



# POSITIVE, PROGRESSIVE PLACE-MAKING

Insights from the first decade of 3LE for  
great leadership of places in the 2020s

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# FOREWORD

I worked as a senior public servant, with a development economics entry point, for over 25 years. My last eight years (2000-2008) were as Chief Executive (CEO) of first a large metropolitan local authority and then a Regional Development Agency (EEDA). I left EEDA in late-2008 determined to focus the next stage of my professional career on “stimulating work in dynamic places with interesting people”.

Third Life Economics (3LE) was established to pursue this goal. This publication is partly about telling 3LE’s story and providing a testament to that endeavour.

It is not a comprehensive account of all 3LE’s 2010s activity and impact. Apologies to those who have played important roles but may not be referenced. However, in recording some highlights from 3LE’s first decade, I have also attempted to consider their relevance and insights to the challenges facing ambitious places and institutions as we move into the 2020s. I have struggled with how to badge this narrative. Is it primarily reflective of the 2010s or forward-looking to the 2020s? Is it glass-half-full or half-empty in terms of the progress made in the last decade and

the prospects for the future? Are places overwhelmingly controlled and corrupted by context or can they leverage it to craft their own confident, distinctive futures?

Perhaps my greatest struggle, though, has been the timing of this piece - written in December 2019/January 2020 before the pandemic, but being published in the midst of the crisis.

Ultimately, I have chosen reflections on the past that can be presented as a forward-looking, glass-half full agenda for LEADERSHIP of ambitious places and their key institutions. Managing the uncertainties and turbulence of what may well turn out to be a torrid decade might comprise much, even too much, of the ‘day job’. But doing it well requires a ‘positive, progressive’ sense of where our places are going and how we can set about trying to get there.

**So – with a deep intake of breath, and mindful of the need for humility – I am proud to present ‘Positive, progressive, place-making’ as a contribution to agendas for ‘great leadership of place’ in the 2020s.**

Cities, towns, regions, and their institutions – public, private and third sector – should approach steering and navigating through the grand and the tactical challenges of the 2020s positively. They can choose to define and deliver changes with enlightened, open-minded, dynamic, creativity – progressive in both process and outcome terms.

One suspects the pandemic will be the defining factor of 2020-24, in a similar manner to how the Brexit virus defined 2015-19. Just as positive progressive place-making was required by our cities, towns and communities to navigate the post-referendum and Brexit, I believe it will be even more necessary, important and relevant in mitigating and then turning around ambitious places and their communities in the coming decade.

As I tried to do in the 2010s, I hope 3LE will play positive, progressive roles in some of those journeys. In that spirit, this report provides a starter to the stimulating work we can do together.



**David Marlow**  
**CEO Third Life Economics,**  
January 2020



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# Introduction and executive summary

In our first decade, Third Life Economics (3LE) has achieved metrics that suggest a relatively successful business. But, as impressive as the bare figures might be, key indicators of achievement should surely be about impact and relevance for the challenges and opportunities faced by places and institutions going forward. This digest, therefore, pulls out some of the highlights of 2009-19, focusing especially on those that might have particular applicability and adaptability for the 2020s.

Following the UK General Election 2019, the confirmation of the UKs still relatively blind withdrawal from the EU, and in the light of genuinely existential global challenges, not least the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

**what can places – cities, towns, regions and their communities – hope to do in the 2020s to deliver success? And, how do places and institutions even set about determining what success should look like?**

This thought piece is primarily intended for audiences who are leaders, managers and those passionate about their places in England. Whether in Government, local authorities, anchor or strategic institutions, place-based partnerships or community organisations, or even as a lay activist, the report outlines important agendas ambitious places should consider and resolve to deliver change. It suggests strategies and approaches from

3LEs portfolio that might be pertinent in pursuing those agendas. The paper, though, also seeks to be of broader interest beyond England, to those playing more indirect roles in place-shaping, or with a more place-blind policy development remit.

It condenses 3LE's first decade into five chapters each with a small number of issues that places, institutions, their leaders, staff and stakeholders need to think about as we begin our journeys through the 2020s.

Each chapter explains why the topic matters and how addressing it can contribute to place and institutional success. It illustrates this with insight and lessons from 3LEs work in key issues integral to this topic. Each chapter concludes with themes places and institutions need to address going forward, specific 3LE project case work on the topic, and how we may assist and support clients, partners and colleagues in the future..

One might quibble with how topics and issues are presented or with boundaries drawn between and within them, but the report presents a discourse on how to set about delivering 'success' in the 2020s.

# 3LE 2009-19 – Illustrative Metrics



## 1. Business metrics

**325 invoices** raised for **55 paying clients** of whom **40 are repeat clients**



## 2. Reports Briefings and articles

- 12 academic publications: 8 'signature' reports for other institutions; and tens of interim and final project reports
- Over 50 LGIU policy briefings
- 135 Planning blogs
- 25 articles for The Guardian, MJ,LGC, WonkHE, RSA, and Manufacturing
- 83 personal blogs and 8 LinkedIn articles



## 3. Roles and responsibilities

- Consultant, researcher, interim and advisor
- Facilitator, trainer and mentor
- Visiting Profesor, Research fellow
- Chair and NED



## 4. Institutional relationships

- 31 LAs and 3 MCAS, 14 LEPs, 6LA associations and partnerships
- 11 Universities,
- EU and 8 other nations/ states
- 8 businesses
- 7UKG Department & NDPBS
- 6 Charities and social enterprises
- 4 economic development companies
- 14 associate/sub-contracting relationships



## 5 Conferences, events and workshops

- Around 40 major conference speeches delivered
- Over 100 workshops and other events chaired and/or facilitated

The **'Principal and Principles of Policy'** chapter suggests the preconditions and foundational options for a place and its institutions. Genuine choices exist about levels and scope of **ambition**. Selecting a preferred pathway requires detailed understanding of the **evidence** and creative **futures** thinking. Articulating the favoured solution demands an overarching, long-term **strategic framework** and plan.

**'Geographies of place'** in England and some other nations can be highly controversial and contested. Whilst the principals and principles may be universal, applying them will be highly differentiated in **cities**, city-regions and in **non-metropolitan** areas. 3LE has worked extensively in both. This chapter draws out more novel lessons for **small and mid-sized** geographies and for **intermediate tier** institutions. These are often overlooked in one-size fits all, place-blind national policies and programmes

Determining the principles of policy and the geography of place is much more about shaping **'Grand societal challenges'** than tactical responsiveness to what seems urgent and important in the short-term. This chapter illustrates 3LEs work on **demography** – especially the fundamentally different age profile issues in cities and non-metropolitan England. Local concerns for managing climate crisis may be exemplified in immediate declarations – but have to be underpinned by holistic long-term approaches to **eco-system vitality**. Economic and social change is definitely moving from a narrow quantitative focus on GVA and numbers of jobs – to a **digital economy** and society providing **good growth and good jobs** inclusively.

Realising place-based potential in practice requires effective **'Leadership and Governance'**. This chapter seeks to learn from England's approaches to **devolution, decentralisation and 'deals'**. Place-based leadership depends on **partnership working**. It needs to nurture and harvest the assets, capabilities and commitment of **communities, civic society and third sector**. But, in any enduring and epic journey, leaders will meet and engage with **heroes and villains**. Helping to manage these interfaces appropriately has probably been one of 3LEs most challenging contributions.

The fifth chapter looks at some of the **'Institutions and instruments'** with which 3LE has engaged in great detail. As the infographic that introduced this chapter illustrates, institutional relationships are very wide ranging. But the institutions section highlights 3LEs signature work with and on **universities and anchor institutions**. It then outlines evidence and examples of the importance of **loosener and disruptive challengers** in place-based leadership and management.

A concluding chapter – **'20 for the twenties?'** – summarises the argument and looks forward to the future.

Clearly this extended thought piece is not the whole and may even not be the majority of an agenda for the future. But hopefully at least some chapters will be thought provoking and helpful. 3LE is determined to play its modest part in the story of the 2020s. A first learning point will be in your feedback on and response to this paper. Whether you just want to start or continue a conversation – or wish to discuss taking a collaboration forward more substantively, please get in touch.



# CHAPTER ONE:

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Principal and principles  
of policy and place-based  
strategy



Photo by Alvaro Reyes on Unsplash

So much of 3LEs work is at the genesis of place-making – almost a prequel to the heavy lifting and business end of place-based strategy and management.

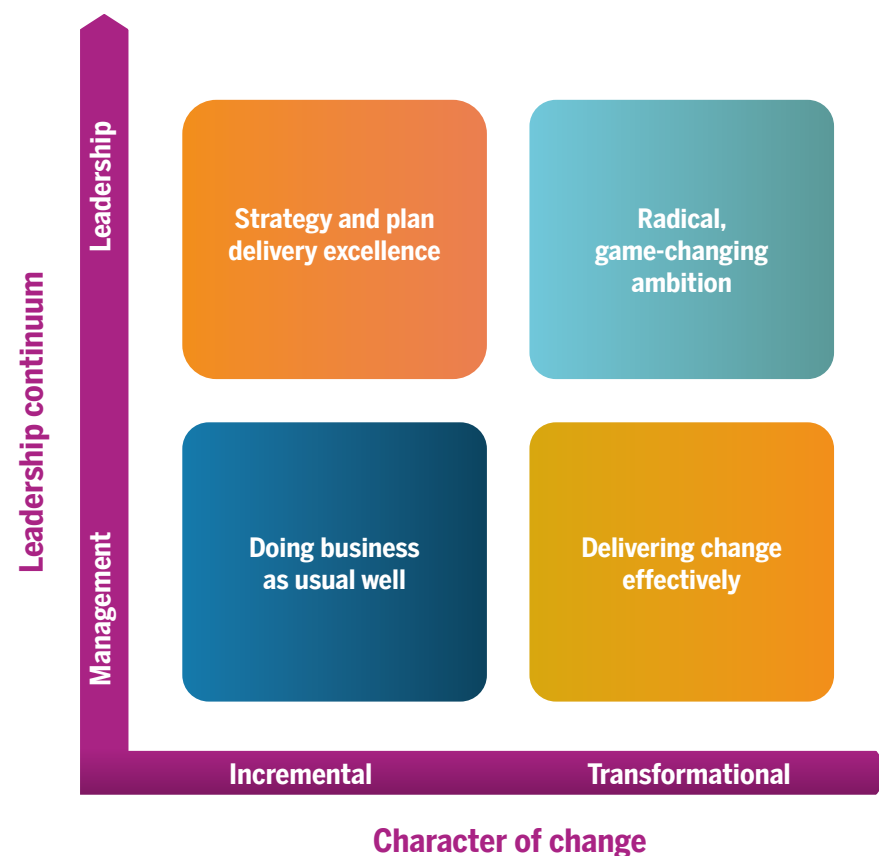
Determining the balance between transformational and incremental change is a primary choice for places and institutions. There is a legitimate strategic option to batten down the hatches and stick to the knitting to try and ride out impending turmoil and uncertainties. But there is also a compelling case this may not be tenable.

**If existential disruptive change is inevitable, better to recognise, embrace and try to shape it.**

Similarly, there are profound tensions between reacting to urgent immediate priorities and proactively taking a long-term strategic perspective.

3LE has operated in all four quadrants of *Figure One* – but has particularly majored on working with agendas for transformational leadership. This tends to gravitate towards four types of contribution, each explored in greater detail below. First is having the confidence to formulate and sustain **high levels of ambition**. Then, informing this with a rich **understanding of the evidence** and **structured futures thinking**. Finally, capturing and articulating the outcomes of these deliberations in a robust and compelling **strategic framework** or plan.

*Figure One: Preliminary foundations for place-based strategy*



Learning and lessons for these issues have come from major enduring, often embedded relationships – like the Lead Role in Cornwall, as Visiting Professor of Practice at Newcastle, and the more recent retained economic advisor to Saint Helena Government. This chapter showcases, among others, the major research project that produced the signature ‘Inclusive future growth in England’s City and Regions’ (2019). But learning is also evident in more traditional short-term consultancy commissions like the strategic recovery planning in UK Overseas Territories after the 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria, or the more extended business case work for the Smart Specialisation Advisory Hub. And even shorter sharper interventions like specific policy briefings for Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) can be rich sources of insight – exposing the extremely wide range of conditions and challenges facing different places in the UK.

Ultimately the chapter is titled ‘principals and principles...’ because

**places and institutions do need to carve out serious time – however distracting – to determine the major policies (the principal items) on which they wish to have an impact, and the underlying assumptions and values (principles) by which that impact should be defined and delivered.**

The sections below illustrate how 3LE can enable and support leadership teams to use this necessary time purposefully and productively.



### **The Eden Project**

*Not utopian - but Eden project is a flagship statement of Cornwall's 'green peninsula' ambitions*

## **1.1. Ambition, visioning and values**

Whether it's a place, an institution, a programme or a project,

**3LEs starting point for any intervention is to question and clarify the level of ambition and the consequential vision of what success looks like.**

There are almost always choices – of focusing on managing existing trends well, on game-changing transformation, on somewhere in-between.

3LE's first major commission – with the impending Cornwall unitary council in 2009 – had the entry point of designing and populating the structures and processes to deliver the new council's economic development roles and functions. But these had to be fit for purpose of the Council's ambitions for Cornwall as a long-standing region with a strong identity but a new strategic leadership institution.

The *figure* opposite – drawn from the incoming new Council's 'Green Paper' drafted by 3LE in Summer 2009 – has obviously evolved over the decade. But it remains relevant and foundational for Cornwall's long run ambitions. It also anticipates many themes that recur throughout 3LEs work, albeit adapted for each place and client's unique context.



Cornwall's distinctive vision is as a high-value, knowledge based 'Green Peninsula', delivered through a coherent mix of demographic, economic, environmental and socio-cultural ambitions with qualitative, quantitative and comparator dimensions.

Each of the goals generates game-changing intervention priorities.

3LE's relationship with Cornwall has continued throughout the decade – encompassing formal commissions like one of the strategic economic plans, or Cornwall's involvement in the Plymouth & Peninsula City Deal; but also informally with periodic meetings and discussions on topics where 3LEs work has read across to specific Cornwall issues.

Our ambition, visioning and values work is genuinely strategic, integrated, and explicitly transformational. 3LE has completed many other visioning and values interventions – and even drafted a second Green Paper in 2019 in a very different but coincidentally an extreme peripheral context with some read across – especially to the Isles of Scilly. Our relationship with Cornwall, though, will always be as special as the place is itself. 3LE seeks to build enduring relationships where our shared journeys will be delivered creatively, with enthusiasm and co-ownership, and most particularly with practical application. Clarifying aspiration is a crucial precursor to turning it into effective policy and practice.



**Figure Two:** Illustrative Cornwall 2009 Ambitions



## 1.2. Understanding and using the evidence

**Evidence-informed analysis is the key to better decision-making. It does not replace value judgements but enables them to be contextualised and increases the chances of successful implementation.**

3LE is a knowledge-based advisory and research practice. Our modus operandi rises to the challenges of interpreting data and intelligence to build a business case or propose practical options for the way forward.

