Local Trust
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people

The future is ours

What will shape the next decade
for England's communities?

Local Trust

Cover photo: Dyke House Big Local, Hartlepool
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Foreword

At time of writing, as 2020 draws to a close, the world is suddenly looking a much more positive place. The much-awaited COVID-19 vaccine is now close to being delivered, and the prospect of returning to something like normality by mid-2021 appears real.

But if we've learned one thing from 2020, it's that things can change very quickly. And the fact remains that the pandemic has robbed us of almost a year of normal life and, for some of us, the impact has been painful and personal. The economic impact has been equally hard to bear and is likely to get worse before it gets better. Most importantly, the last twelve months has shown how important it is to avoid making assumptions about the future that are too determined by the challenges of today.

But if responding to immediate challenges has necessarily dominated the past year, we need to ensure it does not prevent us from taking a longer-term perspective. That in itself can have a positive effect – at a time of uncertainty and instability there is value in approaches that allow us to take more control over our own futures, that give us the opportunity to write the story, rather than being characters in someone else's. And, looking past 2021 and towards the years beyond, a different set of possible stories heaves into view. Many of them provide reasons to be optimistic for the future of communities in England. Yes, we have to acknowledge that there are challenges ahead, but we may also be starting to understand how we can meet them, and how we can do so together.

Over the last year, we have seen an acknowledgement of the power of collective action, not least in the flowering of mutual-aid initiatives across the country as a response to the first lockdown. That has helped a new narrative emerge as a possible future, one in which the role of state, private and charitable sectors is complemented by the emergence of a fourth element in our society. One defined by thriving, resilient communities, in which people are well-connected, and know each other by sight if not by name, and in which local people and organisations are able to work together towards common goals and are confident and self-reliant in the face of challenge. One in which communities have the enterprising spirit to spot, take and create opportunities, and are able to organise, mobilise and communicate in pursuit of the support or change they need, both as individual communities and in larger coalitions across the country. One in which communities have the capacity to imagine a better future, but also celebrate and take pride in their past and current identities.

At the same time, we are seeing new technologies emerge into the mainstream, which change our assumptions of what is possible. Local communities in the future could be generating more of the energy they use, growing more of the food they eat, delivering more products and services, providing more jobs and keeping more money locally. There are some places in England that already look like this. But in the future, they could be the norm, rather than the exception.

Over the last decade, Local Trust has been working to explore ways of genuinely shifting power to communities, chiefly through the ground-breaking Big Local programme, which gives 150 communities across England over £1m each to spend on improving their neighbourhoods, the only condition being that local people come together and make the decisions for themselves. Local Trust is also advocating for changes in government policy, not least as one of the founding members of the Community Wealth Fund Alliance, which calls for long-term funding and support for 'left behind' neighbourhoods to rebuild their social infrastructure, putting in place the foundations for them to take control over their own futures. And we are working with partners across all sectors to change the wider system of funding, values, culture and capabilities, in ways that will enable local people to lead change in their own communities.

We have called this report 'The future is ours' because we believe that the radical changes needed to put power in the hands of local people to transform their communities are more important and more possible now than at any time in the recent past. But to take hold of that power, communities have to plan and prepare. We hope this report helps them grasp the challenge.

James Goodman
Director of partnerships, Local Trust

Introduction

The past decade has been a time of vast change for English communities: a time of economic restructuring, political turbulence, social change, environmental stress, institutional upheaval and fiscal austerity. And on top of this has been the profound impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Communities have responded to both these longer-term shifts and the more immediate challenges of lockdown with a huge range of innovations, but there have also been new or intensified stresses on places and the people that inhabit them.

As this report sets out, the pace of change is unlikely to abate; on the contrary – if anything, it looks set to accelerate. And while some aspects of the future, such as an ageing population, can be predicted with confidence, many other features of the next ten years and beyond remain highly unpredictable.

But the fact that the future is unpredictable does not mean that it cannot be anticipated. Instead, this report starts from the recognition that, as communities continue to adapt and experiment, it can be deeply helpful to them – and to the organisations that support them, like Local Trust – to explore what the future could look like; and then to think about what the implications for communities might be of a wide range of different factors that could plausibly emerge over the next decade.

