



GROWING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER

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*This is an expansion of the chapter **Mobilising Support to Build Our Future** in the anthology **Ordinary Hope: A New Way of Changing Our Country Together**.*

Ordinary Hope is a partnership between UCL Policy Lab and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, facilitating deep relationships to support social and economic change.

IMAGINE IF WE FELT CONFIDENT, NOT SCARED, ABOUT THE FUTURE.

Imagine if we all pitched in to make our hometowns thrive. Imagine if we were respected for our contribution and backed to get on with it. Imagine if the hometowns we love experienced growth which was about more than the money. Imagine if our neighbourhoods were buzzing with people and with nature. Imagine if we were proud of the legacy we were leaving for our grandchildren and knew we had played a part in creating it.

The Ordinary Hope project shines a light on the latent potential that exists in communities across the UK and proposes a new approach to social policy that is rooted in respect, relationships and a rebalancing of power to people and communities who understand the issues and are rolling up their sleeves to fix them.

This belief is at the heart of Our Future's work. We think it is time to look at things differently, change the patterns of the past and write a new story - one in which the future benefits all of us and where we can all thrive in the hometowns we love. To do this we need to be realistic about what it takes to operationally deliver change.

The UK is on the cusp of a green transition which will generate huge wealth and opportunity. The Climate Change Committee estimates that it will take £50bn of investment per year until 2050 to reach net zero.^[1] However, as a country we haven't managed economic transitions well. Previous transitions have created winners and losers. There are parts of this country that are still suffering from the loss of industries in the 1980s. This isn't just about the loss of jobs but also about the loss of friendships, identity, hope and power. This loss is shown in every marker of quality of life.^[2] We are a country of widening inequality where your health, education and even mortality are determined by where you live. Traditional approaches have repeatedly failed to address the systemic challenges that the de-industrialised communities face.^[3]



[1] <https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sixth-carbon-budget/>
[2] The Marmot Indicators their public health successors provide a useful quantitative basis for quality of life including mortality, employment, education as well as life satisfaction
[3] <https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/blog/levelling-lessons-history/>



We know that an alternative is possible, because we see it starting to happen. Over the past two years, Our Future has been testing and developing a new approach in Grimsby. Citizens are mobilising around the football club to build a positive future through community-led housing, the green economy and citizen-led change. For example, our friends at East Marsh United brought together residents in their neighbourhood who wanted change and saw that no one was coming to help. They have now bought ten homes to lay the foundations of their future, reclaim power back from absentee landlords and ensure that residents have safe, healthy homes where they can thrive. There is a drive for this to grow. In October we brought together 70 people from across the town and country who want to seed and scale community led housing in their neighbourhoods. These leaders were from every sector, keen to participate in and contribute to making this positive change reality.

Alongside developing a collective to show what is possible in Grimsby we have also been designing an operational and financial model to support this change nationally. Both the long-term support and the long-term funding are central. This new approach creates a platform for all of us to contribute to building a positive future and backs communities across the country to create a future they believe in.



THIS PAPER LAYS OUT A ROUTE MAP TO BRIDGE FROM TODAY TO TOMORROW:

1 THE DESTINATION

2 PRINCIPLES BEHIND A NEW APPROACH

3 HOW TO OPERATIONALLY DELIVER IT

1. THE DESTINATION



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A place that gives us a choice. Honest opportunities, fulfilling jobs, pathways to stay, and to thrive here. A reachable ambition of security, stability, a place where people want to raise families, a place where residents don't live in fear", where "people spend quality time outdoors, socialising, and children explore and learn in nature", and "older and younger generations build meaningful relationships."

At the moment, we lack a sense of common direction which makes things feel more desperate. Not only is today hard, but there is no sign of a way out, no light at the end of the tunnel.

The starting point must be a shared vision of the future we want. This is not a dry mandate from Westminster but a living vision that we all own, that touches our hearts, our identity and builds on the strata of history laid down in the places we belong to. A vision for who we can be for each other and ourselves. These are the visions that will sing to us and give us hope.