An impending place-based policy workbook authored as part of the CURDS Visiting Professorship of Practice suggests places need to:

- Ensure the full range of economic, demographic, social, environmental and health statistics from traditional sources are collected and analysed
- Supplement these with selected non-economic data and relevant survey material, including sources from big data digital platforms and services
- Identify gaps in data and consider how to address these
- Look particularly into areas of variation either within the area or with national and regional averages, degrees of self-containment and permeability – ideally using consistent time series. This will help to

identify questions about performance that may need to be understood and addressed

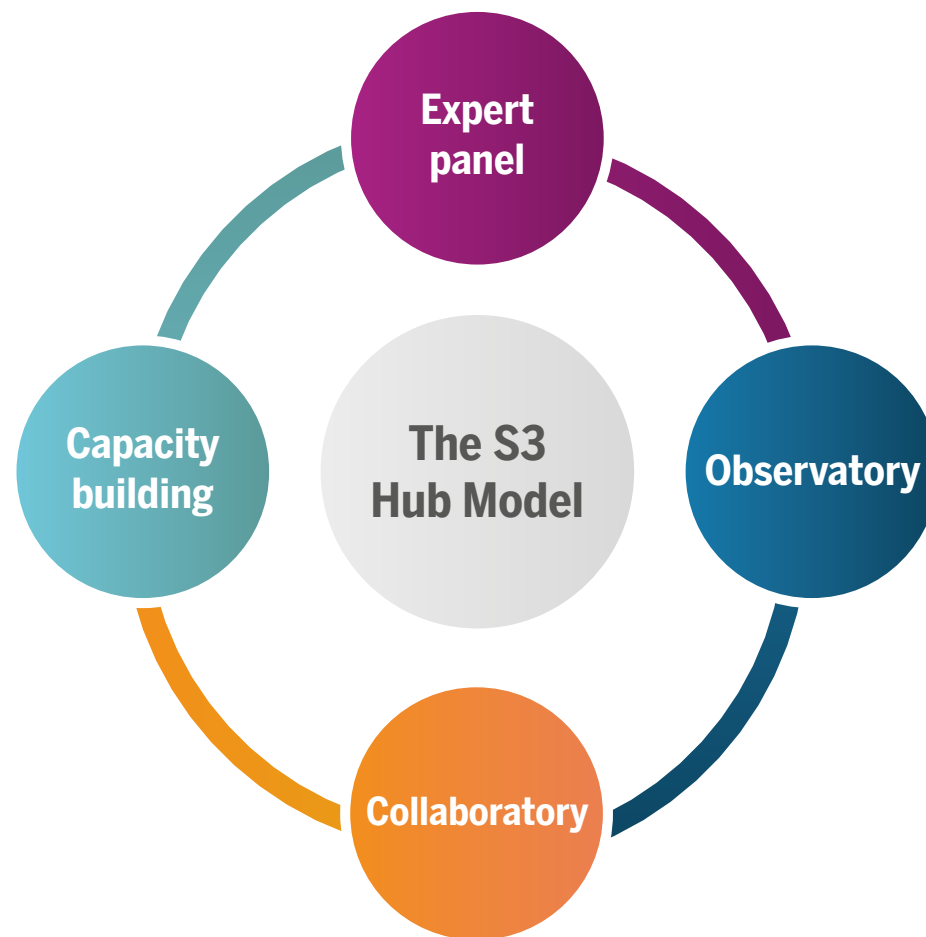
- Look at a range of existing index or composite measures that are readily available and/or construct a bespoke one. These indices or bespoke baskets of indicators are useful for raising additional questions and providing a framework for capturing ambitions and priority challenges
- Review whether the systems exist for keeping this data and intelligence live – e.g. Observatory functions – and usable – e.g. regular dashboards/performance reporting

The forthcoming workbook is a synthesis of many individual pieces of research and analysis conducted by Newcastle University's CURDS and partners. For 3LE understanding and using evidence is integral to every project – but the process itself ranges from composite policy briefings like the periodic reviews of local ONS statistics with LGIU, to projects to understand and review Urban Observatories, to establishing and business planning knowledge hubs.

3LE will continue to offer capabilities for these analyses to individual places and institutions, and also for the sector as a whole through periodic briefings.

At the institutional end of the intelligence spectrum, 3LE was part of the team specifying and setting out the business case for what became the Smart Specialisation Advisory Hub. This provided evidence-informed support to 2014-20 European Structural Fund (ESIF), related programmes, and place-based strategies more broadly. Our involvement comprised extensive investigation and inquiry of differential local and programme knowledge, research and intelligence needs. It analysed realisable and fundable demand for support to deliver ESIF compliant and well-founded place-based smart specialisation strategies, and options for its supply. The feasibility and business-case work built on specific 3LE and partner work on actual S3 evidence-informed strategies in LEP geographies, literally from the North-East to the South-West. It resulted in the establishment and operation of a highly-regarded facility for 2016-19 – and has been quite influential in shaping further local intelligence hubs and systems.

As cities and regions consider their intelligence requirements for the 2020s, this type of approach is contributing to the business case work for a Policy and Evidence Hub in Newcastle and the North East.'



**Figure Three:** *Conceptual Model for the S3A Hub*

## 1.3. Futures thinking and scenario planning

Delivering positive transformational changes is almost always a long term inter-generational 'project'. Place-based leadership teams need particular types of mind-sets to ask and answer 'futures' questions. For instance,

**those born in 2020 will celebrate their 30th birthdays in 2050. What sort of place do we wish to be for those people not yet born, or those not currently living or working in our area?**

Clearing our heads of the immediate and urgent is not straightforward. 3LE deploys many futures tools and techniques to help us do this – forecasting & back-casting, foresight and horizon scanning, scenario planning, road mapping etc. We have advocated, supported and provided evidence for setting up and operating serious structured exercises like independent Futures Commissions.

Futures scenarios should explore extrapolation of trends but also 'what if...', disruptive change and 'unknowns-type scenarios.



*Figure 4: A simple known/unknown futures framework*

Much attention is paid to 'smart city' approaches to development. 3LE's review with Newcastle University of the Urban Living Partnerships (ULP) pilot programme produced the '**Inclusive future growth in England's cities and regions**' report. Based on studies of eight places and their universities' contributions to development, it suggests six long-term preconditions for formulating and delivering smart AND inclusive 'Urban Living Partnership' strategies – illustrated opposite.

Smart city-type analyses can also be applied in non-metropolitan contexts – like the long term strategic recovery planning 3LE led in the three UK Overseas Territories (OTs) of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands (BVI) and Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI) in the aftermaths of the 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria; and the 2019 Saint Helena 2050 Green Paper – explored in greater detail in sections below.

The benefits of applying futures thinking to your place or institution are important and relevant, even if it seems time consuming and resource intensive in the midst of urgent crises or business-as-usual management. It gives perspective, fresh-thinking and allows the major challenges being faced to be contextualised, plans and programmes (even statutory strategic plans formally reaching into the 2030s) to be positioned for inter-generational change management.



**Figure Five:** *The futures-oriented Urban Living Framework*

## 1.4. Strategic planning frameworks, recovery and turnaround strategies

A sequential approach to the type of policy development described above might do the visioning, evidence review, and futures thinking, and then put it all together in some sort of aspirational prospectus and more detailed strategic framework and prioritised plan. These can be important documents – exemplified in 3LEs portfolios by many contributions to Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Strategic Economic Plans (SEPs), city and district blueprints.

The aspirational plan will continue to have a place in signalling and promoting (to potential funders/investors among others) what a place or institution wants to do, why it matters, how they will deliver and resource it, the key initiatives and big ticket interventions, important relationships and expectations of partners.

However, the 2020s will most likely also require different types of planning frameworks and strategies especially in the aftermath of short-term COVID19 crisis management.

Many places in the UK will experience profound, potentially even existential shock and crisis at some stage during the coming decade. Whether natural disasters, political and economic changes like fallout from Brexit, or societal pressure points, assumptions the process of change will be smooth, wholly positive, building on potential, will not always be the case.



*Crises come in many shapes and sizes - but never waste the strategic opportunity*





3LE founder's public service career has extensive experience relevant to strategic recovery planning – integrating this with vision-led development and transformation. This ranged from UK steel, coal and textile closures in the 1980s, to Montserrat's recovery planning after Hurricane Hugo, to urban regeneration and council reinvention in the most disadvantaged UK areas in the nineties, to leading the regional economic response to the 2005 Buncefield oil explosion.

Following Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017, 3LE led a joint FCO/DFID strategic recovery planning team to Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and Turks & Caicos Islands. The reports transitioned relief into long-term redevelopment and transformation plans – accepted by both UK and the OT governments.

The success of this exercise resulted in a 3LE Commission to conduct a 2018 independent economic review (IER) on St Helena. This considered radical alternative development strategies in the light of the new Airport operating at significantly lower levels of capacity than initially expected. The positive reception of the IER created the opportunity to draft the 2019 SH2050 Futures Green Paper. This codifies a new development trajectory for the island, supported by a radically different UK relationship.

In summary, many of the disciplines of visioning, prioritisation, futures scenario and contingency planning are foundations of 'good' strategic recovery planning and will be highly relevant to many if not most places in the 2020s. Indeed, these

**existential crises and traumas must be used as an opportunity for fresh thinking, refreshing visions and values, reviewing indicators of success, identifying 'big ticket' changes, and considering the means of delivering them.**

For places in the UK, they will also require intelligent and robust evidence-informed discussion, negotiation and reaching agreements with the UK national government.

## 1.5. Concluding remarks

The preconditions of presenting and thereafter incepting a long run strategic framework for a place or a key institution are amongst the most stimulating and important undertakings for positive progressive place-making. They require energy, focus and time that is often highly limited in the face of urgent important priorities. 3LE's goal is to provide tailored support that amplifies and makes the most of client and partner capacity and capabilities to determine these purposes.

### Among key lessons from the 2010s portfolio are:

- **Be aspirational:** Starting with 'outrageous ambitions' is always worth consideration even if the eventual published vision, plan and priorities are more pragmatic.
- **Always seek to 'punch above your weight':** Place-making outcomes should be set at qualities significantly above where we are today. Regions and cities need to have globally or at least nationally significant ambitions; towns for national or at least regional quality; communities defined as much for their wider roles as for their local purposes.
- **Understand and use the evidence (or lack of it) intelligently:** Eschew superficial explanations of crude averages. The keys to better place-making lies in differences and variations and testing propositions about this creatively and in novel ways
- **Think about what we wish to be known for in the long term:** Beyond the status quo, consider how future generations and current non-participants might be motivated to engage.
- **Address grand societal, economic, environmental and technological challenges:** Long term frameworks and plans should be about very big issues. Having grappled with these at this level, the findings will be relevant in shaping short and medium-term opportunities.

- **Be ready for contingency and recovery planning:** Ask lots of 'what-if?' questions. Build the partnership working and operating styles that will enable you to make the most of a crisis.

3LE does not underestimate what a slog large parts of the 2020's will be. Positive progressive place-making is hard at the best of times. Is it really sensible to put effort and resource into it now?

This is primarily a question for leaders of places and their key institutions. What the evidence of 3LE's first decade suggests, however, is that

**agreeing 'principals and principles' are motivational, reenergising exercises in their own right. Doing them will deliver more impressive outcomes in the long run and make the most of opportunities in the short-term.**

And 3LE will be delighted to be a partner in and contributor to delivering these results.

## Major 3LE interventions and projects referenced in Chapter One

- **Cornwall Economic Lead Role 2009-10:**  
Included producing initial 'Team Cornwall' and unitary council economic development configurations; 'Economic priorities and strategic intent' Green Paper; 'Single Conversation' Local Investment Programme; and county-region options for enhanced devolution
- **LGIU periodic Census and ONS statistical reviews 2012-19, LGIU Policy Briefings**
- **NELEP Smart Specialisation 2013,**  
Newcastle Science City
- **HotSWLEP Smart Specialisation 2014**  
(with Louise Kempton, CURDS)
- **Smart Specialisation Advisory Hub 2013-14:**  
Platform of support for England (CURDS, 2013) and SSAH Design and business case (NCUB, 2014)
- **Visiting Professor of Practice, CURDS,**  
Newcastle University, 2016-20
- **Strategic Recovery Planning in British Overseas Territories 2017**  
(Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Turks & Caicos Islands), DFID 2017
- **Saint Helena Green Paper 2019,**  
'SH2050: Our journey to enduring and sustainable success'
- **'Inclusive Future Growth in England's cities and regions' 2019, and Urban Living Partnerships pilot programme review:**  
Newcastle City Futures
- **Policy and Evidence Hub** - Business case and strategic plan, 2020:  
Newcastle University (with Urban Foresight)

# CHAPTER TWO:

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## Geographies of place



Photo by William Hook on Unsplash

Place-shaping and making self-evidently requires a sense of place. But, in many ways, specifying this is one of the most challenging conceptual issues facing sub-national leadership teams. Every neighbourhood or village has a local town, city, and probably region. Social, economic and environmental footprints almost always have overlapping, multiple administrative geographies.

At the same time, 'place-blind' national policies are one of the principal barriers to optimal place outcomes and a major driver of decentralisation and enhanced devolution. This needs to be set against strong national concerns over and sometimes aversion to 'postcode lotteries'.

3LE has worked at most scales of geography – literally from Norbiton Community Budget to participating in Global Education Dialogues and contributing to European innovation eco-systems development. We have put major effort into perennial questions about what interventions are done best at what levels of geography and governance, and how to incentivise and deliver effective alignment, collaboration and synergies up and down levels and across boundaries.

The principals and principles of chapter one – vision and values, use of evidence, futures thinking, and strategic planning – are relevant at all levels. But, of course, the way they are applied and received will be different in a Norbiton, a Newcastle, or a 'Northern Powerhouse'.

This chapter seeks to consider this differential application. The **city and city region** remain a major focus and priority of development and decentralisation policy and practice and therefore rightly headlines

the narrative. However, some of 3LE's most interesting and innovative work has been with **non-metropolitan areas, small and mid-size geographies**, and in the fragile and turbulent '**intermediate tiers**' of England.

A place like Cambridge can concurrently be regarded as a large provincial town and as a powerful national, continental and global brand. The most recent Complete University Guide UK top-10 universities contain five in built-up areas under 100,000 population (with St Andrew's really only a mid-size market town), and even Oxford and Cambridge under 200,000. In some senses, England is an intermediate tier construct in the UK!

**In summary, all places can aspire to global quality and relevance. And where a place is in the global hierarchies very much depends on one's starting perspective and where one wishes to be.**



## 2.1. Cities and city regions

The focus of contemporary growth and development policy and practice on 'cities' is underpinned by theories and models of agglomeration. It is pragmatic in terms of cities' dynamism, welcoming change, critical mass and potential impact. But it is not without pressures. It is genuinely demanding for cities to establish distinctive narratives of 'what they want to be known for' that is well-owned locally and relevant nationally and globally. At the other end of the spectrum, city-led agendas are often regarded ambivalently or even negatively by polycentric, regional and sub-regional institutions; and from tensions and jealousies with, particularly, county councils in England.

3LE seeks to address these issues in a number of ways.

*Figure Six: Considerations of a city-based agenda*



We have worked extensively with and in London, Core Cities and their city regions. Major agglomerations are expected to establish robust distinctive profiles with global and national significance; and be able to demonstrate this in how they plan and manage change.