With that in mind, Local Trust commissioned this project to explore and map out a range of 'future factors' that could shape the context for communities in England from now to 2030 and beyond. We have not sought to reach definitive answers as to what the future will look like or what local communities can do to prepare; instead, our aim is to provoke and stimulate, to help others to ask the same questions that we have been asking, and to enable them to make their own journeys through the same terrain that we have been exploring in this process.

Much of the research and conversation that this work draws on took place in 2019 and 2020, before the pandemic hit. Suddenly, in the face of the immediate crisis, it seemed woefully out of date. But, reviewing and updating the work for publication in 2020, we realised that the pandemic, while changing the context, had accelerated many of the factors we had identified. If anything, the pandemic has reminded us that the future is deeply uncertain and so underlines the need for work like this.

We had three audiences in mind – starting with ourselves. When this work was first commissioned, Local Trust was looking ahead to its final strategy, covering the period from 2021 to 2026 and, in particular, thinking about its legacy beyond 2026. The aim of the research was therefore to make sure that we were challenged to reflect on how our operating environment was evolving, and how that might lead to radically changed circumstances for Big Local areas and for communities in general.

Second, Local Trust sought to support the creation of a resource that would be relevant to the wider family of organisations that work on community-led change. Recent years have seen a superb harvest of thinking, experimenting and learning at a community level. We want to support and contribute to that process wherever

we can – from the Big Local communities at the core of our work to the new leadership academy that we announced in 2019 – and so we hope that research like this may also be helpful in that wider context, including to many of the people consulted in the research who fed into this work.

Third, and most fundamentally, we hope that this resource will be helpful to communities on the ground, including of course the 150 Big Local communities that Local Trust works with. The Big Local communities themselves are also beginning to develop their plans for activities leading up to 2026, which will include consideration of long-term legacy. So we also hope that this work can provide people in communities with a set of prompts for thinking about the future

How we approached the work

The report is based around a set of 41 future factors. Each one takes a single variable that could affect English communities over the coming decade, imagines how it might play out, explores what's currently happening on the issue and some existing signals of change, and identifies some of the questions that might arise for communities if things were to develop as we imagine.

The factors are not predictions, but neither are they random speculations. Rather, they are intended as what-ifs: a kind of evidence-based imagining that presents plausible micro-stories of the future, rooted in changes we can see emerging or sustaining today, designed both to awaken and sensitise us to uncertainty, and to create a prompt for thinking through how communities could anticipate, prepare or respond.

Nor are the factors intended to add up to a comprehensive set or an overarching story of the world through the 2020s to 2030 and beyond. We do not expect all of these future factors to play out simultaneously; indeed, some directly contradict each other. And the report does not set out to offer comprehensive analysis of the drivers of each future factor, or definite answers to what it would mean for communities if it comes about. Instead, the aim is for them to be used as provocations to stimulate both thinking and discussion. Whilst the economic, social and political volatility engendered by COVID-19 makes it in some ways harder to tell plausible stories of our possible futures, it is also a time in which everybody has a heightened awareness of the potential for sudden collapse – or, indeed, renewal.

To compile the factors, we surveyed a wide range of reports and research data, and then spoke to a highly diverse group of thinkers and practitioners – in communities, companies, central and local government, campaigning organisations, the media, academia and other sectors. We also worked closely with Local Trust's own trustees, senior management team and staff, and – most importantly – with people from Big Local communities up and down England. In all, more than two hundred people have taken part in conversations as part of this work, the majority of whom are involved directly in delivering or supporting the Big Local programme.

We deliberately set a relatively near-term time horizon for our work, looking across the 2020s and up to 2030. While a lot can change in a decade, as we saw during the 2010s, a ten-year outlook also means that many or even most of the seeds of what 2030 will look like are already starting to sprout. As the American author William Gibson famously observed: "The future is already here – it's just not very evenly distributed."