In Grimsby, we worked with school children to create their stories and pictures of the future, had workshops with community leaders and worked with a Grimsby-based writer and an artist to create a sense of the future. We have heard that the future is a place where people flourish:

These themes of flourishing, thriving, opportunity and connection align with the academic evidence of what makes a good life.^[4] Although each community will have a different emphasis on what is important, there appears to be strong agreement on the underlying direction. People want a good life where they have purpose, opportunities, security, belong, care and are cared for, have moments of joy and beauty.

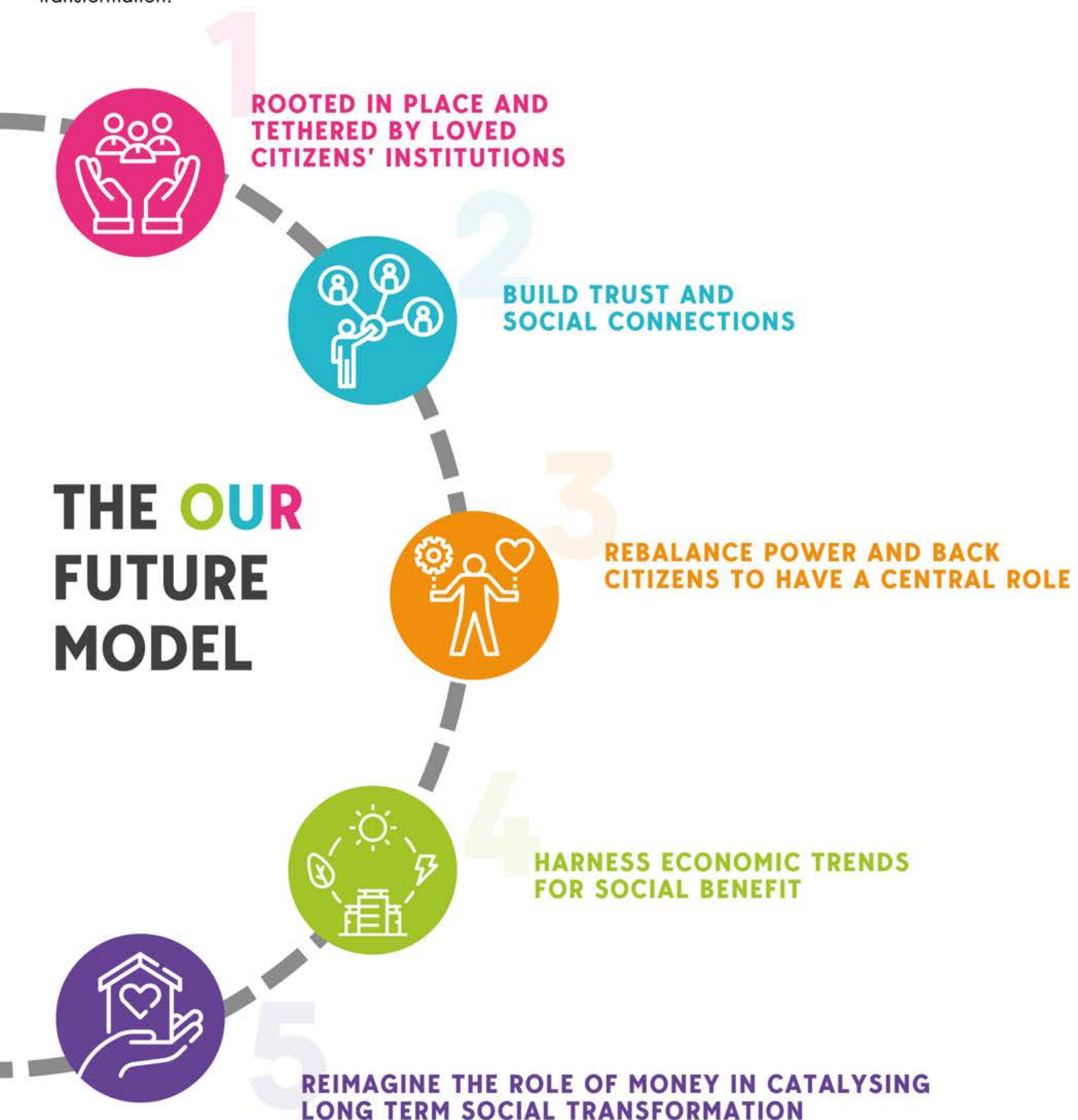


[4] Marmot M, Allen J, Boyce T, Goldblatt P, Morrison J (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review ten years on; Waldinger R, Schulz M (2023) The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Study on Happiness; Blue Zones