3LE has also specialised in establishing distinctive niches and managing the scale and complexity of specific places within their world and core city regions. This is illustrated in commissions with Outer East London, Oldham and Wakefield, in a Leicester & Leicestershire Strategic Economic Plan, and in the innovative Plymouth-Exeter-Torbay (PET) redefinition as a virtual city-region driving Heart of South West.

A common theme for many of these places is how to formulate and promote their 'voice' without being squeezed out by either the nearby metropolitan centre or dispersed county-based influence. 3LE will consistently formulate and present arguments that

**ambitious small and medium-size cities have the scale and capabilities to be globally and nationally significant drivers of city-region economies, whilst retaining more cohesive, coherent, intimate networks than larger metropolitan centres.**

The small and medium city voice can be amplified through establishing networks and associations. 3LE brought experience establishing and supporting Regional Cities East (RCE) in the noughties to the Growth Cities Network (GCN) and then Key Cities Group (KCG) during the 3LE period.

Successful 'small and medium city' (SMC) cases influenced the establishment of LEPs and some of the wave two city deals. For instance, in 2010, Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough LEP's proposition was considered amongst the most interesting and innovative of the first wave of approvals. In 2012/13, 3LE argued strongly for a core SMC proposition across 12 of the applicants.

Even when not pursued directly by Government or the cities themselves, these propositions strongly influenced implicit SMC policy, KCG agendas, and strategies of individual SMCs through the decade. These themes evolved to now be at the forefront of leading thinking and practice on smart cities and urban living partnerships – in both of which 3LE is involved.

City-based agendas have the potential to evolve in bold and innovative directions. For instance, as a bespoke portfolio of projects, the 2014 Plymouth Local Economic Strategy led to a functional economic area (FEA – essentially city region) prospectus in 2016-17, a Plymouth – Exeter – Torbay corridor proposition, and finally a well-regarded Heart of South West High Growth Corridor submission to Government in 2018. This placed a polycentric city-region at the centre of the South West peninsula's narrative in a manner quite different from a dispersed county-based approach.

A novel place-based cluster example is our longstanding relationship with CEME in Outer East London. Our work led to formulation of an 'advanced urban services' cluster proposition for Barking, Basildon, Havering, and Thurrock. It gave this pan-regional under-performing area on the fringe of the world city a new compelling strategy for growth that builds on their engineering capabilities, realises synergies with Tech City in Inner East London, and plays a distinctive specialist set of roles and functions crucial to London's enduring success.



*Figure Seven: PET Corridor submission – Feb 2017*

## 2.2. Non-metropolitan regions

Cities and city region building blocks for sub-national development raises challenging questions for local leadership teams of non-metropolitan areas. Establishing a coherent narrative for a more dispersed geography without a metropolitan city anchor requires different types of approaches in both content and process terms.

Some of 3LE's most innovative and stimulating work has been in these areas of geography and policy. Meta-narrative choices have ranged from extreme dispersed polycentricity and virtual urban systems in Cornwall, to building city regions and corridors around Plymouth and Exeter in Heart of South West, to deconstruction and looking outwards in places like Greater Lincolnshire and Wiltshire, to creating new socio-economic geography perspectives in a sub-region like Gloucestershire. It also encompasses appreciation of the immense potential of much smaller places (see below) – whether new cities and towns like Milton Keynes or Hemel, market towns in Rutland and South Kesteven, unique islands like St Helena, or community budget pilots like Norbiton in Kingston.

Non-metropolitan geographies face barriers too often – both local and national. Local role players with NIMBY antipathies in general and suspicions of their adjacent city in particular prevail in too many non-metropolitan areas. Government focuses on metropolitan city regions as prime movers in local growth and devolution. Too often it has been unwilling to confront partisan interests, especially in the South where the balkanised fragmented array of administrative geographies in the London mega-city region retards both the development of the world city, and that of its own major urban centres.

3LE works hard to overcome these barriers – supporting counties and districts to look afresh at their world views, with regional cities to adopt strategies that embrace their hinterlands, and with sub-regional partnerships like LEPs with a remit to build their area's narrative.

*Figure eight* describes examples of strategic and delivery institutional solutions that non-metropolitan areas can adopt and adapt. This was part of the agenda for multiple projects with Gloucestershire – firstly to refresh their ambitions and consequential vision, then to build a Joint Economic Development Committee leadership team to lead the vision, and finally to validate and build ownership of the narrative. It is one of the better examples of what county-based sub-regions might do.

Pieces of work for South East Midlands LEP geography also considered strategy, leadership and governance alternatives to administrative county defaults – across a range of geographies.

For non-metropolitan geographies, 3LE can provide a fresh, independent look at the challenges and opportunities of organising at different scales of geographies; and the potential devolution and decentralisation alternatives available. We can work through defining options, determining and applying appraisal criteria, and selecting a preferred option to progress.

In the administratively messy non-mets, external context may demand a tactical sub-optimal solution based on political least-resistance. But it is worth having a bigger picture polycentric, SMC-based or non-metropolitan 'ideal' in view, even if it remains a long-term aspiration.

**Figure Eight:** Institutional options for non-metros

Type of Leadership	Institutional Model	Comment/ Analysis
Overall leadership of G2050	Mayoral Combined Authority	
	Combined Authority	
	Economic Prosperity Board	
	LA Joint Committees	
	LEPs	
	Hybrid/Bespoke models	
Delivery Management of intervention strategies, programmes or projects	City or Economic Development Company (CDC/EDC)	
	Urban Development Corporation (UDC)	
	Urban Regeneration Company (URC)	
	Local Asset-backed vehicle (LABV)	
	Other LA-based arms-length companies	
	Site specific project arrangements	
	Hybrid/Bespoke models	

Strategy Geography	Bespoke, distinctive SEMLEP strategy		Tactical CA/EP8/ leadership and governance strategies
	Geographical considerations	Outcome/functional considerations	
Existing SEMLEP	●	●	●
Greater SEMLEP - genuine O2C regional scale	●	●	●
Lesser SEMLEP - core unitaries in MK, Luton & Beds	●	●	●

**Figure Nine:** Considerations for SEMLEP strategy & leadership

## 2.3. Small and mid-sized-ness

**Some of the most credible and compelling models of success in England can be found in small and medium cities**

in which 3LE has worked. Cambridge has hosted arguably Europe's most dynamic innovation cluster. Milton Keynes leads the UK on many 'smart city' agendas. Plymouth and Southampton are premier regional cities and port-based global gateways in their city-regions. Preston's circular economy exemplar is stimulating new approaches to anchor institution collaboration and inclusive growth. 3LE's role as retained strategic advisor for South Kesteven and multiple commissions with Rutland as the smallest English unitary LA geography have progressed ambitious agendas different but as rich and almost as broad as those of larger metros.

Small and mid-size towns and cities are places where a focus on major strategic interventions can have profound, game-changing impact. As a Lincolnshire-based business and resident, and member of the Greater Lincolnshire Innovation Council, 3LE's owner has long standing direct experience of the existential transformation University of Lincoln has had on this small city – 'the most positive thing to happen since the middle ages!'

Recent visits to cities like Helsinki, Tallinn and Bratislava provide models of urban living within small states that augment and cast fresh light on future UK templates for enhanced devolution to both the four UK nations and to metropolitan and non-metropolitan single and polycentric city regions.

Challenges for mid-sized places with which 3LE can assist include building strategic capacity and capabilities, shaping a favourable regional context, and attracting a reasonable level and consistency of attention from national decision-makers and global markets.

The other imperative for small places is empowering communities and neighbourhoods. This has an intrinsic rationale and adds genuine value to the legitimacy and standing of their town, city or district.

3LE championed enhanced 'total place' constructs in a comprehensive March 2010 Budget report for the then Communities & Local Government (DCLG).

'Total Place' stalled with the inception of the 2010 coalition, but a strand was taken forward as a key member of the LGIU team supporting the Norbiton Community Budget pilot.

This delivered technical analyses (socio-economic and resource-mapping) and participative processes to produce a 'Neighbourhood Plus' proposition. Improved outcomes and savings in key policy areas of Community Safety and Young People not in employment, education or training (NEETs) requires radically different ways of working with local people for the LA and other anchor institutions. Neighbourhood Plus empowered the community forum as local 'client' and intermediary. It described how public service providers could work across institutional and annual boundaries to resource an outcomes-based proposition for Community Safety and NEETs.



Community regeneration tended to be submerged in the austerity decade as government prioritised growth and public savings. However, expect to see empowering small and mid-size cities and sub-regions, addressing left-behind communities and neighbourhoods assume greater importance and profile in the 2020s. This is already evident, for instance, in the Johnson Government's town-badged programmes.

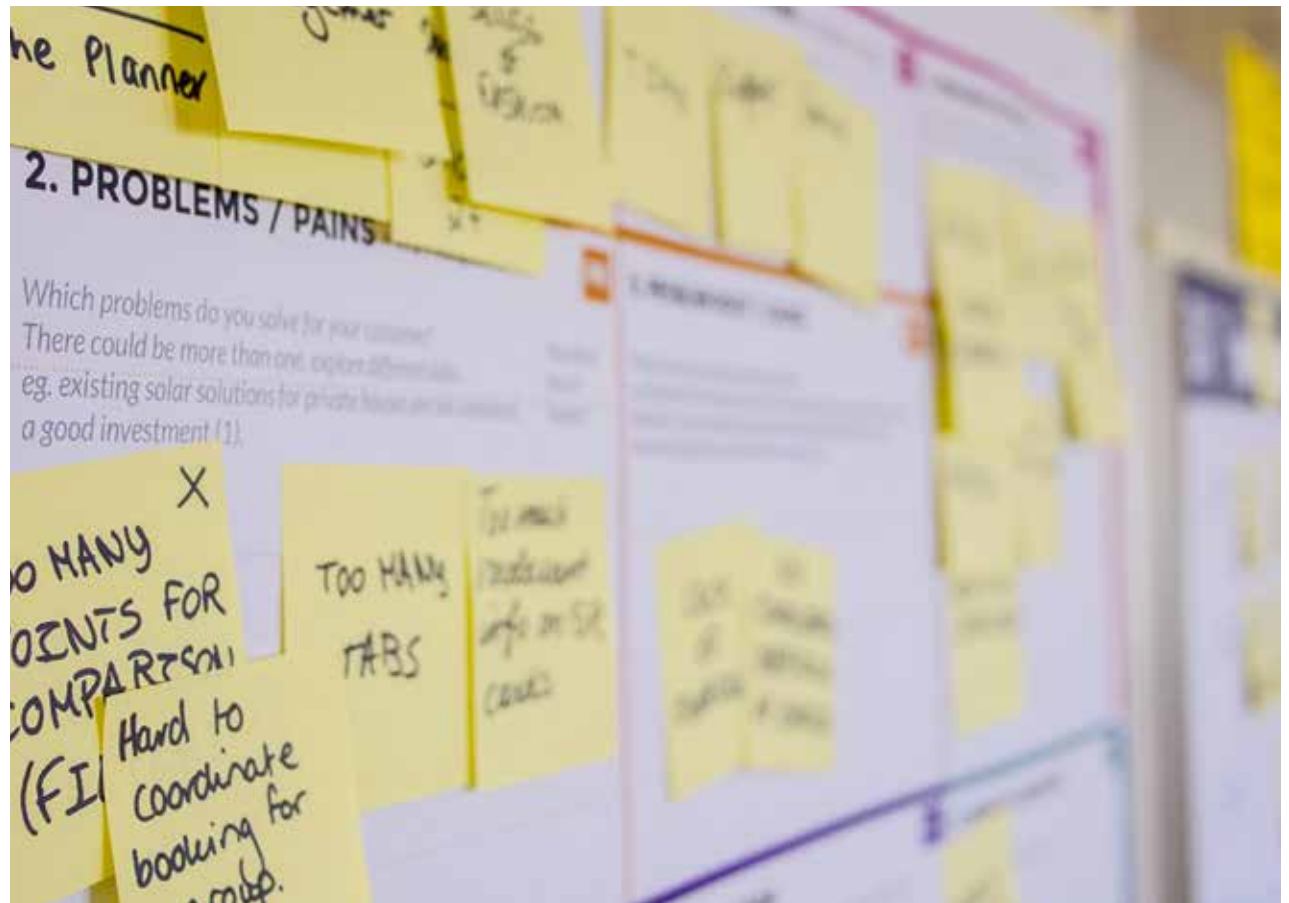
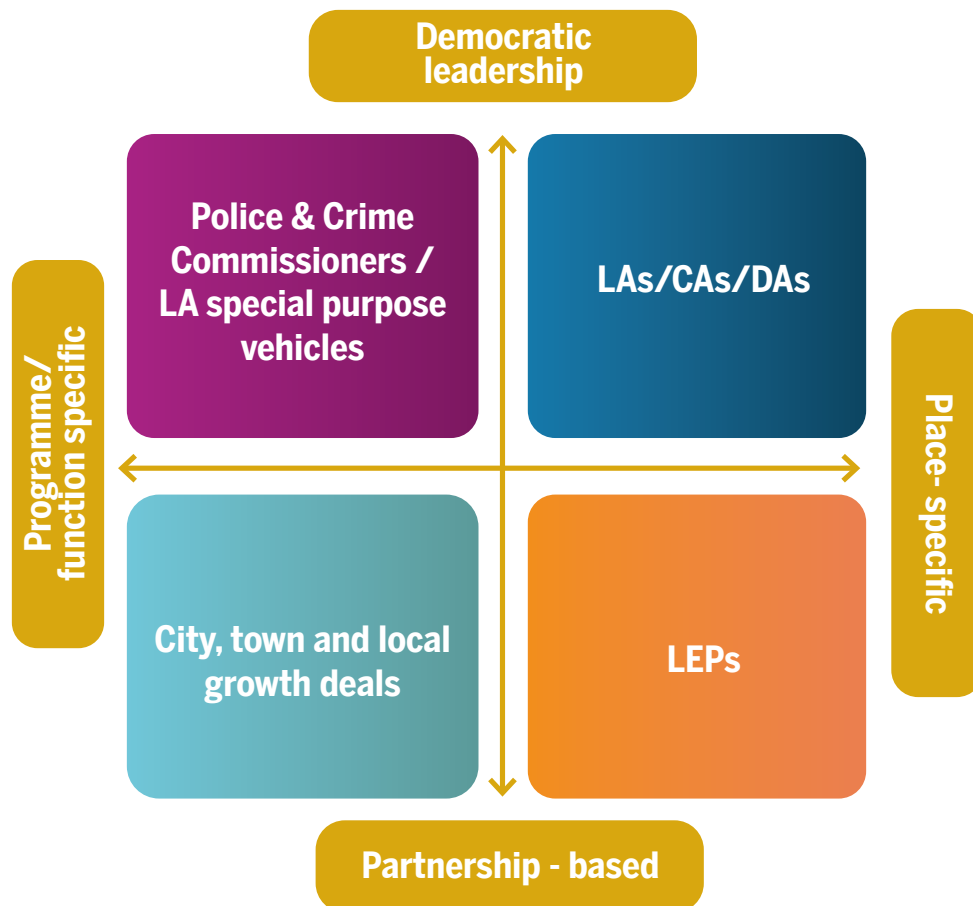


Photo by Daria Nepriakhina on Unsplash

## 2.4. Intermediate tiers and tears

**Figure Ten:** A 2010s implicit approach to intermediate tier governance in England



One of the major barriers to effective, accountable devolution in England has been a chronic antipathy to intermediate tier institutions – both top-down and bottom-up. National and local government are deeply suspicious of powerful, purposeful, well-supported regional and sub-regional tier institutions.