We also deliberately looked at different kinds of future factors. Some, like the changing role of funders, have direct consequences for communities; others, such as questions of national identity, are more indirect in their effect but still important. And, crucially, none of the factors stands alone: instead, they are all interlinked, some in obvious ways and others more subtle.

This report is long – but we don't suggest it is read cover to cover as a linear piece of work. Rather, it is a resource to dip into and draw on. The opening section gives an overview of all 41 future factors; we then explore the implications for communities today, by asking what capacities will be needed to successfully navigate the 2020s. The second section then explores each of the future factors in detail.

Exploring the future factors

To make the 41 future factors easier to navigate, we have grouped them loosely into four categories. These are based on the origin of the shift (is it coming from within communities, or outside?) and whether, on balance, it is a threat or an opportunity:

The centre cannot hold:
externally driven threats

The challenge within:
obstacles at community level

Glad tidings:
opportunities emerging from national level

The future is ours:
positive futures that communities can drive themselves

This section sets out an overview of some of the key themes that emerge in each of these categories, together with a summary of the 41 future factors covered. These factors are explored in full detail in the appendix.

The centre cannot hold

We may not know what is going to happen in future, but we can see that the tectonic plates are moving: internationally, as the relative balance of power between the US, Russia, China shifts, as multilateralism struggles, and as countries across the world try to contain coronavirus; nationally, as the UK government sails the uncharted waters of a pandemic while exiting the European Union; and within communities, as their economic and social fabric comes under almost unprecedented strain during the coronavirus crisis. The first section looks at what these externally generated stresses may mean for communities across England over the next decade.

The future factors we imagine in this basket start with the recognition that we are unlikely to have finalised a new political settlement in the UK or globally by 2030. Rather, we may see a decade or more

of permanent crisis, with the Westminster government distracted, economic crises, contested pressure for further devolution and the steady intensification of the climate crisis. Other factors include the threat of widening inequality, and emerging new forms of economic exclusion.

In the short descriptions below, each factor describes an aspect of the world in 2030 as if it were already reality, as seen from a point of time in the next decade. Then in the appendix, each factor is described in detail, unpacking the existing signals of change that show that the factor is plausible. We also explore the possible implications for communities and share illustrative quotes from the interviews and workshops conducted as part of the research for this project.

1
Westminster diverted →

The 2020s see virtually all political bandwidth consumed by the coronavirus pandemic, Brexit, and continued pressures towards a possible break-up of the United Kingdom. Domestic and local issues are largely overlooked. On Brexit and Scottish secession, endless negotiations founder on the minutiae of what kind of relationship politicians in London really want with their neighbours – rather than what's happening on the ground in communities.

2
The tensions of devolution →

Throughout the 2020s, debate on constitutional reform is intense, driven by disaffection with a political elite that struggled to manage the coronavirus pandemic and led the country into a painful Brexit. Scotland's secession in 2026 forces London to relinquish more power to the remaining countries and regions of the Union. But, though years of centralisation of power may finally be coming to an end, new tensions are emerging between ultra-local town and parish councils, powerful municipalities, new regional and metropolitan institutions, and a possible English parliament.

3
The next crash
→

In 2021, in the aftermath of COVID-19, the UK economy enters a deep recession. With public debt at an eye-watering high, the government implements austerity measures and raises taxes. But it's a long, slow road to recovery, with the possibility of nasty bouts of hyperinflation on the way. The result: an even more savage wave of cuts than those following the 2008 financial crisis, with communities struggling to pick up the pieces.

4
Working for the algorithm
→

Artificial Intelligence, big data and automation continue to turn labour markets upside down throughout the 2020s. Jobs are polarised between the highly skilled and those caught in the casual gig economy, who were already struggling to make ends meet before COVID-19 devastated the service sector. Increasingly, the decade has seen a divergence between the people writing the algorithms and those whose lives are scripted by them.

5
Inequality wider than ever
→

Inequality – of wealth, income and opportunity – has only widened by 2030, with increasingly worrying impacts in many places. But the voting power of the elderly means that it's becoming a problem primarily for young people and children, while state pensions and other benefits for the old have become far more generous.