2. PRINCIPLES BEHIND A NEW APPROACH

To get to this flourishing future Our Future is dismantling the blockers that prevent people who love their hometown from building the economies, communities, and spaces that they want to see in their area.

We are working to demonstrate that an alternative way is possible. That a programme of national renewal could be delivered through a different model. One that grows within an area, builds interdependence and solidarity, backs local leaders, drives action, fosters entrepreneurialism, and connects the present to the future. The approach to change embodies the flourishing, relational future that is the end goal. Our Future is founded on five principles which have developed through our work in Grimsby, our practical experience and academic insight. These principles could form the foundation for our national transformation.





ROOTED IN PLACE AND TETHERED BY LOVED CITIZENS' INSTITUTIONS

Over time, economic dogma and a rational approach to strategy and operations has all but erased “places” from the agenda. National programmes and services are designed for efficiency but experience tissue rejection on implementation. They don’t “fit” with the landscape of where we live, who we know and the pattern of our lives. They prioritise efficiency over humanity, and result in neither.

For a long time, conversations about places and home were viewed as parochial. However, economists Esther Duflo and Abhijit Banerjee have shown the ‘stickiness’ of place. Even with rational economic reasons to leave, people have a commitment to their home and stay.^[5] This stickiness is demonstrated every day in our work – people are bound by a shared history and a pride in being from Grimsby. When people do leave, many want to find ways to connect to their hometown. In our work this has resulted in a “Home Wins” network of Grimsby diaspora, developed out of the football club, that enables people who have moved away from their hometown to engage in the positive project of creating a thriving future.

Transformative social change needs to start in an area and ensure that the arc towards the future is rooted in the history and identity of the place. We have seen how anchoring this change in existing civic infrastructure, the places people love and belong to, can significantly accelerate the work. Our Future in Grimsby is grounded by our partnership with Grimsby Town Football Club. This 145 year old institution brings together over 6,500 people at each game and is at the heart of the identity of the town. This partnership enables the love and belonging people feel for the club to be used to serve a wider social programme. EFL clubs provide a national infrastructure across this country to root the work of social transformation in a place that is central to people’s identity and has the power to galvanise action.



Beyond the football club, a successful approach needs to celebrate the place, its history and the promise of its future. This work is about belonging to our homes or hiraeth in Welsh. This is the fuel that powers the change and it should be both respected and harnessed. In Grimsby we partner with story tellers, artists and photographers to capture the change underway and work with local musicians and comedians to celebrate the town people love.



BUILD TRUST AND SOCIAL CONNECTIONS



We have fallen out of touch and out of trust with each other.^[6] In his book *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam charts the degradation of social capital in the US, within and between groups. He shows that this loss of social capital has long term consequences for addressing social issues, economic productivity and our wider health and wellbeing.^[7] In the UK, this degradation has been compounded by years of austerity which has stoked a culture of scarcity and competition between organisations. This scarcity has corroded the ties that bind us. A recent UK survey showed that people yearn for a closer, more connected society.^[8]

For the good life people dream of to become a reality we need to collaborate, none of us alone can do this but all of us have a piece of the answer. Trust and relationships are the life blood of these long-term collaborations. Our first priority has been to build a collaborative, relational, abundant culture. Inspired by social and community leader, David Robinson, we have used relationships as our first design and operating principle.^[9]

We have been astounded by the appetite for these new relational and trusting spaces. All of our recent public events have been oversubscribed, and we have had 865 attendees at our events since November 2022 (including repeat attendees).

These spaces have created "Better relationships, energy, belief, confidence."^[10] and we have been told that this new relational way of working has "changed everything" and ensuring that local leaders are "best placed for our own 'luck' to arrive".