**Nevertheless, there is an overwhelming case for and evidence to support sub-national governance with a critical mass able to hold their own globally and nationally – yet remain close and add distinctive value to their places and people.**

International good practice (e.g. World Bank, OECD research) propose the rationale for an intermediate tier as one of four improvement purposes – socioeconomic outcomes; delivery of specific services (that benefit from economies of scale); governance; and/or stability/conflict resolution. To achieve any of these purposes, an intermediate institutional configuration will require a distinctive mix of citizen/community participation, technical and managerial capacity, a clear legal/fiscal framework, and multiple accountabilities upward and downward that adds value to both national and local 'systems'. New intermediate arrangements are an emergent, long-term process, unlikely to be successful if incepted in haste. They require behaviour change within and between each level of governance.

As economic and social disparities within and between regions grow ever wider, demands for national government to adopt stronger place-based perspectives are increasing. To some extent, Scotland, Wales, London, the advent of city region directly elected Mayors, pre-2010 experience with England's regional tier, and constructs like the Northern Powerhouse or even Oxford to Cambridge Arc offer foundations and preliminary models for a new devolution settlement. Arguably, it is inconsistency that is the problem – the propensity to deconstruct and recreate new intermediate tiers each decade.

In the 2020s England needs to resolve how committed to and for what outcomes should 'levelling up', rebalancing or convergence between geographies be a national priority; and what needs to happen at what level of geography for these priorities to be achieved.

This has been a specific specialist area of 3LE investigation. Advanced radical work on regional reforms, then the winding up of regional institutions and their replacement by LEPs dominated the first half of the decade. The birth of Mayoral Combined Authorities and local government reorganisation was more prominent in the latter half of the decade. Whether these new intermediate solutions will be more enduring than their forerunners will be challenging in the absence of a serious, England, devolution 'project'. 3LE hopes to have the opportunity to contribute to this absolute and increasing necessity in the early 2020s arguing cases for both an independent national commission to take forward any national project (like the Devolution White Paper promised alongside the March 2020 Budget) AND for sub-national and local teams to firm up their propositions in the meantime. This is explored further in Chapter Three.



Photo by Ian Cylkowski on Unsplash

## 2.5. Concluding remarks

Positive progressive place-making almost self-evidently requires a strong sense of place with some degree of autonomy and control. But the reality has been that defining place in England is highly contested and competitive – both within and across types of places. In the context of the highly centralised UK, zero-sum win-lose conflict between places plays into national Government's hand. The 3LE experience suggests, therefore:

- **Embrace pluralism and diversity:** Accept and welcome that place-making will always happen at multiple levels from neighbourhood to devolved nation or pan-regional construct like Northern Powerhouse. Strategy should explicitly nurture inter-governmental multi-tier alignment and synergies and work collaboratively with neighbours.
- **Agree what we wish to be known for:** This is a legitimate primary question for leadership teams at all levels. Whilst we expect globally significant answers in metropolitan cities and their regions, there is a good case for small and medium cities to be similarly ambitious.
- **Sort out the intermediate tier without tears!** If inevitably there will be intermediate tiers between most places and national government, put effort and energy into making them fit for purpose and sustainable. This certainly applies to the still infant MCAs in England and should also be the case for non-metropolitan and small/medium city models. Further short-life intermediate tier arrangements only strengthen top-down centralising patronage.
- **Empower communities and neighbourhoods to take greater control of their future:** There is a case for local community anchors who can play powerful visioning, advocacy and client role for public services in their areas. Tools like community budgets, neighbourhood plans can be adapted to provide the frameworks for this but require a flexibility and responsiveness from larger democratic institutions and major service providers

## Major 3LE interventions and projects referenced in Chapter Two

- **HM Treasury, Communities and Local Government,** 'Total Place: a whole area approach to public services', 2010
- **Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGPLEP),** Outline proposal and MOU, 2010
- **Growth Cities Network,** Making the most of city deals, SEPs, & other opportunities, 2012-13
- **Norbiton Community Budget pilot (with LGIU),** 2012-13
- **South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP),** Enhanced devolution and leadership of local growth models, 2013-15
- **Plymouth – Local Economic Strategy 2014,** Functional Economic Area Strategy 2015, Plymouth – Exeter – Torbay virtual city region proposition, 2016-17
- **LGIU Policy Briefing,** 'English devolution and intermediate tiers of governance', 2014 and a range of follow up briefings 2015-19
- **Barking & Dagenham, Basildon, Havering and Thurrock, Outer East London Advanced Urban Services proposition** (with CEME), 2015
- **Retained strategic economic advisor,** South Kesteven District Council (SKDC) 2015-19
- **Global Education Dialogue,** Bogota, Colombia, 'Universities' roles in local economic growth and place-making', British Council, 2016
- **Gloucestershire Ambitions,** 2016
- **Member of Greater Lincolnshire Innovation Council,** 2018 – present
- **'Great expectations...inconsistent delivery: Universities in the development of England's lagging regions.'**, in 'Innovation based regional change in Europe: Chances, risks and policy implications' ed., Koschatzky & Stahlecker, Fraunhofer ISI 2018-19



# CHAPTER THREE:

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## Grand societal opportunities



Photo by Ryan Searle on Unsplash

If we are going to put the time and energy into sorting out evidence-informed ambitions for a coherent place-based geography, then this surely must be to tackle the big long-run issues. This is not to downplay the importance of doing the urgent immediate stuff well or responding proactively to the latest government flavour of the month. However tactical opportunism unrooted in a longer-term vision and strategy for addressing existential challenges will only take a place so far.

This chapter looks at four such challenges – badged for the paper’s purposes as societal opportunities.

The demographic profile of London and metropolitan England is now so different and divergent to the rest of the country that most non-metropolitan geographies face an unsustainable aging profile for current public policy and fiscal systems. This is driven, inter alia, by health and care, and will be exacerbated by an increasingly restrictive national immigration policy. 3LE has worked to assist these geographies understand the character and statistics of the issue and consider strategies for attracting and retaining young, talented and working age residents.

Sustainability and eco-system vitality have a higher profile than ever as places recognise their responsibilities for mitigating climate change crisis. Local environments can be key assets and qualities for driving positive progressive change if the balances and trade-offs with economic and social pressures can be managed and win-wins realised.

Digital and technology change is impacting every aspect of economic, social, and environmental life but technological progress can be inherently

disruptive, difficult to predict and leverage. In what areas of digitalisation can places be leaders, early adopters and in which should they wait for the market or government initiative? And how can they turn choices into effective intervention strategies?

Finally, the austerity decade tended to default to simplistic goals to increase GVA and employment. These crude measures are now recognised as partial and particularly inadequate for left-behind places in many ways. From concerns with the ‘gig’ economy, in-work poverty, increasing inequalities to appraisal frameworks that explicitly benefit better-off geographies, 3LE has worked with place-based leadership teams to define and deliver strategies for good growth and good jobs.

To be fair to government, the four sections have a strong read-across to the May government’s industrial strategy four grand challenges – aging (demography), artificial intelligence and big data (digitalisation), clean growth and mobility (sustainability and eco-system vitality). Good jobs and good growth seek to address the inclusive growth weaknesses of UK industrial strategy – whilst 3LE’s place-based approach joins the four together in a way with which vertical sector deals and other national instruments – including already approved local industrial strategies – have struggled.

Authoring this thought piece preceded the 2020 pandemic crisis. Whether if it were written today, post-pandemic recovery strategies would be a fifth grand societal opportunity or whether it would shape demographic, sustainability, digital and inclusive growth challenges, or BOTH, is an open question. Lets work this through when we meet in the future!

## 3.1. Demography

It is perhaps surprising how little robust transformational local and regional policy is made on population issues, and how little it is explicitly debated. Nationally the UK recognises demography as a major societal challenge, but the popular (some might say populist) narrative has been about immigration, fears of rapid population growth and overcrowding. Explicit local policy like statutory Local Plans that is required to address population growth is highly constrained by technical and political assumptions about 'containment'. Politicians tend to plan mainly for local births and deaths – rather than internal or international migration. Consequently, housing requirements focus on NIMBY debates.

However, a more granular analysis shows

**the UK is characterised by huge variations in demographic trends that national narratives tend to obscure –**

often with chronic negative implications for non-metropolitan England geographies most averse to attracting incomers.

Firstly, the trend of rapid population growth across the UK has slowed significantly since the 2016 referendum. Over the decade it varies enormously around the average growth of 7.5%. From 2008-18, the five fastest increasing Local Authorities (LAs) were London boroughs – from 37% (Tower Hamlets) to 23% (Barking and Dagenham). Coventry's 20%

was the fastest growing city outside London. At the other end of the scale, 45 LAs saw their population fall in absolute terms since 2016. Annual reductions in the latest figures also occurred in places you might not expect throughout the UK – e.g. Aberdeen, Warrington, Luton, even Ealing. Over the decade, eighteen LAs have seen absolute declines in population. The two largest falls are in Scotland, but it is surprising to see Kensington and Chelsea third with -3.9%, alongside Isles of Scilly and Barrow.

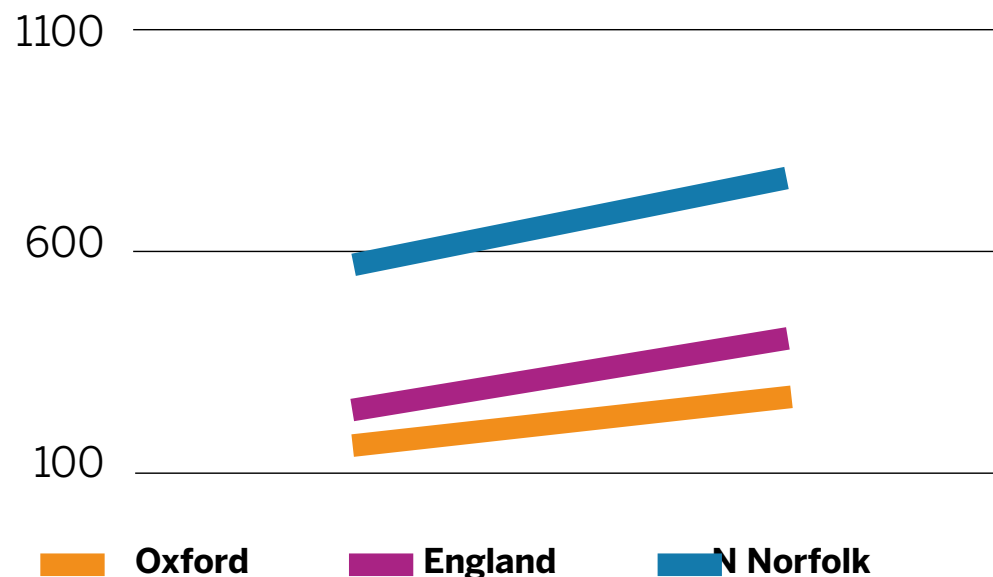
This matters because of the rapid aging of the population. The median age of the UK population ranges from 53.8 in North Norfolk to 29 in Oxford. The current Old Age Dependency Ratio (OADR) of over 65s to Working Age Population (WAP) is 308 per 1,000 nationally. But in North Norfolk it is around 600 whilst in Tower Hamlets it is 89. 3LE considers it is virtually impossible to run a top-down national system in many key areas of public policy with such variation in demographic (and socio-economic) profiles.

Twenty LAs have more than one over-65 resident for every two of working age – mainly in rural communities. Twenty-seven LAs and London as a region have more than five of working age for every over-65 resident – including eighteen London boroughs, and cities like Glasgow, Bristol, Brighton, Leicester, Manchester and towns of Reading and Slough. Sometimes these divergent profiles run up against each other at sub-regional level with South Devon including some of the highest levels of age dependency whilst Exeter has one of the youngest profiles in non-metropolitan England.

Looking at population forecasts to 2041, England's OADR age dependency will rise to 360 by 2026 and 450 by 2041. Over-65s increase by over 5m persons whilst working age populations rise by only 1m. In London the comparable trend of over 65s to working age is 183 (2016) to 289 (2041) – i.e. still significantly under the national OADR today! In North Norfolk, on the other hand, OADR will rise to close to 800 over-65s for every 1000 of working age – with over-65s increasing by 32% and working age falling in absolute terms by almost 10%.

These trends raise quintessential issues about the character of places – and are a key part of LAs community leadership roles. LAs should ensure they know what the evidence is telling them and shape their place-narrative accordingly. Some of 3LEs most sensitive work has been working through the issues these trends raise – particularly considering strategies to reverse depopulation and/or attract and retain young talented populations in areas with unsustainable OADRs.

## OADR extremes (outside London) 2016-41



*Figure Eleven: Youngest and oldest age profiles in England outside London*



## 3.2. Sustainability and eco-system vitality

Longstanding concerns about sustainability have recently focused local councils on statements of climate change emergencies and related issues. However, these topics have very different currency and levels of priority in different places. For some, carbon reduction is primary; others might focus on biodiversity and natural habitats; others on the growth potential of cleantech and the environmental industries; others on behaviour change or resource efficiency.

Of course, all these entry points to sustainability and eco-system vitality are closely related. Ultimately a whole-system approach is needed – both across environmental issues and for wider sustainable development (SD). But, from wherever specific leadership teams start their SD journey, it is important to make a successful start and thereafter join up the different dimensions of a SD approach.

3LE has touched on most of these strands during its first decade and will surely build on this track record in the 2020s. Perhaps the most noteworthy of recent commissions has been the Saint Helena (SH) 2050 Green Paper which places eco-system vitality – green and blue exemplar – at the heart of the island's long run vision.

The Green paper recognises SH's unique biodiversity, 'green' and 'blue' assets, are amongst the most distinctive and valued contributions made by the 'UK family' (i.e. the mainland and Overseas Territories) to the world.

SH's challenge is to enhance and use these characteristics to generate economic and social success. SH2050 explores next stages once SH achieves near-100% renewables energy self-sufficiency in the 2020s. It seeks to ensure visitor economy growth respects and celebrates SH's unique environment. It proposes SH hosting research, development and innovation programmes for new approaches to SD. It suggests products and services SH's green and blue assets can enable. In suggesting relevant framing policies for the development priorities of the 2020s, the Green Paper outlines key green and blue intervention strategies and makes explicit their synergies with social and economic priorities.

Earlier work with, for instance, Heart of South West, Plymouth and Exeter have considered knowledge strengths in climate change and the Met Office in Exeter, and the 'blue' assets of Plymouth's marine industries and technologies as foundations of the City Deal, Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) and their flagship interventions. In a similar vein, formative work with Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough sought to define and leverage Greater Cambridge's academic and technological expertise with Peterborough's Environment City designation and Land and Water-based sectors of both cities' hinterlands to provide the glue that drew these three very different sub-regions together.

Mainstreaming SD includes contributions to Smart Specialisation and ESIF 2014-20 programme prospectuses, environmental sector components



of strategic economic plans (SEPs) and local industrial strategies (LISs), and the impact of technological and digital innovation on carbon reduction and resource efficiency.