6
Places the state has abandoned
→

By 2030 the idea of 'left behind' places has given way to a narrative of 'failed communities' in locations where cycles of trauma, conflict, political neglect, economic under-investment and hollowed-out institutions, exacerbated by COVID-19's disproportionate impact on the poor, combine to create a vortex that's almost impossible to escape.

7
The new politics of debt
→

Personal debt levels accelerate over the 2020s, after a hefty push from the pandemic. More and more of us are going into debt just to make ends meet. As a result, slogans of 'debt servitude' are increasingly part of our politics, loan sharks are thriving, food banks are feeding more of us than ever, and there are signs of a movement among younger people towards refusing to pay off debt.

8
The rise of data-driven exclusion
→

By 2030, the economy is driven by data, with goods and services shaped by the data of the people who generate most value through their spending power. As a result, people who generate little data, or who have little money and whose data is therefore less valuable, are not catered for in an economy increasingly built on hyper-personalisation.

9
Leaderless protests cause paralysis
→

By 2030, leaderless 'protest swarms' are adept at disrupting critical infrastructure – and have become a chronic feature of the political landscape, with governments often unclear about how to disrupt them or whom they're supposed to negotiate with.

10
The retreat of the NHS
→

The increased public spending demanded by the pandemic helps the NHS recover a little in the early 2020s, but by 2030 it's in crisis once again, thanks to chronic underfunding, administrative complexity, endless reforms, spiking demand and spiralling costs. Local community healthcare tries to step into the gap, but it's more of a desperate rearguard action than a real replacement.

11
Intensifying impacts of climate crisis
→

By 2030, communities are already struggling with climate impacts much more powerful than the ones seen ten years earlier – in particular in the form of heatwaves, droughts, flash floods and storms. Transport and utility infrastructure struggle to cope, and there is a far stronger focus on community resilience.

12
The looming shadow of climate collapse
→

Although the worst climate impacts are still in the future in 2030, they're already casting a long shadow. Across the globe, people still scarred by the coronavirus pandemic have a fresh appreciation of mankind's vulnerability to existential risk. Coastal communities, towns prone to flooding and upland farms are increasingly struggling to attract investment or hold on to their inhabitants, as we start to realise the shape of things to come. Insurance premiums are rising, investment patterns are shifting, and there's widespread climate anxiety and grief.

The challenge within

Our second basket of future factors looks at challenges that could arise *within* communities. They explore topics such as the potential pitfalls of devolution and the implications of continued high street decline. They also look at how we relate to each other: for instance, in scenarios where political polarisation is spiralling out of control, or more of us are retreating into our filter bubbles. Finally, they address how lack of national action on infectious disease and antibiotic resistance could affect us all, and the challenges of tackling mental ill-health without adequate national support.

13 The rise of local fiefdoms →

The 2020s see a wave of devolution across England. Money, power and political attention increasingly flow to community level, leading to a new cadre of local barons and fiefdoms. Impressive results ensue in some places, but concerns rise in others about corruption, patronage and accountability.

14 Too much participation? →

New and more participatory forms of democracy are flourishing in communities in 2030. The challenge now is how to join these disparate strategies and processes into something coherent, and how to resolve sometimes intense conflicts of legitimacy. Some local councils successfully rise to the challenge but, increasingly, it's new self-organised community networks – often forged in the crucible of the 2020 pandemic response – that are proving best suited for the job.

15 We retreat into our filter bubbles →

By 2030, misinformation, fake news, online filter bubbles, the rise of nearly undetectable 'deep fakes' and the prevalence of AI-mediated social media have led to 'the end of truth', with the collapse of any idea of common ground in politics.

16 We still feel alone →

Following the atomising effect of multiple lockdowns in the early 2020s, an ageing society with more single-person households, busier lives and more time online combine to make us lonelier than ever in 2030 – in the process, making us less happy, less healthy and more prone to extremism.