[6] ONS recorded a decrease of 8 percentage points between 2014/15 and 2021 in the percentages of people agreeing that others in their neighbourhood can be trusted - Office for National Statistics (2021) Social capital in the UK April 2020 to March 2021

[7] Putnam R (2000) *Bowling Alone*

[8] Our chance to reconnect: Final report of the Talk project (2021) - 73% of people saying that they would like our society to be closer and more connected in future

[9] Robinson D (2023) *In conversation: Mayday Trust and Relationships Project*

[10] Feedback from an attendee at our November 2023 Celebration of Grimsby



REBALANCE POWER AND BACK CITIZENS TO HAVE A CENTRAL ROLE



Currently, most people living in de-industrialised communities are powerless to shape the decisions made about their areas. John Boswell, John Shillick and colleagues at University of Southampton write that deindustrialised communities are:

“...‘held back’ by a systemic lack of power. Local people have lost effective control over their lives, livelihoods, and the future development of their area, and are instead reliant on the discretionary power of various, often distant, decision makers... the challenges facing ‘left behind’ places go beyond particular deficits in employment, investment, or social infrastructure, and instead points to a more fundamental lack of power in the hands of local citizens.”^[11]

A new approach is needed to rebalance power to ensure that citizens are central to the long-term transformation of the places they love. Evaluations of place-led change^[12] have shown the benefits of trusting citizens, in an area, to own funding and deliver for their area.

Funding is just one element of the backing leaders need. Operationally, our goal is to create an ecosystem of support, bringing different worlds together, new expertise to the table and create a forum for collective change - proactively working to remove power asymmetries. We see everyone as a citizen of the place with an equal contribution to the change. We intentionally design interactions to reinforce our equality and shared humanity. One social leader mentioned that at one of our events;

“I was able to sit next to [senior politician] and we just talked about our lives. I’d never done anything like that before with someone in [their] position.”

In Grimsby we work alongside inspired leaders to bring complementary skills, either from our own team or from a national network of partners. For example, we worked with national communications agency The Change Arc who ran a series of workshops in Grimsby on how you can better tell your story and link it to a collective narrative. Partners at New Local and We’re Right Here came to share their experience and perspective on new ways communities and the council can work together. Over more than 10 events in 2023 we brought local and national partners together to find common cause, share expertise, build partnerships, and connect to resources.

We have recognised the power inherent in people coming together, supporting each other and sharing a vision for change. Within a relatively short period of time that has fostered new, positive relationships – one partner commented;

“One thing that kept coming up with people I spoke to was how the relationship between the community and the council had changed [in a] year.”



[11] Boswell J, Denham J, Furlong J, Killick A, Ndugga P, Rek B, Ryan M & Shipp J (2020) Place-based Politics and Nested Deprivation in the U.K.: Beyond Cities-towns, ‘Two Englands’ and the ‘Left Behind’
[12] Big Local (2022) ‘Our Bigger Story’ Evaluation of Big Local



HARNESS ECONOMIC TRENDS FOR SOCIAL BENEFIT

Social policy sits in a different bucket from industrial strategy and often reacts to the consequences of economic change rather than proactively working to ensure that economic opportunity delivers a wider social dividend. To create good growth we need to exploit the interconnectivity between industrial strategy and social policy.

The coming green industrial revolution which will be a far greater force than any government regeneration funding. In the Humber region there is forecast to be £15bn of private investment decarbonisation alone.^[13] As a country, reaching net zero will be worth up to £1 trillion to UK businesses in the years to 2030.^[14]

We have an opportunity to make sure it leads not just to economic prosperity but also flourishing communities. This is about more than jobs, it is about communities having a stake in the economic future, agency in the decisions that will shape their hometown, opportunities to be part of the upside and a sense of pride and shared identity in the emerging industries.



To do this we need to have business as an equal partner in this endeavour – reimagining the role of business and investment so that it works for local areas. We are developing a new approach to bringing businesses into a wider movement for change in the area. We are working on a model of what it means to be rooted in a local area in the 21st Century, and this year we will be collaborating with local businesses, employees, and business leaders to develop and demonstrate a new way of working between businesses, government, and local communities.

