to understand how those needs vary between different demographics and locations and how age, location and other factors shape different groups attitudes to different types of services and infrastructure.

Using this data WSP and TfSE have been able to identify four broad types of ‘place’ in the region – see figure five below – but have also recognised that it does not tell the full story. So they have drilled down further to subdivide these areas by size, their relationship to London and also the coast.

All of this analysis is reflected in a strategy that breaks down traditional modal silos to identify bundles of services and infrastructure that have the best chance of meeting the needs of each type of area. It is worth noting that many of these solutions are no or low build options and have a strong link to behavioural change, for example car sharing, or embracing digital as a mode. These bundles will guide decisions by local authorities and their partners in different parts of the region, allowing them to make investments based on what is most likely to work.

To further build this evidence base, bundles of interventions will be piloted across the South East. This will provide the added insight needed to optimise full-scale deployment and clarify how services are likely to be used in different locations and under different conditions.

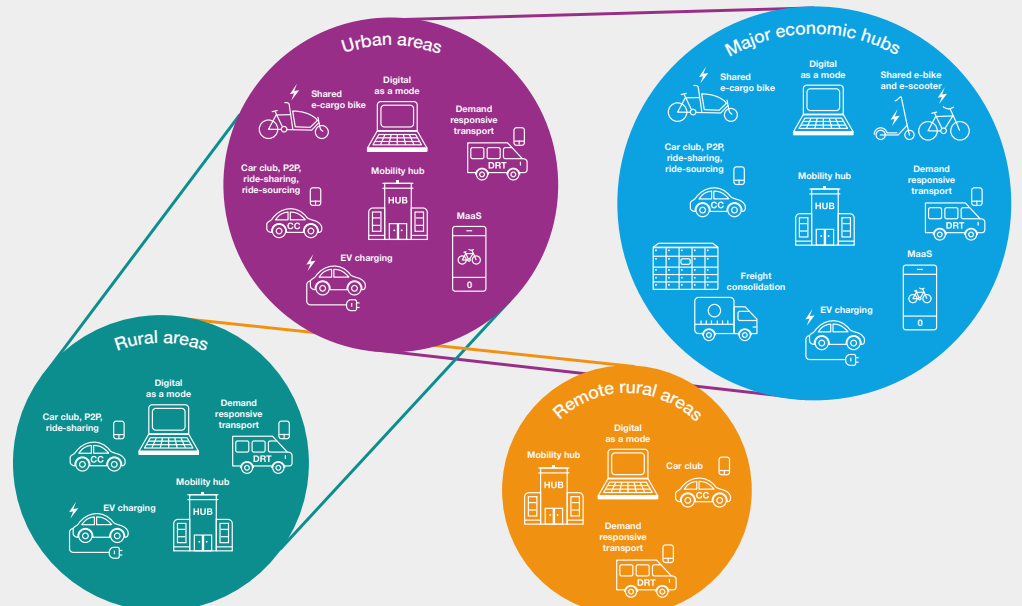


Figure five: Graphic from SWP and TFSE

## Listening first, designing second

ACE member **Hoare Lea** has worked closely on a number of schemes with **Igloo Regeneration**, a UK development business and certified benefit corporation. Igloo take a listen first, design later approach to their schemes grounded in the belief that every place, and every community is different. Igloo's consultancy partners are closely involved in a design co-creation process with local communities that has meant that over its 20-year life, the developer has never had a planning application turned down.

Igloo stress the importance of measuring impact – but ensuring this is meaningful for the people who are impacted by a scheme. They are keen to see greater consistency and comparability, pointing to the UK Green Building Council's guidance on measuring Social Value as an important step forward but warn that a key part of listening is understanding what communities believe should be measured.

Oakfield in Swindon, an Igloo-led development for **Nationwide Building Society**, is a great example of the value of this approach and the upfront work involved. The project is a not for profit, sustainable housing scheme. It occupies a large brownfield site, between three existing communities that no other developer had been prepared to invest in. The scheme will be test-bed for community focused,

environmentally sustainable housing development and Nationwide are committed to share their learnings as part of its contribution to tackling the UK's housing crisis.

Igloo set out to engage meaningfully with the communities surrounding the site, taking the unusual step of employing a community organiser who as part of their work, knocked on over 600 doors before design work even began. This process flushed out the existence of, not a single homogenous community, but multiple communities, with distinct attitudes and needs. All of this work fed directly into the inclusion of features such as a wide mix of homes and tenures, dog walking routes, new connections between surrounding places to local amenities, improved cycling facilities and shared parks and play areas.