17
The partial death of the high street
→

Our high streets haven't recovered as retail hubs in 2030: we're buying more stuff online than ever before, in a shift that was turbo-charged by the pandemic. But while malls and retail centres are ailing and retail jobs being lost apace, some high streets are thriving. Falling rents have allowed us to reinvent these as congregational spaces where we can gather, learn, and get to know each other.

18
Political tribalism goes feral
→

Through the 2020s, political polarisation and populism have intensified – making what happened in the wake of the Brexit referendum look like a playground squabble. New issues such as Black Lives Matter and transgender rights have been drawn into a deepening culture war, intergenerational conflict has exploded, political leaders have become better at exploiting our fear and outrage, and both media and social media fan the flames. Result: we're increasingly at each other's throats, just as the issues we're up against most need us to pull together.

19
Local infectious disease epidemics
→

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic reshaped the world. But a decade on, despite far better UK public health surveillance and pandemic preparedness, many communities are struggling with much more localised outbreaks of disease – from tuberculosis hotspots in areas of high deprivation, to measles and mumps in areas where strong anti-vaccine opinion has taken hold.

20
Mental health breakdown
→

The past decade has seen a splintering of professional psychology and psychotherapy services. Already struggling to meet the rapidly growing incidence of depression, anxiety, suicide and self-harm, these services were utterly unequal to the mental health demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now in 2030, ordinary people and communities are increasingly discovering how much they can do for themselves, amid an explosion of collective self-help groups that give people the chance to hear and be heard.

Glad tidings

Third, we explore a range of more positive, externally driven future factors. Economic factors include potential shifts away from austerity, and the possible emergence of local currencies. And the factors that focus on identity, at a time of pronounced volatility in politics, include the emergence of successful nation-building efforts, the potential for an explosion in volunteering, and shifts in values and political attitudes driven by new intergenerational solidarity.

21 A flood of public spending →

Austerity is a distant memory by the mid 2020s as public appetite for a larger state soars post-pandemic. The government makes a bold gamble on modern monetary theory, printing money to spend its way out of COVID-19 debt. Health, infrastructure and local services all see a wave of investment, particularly in areas previously described as 'red wall' seats – the neglected towns of the north. Some local authorities struggle to cope with the influx of money after years of scarcity, reverting to top-down models of service delivery and prioritising big-ticket items – leading to tensions with grassroots groups.

22 Philanthropists change tack →

Through the 2020s, philanthropy and funding more broadly have decisively shifted in approach. Following lessons learned in the pandemic response, the old focus on stand-alone or high-profile projects has gone. Instead, there is greater focus on core funding for people and organisations, collaborations on joint funds, and place-based approaches.

23 Diversity gets real →

The sparks of #MeToo and Black Lives Matter lit a fire that burned brightly throughout the 2020s. An avalanche of popular pressure forced a serious and sometimes painful engagement with questions of voice and representation in modern Britain. The result? By 2030 we saw an acceleration of the steady progress that was already being made on gender equity, a step change in ethnic representation and steadily improved rights for those in the LGBTQ+ community.

24 Ageing kicks in →

By 2030, the effects of an ageing population are being felt in earnest. Millions of old people are volunteering, transforming community life. Yet the burden of care – in terms of time, money, tax and emotion – is proving bigger than anyone expected. Meanwhile, the dominance of the more conservative baby-boomer vote is declining thanks to accelerating shifts in values among some older people, who recognise the sacrifices made by the young for the old during the early 2020's coronavirus pandemic. They want to be allies to their children and grandchildren and are increasingly dependent on them as they age.

25
The currency multiverse →

The pound is just one of a range of currencies we use in 2030: euros, dollars, private currencies run by companies like PayPal and Facebook, and cryptocurrencies are all part of everyday life, and concerns are growing about the extractive economic dynamics they can drive. But a growing number of communities are also running their own currencies or gift economies, with surprising successes – and a few mishaps.

26
Government gets serious about local climate policy →

The UK is well on track for its climate targets by 2030 – the result of a step change in both political priority and funding. Local areas now have their own carbon budgets and money to spend on staying within them, creating a wealth of new jobs in areas such as domestic re-fits, local public transport, and community power generation.