In Grimsby, we are starting with a blank piece of paper to develop new approaches that use money well. For example, we have been working with Sustainable Ventures, a leading Climate Tech Incubator, to understand the long-term green economy opportunities of the region and innovation models that could deliver locally rooted economic prosperity. Alongside this we have worked with legal experts to understand how traditional investment models can be adapted to benefit places over the long term.

Government and policymaking needs to enable and promote an equal and imaginative collaboration between citizens, business and state that backs places to thrive as we transition to a green future.

[13] Humber Industrial Cluster Plan (2023) Humber 2030 Vision

[14] HM Government (2023) Mobilising Green Investment: 2023 Green Finance Strategy



REIMAGINE THE ROLE OF MONEY IN CATALYSING LONG TERM SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Too often money blocks rather than enables change. It is designed by and for those holding the money. Many times, those driving social change do it in spite of the money rather than because of it.

Money is often siloed and tied to a single issue rather than recognising that this is holistic interconnected change.^[15] Leaders patch together money from a range of disconnected sources. One phenomenal community leader has had over 100 different funders to back the place-based change she is driving.

On top of this, in left behind areas there is less money, of every type^[16] – less investment funding,^[17] increased local government spending cuts,^[18] and less grant funding.^[19] When it does arrive, funding is generally short term when the solution is long term.^[20] This is not only inefficient it also breaks traction and trust - once again, people are promised something that doesn't arrive.



Money is often the tail that wags the dog. The requirements of the money define the plan – for example the margins of a housing developer drive the level of affordable housing made available and even where it is located. We need to start seeing money as a tool not a master. Let's start with the problem, the opportunity and the right answer. Then work out how different sorts of money can participate in delivering the solution being pragmatic about the fiduciary requirements on each pot of money.

For the money to work we have to move beyond our silos and bring together the deep knowledge and insights of citizens driving change, the policy knowledge of civil servants, the market knowledge of business leaders and the financial innovation of impact investors. If these stakeholders come together, with shared purpose and from a place of mutual respect, we could develop a broader range of financial tools that achieve more impact, develop long term sustainability and exit routes from the initial government funding.

[15] LankellyChase (2017), Historical review of place-based approaches

[16] <https://www.ippr.org/files/2023-01/looking-out-to-level-up-state-of-the-north-2023.pdf>

[17] businesses outside London having less likelihood of raising equity funding (up to 50% lower) and raising significantly less money (35% lower in Yorkshire and Humberside) Wilson N, Kacer M, Wright M, BEIS Research Paper Number 2019/012 (2019) Equity Finance and the UK Regions: Understanding Regional Variations in the Supply and Demand of Equity and Growth Finance for Business (data from 2011-2016)

[18] Local councils have been hit the hardest, with the net expenditure per person having fallen ~31% since 2009, compared with ~16% in the least deprived areas.

"Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On," The Health Foundation. <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

[19] During Covid, research showed that left-behind communities received around a third of the Covid grants of other communities in the UK - APPG Left Behind

Neighbourhoods (2020) Communities of trust: why we must invest in the social infrastructure of 'left behind' neighbourhoods (<https://www.appg-leftbehindneighbourhoods.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Communities-at-risk-the-early-impact-of-COVID-19-on-left-behind-neighbourhoods.pdf>)

[20] Bridgespan's 2017 report, Audacious Philanthropy, provides perspective on this challenge. They reviewed fifteen examples of large-scale change and found that 90% of the efforts took more than 20 years to achieve (the median was 45 years)

3. HOW TO OPERATIONALLY DELIVER IT

The desire to unlock the potential of communities is not a new one. For decades politicians have talked about backing communities to drive change. In recent memory, we have had David Cameron's Big Society and Labour's New Deal for Communities. These are the latest of countless government initiatives. Back in 1975 the government's Urban Aid programme was criticised for not taking the;

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“opportunity for real power-sharing and giving responsibility and hope to those without either, the Government insisted on making the operation as bureaucratic and as one-sided as possible.” ^[21]

The part that has confounded policymakers is how to operationally deliver the change. How to create the lightning rod to channel the community energy and our collective desire to participate.