Finding the win-wins and synergies in sustainability and managing any trade-offs and tensions with inclusive, industrial growth and quality of life will only increase in prominence in 3LE's second decade.



*Whale shark diving in St Helena*

### 3.3. Digital economy and society

Like demography and SD, technology and digitalisation are societal challenges and potential opportunities that all places and organisations need to consider. There are an array of entry points for that consideration – infrastructure, services, skills, specialist technologies and digital capabilities as drivers of economic growth, diffusion of automation and digitalisation in foundation industries, big data, behaviour and social change among others. Again, as with SD, digital economy and society strategies need to enable and realise synergies with broader socio-economic and environmental change. Additionally, they need to be sceptical of the latest piece of fantastic kit and, rather, specify and procure technological change intelligently.

3LE's involvement in the 2014/15 start-up of Corsham Institute (Ci) – a philanthropically funded UK Centre for Digital Society – explored how these agendas might play out and create synergies for Swindon & Wiltshire's growth and development. Ci sought to provide a technology park and skills centre, community and off-campus programmes, a think tank and lobbying capability.

How to build a national and global influencer with a strong local footprint is an important strategic option for places – particularly for their anchor institutions like universities and outward-looking charities like Ci.

It was also an interesting component of the signature Urban Living Partnership (ULP) Pilot Programme review. This explored, inter alia, the roles of Urban Observatories, AI sensors and big data in urban services systems and evidence-based policy development. These have intrinsic value in the host city – but are also potentially a major trading and knowledge exchange asset internationally.

Beyond Ci and ULP, 3LE's work on the enabling frontiers of these areas of activity includes sector, technology and digital skills strategies in SEPs, LISs, and an interesting public service reform paper for ADEPT looking at future digital highways and traffic management systems. We have also written extensively on local dimensions of digital society and creativity, on tech nation and its local clusters, and on digital exclusion.

For places and institutions digital economy and society really are cross-cutting and enabling issues. Securing fit-for-purpose digital connectivity and the skills to use it are now foundation tasks. Beyond these basics, determining if there are niches where your place or organisation can sustain a digital 'edge', and whether this edge is to be of global, national or regional significance, is an important consideration of digital economy and society strategy.

Finally, given recent gross application of digital opportunities for more malevolent and manipulative purposes, digital economy and society requires ethical values and adoption of standards that are demanding and sometimes expensive.

Like SD, digital economy and society are integral to future place-based and institutional strategies. There are opportunities for synergies and win-wins – but they are not a given. And the quick or faddish technological fix should not drive but be driven by the vision and values – not the other way around.

## Infrastructure

- Internationally competitive digital infrastructure in terms of bandwidth, speed, stability ect

## Services

- Digital-by-default services delivering better outcomes more efficiently and effectively

## Business

- A nationally-significant high value digital cluster, and broader SME's using digital opportunity to drive business growth

## Skills

- High levels of digital literacy and talent at all levels of Wiltshire labour market
- Citizens able to make the most of digital opportunities

## Communities

- Digitally-empowered communities using and exploiting a 'trusted, accessible and affordable internet'

## Global Reputation









- Corsham cluster
- Porton/ Salisbury health and life science
- Digital exemplar for 'smart market towns and villages
- Other new developments, not yet anticipated

**Figure Thirteen:** 'Corsham Institute's proposed digital society framework for Swindon & Wiltshire 2014

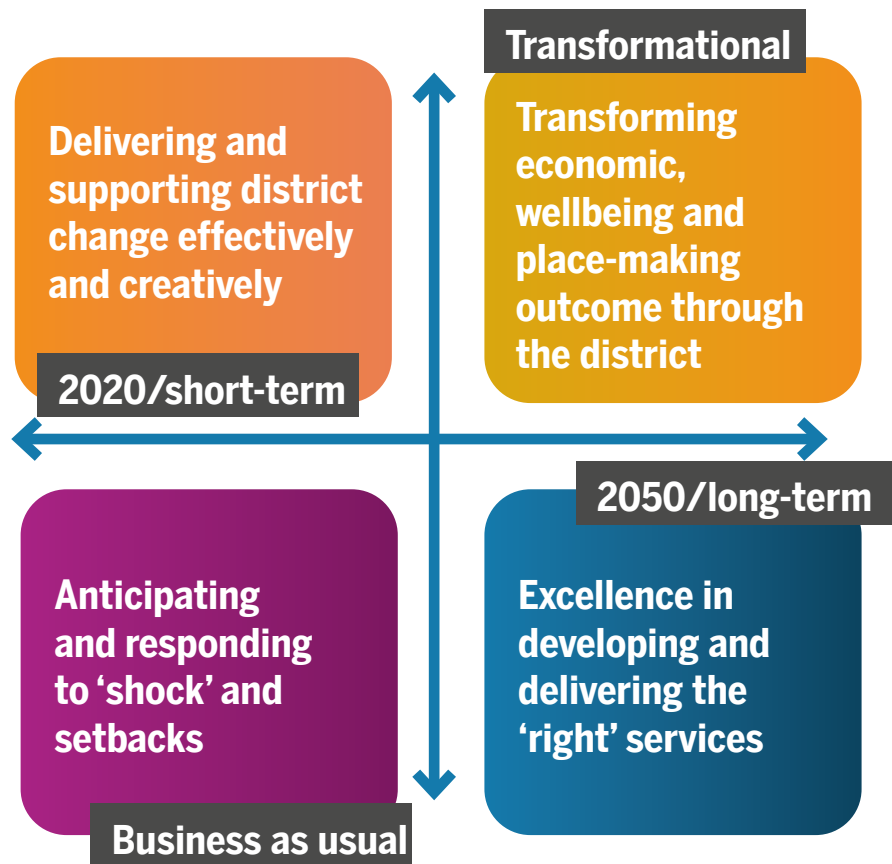
## 3.4. Good growth and good jobs

Most of the austerity decade counted increases in GVA and numbers of jobs as success rather than the character of economic and employment change. However, as the decade progressed the limitations, superficiality, and sometimes genuinely negative implications of these measures has become more apparent – exemplified by concerns about the ‘gig economy’, low labour productivity in foundation industries (like retail or care), and the increasing incidence of in-work household poverty. In the face of these concerns, considerable thought has been given to ‘good growth’ and ‘good work/jobs’.

3LE has contributed to development of good growth and good work strategies both in terms of formulating indices and identifying intervention strategies. The figure opposite draws from a Validity framework for a county sub-region. This matches good practice in outcome indices to the county’s own priorities in a bespoke but replicable tool. The framework was adopted by the sub-region’s statutory Joint Economic Development Committee and wider stakeholder for translating their 2050 vision into strategic priorities.

Impact	Indicators	Evidence
 <b>A Magnet County</b>	A growing population of 18-40 year olds with high level qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of population 18-40</li> <li>• % of graduates attracted/retained</li> </ul>
 <b>An Innovative County</b>	More businesses starting up, growing and investing in research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses per 10,000 population</li> <li>• % of businesses innovating</li> </ul>
 <b>A Skilled County</b>	More people with high level skills and jobs in skilled occupations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % population with high level skills</li> <li>• % knowledge</li> </ul>
 <b>A Prosperous County</b>	Rising productivity and household income relative to other places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GVA per job</li> <li>• Household income</li> </ul>
 <b>An Inclusive County</b>	Economic and social benefits of growth are felt by all	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of social capital</li> <li>• % children and elderly in poverty</li> </ul>
 <b>A Healthy, Happy County</b>	Good work/life balance and improved health outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthy life expectancy</li> <li>• Usage of culture/ sports venues</li> </ul>
 <b>A Connected County</b>	Improved physical virtual connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access and usage broadband</li> <li>• Journey time to key hubs</li> </ul>
 <b>A Sustainable County</b>	Efficient use of resources and sustainable energy sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable energy generation</li> <li>• Quality and use of green spaces</li> </ul>

**Figure Fourteen:** A validity framework for a county sub-region's long-term ambitions



**Figure Fifteen:** *An intervention strategy framework for local good growth*

Good growth strategies tend to focus on a composite of wellbeing and environmental as well as economic indicators. For instance, the PWC-Demos Good Growth Index includes health, skills, environment and housing indicators alongside economic factors that straddle jobs, income, inequality, business competitiveness and dynamism factors.

Similarly good jobs or good work strategies championed by bodies like OECD consider the propensity to participate in the labour market, the distribution of earnings across the workforce, security of employment, and the quality of work environment in addition to the absolute numbers of jobs created or those unemployed.

There are still low employment hot-spots and low labour market participation in specific communities of interest; and there are still areas of very low job-density with concerns over high levels of out-commuting. All of these need specific intervention strategies – either stand-alone in their own right or as a specialist part of a broader good growth approach.

Having determined the high-level indicators of what success looks like in a good growth strategy, individual institutions need to determine their roles and responsibilities in progressing it. The framework opposite outlines the balance of short-term/long-term, incremental and transformational intervention strategies that a metropolitan district needs to work through in determining their institution's contributions to the district's management of change.

This has been refined, adapted and deployed with a number of senior management and senior partnership masterclasses and workshops across 3LE's portfolio.



## 3.5. Concluding remarks

Places will inevitably face existential demographic, SD, technological and 'good growth' challenges over the 2020s. Some of these will take the form of economic, environmental or social shocks and crises. Some of them are driven by longer term trends. An early challenge will certainly be strategic recovery planning and implementation as COVID-19 crisis management moves to turnaround and regeneration. 3LE's experience suggests local leadership teams need to:

- **Recognise societal challenges in all aspects of strategic decision-making.** How they approach and assimilate issues like demography, SD, digitalisation, good and inclusive growth in their plans and programmes are likely to be the key determinants of successful place-making in the 2020s and beyond.
- **Determine whether their long-term approach to these big and often wicked issues is going to be wholly responsive or seek to shift trends and/or 'build back better'.** This chapter suggests there will be at least some aspects of each challenge where there will be opportunities to shift the trends. Whether policies and programmes to attract and retain the young talented, or niches in SD and digital society, there will be potential of some places to be leaders or first adopters. And this will give them an edge.
- **Reframe up-front what we think success looks like in terms of these grand societal issues.** This is neither an easy nor a straightforward process. There is a need for honesty and self-awareness, recognising where you are choosing a radical first/early adopter strategy – often with higher risks than a more follower-based or catch-up approach. 3LE can provide assistance and enabling support in visioning, design and development, comparator and competitor analysis, and then in performance management and review.

## Major 3LE projects and interventions referenced in Chapter Three

- **Plymouth and Peninsula City Deal, 2012-14 and Hot5SW High Growth Corridor, 2018**
- **GCGP LEP Growth Hubs programme development, 2013**
- **Corsham Institute – start-up programmes and institutional development, 2014-15**
- **‘Building a real tech nation’, 2015 and ‘Not enough ingenuity in Nesta’s Geography of creativity’, 2016**
- **Gloucestershire 2050 Validity Framework (with Louise Kempton, CURDS), 2017**
- **ADEPT, ‘The route to the highways systems of the future’, 2017**
- **Urban Living Partnership Pilot Programme Review, 2018-19**
- **South Kesteven Futures Commission proposals, 2019**
- **Wakefield City Council**  
Senior Management Masterclass, ‘Towards Good Growth in Wakefield’, 2019
- **Saint Helena 2050 Green Paper, ‘Our journey to sustainable and enduring success’, 2019**

# CHAPTER FOUR:

## Leadership and governance



Photo by Austin Distel on Unsplash

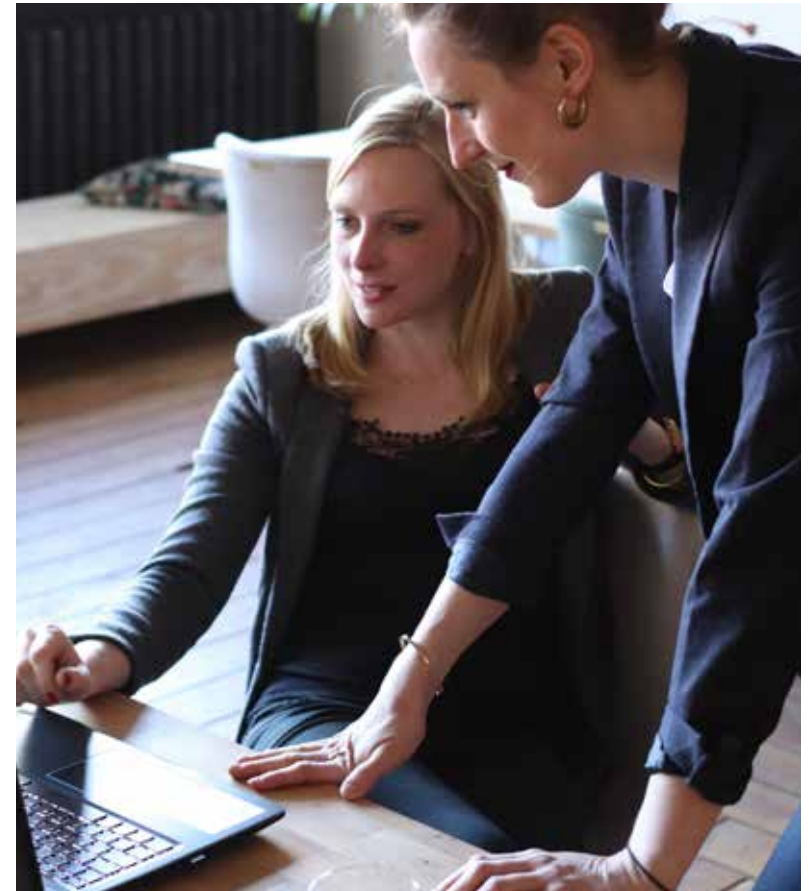
Arguably, this is the most important chapter of this report. Surely positive progressive place-making demands and requires 'great leadership' discharging decisions through fit-for-purpose governance? But in a highly centralised state – especially in England – one might argue that all places really need are persons willing to do what government asks reasonably efficiently. Academic and policy practitioners struggle to find correlations between a places' performance outcomes and its leadership qualities.

For instance, Manchester and Greater Manchester have been long admired for the cohesion and continuity of leadership and the advanced character of their governance. Yet, socio-economic outcomes have been highly variable both locally and compared with other core cities. Meanwhile, Bristol has the highest core city socio-economic outcomes on many measures yet has often been considered inconsistent in leadership and piecemeal in governance – especially at city-region levels.

This chapter, though, explicitly takes the perspective that

**leadership and governance does matter. It can influence the settlements it agrees with Government; mobilise partners, communities and civil society to participate enthusiastically in achieving better results. Moreover we argue the character and ethics of leaders are important motivators for 'followers' and for place profile and reputation**

It outlines how 3LE has tried to support and enable leadership and governance that does matter and does make a difference. The counterfactual is too disheartening to countenance!