Oakfield will contribute to a number of key levelling up outcomes, for example at least 30% of the homes will be regulated affordable housing. It will also deliver a series of co-benefits, including to Net Zero goals via the use of air source heat pumps in lieu of traditional gas boilers.

Just as importantly the listen first, design second approach has also delivered real commercial benefits. The scheme received no objections at planning, greatly reducing the risk of delays and late design changes.



## Achieving multiple levelling up benefits

Dudley Town Centre in the Black Country is currently undergoing a major regeneration, with investment of around £1bn in the pipeline. **Dudley Interchange** will be a focal point and hub for this programme, sited in the centre of the historic town, overlooked by Dudley Castle, an ancient monument and tourist attraction.

ACE member **Waterman group** is collaborating with the **West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA)** and other consultants on this project. The scheme will replace an ageing 1980's bus station but has much wider ambitions for it to become a significant focal point and hub to spearhead the regeneration of Dudley town centre. It will improve the town's connectivity to the wider West Midlands by linking bus services with the planned extension of the Midlands Metro, as well as upgrades to the local highways network. This opens up employment, education, and leisure opportunities for residents of the town.

The split level, architecturally designed interchange building will also be significant

landmark and destination in its own right, supporting the town's recovery from the pandemic.

The scope of Waterman's role in the scheme is an excellent example of the breadth of support consultancy can provide authorities, taking the project from concept layouts through planning, business case support and detailed design and construction support.

### Specific services provided included:

- External infrastructure design including highway, drainage, and street lighting.
- Role of Principal Designer.
- Environmental pre-planning and planning support – ecology, noise, archaeology, and flood risk assessment.
- Geotechnical and geo-environmental investigations and design.
- Road safety audits.
- New and amended traffic orders.
- Support to WCMA on tender evaluation for construction procurement.



## Nationwide collaboration networks to share resources

A detailed understanding of an area's existing built environment is one of the foundations of an effective levelling up strategy. This means that very different levelling up approaches will be appropriate in different parts of the country, reflecting not just this built environment inheritance but factors such as geography, historic skills and the eco-system of businesses and institutions.

Different does not however mean unique and we believe that one underexplored opportunity is to facilitate a much greater sharing of resources and experience between areas pursuing similar strategies to meet similar needs. We believe such collaboration can also create a greater sense of shared purpose across all four parts of the UK that can help tackle the emotional aspect of feeling "left behind".

One barrier to such collaboration, is that these similarities don't map on to the traditional regional administrative structures and hierarchies. Remote rural areas of Devon and Somerset may have more in common with their counterparts in the North East and Mid Wales, than each do with urban Bristol, Cardiff, or Newcastle. The eight English freeports announced in the 2021 budget bring big levelling up opportunities, but they are distributed in all four corners of the nation.<sup>11</sup>

ACE has conducted some preliminary research to identify commonalities between different types of left behind places. This type of analysis can be used to create collaborative networks to support levelling up. Consultancies, with their experience of working across different places are well-placed to help create such networks, in the same way they support the ADEPT LiveLabs project, and are ready to help.

## An approach to characterising the built environment of left behind places

To demonstrate the potential of this approach ACE has carried out its own research into the patterns of need and opportunity in the four groups of areas identified by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) (see previously) as the most left behind in the UK.

Under these four headings: Post-industrial, Urban centres, Remote rural and coastal we

analysed a series of data sets on the provision and condition of social and economic infrastructure across local authorities in different parts of the country.

We hope this will help policy makers understand some of the differences in the built environment inheritance of different parts of the UK and to encourage collaboration between areas with similar needs.