To get there we need to do things differently, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. Yes, more money is needed but this is just one ingredient in the alchemy of change. The missing ingredient has been a different approach and the infrastructure to support it. Previous approaches have been agnostic about the process, beyond rules about governance, value for money and financial management. They have cared about where money is allocated and what it is spent on but not on who leads, decides, owns and how this work is done.

Embedding and sustaining success requires a more thoughtful process. This takes longer and involves moving at the pace of the community. This is not about fitting a pre-agreed schedule drawn up by the Treasury, or even by a Local Authority. Real citizen collaboration needs patience, curiosity, love and courage as well as cash. It needs an openness to move in directions that cannot be foreseen at the outset and cannot be determined from afar. This lack of centralised control feels scary and is essential if we are going to crowd in our collective participation, unlock innovation across our country and make public money go further.

On top of this, we need models that can work across the country. The change underway in Grimsby is important but we will have failed if it ends there. Too often in social policy we have beautiful, one-off projects that have not scaled their impact. Speaking to people from deindustrialised communities around the country we hear of similar issues and a desire to build a national collective with resources to make change. A friend in Lancashire commented that “The story of Grimsby is the story of Burnley, is the story of Preston, is the story of Wrexham”.

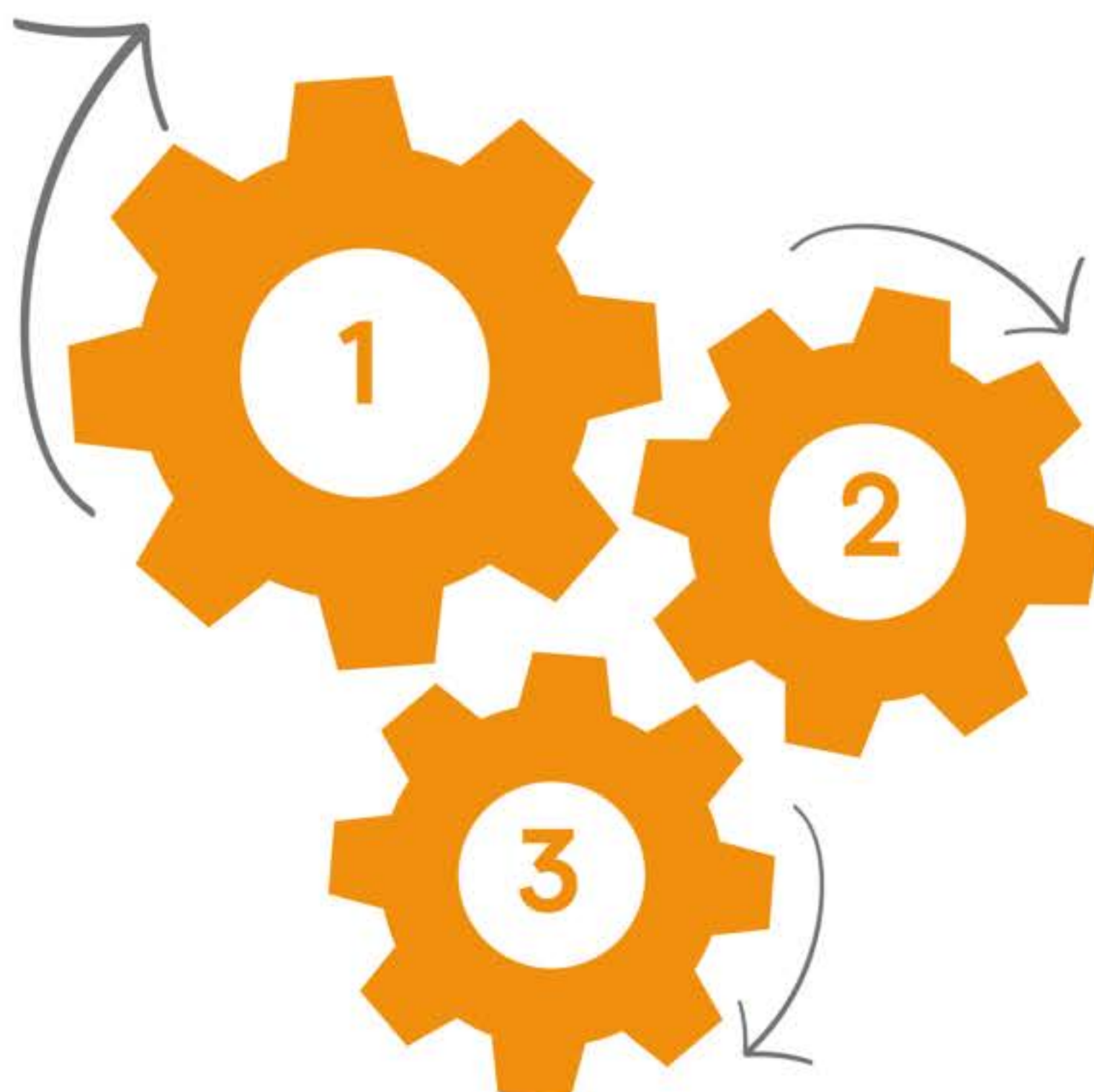
We need a national response that has the right leadership, ethos and infrastructure to support place-driven change.