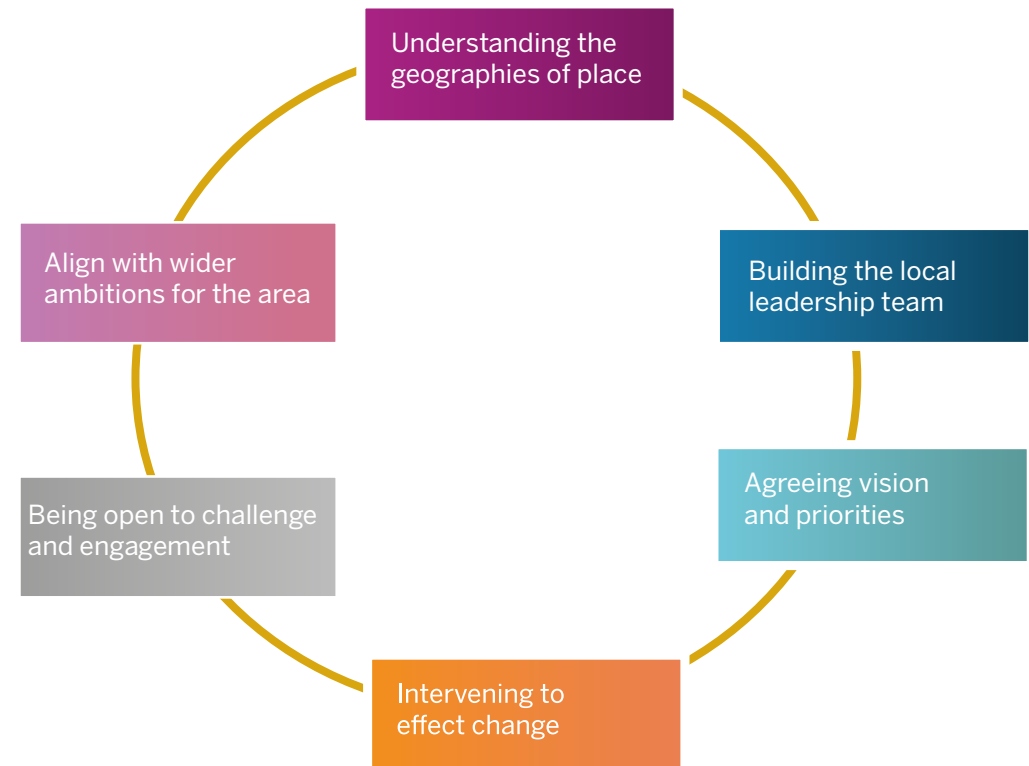


## 4.1. Devolution, decentralisation and deals

England's approach to devolution is inconsistent, piecemeal and competitive. There is no coherent national vision and policy. Too often bottom-up motivation is a tactical bid for the next slice of Government patronage – negotiated in a tactical 'deal'. Much badged devolution amounts to no more than Government decentralisation to local 'field administrations' with constrained local accountability and autonomy. Nevertheless, Scotland, Wales and to some extent London, Greater Manchester and West Midlands show dividends an anchored well-founded approach might deliver.

Assisting local leadership teams address questions about what devolution should be for and how to deliver it effectively has been at the forefront of 3LEs work in the 2010s. We have helped to define and negotiate 'deals' and agreements with Government; supported establishment and operations of Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) in Greater Manchester, West Midlands, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough; advised non-metropolitan Joint Committee staging posts in geographies like Gloucestershire, Heart of South West (HotSW), and even 3LEs home base in Lincolnshire. A signature piece of work for LGA suggested a robust process for defining and negotiating devolution deals with Government illustrated opposite.

The lessons of these types of intervention have been captured in a number of academic and policy pieces – notably a portfolio of approaching 50 LGIU policy briefings covering all the major devolution building blocks. However, they are particularly synthesised in two signature publications produced with CURDS team at Newcastle University as part of DMs Visiting Professor of Practice relationship.



*Figure Sixteen: A better place-based leadership framework*



The 2016 'Decentralisation: Issues, principles and practice' report outlined the multiple purpose of decentralisation, reviewed 'deals' to date, 'messy' geographies, dysfunctional public finance systems, and the challenges of accountability and transparency to propose a 'decentralisation road map'.

Putting this work into practice is at the centre of an impending 'place-based policy and local economic strategies toolkit and workbook'. Drawing on extensive evidence, the workbook suggests questions on which regional and local leadership teams should focus, tools and techniques that can be deployed to resolve them. It is also relevant more widely in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and for devolution in other countries.

It is stimulating how 3LE's extensive work in Overseas Territories (OTs) in 2017-19 has thrown light on devolution issues in England and vice-versa. The Saint Helena Independent Economic Review applies the lessons of deals and devolution agreements in England to the need for fundamental resetting of the UK Government's relationship with its Overseas Territories. But small OTs are in effect countries and they provide insights into future potential freedoms and flexibilities in devolved tiers of the UK.

## 4.2. Place-based leadership and partnership working

If the powers and resources of place-leaders in England is largely determined in the short-term by what government agrees they can be empowered to do, the next major issue is that leadership of place in the UK is highly problematic and often contested. As outlined in chapter two, the UK has a complex and some would say incoherent breadth of overlapping sub-national geographies, especially in England. Indeed, this complexity works very much in favour of the centralising state.

Nevertheless, place leadership should not be abdicated in despair. This complexity, and the national propensity for top-down field administration masquerading as devolution, requires sub-national leaders to spend time and effort on building fit-for-purpose leadership teams, followership, and partnership working – trusting each other and sharing commitments to and passion for place.

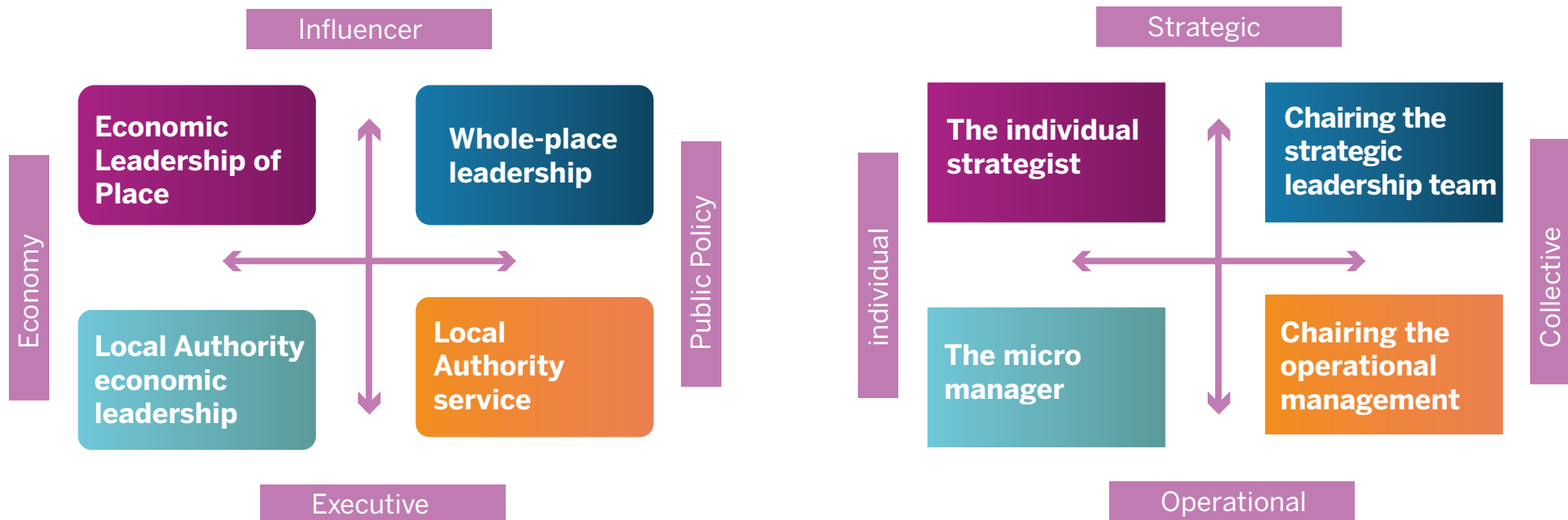
3LE has been at the forefront of defining and developing sub-national structures and processes – especially in England – literally for over 20 years. From 2000, 3LE's founder spent eight years as CEO of first a large metropolitan council and then a Regional Development Agency.

Since the establishment of 3LE projects include all sub-national tier leadership teams – regional, city and sub-regional, metropolitan and non-metropolitan, county, district and town/zone/site-based.

3LE has helped establish and operate Mayoral Combined Authorities, LEPs, Growth and Economic Development Companies, and bespoke

arrangements – developing models, tools and practices that will assist their performance. For instance, the framework below was originally conceived for 2012 city mayors (like Bristol and Leicester), their powers and positioning, but was then adapted and developed further including the choices for leadership styles and establishment of 2017 MCA leadership teams in Greater Manchester and West Midlands.

Similarly, we have worked particularly on partnership and accountability structures – especially for intermediate tiers. With low electoral turnouts and limited powers and resources, both elected mayors and local authority leaders need an inclusiveness if they are to be legitimate, influential and accountable. One of the original authors of both the Local Growth Academy (a brand 3LE owns) and Leading Places, this work has been especially influential for civic universities and place.



*Figure Seventeen: From 2012-17 – Choices for Character and focus of Mayoral Leadership*

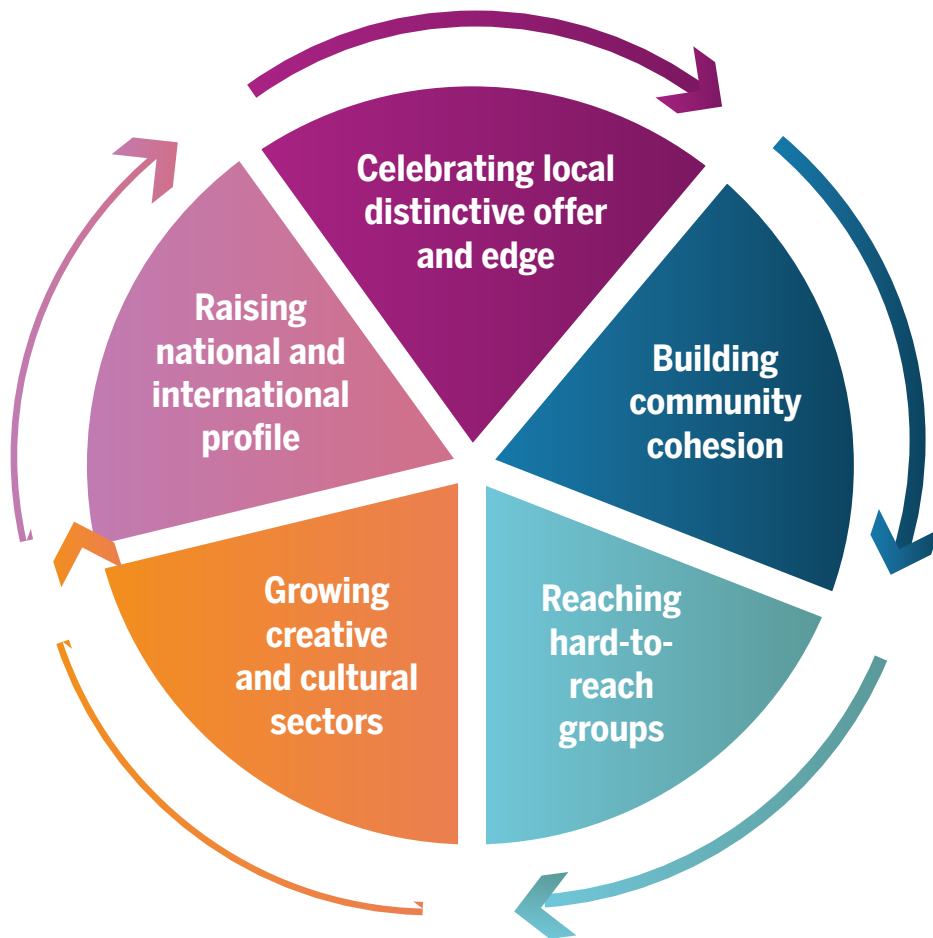
## 4.3. Communities, civic society and third sector

The absence of swathes of the population from active citizenship has been an acute and toxic component of the current UK crisis – particularly in so-called ‘left-behind Places’. ‘Did-not-voters’ outnumber votes cast for ‘winners’ of almost every electoral test in contemporary UK, with turnouts often under 30%. This undermines democratic legitimacy of the elected sector. It implies a degree of politician humility vis-à-vis non-directly elected national services or in sub-national partnerships often required by Government for local investments and programmes. At the same time, national initiatives like ‘Big Society’ have often quickly run out of steam or been unable to sustain commitment either nationally or locally.

Places, local leadership teams, and intermediate tiers seeking to deliver major change need to put considerable effort into building local ownership and strengthening local accountabilities of their strategies and activities. Some of this is electoral. It is also about PR and communications. But deeper connections require intervention strategies that empower and enable civic society and third sector institutions in ways that go beyond seeing them as, for instance, relatively low-cost contractors of commissioned services.

3LE support for these types of activity has ranged from PR and communications campaigns; to deeper, genuine consultation processes; advocacy and bottom-up planning; engagement and direct third sector involvement in change leadership and development. 3LE can apply tools and techniques showcased above in communities and civic society contexts – training, mentoring and advising community and third sector role players; facilitation and workshop support on the state/non-governmental interfaces; designing/developing PR programmes; to socio-economic, business case work and project management.

We have also played a number of non-executive (including Chair) roles with charitable and third sector cultural, community and environmental bodies. We recognise the efforts required from community and third sector organisations in building and sustaining strategic capacity. Typically contracts with the state sector do not provide direct resources or margins for this work. 3LE tries to redress this – as often pro bono or informally as through paid commissions and formal NED roles.



In the cultural sector, interventions with bodies like the UK Centre for Carnival Arts (UKCCA) and a regional arts centre built strategic cases for artistic excellence and community involvement around broader socio-economic and place-making themes – an example of which is illustrated opposite.

The more recent afore-mentioned ULP review recommends explicit recognition and resourcing for community anchor institutions – alongside and as partners to the ‘big beasts’ of state and university sectors. Nevertheless, equal or a more balanced partnership will remain elusive without sustained support for strategic capacity and capabilities, talent attraction and retention, and genuine outreach into community and hard-to-reach groups.

**Figure Eighteen:** A simple framework for cultural value-add

## 4.4. Heroes and villains, zen and zeitgeist



Photo by Jessica Podrasa on Unsplash

Possibly the most controversial section in this publication, offered with some anxiety and humility, we hope the narrative acknowledges and celebrates the good fortune 3LE has had to work with and for some of the most impressive figures in local, regional and, indeed, institutional development.

Although most of this was in England, there have been important initiatives with EU partners, relationships in South America, and the honour of assisting four UK Overseas Territories. It has been a privilege and deep pleasure when these relationships have been sustained and grown together.

**Even in the most polarised and dystopic of periods, 'good' people shaping progressive institutions and places can deliver better outcomes.**

This proposition is even more important if 3LE is to continue to operate positively and constructively during the 2020s.

Because, sadly, there is little doubt that the 2010s has had a plethora of villains and an increasingly intolerant, divisive and toxic zeitgeist. The rise and binary triumphalism of Trump, Johnson and their values are oft-repeated narratives. The weak, often collusive, leadership of 'opposition' masquerading as radical and progressive is a deep disgrace.



It is of considerable regret how 3LE's personal blog content has been increasingly distorted away from professional commentary and insight to global and national political despair – albeit seeking to introduce analysis that offers alternative explanations and broadens rather than closes down debate.