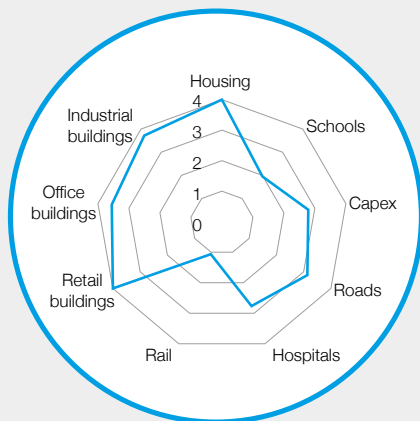


Figure six: Coastal

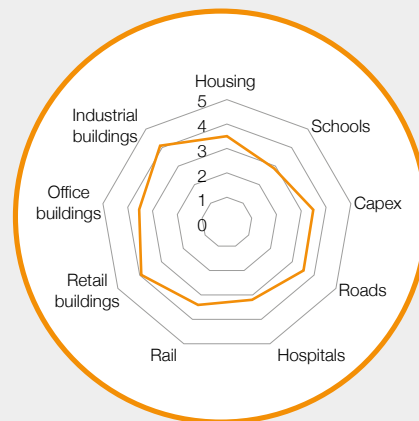


Figure seven: Post-Industrial



Figure eight: Rural

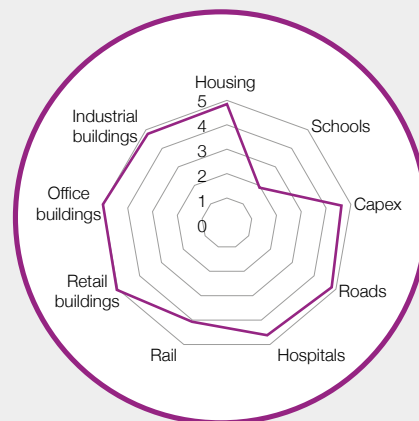


Figure nine: Urban

Please note that the locations and data sets are listed in the appendix to this report.

Even this initial analysis reveals some useful hints as to where patterns of need and opportunity exist. For example, across the coastal, urban and post industrial groups there is a strong legacy of industrial buildings. These are in various states of repair but represent a potential resource to be exploited, as our case study of the regeneration of Liverpool's Tobacco Warehouse demonstrates.

The analysis also points to a large inheritance of commercial buildings, though again, the decline of many traditional town centres, exacerbated by the pandemic means many are not being used. Our case studies of town centre regeneration in Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire and Yorkshire show how collaboration between local authorities and a consultancy business working across the UK can bring much needed investment and pride back to these places.

Outside of the urban areas studied connectivity is very dependent on roads and that the rural group of locations is very badly served even

on that measure. As our Transport for the South East case study shows, there may be opportunities to transfer learning on how digital infrastructure and more user-responsive services can help those areas.

In all areas, access to affordable housing is a challenge. Our case study of how ACE members have supported the Development Bank of Wales begin to unlock many small pockets of land for development, show the benefit of an approach that scales up many small schemes across a wide area.

These are initial thoughts based on a limited study. In some areas, particularly outside of urban centres good quality data was hard to come by, something all stakeholders need to collaborate to address. Those limitations aside, ACE members working as they do in all parts of the UK for many different authorities, stand ready to work with national and local government to facilitate the joint working and knowledge sharing that will be needed to make a success of levelling up.

## Making the most of industrial heritage

The regeneration of the Ten Streets area in Liverpool's historic Stanley Dock aims to leverage a rich legacy of industrial buildings to create a new cultural industry hub. Ten Streets is intended to help diversify the city's economy, creating 2,500 jobs, while meeting wider needs via new public spaces, cultural venues and transport infrastructure.

The Tobacco Warehouse is a key part of these plans. On its completion in 1901 it was the largest transportation warehouse in the world. The decline of the docks in the second half of the 20th century saw the warehouse alongside much of the rest of the Ten Street Area fall into dereliction.

The original purpose for which the building was designed – storing tobacco – created two huge barriers to repurposing the warehouse. First the building suffered from very little natural light and second the height of each of the 11 stories was limited to the height of 2 stacked barrels of tobacco,

roughly the height of a standard modern door. These challenges were so severe that studies had suggested that demolition of this landmark structure was the most viable option.

Civil and structural engineers **Sutcliffe** have worked alongside architects Darmody to execute a design that creates three new light wells to open up the interior space to use. This is complemented by a series of structural interventions to create a series of 2 story live-work units, each with their own double height space. Externally civil engineering works are also progressing to connect the building to the Mersey Heat District Heat Network, bringing in co-benefits for Net Zero.

This structural engineering and design expertise has unlocked a £100m project delivering 550 new apartments and 100,000 square feet of commercial space as part of the wider regeneration effort.





## Plugging capacity gaps to revive town centres

The ex-industrial towns of Sutton and Kirkby sit in the district of **Ashfield** in Nottinghamshire. Both have suffered decline since the demise of the local textile and mining industries. One consequence has been an increasing number of empty or derelict sites in their town centres that owners and developers have been unwilling or unable to make investments on a commercial basis. The district council, unlike some of the larger authorities in the area did not have the resources to develop oven ready schemes.