The operational manifestation of the five principles described above. This would include three interlinked elements:

1) Citizens' Institutions for the Future

2) A locally led Endowment for the Future

3) A national partner to bridge national and local



[21] Mr Anthony Steen Hansard: URBAN AID PROGRAMME, HC Deb 04 December 1975 vol 901 cc2032-64
[<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1975/dec/04/urban-aid-programme>]

CITIZENS' INSTITUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE



The heart of this work is a new way of working, coming together and participating. This needs to grow out of the places we belong to and be enshrined for the long term. Citizens' Institutions for the Future would create and foster a local ecosystem to support the transformation of places.

Building these institutions out of existing, loved civic infrastructure can build on what already exists and provide rocket fuel to the work. Football clubs, or Rugby clubs, play a distinctive role bringing together people from every walk of life, with a shared love of their hometown and a sense of common cause. At the Football we are all equal, we take off our "work hat" and our status and embrace shared experience. For many, the relationship with their football club is the longest relationship in their life. A football club provides a natural continuity between the history of a town and its future.

Citizens' Institutions for the Future can build on the love for a football club to create a platform for wider participation in the renewal of our communities.

They can create a new ecosystem with:

- A citizen-led vision for the future
- A network of citizens who trust and support each other, believe in the future of the town and are willing to roll up their sleeves to make it happen
- A wider network of support and expertise
- Clear routes to participate in the change underway
- Ongoing communication about the change underway to show that change is possible and happening
- A place for national actors – policy makers, social investors, national grant funders – to connect into and support the transformation underway in a place and have honest conversations about what is and isn't working

Practically, Citizens' Institutions would back people building the future. They would understand the dreams and visions of citizens to both support them today with the right skills and expertise and build investment propositions to create a more sustainable local funding ecosystem.



A LOCALLY-LED ENDOWMENT OF THE FUTURE

Alongside the Citizens' Institution, each area should be supported with money that can harness the opportunities, multiply impact and demonstrate that a positive future is possible.

A £30m *Endowment for the Future* in each deindustrialised town would be catalytic. This citizen-led 10-year funding pot could harness a range of financing vehicles to drive change. This money is both a lot and not enough. What it is, is a starting point to get a flywheel of change moving. If used well, this money can seed new partnerships and models between citizens, business and government. It can enable new approaches, demonstrate that different is possible, build a track record and crowd in other public, private and philanthropic money.



In Grimsby we have worked with citizens from every sector to understand the demand, opportunities and barriers and how money could unlock change.