Many of us struggle with contradictions inherent in working for those we know to be rotten, maybe even evil, with whose motivations and intentions we have no empathy and co-ownership.

Most of the time, professional integrity and personal commitment to the task and to the beneficiaries can overcome this – even if outcomes will be sub-optimal. For instance, the 2017/18 strategic recovery planning of the Caribbean Overseas Territories was formally for UK Foreign and Development Secretaries whose personal ambitions and focus on domestic agendas dwarfed commitment to or generosity for the future of the OTs and the citizens devastated by the hurricanes. Yet the project made positive contributions to their recovery and redevelopment.

Similarly, UK citizens – especially those with less advantages and wealth than national political leaders and their paymasters – merit robust advice, even if a large but minority of them have voted perversely.

Looking at the decade as a whole, it is difficult to avoid the conclusions that

overall the villains have trumped the heroes, and the zeitgeist has neutered any zen. This reality has to moderate any pride we feel in 3LE's portfolio and put it into context.

Whether there can be turnaround in the 2020s is uncertain. But 3LE is determined to do more than just observe the new decade. We cannot ignore that there are 'villains' out there in positions of sometimes intimidating power. Nor should we underestimate just how much energy it requires to lead well, shoulder responsibility and take accountability. 3LE will continue to seek to contribute positively, progressively, to work with and for those who wish to answer the issues raised in this report seriously, thoughtfully and with affirmative values. Great leaders deserve nothing less.

## 4.5. Concluding remarks

A paper contemplating positive, progressive place-making insights for great leadership of place requires at least a chapter on leadership and governance. What this chapter seeks to outline is the breadth of technical work that is required to define, deploy and discharge great leadership. The chapter also recognises the emotional burden and price paid by great leaders of place. Whilst leadership teams may not all be 'best buddies', they should as far as possible share best intentions and recognise from where the opposition is going to be coming. That being said, key lessons going forward include:

- **Leadership teams need to take the time to agree their parameters and ways of working:** Priority purposes needs to be defined, with powers and resources achieved (effectively devolved) to progress them. The leadership team(s) must be assembled with the structures, processes, mutual trust and commitment to be effective.
- **The early 2020s will surely require a new constitutional settlement if the UK is to endure the decade:** That settlement would benefit from a significant devolution section – founded on a consultative independent process, perhaps a Royal Commission; and with a deep content that recognises and respects increased levels of autonomy for devolved nations, a purposeful intermediate tier, local government, cities, towns, and communities.
- **More attention than hitherto needs to be given to 'followership', communities, civic society and third sector engagement:** Delivering transformational change is so demanding, it will only be accomplished if there is significant community buy-in. Democratic renewal should be an important element of place-based change programmes. Capacity-building to enable meaningful and increasing civic society and third sector institutions participation and involvement will be both an enabler of this democratic renewal and instrumental in delivering place-based renewal and success.

## Major 3LE projects and interventions referenced in Chapter Four

- **LGIU policy briefings on enhanced devolution and local growth 2012-20**
- **Various NED roles for charities, community and cultural sectors including UK Centre for Carnival Art and Plymouth Arts Centre 2010 - present**
- **LGA Commissions on ‘Making your LEP Work’, ‘Getting devolution of funding right’ and ‘The future of local leadership of growth’, 2014-16**
- **Local Growth Academy and Leading Places exercises, 2015-17**
- **Decentralisation: Issues, principles and practice,** with Pike, Kempton, O’Brien and Tomaney, CURDS, 2016
- **Strategic Recovery Planning in Anguilla,** BVI and TCI (with DFID/FCO team), 2017
- **Saint Helena Independent Economic Review I and II,** 2018-19
- **Improving place-based policy and local economic strategies: An evidence-based toolkit for local leadership,** with Pike, Kempton, O’Brien, CURDS, 2020 (impending)

# CHAPTER FIVE:

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## Institutions and instruments



Photo by Mikael Kristenson on Unsplash

Chapter four makes the case that positive progressive place-making requires great leadership. This chapter explores the sorts of institutional arrangements that great leadership teams need and the instruments these bodies can then deploy at their behest.

There is increasing recognition in policy and practice that places' character and outcomes are significantly determined by the qualities and commitment of a relatively small number of anchor institutions. These are defined in terms such as large employers and purchasers, relatively spatially immobile, and with some social purposes in their mission. The concept has most robustly been applied to universities – whether the large research-intensive universities many with a traditional civic genesis or former large teaching polytechnics who were until relatively recently locally owned and controlled.

In many mid-size cities, the LA, hospitals, universities and two or three of the other largest organisations account for significant proportions of employment, GVA and land use.

Take the case of Coventry where 3LE has had extensive involvement and provided the secretariat of the Warwick Chancellor's Commission on the University's future roles in the city and the region. University of Warwick alone accounts for over 8% of employment and GVA in the city. Put together with the Local Authority, the Hospital, JLR and its local supply chain, and Coventry University (itself probably the major landowner within the Inner Ring Road), around half a dozen institutions effectively shape the

city's current economic performance. They also are major determinants of day-to-day patterns of transportation, land-use, development and most basic public services. The proposition that anchor institution collaboration can be a key driver of place-based success is credible and compelling.

Inevitably the 3LE portfolio comprises many commissions from and for anchor institutions. In recent years these have been about how anchor institutions collaborate purposefully – focusing particularly on university roles and functions. Working together, anchors can get a much greater understanding of their collective impact on place, and the synergies that deep partnership working might achieve. But the portfolio has also exposed the limitations of strategies founded on exclusive anchor institution approaches. These large, complex bureaucracies can become too comfortable with each other and the status quo. 3LE has increasingly focused on smaller 'looseners' who can constructively challenge incumbent elite anchors with new approaches and ways of working.

Both anchors and looseners can only be liberated if they recognise that there are no single right answers to the complexities of place-shaping and making – with the implication that every other solution is 'wrong'. The chapter concludes with the perils of 'bad binary' winner-take-all determinations that are such a hallmark of national populism currently epitomised by Trump and Johnson's capture of their nation states. Places are where the messy realities and wicked issues meet the fake certainties of populism – and managing this friction will be a major concern of great leaders in the coming decade.



## 5.1. Anchor institutions and the universities dimension

Much thinking and practice seeks to leverage the footprint of larger, more strategic institutions for the benefit of the places where they are located. There have been longstanding Government requirements for inter-agency partnership structures – from local strategic and regeneration partnerships in the noughties to the 2010s establishment and evolution of LEPs, LNPs etc.

The ‘anchor institutions’ concept, though, is more granular, encompassing large, spatially immobile, significant (e.g. in employment, purchasing, land asset terms) organisations, some with social purposes in their mission. Cities and communities have a number of anchor institutions within their geography - local authorities, hospitals, large corporate institutions with local links, sporting bodies, major cultural venues. In principal, if they share understandings, local priorities, and collaborate effectively, they should have highly significant positive impact on their cities and towns.

In practice, the concept has been particularly used in the UK as a construct for the relationship of major universities to their locations and their local governance – captured in ‘civic university’ debates. However, some places do extend this to other partners like the NHS and major businesses and third sector employers, investors and/or land-owners – and capture collaboration in constructs like the ‘circular economy’.

3LE has a rich track record of building and operating local and regional partnership structures – with the owner chairing a number of them as RDA and LA CEO and, latterly, as an independent NED.

We have also been instrumental in building anchor institution collaboration formally in bodies like LEPs, Growth Companies and Joint Committees and

more informally in interactive programmes like Local Growth Academy and Leading Places.

However, perhaps 3LE’s major distinctive contribution has been to civic university debate and practice. Extended involvement as Executive Commissioner on the 2015/16 University of Warwick (UOW) Chancellor’s Commission into UoW’s future civic purposes, produced a three-layered tool to use in thinking about university roles and responsibilities in their local and regional locations.

Later work in 2017-19 challenged assumptions that increased anchor institution collaboration is always positive. To paraphrase Kennedy’s test “Do not accept what anchor institutions (especially universities) tell you they can do for you. Rather, ask of them what you need from them.”. This type of approach explores different positioning universities can take to distinguish itself from being a member of cosy local incumbent elites, sharing out state resources internally.

This was developed in the eight-place review of Urban Living Partnerships between universities and their locations suggesting both the Urban Living Framework referenced above, and an analysis of seventeen different Place-University configurations in England. ‘Civic University Agreements’ and equivalents need to be tailored for the socio-economic character, types of leadership and governance, and university configuration in the geography. This has informed work 3LE has done from new proposed universities (e.g. Peterborough) to establishing new institutions in metropolitan city regions (e.g. West Midlands Growth Company). It has also reaffirmed the potential catalytic role of smaller specialist institutions.



**Figure Nineteen:** *UoW university-place framework*

## 5.2. Looseners and disruptive challengers

'The Plymouth provocation' frames the challenge to 'lazy' anchor institution collaboration by working through the implications of 'flipping the question' of anchor institution collaboration posed in 5.1 above.

Cities and sub-regions need to make the most of large anchor institutions for obvious reasons. But they should also understand, welcome and involve what is termed 'loosener' institutions - smaller, sometimes disruptive, challengers. These can be equally passionate about and committed to place - but more agile and flexible in experimenting and demonstrating new approaches.

Whilst welcoming a focus on improving anchor institution collaboration, the hypothesis is that national policies and local attention gravitate towards the bottom left-hand quadrant of the provocation matrix. This is necessary but insufficient for better place-based leadership and management. It is too 'safe' and 'comfortable' a world view for the turbulence and uncertainties of the 2020s.

Many places require transformation and disruptive change to successfully navigate the coming period – new types of institutions in leadership and delivery roles – i.e. the top-left quadrant of the matrix.

They may need large universities to take on new roles and responsibilities locally. The Urban Living Framework prescribes observatory, policy development, co-design and production roles as foundation university functions for better urban living in the places where they are located. But

more generally, there are also increasing pressures for universities to take responsibility for the delivery of services that have traditionally been managed by the public sector, such as libraries, cultural and sporting venue, and even in some cases, public transport. This is depicted in the bottom-right quadrant of **figure 20**.

In some places there may even be an appetite to scale up some of the results and forms of radical disruptive challenge in decision and policymaking forums. Ambitious places developing their inclusive future growth strategies need to at least consider how their place can leverage the talents, energy and capabilities in all four quadrants of the provocation matrix.

Although the ULP review focused on arms-length and smaller specialist universities as 'looseners', 3LE has also championed and supported independent investigative and advisory Commissions; arms-length bodies like economic development companies and other specialist vehicles; citizen juries and panels; and other forms of expert and external deliberation; as part of an armoury of tools and techniques to challenge 'group think' in incumbent local elites and their leadership processes.

These are particularly helpful – often necessary – in settings where disruptive transformational changes in policy or practice are required, and in contexts – place-based and institutional – where innovation is welcomed and encouraged.



**Figure Twenty:** The 'Plymouth provocation'

### 5.3. Synergies, alignment, team-working and 'total places'

The departmentalism, piecemeal and often competitive approaches of the highly centralised UK state to place-making – together with the absence of a coherent national 'devolution project' – requires joining up and weaving together by regional, city and local leadership teams.

There have been multiple attempts to do this in recent years – through deals, agreements, place-based investment boards and delivery vehicles, and serious place-based budgetary analyses like Total Place. These have delivered valuable evidence and experience. For instance, 3LE's work on the 2010 Treasury and CLG 'Total Place...' report illustrated overleaf provides enduring relevance to decluttering governance and aligning investment, services and place-shaping from regional to local level.

This needs to be progressed, deepened and broadened during the 2020s if places are to navigate their way through global, national and local changes – with a much more balanced collaborative approach to multi-levels of governance (from national literally through three or four tiers to communities).

Through the decade, putting these types of concepts into practice have included support for wide-ranging initiatives with both LA leadership teams, Combined Authorities and partnership bodies – literally from the smallest unitary council (multiple exercises with Rutland) to the largest (two major contributions to West Midlands Combined Authority); from rural partnerships like the Welland in East Midlands to England's most

sophisticated Mayoral Combined Authority in Greater Manchester; from southern county councils like Surrey to northern mets like Oldham and Wakefield.

The starting point in many senses has to be strategic and corporate coherence internally – what’s the point of strong partnerships if you cannot deliver your own organisation’s side of the agreements? 3LE has worked at Directorate, Corporate Management and Cabinet levels as well as with partnership arrangements like LA associations and joint committees, LEPs, Development Companies, Combined Authorities and ‘deals’ governance bodies with Government. From the deliberative workshop to more detailed organisation and institution development, 3LE interventions always bring together team-building processes with outcomes-based content and agreed follow up. Finding win-win solutions for participants with very different agendas and cultures are amongst our most stimulating exercises.

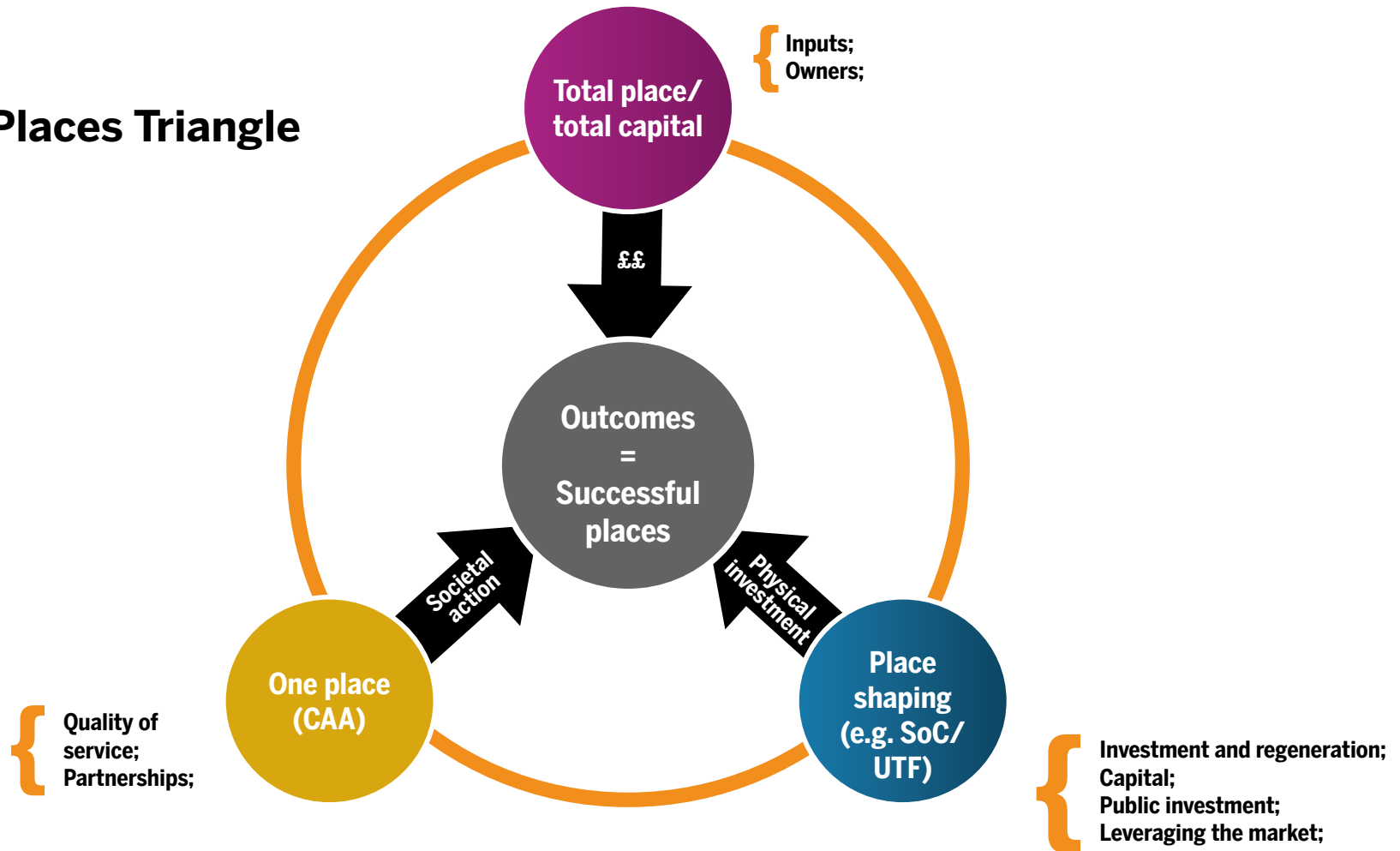
Much too often, different funders and funding streams are highly resistant to integration and alignment. A particularly pertinent piece of work – as part of a NCUB team – explored how to leverage synergies from EU2014-20 funding. This made programme-level recommendations for ERDF and ESF EU structural funding (ESIF) but was then extended to ESIF/R&D synergies, area-based ‘integrated innovation pilots’ which also incorporated national funding streams, and even potentially to Mayoral Combined Authority devolved leadership teams.