Since 2018 ACE member **Gleeds** has been working with Ashfield District Council to help plug that capacity shortfall. This work began with support for master planning, including the assessment of options for a series of development sites in Sutton and Kirby. Gleeds then developed a set of delivery models that

have allowed regeneration schemes to go forward with a level of risk acceptable to the Council. Finally, in this front-end stage, the business took ownership of developing a business case compliant with HM Treasury's Green Book.

This business case unlocked an initial £10m of funds for regeneration schemes in the two towns. Gleeds continued to support Ashfield, including working on its Towns Fund initiatives, which in June resulted in the granting of up to £62m, almost double the size of the next biggest Towns Fund Deal.

This investment in the physical infrastructure of the towns will meet a variety of local needs around employment, connectivity, housing, leisure, carbon reduction and health.

## Helping the public sector engage more effectively

Consultancies have a unique mix of planning, design, economic, design and project delivery skills that can be deployed to support level up. In June 2021, ACE launched **Consultancy 4.0**, a campaign to help clients and consultancies engage and collaborate more effectively.

The campaign sets out the different roles that consultancy businesses can play through the whole lifecycle of a levelling up scheme from strategy, through solution definition and delivery and on into operations.



## Town centre regeneration

High Streets are an important part of Britain's built environment heritage and historically have been at the centre of many town's economies. Long term decline, the rise of internet shopping and the pandemic have all taken their toll, denting not just local economies but also pride and well-being.

Regenerating and repurposing high streets has therefore been a recurring theme in the levelling up debate. Recent work backed by the Towns Fund and the Future High Streets fund show what can be achieved. They also demonstrate the variety of capabilities that consultancy can deploy to support public sector partner.

In Doncaster, **Gleeds** have played a key supporting role, providing cost management services in support of an application to the Towns Fund that secured £24.8m. This helped the borough council refresh its masterplan which includes a focus on a gateway site adjacent to the town's railway station. The redevelopment will provide a new arrival experience to visitors to Doncaster including an expanded public square, site ready development plots for commercial and leisure use, alongside new office space and a repurposing of the historic Grand Theatre

Gleeds work underpinned a cost benefit analysis and business case for the successful Towns Fund bid, which is in turn

stimulating further private investment. The £24.8m received is kick starting the levelling up process in the town with expected benefits around jobs and skills, economic uplift, health and crime reduction.

In Nuneaton, Gleeds are also providing these cost and project management services for Abbey Street Development which is a bold and exciting regeneration in this traditional market town. This £55m project has secured contributions from the Future High Street and Town's funds to support the innovative Transforming Nuneaton vision which changes the focus of the declining town centre which is overshadowed by its neighbours, Warwick, Leicester, Leamington, Coventry and Birmingham.

The Local Authority has taken privately owned land and buildings into public ownership to put the local authority at the centre of the regeneration process. This involves the identification of some key parts of its built environment heritage, including the former Co-Op department store as the focal point of the scheme. The scheme will use well known and well loved elements of the town centre to provide new public spaces and walkways. A goal of the project is to help the town centre diversify away from a traditional retail offer that has been in decline. To catalyse this diversification the proposals include a cinema, a food hall and hotel, as well as shops and business space.



## Sharing resources between places

The Self Build Framework by the Development Bank of Wales is an example of the potential of an approach that shares resource across a range of places with similar needs and opportunities.

There are many places across Wales that need to provide access to affordable housing and home ownership. These same places also often share an inheritance of many small pockets of under-developed or unused land. The framework offers support to local authorities and housing associations across the whole of Wales.

ACE member **Burroughs** are one of the specialist planning and civil engineering advisors acting on behalf of the Bank to identify blockers to the viability of these land parcels. Burroughs are working to identify and resolve any issues and where a site is viable supporting it through the early planning and consenting process.

A wide range of support is being provided including town and country planning, planning history, land ownership searches, site planning & master planning, land valuation and assessment of site commercial viability, and primary engineering and buildability assessment.

Where projects go forward the framework will support work to further define the constraints to the site and create a bespoke Plot Passport for the development, whilst obtaining early advice from the Sustainable Urban Drainage Approval Body (SAB)

Authority and preparing the documentation for planning.

This will cover highway access requirements, site levels and material management planning, utility service diversions and provisions for the site and engagement with the SAB Authority. The sustainable drainage systems must be designed and built in accordance with the Statutory SuDS Standards published by the Welsh Ministers and then approved by the local SAB Authority. The principles required to be satisfied include run-off destination, hydraulic control, water quality, amenity and biodiversity and need to be considered during construction, operation and maintenance.