27
A decade of nation building →

By 2030, major attempts are being made to bring people together as a nation again. There have been new bank holidays, including one celebrating the NHS, festivals of Britain, countless citizens' assemblies, and a controversial reconciliation commission designed to build bridges across the political divide. Brexit is largely done and dusted – though the underlying culture war continues to erupt in new ways.

28
Strong support for immigration →

By 2030, the number of immigrants living in England is higher than ever. There are tensions, with some people heavily focused on keeping immigration numbers low and increasingly populist in pursuit of this goal. But younger generations are increasingly vocal about the need for more immigration to ease the massive tax and care burden that's weighing more heavily on their shoulders every year, and as a necessary moral response to the rapidly rising global number of climate refugees – and overall, public opinion is with them.

29
Work takes up far less time →

As automation gathers pace, there is less work to be done. The economic impacts are hard: wages fall, unemployment rises and inequality rises even more. But the shift also sees the newly time-rich doing more in their communities: volunteering, participating and building a sense of place.

30
Drugs are decriminalised →

Following the example of many US states, by 2030 most drugs have been decriminalised and some legalised altogether – coupled with major investment in harm reduction that treats addiction as an issue of health rather than criminality. The illegal drugs-trade economy largely implodes, freeing up much police time and prison space – but addiction in the most deprived communities remains a massive problem.

31
An infrastructure renaissance →

By 2030, a massive programme of infrastructure renewal is underway, affecting roads, railways, telecoms, power generation and more. Many communities, especially those in major cities, benefit handsomely from their improved connectedness – but some 'left behind' places, especially in the north and midlands, become more so than ever.

The future is ours

Finally, the report explores positive opportunities that lie within communities' own gift. These optimistic future factors include how local economic ecosystems could emerge – from new, neighbourhood energy economies to the rapid evolution of localised manufacturing – and from new livelihoods created by regenerative agriculture and rewilding, to the jobs that could be created if local authorities were to start paying people for care work. The report looks at how homes, education and transport systems could better serve communities, and explores the quality of our relationships – particularly how our preoccupation with status-driven, material consumption may be giving way to a greater focus on social connection, and how this may be reflected in a new 'post-religious' movement.

32 Grassroots economic power →

A new world of hyper-local social and economic ecosystems has emerged, with locally owned social enterprises connecting with local authorities and community organisations to manage common resources, from streets to housing to local food production. The result: a new level of coherence and accountability, rooted in dense webs of community relationships.

33 Supply chains go local →

The age of globalised supply chains – from food and fuel to manufactured goods and finance – is in its twilight by 2030. Instead, a mix of consumer demand, higher energy costs, 3D printing, maker spaces and local innovation clusters means that much more of what we use and consume is produced locally – part of a thriving community-wealth movement which pushes big-business chain stores that suck money out of the town to go somewhere else.

34 The rise of the neighbourhood energy economy →

By 2030, over half of us are producers as well as consumers of energy, as domestic and community-level power generation becomes the new normal. Power grids look very different and communities have a new source of income; but it's the change in relationships and social capital that's the real surprise and drives more local economic success.

35 Farming gives way to rewilding and regeneration →

Much of English farming as it used to exist has ceased by 2030 – the result of Brexit, shifts in global markets, more extreme weather, and recognition of the deep unsustainability of much of the old approach. Rural communities are flourishing nonetheless, thanks to new policies that have created thousands of jobs in conservation, regenerative agriculture, urban and indoor farming, and rewilding.

36 Education takes flight →

The 2020s see acknowledgment that education in the UK is no longer fit for purpose. Lessons from lockdown – some surprising – lead to changes, from primary education starting a year later to a massive move online for college and university students. As the skills needed for jobs continue to shift rapidly, communities realise that their ability to help people retrain dictates their ability to attract jobs and investment.

37 The new care economy →

By 2030, more people than ever are engaged in care work, but now they're being paid for it. Local authorities are recognising that care by friends and family is both better and cheaper than doing it themselves or outsourcing to the private sector. The result: a fairer deal for carers, and a new economic sector around people providing ultra-small-scale care for a handful of people who need it.