For example, a £30m ten-year endowment could support:

- £10m blended grant and social investment funding to enable community led housing to scale across the region and to grow within neighbourhoods. This funding would transform neighbourhoods by ensuring that good quality homes with caring landlords, more stable tenancies and a sense of community investment in their neighbourhood. This would bring social investment funding and national social investment expertise to a neighbourhood level. By building a track record, over the long-term groups and areas will be able to access mainstream investment to support this work.
- £10m of grant funding to back inspired community leaders who are already driving long term change in their areas and to support neighbourhoods through community plans, which would be participative processes to reimagine and build the future. We are collectively starting the first one this year to show what is possible. This is about backing the community groups in our neighbourhoods and ensuring they have the resources they need to drive change. This locally led, participative approach may crowd in action from every sector. We will measure the impact of this approach and if it is more effective it could be a better use of public money.
- £10m of grant and equity funding to support the development of the green economy in a way that benefits current and future residents of the town. We are currently developing an initial proof of concept of this model with partners in Grimsby. This is a real collaboration between green economy businesses, public sector leaders, legal specialists, communities and financial experts to design a new model that delivers social and financial returns and could provide ongoing funding for the wider work.

It is likely that some of these structures, partnerships and funding models would be directly transferable to other towns shortening the learning curve. However, we should avoid the temptation to short cut the work of listening, learning, building trusting and responding to the opportunities and entrepreneurial energy in a place.

A NATIONAL PARTNER TO BRIDGE NATIONAL AND LOCAL

The centre of gravity of this work is the places we belong to and the hometowns we love. However, a national partner would bring additional support to embed a new way of working, spark new partnerships and ensure that the money lands well and achieves impact. This would sit alongside, not above, citizens institutions. The national body's role would be to support citizens to establish anchor institutions in their towns, embed the five principles and would also support places to be propositional – convening unlikely actors to bring their expertise alongside citizens to reimagine how funding can galvanise long term change in place. It would also build learning and community across areas, generate evidence to inform policy and investment and connect places into national networks and resources.

It is time for a new future and a new approach.

We need to stop colouring between the lines given to us by previous generations and reimagine the possible. Our Future works with inspired people up and down this country who are rolling up their sleeves and getting on with building the future without asking for government's permission. What would happen if government saw their role not as a gate keeper but as an enabler and backer? Think of the energy and transformational change that would unleash. Imagine the Britain we could build together and the future we could hand to the next generation.



AUTHOR: EMILY BOLTON

Emily Bolton founded and leads Our Future, based on her belief that a better future is possible and her practical disposition to get on and make things happen.

Emily has a long record in social innovation in the UK and US. She has founded or co-founded several organisations and partnerships that have created lasting widespread change. This includes setting up the first Social Impact Bond in Peterborough Prison and The Drive Project which has catalysed a national response to perpetrators of domestic abuse. She has a deep understanding of the strategic, financial and operational requirements of delivering change both on the ground and systemically.

Emily is part of the UCL Policy Lab's Ordinary Hope core group working to spark national renewal by unlocking the potential of people across our country.

Emily believes in the importance of joy to all of our lives. She is a board member of Matthew Bourne's New Adventures – bringing joy, connection and wonder through dance.



Our Future is an organisation that unlocks the potential and power of leaders in communities across our country to build a flourishing future.

Our Future believes that the green transition can be a reason for hope and we can harness it to create lasting change. Our Future has developed a new approach to community transformation that is based on leading academic thinking, decades of work in social change and is being piloted in Grimsby.



Acknowledgements

This essay is the culmination of many years of both doing and reflecting. In this work I have been inspired by friends and partners from every sector who are rolling up their sleeves and creating the world they want to live in. This learning is very much a collective effort.

Most important of all are the Our Future coalition in Grimsby and NE Lincs who we work alongside to build a flourishing future, learning along the way. I am so thankful to them for the generosity with their insights, willingness to get stuck in and for their friendship and belief in what could be possible.

I am also incredibly grateful to our partners at UCL Policy Lab and in particular the Ordinary Hope group who have believed in the work we are doing from the outset. We so enjoy walking this path with them. An edited version of this essay appeared in [Ordinary Hope: A New Way of Changing Our Country Together](#) with the full piece on the [Ordinary Hope website](#).

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ACTION BOLD IN HOPE AND BOLD IN SCOPE



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