Burroughs are currently supporting **Swansea County Council** with a site in Wychtree Road in central Swansea, that will release four new development plots. It is a brownfield site, that, as a consequence of the SAB legislation and guidance will now benefit from proposed rainwater harvesting in the form of water butts, soakaway surface water drainage local to source, permeable parking and adjacent wildflower soft landscaping. It is also protected through design and design check from extreme flood events while having no impact on the adjacent areas.

In the past these elements would have been a “nice to have” but with this forward-thinking legislation these aspects become integral to design right from the start.



# Appendix

ACE has sought to develop an indicative way to compare the built environment stock across different localities. The aim is to identify the built environment characteristics of different types of place and the degree of overlap in the challenges they face.

The analysis has been drawn from publicly available data although challenges around definitions and geographical boundary inconsistencies for some of the data mean that the results should be treated as illustrative.

## Types of places:

An analysis of the IFS study referred to in the report suggests that the localities identified by the IFS as 'left-behind' fall into four separate types: urban; coastal; postindustrial and remote rural. For the purposes of our research we examined the available data five different example places for each of the four categories. Where possible each of the places looked at was specifically identified as 'left behind' in the IFS report.

## Places included:

- Remote rural: Fenland, Northumberland, East Lindsey, Craven, North Norfolk.
- Post industrial: Bradford, Wakefield, Barnsley, Wigan, Stoke-on-Trent.
- Urban centre: Liverpool; Birmingham; Manchester; Newcastle upon Tyne; Leicester.
- Coastal: Hartlepool; Blackpool; Torbay; Great Yarmouth; Gosport.

## Data used:

The data analysed was a basket of measures covering several different types of both public and private built environment (housing, roads, commercial buildings, schools). Where possible the data used reflected the accessibility of the built environment as well as its volume. Data sets used included:

- Road length per hectare.
- Average number of selected rail stations within 30 minutes by public transport.
- Dwelling stock density by local authority district, dwellings per hectare MHCLG 2020.
- Stock of retail non-domestic properties per hectare, England and Wales 2020.
- Stock of industry non-domestic properties per hectare, England and Wales 2020.
- Stock of office non-domestic properties per hectare, England and Wales 2020.
- Capital expenditure per capita.
- Travel time in minutes to nearest hospital by public transport/walking.

## Contributors

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Midland Metro Alliance  
Ramboll  
Renewables First  
RSSB  
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Tideway  
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## ACE's policy reports

### Project Speed briefings

A series of briefings released in February 2021 exploring how to boost delivery of hospitals, schools, housing and rail featuring a range of case studies from across the industry.

### Are we ready?

A joint report from ACE and EIC exploring how advanced the built environment sector is on our Net Zero journey published in December 2020.

### Five Capitals

An ACE discussion paper on a new approach to procurement published in April 2020 and how it can deliver outcomes focused on different definitions of value, notably around sustainability.

### Scrapping the Levy

This October 2018 report explores the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and analyses its expenditure by local authorities across England and Wales.

### Unlocking Housing

The third report in a series on housing looks at ways to invigorate local communities through the concept of placemaking was released in June 2018.

### Funding Roads for the Future

A January 2018 report exploring options to make the road network more sustainable in light of decreasing fuel duties, notably through the introduction of dynamic road user charging.

To download these and more please visit:  
[www.acenet.co.uk/policy](http://www.acenet.co.uk/policy)

# About ACE

**ACE is the association for the UK's professional consultancies and engineering companies operating in the social and economic infrastructure sectors.**

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) champions infrastructure and the built environment to government and other stakeholders, representing the views of around 400 members.

Our members employ over 60,000 in UK and 250,000 worldwide, contributing more than £15 billion to the UK economy. However, the buildings they create actively contribute over £570 billion a year of GVA.

They have worked on some of our most high-profile infrastructure and projects to date including Crossrail, Tideway, HS1 & 2, the Queensferry Crossing and Heathrow Terminals 2/3 and 5.

They provide solutions to some of our biggest challenges – How do we design a Net Zero future? How do we create opportunity for communities across the devolved nations and level-up regions? How can we kickstart growth and jobs on a path to economic recovery? How can we deliver more social value?

Our practical approach means we are ideal partners for government, working at the heart of policymaking for the benefit of infrastructure and construction. On behalf of our members, we champion the built environment at every level – from Westminster to the metro-mayors and everyone in between.

Our vision is for a political, economic and commercial environment that enables consultancy and engineering businesses to thrive and make the world a better place.

## Further information

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# Endnotes

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