Synergies may be strengthened by joint or aligned commissioning and design processes and/or in integrated delivery management. But these are very difficult to achieve without many of the prerequisites outlined in previous chapters. 3LE works particularly on assembling and analysing the evidence base to identify and map potential solutions, and then with leadership and delivery teams to facilitate and build shared understandings, purposes, and agreements for bringing them to fruition.

These types of joining up and synergies exercises will be crucial in the 2020s, almost regardless of the appetite and devolution-readiness of the UK national government.



## Successful Places Triangle



*Figure Twenty One: A Total Place framework for place-based success*

## 5.4. Beyond ‘bad’ binary decision-making

Some interventions start with the ‘answer’ and then build the business case and appraisal to justify this pre-existing judgement.

To give a sample of many, many examples of misplaced binary thinking.

Throughout the decade many places wanted a Combined Authority with similar powers and resources to those seemingly being achieved by Greater Manchester. County councils argued for parity of national treatment and attention with urban metros.

Internationally competitive economic growth required a large, knowledge-intensive research park, an Enterprise Zone or ‘freeport’; housing supply a garden town or village; town centre revitalisation included a new shopping mall with free parking.

Local sentiment may resist change to keep a local hospital or school open intuitively regardless of potential improvement in health or education outcomes. Some publics may promote change punitively – for instance, seeking increased labour market participation by reducing out-of-work benefits.

Too often pilot projects are scaled up and spread out before they have been properly evaluated. At the same time promising initiatives are closed down because of short term financial and other shortages.

Perhaps most striking, the greatest national existential ‘mistake’ of the decade – BREXIT – was progressed as the authoritarian ‘will of the people’ following an advisory vote by 26% of the population and confirmed following the 2019 general election in which a clear majority of those who voted did so for Remain or confirmatory second referendum parties.

Not all of these solutions are necessarily wrong all of the time – but what they share is a ‘cart-before-the-horse’ belief in binary decision making – that one decision is uniquely ‘right’ and all other decisions are ‘wrong’.

3LE always seeks to start by clarifying the questions we are seeking to address through a policy or strategy – and considering all the dimensions of what success would look like for a place and its communities or for an organisation and its stakeholders. We can surface wicked issues and support neutral, independent spaces for at least progressing, even if not resolving, intractable questions.

If one approaches interventions in this way, there is rarely a single ‘right’ strategy and solution – more a range of options that require robust appraisal before value judgements are made.

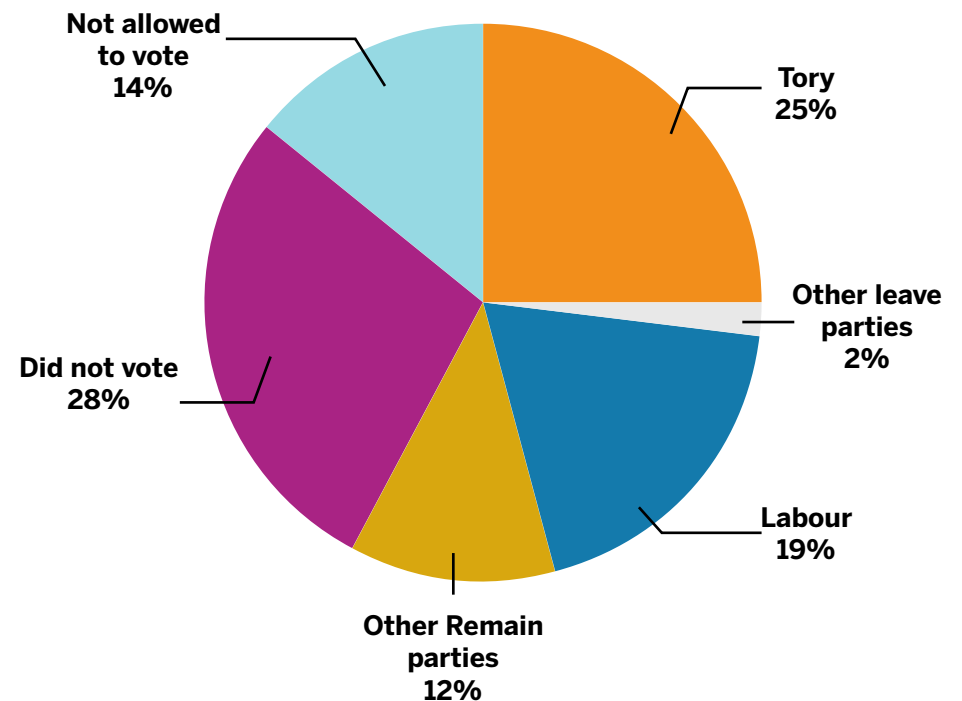
This is not a rejection of decisive decision-making. Every such process must be tailored to reach a solution at a favourable or required moment – even if it means a quick, light-touch deliberative process. Nor is it eschewing responding opportunistically to the latest fad or initiative offered down by a

government itself mistakenly adopting a sub-optimal binary solution. Nor is this about increasing complexity or extending confusion.

Rather, it is about a worldview and approach to policy development that prioritises open-mindedness, inquiry, creativity, building consensus, clarifying areas of dispute and difference. It recognises most decisions are complex and embody a level of unknowns. It acknowledges the role of value judgements in ultimate determinations – but seeks to ensure these are as explicit, transparent, and evidence-informed as possible. It builds consensus where possible but respects and seeks to reconcile and compensate losers in win-lose, zero-sum solutions.

We try to bring these values and operating styles to all 3LEs commissions – whether it is formative visioning, delivery management, even analysis of what might appear to be obvious lessons of statistics and other evidence. Amidst all of the cases mentioned throughout this report are illustrations of the outcomes of this type of approach.

## General Election 2019 Voting Statistics



*Figure Twenty Two: General Election 2019 voting shares*

## 5.5. Concluding remarks

Better leadership of place requires effective institutions collaborating purposefully. This chapter recognises the crucial roles anchor institutions need to play collectively, the individual and joint responsibilities they have for doing this purposefully and productively, and the sort of arrangements in which this collaboration can take place. In particular:

- **Places need to seek shared anchor institution collaboration on vision and key priorities for progressing it:** This probably requires both establishing formal, well-founded and resourced leadership teams; and building open, trusting informal relationships.
- **At the same time, though, anchor institutions need the humility to positively encourage and welcome constructive challenge.** In terms of humility, they need to be prepared at times to place the needs of place above their individual needs as institutions. This is a big and contentious ask. 3LE experience does propose a number of ways this might be addressed and has helped define a new perspective on civic-ness that is necessary and important going forward. In terms of challenge, they should support constructive challenge and 'loosener' institutions – and enable purposeful radical disruptive experimentation and scale-up
- **Local leadership teams need to rework 'Total Places'-type approaches and seek synergies across top-down government programmes:** Particularly in the post-pandemic, post-Brexit context, the need for holistic place-based budgeting, cohesive policy making, alignment and synergies across intervention strategies has never been more needed.
- **Where possible, eschew binary, winner-takes-all worldviews and zero-sum decision-making.** Great leaders of place know it is not as easy as that. There will seldom be a single right answer with every other answer wrong. In the 2020s we have to persuade national government and its winner-takes-all political leaders of the realities and complexities of place.

## Major 3LE projects and interventions referenced in Chapter Five

- **Luton Gateway Development Company, Chair, 2009-11**
- **HM Treasury, Communities and Local Government, 'Total Place: a whole area approach to public services', 2010**
- **Rutland Council – multiple exercises 2010-18**
- **Welland Partnership – repositioning in LEP-land, 2011-12**
- **Norbiton Community Budget pilot (with LGIU), 2012-13**
- **University of Warwick Chancellor's Commission, 'The future role of the University of Warwick in Coventry, Warwickshire and wider region', 2015-16**
- **West Midlands Growth Company Business Case (with AMEO), 2016-17**
- **Team building, Oldham and Wakefield MDCs, multiple exercises 2016-19**
- **'Towards an anchor institution revolution', Plymouth College of Art, 2017**
- **Reforms of TfGM for the new mayoral system, Greater Manchester CA (with SDG), 2018**
- **'Inclusive future growth in England's Cities and Regions' (with Newcastle City Futures) and the Urban Living Partnership Pilot Programme Review, 2018-19**
- **West Midlands Productivity and Skills Commission (with IER, University of Warwick), 2018**
- **University of Peterborough Visioning Exercise (with Hatch-Regeneris), 2018**
- **Institutional Development, Surrey County Council (with AMEO), 2019**



# CHAPTER SIX:

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Twenty for the twenties?



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An earlier draft of this report used the working title “Twenty for the twenties”. The motivation at that point was to try and identify 20 key insights from 3LE’s first decade that would have relevance and importance for local leadership at the start of the new decade. That reasoning was shallow and self-indulgent. 3LE has to be about more than the next mildly flashy headline.

**Ultimately, 3LE tries to be about helping leadership teams deliver better results for their places and communities – tackling this positively and progressively.**

In a similar vein, findings and lessons do not naturally come in round numbers – although a good advisor and consultant can shape the evidence to achieve that purpose if required.

Readers will form their own opinion of this narrative on 3LE’s first decade. But if one was to manipulate the story into a ‘twenty for the twenties’ convenience, 3LE has sought to positively and progressively assist clients and partners to frame answers to the following primary questions:

1. How ambitious should we be for our place and institution?
2. What does this mean for our vision, values and the priorities we choose to pursue long-term?
3. What is the evidence telling us about the purposes we are trying to achieve and the problems we will have to solve on our long-run journey?
4. Do we have a credible, coherent framework for planning and managing changes we need to make?
5. What do we wish to be known for globally and nationally as a place and as an institution?
6. What leadership and governance will be most fit-for-purpose in our geography?
7. How do we empower communities and neighbourhoods to manage change and take greater control over their own futures?
8. What is our devolution proposition, and what powers and resources are needed to progress this?
9. How do we create new forms of multi-layered governance – including sustainable, legitimate and accountable intermediate tiers?
10. How will we manage the demographic challenges facing us – including shifting the business as usual trends and forecasts if necessary?
11. What responsibilities are we prepared to have for global environmental challenges and how might we discharge them?
12. How are we seeking to position ourselves in terms of digital economy and society?
13. What does ‘good growth’ and ‘good jobs’ mean for our approach to economic interventions?
14. Can we achieve synergies and alignment across different policies and funding streams in our area?
15. How are we building a cohesive leadership team with shared understandings and mutual trust?
16. Are roles and responsibilities of our anchor institutions – especially universities – clear and agreed?

17. Is the leadership team building strong 'followership', engagement and participation in our priorities – especially from relevant communities and civil societies who are hard-to-reach and disengaged?
18. Are we open to constructive challenge and prepared to experiment with disruptive change?
19. Can we strengthen can-do, creative commitment to our priorities across staff and stakeholders?
20. Are the advisors and consultants with whom we are working adding real value and committed to embedding knowledge exchange from their interventions?

As you can see, 3LE will deliver to a glitzy superficial “20 for the twenties” brief if that is requested!

But, seriously, we have tried to answer these questions with the tools and techniques showcased in this report, by turning data into intelligence, and by building the types of relationships which will give places and their institutions the confidence to consider 3LE advice intently.

## 6.1. Looking forwards and outwards

The start of the 2020s should have been a time to reflect on, refresh and set new goals and ambitions. Sadly, it has been a moment of extreme threat as COVID19 has become an existential challenge for places and communities worldwide. 3LE recognises that the '20 for the twenties' questions above will not be your whole preoccupations certainly not whilst the pandemic is all consuming but at least some of them are likely to be relevant at least some of the time.

On the face of it multiple global existential challenges can seem overwhelming. The national context, although it probably looked more stable politically after the 2019 General Election, is almost certain to be preoccupied by the pandemic and its aftermath, and distracted by Brexit fall-out and increasing centrifugal forces on the Union formerly known as the United Kingdom.

Places, institutions, even individual professionals may be attracted by a strategic combination of looking inward/keeping what we've got/preventing deterioration and responding opportunistically.

To be fair, these are legitimate options on which to focus much attention.

But they are essentially tactical. Places and institutions will change profoundly – maybe existentially. Leadership is about shaping that change

with priorities informed by ambitions, values and evidence. It is about delivering change effectively and securing management capacity and capability to do this.

The 3LE manifesto for this process is to look forward, look outward and to have confidence in our abilities to influence the interdependencies this entails. To rework a much-misused platitude from current UK ruling party narrative orthodoxy,

**'taking back control' will never be a zero-sum game. It is about sharing decision-making; building trust, co-ownership of and alliances for change; about collaboration and flexible adaptability.**

That will be 3LEs journey for the 2020s – and also that of successful places and their institutions. We hope we will do parts of that journey together.



## 6.2. Concluding remarks



3LE's genesis in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (GFC), a 50th birthday milestone, and shortly before the inception of the 2010 Coalition government, sought to test three main propositions. Could 3LE as a micro-entity continue to have professional relevance, demonstrate personal entrepreneurial and creative dynamism, and be able to sustain a commercial business, after its founder left a relatively successful public service career?

One of the piece's main foundations is to eschew binary answers. Our perspective has to be that, whilst proud of much that is showcased, many things could have been done better or delivered differently.

More fundamentally, positive progressive place-shaping is an ongoing process – not a finite end point.

3LE will continue to support and enable places and institutions to deliver positive progressive outward-facing results – bringing the values and approaches implicit in this paper. For, as much as recording 3LEs first decade, this thought piece is offered as collateral for discussion and development of the work we will do together in the 2020s.

Please offer feedback, comments and suggestions. It will make the 2020s journey more stimulating and enjoyable. It should improve the relevance and impact of our activities. These are the purposes for which 3LE was established and remains its purposes and priorities for the new decade.







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