38 Connection takes over from consumerism →

By 2030, we've largely stopped trying to define ourselves through material consumption. Instead, status-signalling mainly takes place through virtual or online goods – but the bigger picture is that we're increasingly valuing social connection over consumption.

39 Transport for all →

The 2020s see two quite different transport shifts unfold. There is a massive and sustained post-pandemic reduction in business and air-travel, as working from home becomes the new normal; and, once we are through the pandemic, a move away from car use and the corresponding reinvigoration of local transport services. Fast, frequent and free bus services connect rural areas, tram lines become a feature of urban centres, and safe, accessible bike lanes pop up everywhere.

40
Homes for everyone
→

By 2030, a massive wave of investment is taking place in building new housing and upgrading existing homes, and a renaissance is underway in the social housing sector, much of it thanks to community land trusts.

41
Post-religious congregations
→

By 2030, the religious landscape looks very different. While formal religious observance is still falling nationally, charismatic congregations are exploding in cities and, increasingly, young people who see themselves as 'spiritual but not religious' are creating new kinds of congregation, leading to engaged activity in their communities.

What capabilities will communities need in 2030?

While the future factors in the report tease out some of the specific questions that might arise for communities in each case, the report is also designed to provoke thinking about the overall capabilities that could help them to navigate a range of different futures, through the 2020s and beyond. Each of the future factors includes some initial ideas about the kinds of questions that communities will need to answer in order to navigate those factors successfully.

So, in this section, we set out some initial thoughts on six capacities that we think communities are likely to need more of over the coming decade. While some are about maximising prosperity and quality of life, many others are more basic, and focus on how communities can cope during a decade likely to be characterised by high turbulence and uncertainty. For many communities, the 2020s will be less like drifting gently downstream and more like a stretch of rapids on a whitewater river.

Based on the future factors set out in the remainder of the report, this is what we think they will need in order to stay afloat and prosper. As with the rest of the report, though, these ideas are suggested not as definitive answers, but rather as prompts for communities and the organisations that support them to do their own thinking and come up with their own responses.

© Fotonow

Nudge Community Builders, Stonehouse, Plymouth

Connection

Throughout the future factors, the nature and quality of relationships in communities recurs as the foundation for everything else. In **23. Diversity gets real** and **18. Political tribalism goes feral**, for instance, we ask how communities can create more experiences that highlight what they have in common, including through more radical and serious attention to diversity. In **5. Inequality wider than ever**, we question how communities can pull together to support young people growing up in poverty. And in **16. We still feel alone**, we ask what are the most effective things communities can do to bring people together, given the terrible toll that loneliness takes on everything from health to vulnerability to extremism.

Research suggests that 'weak ties' – the kind of relationship we have with people who we might not call friends but whom we know to say hello to, and still value our relationships with – are especially important here, both in creating most of the embeddedness that people feel in their communities and in transmitting the majority of information through these networks (Granovetter 2005). This meaningful relationship-building has suffered badly in recent years, amid the loss of many of our congregational spaces and our increasing busyness. But our future factors also suggest ways that we can start to rebuild these connections – something that will help on all of the other capacities below.

If connection between people is one key foundation for communities, then the other is their connection with nature. We explore what happens to communities when society at large gets this wrong in **11. Intensifying impacts of climate crisis**, and its attendant mental health implications in **12. The looming shadow of climate collapse**. But this also has the potential to be a virtuous spiral. As research during the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated, people with access to green space are more likely to see higher levels of happiness. In **35. Farming gives way to rewilding and regeneration**, we explore what it might look like to have thousands of communities more closely linked to their land and food supply; and in **34. The rise of the neighbourhood energy economy**, and **26. Government gets serious about local climate policy**, we look at how decentralised energy production or local carbon budgets could increase communities' sense of connection and responsibility with regard to nature.

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Friendly bench' launch, North West Ipswich

Self-reliance

The decade ahead is likely to be heavily characterised by shocks, stresses, turbulence and uncertainty, and this theme is central to many of our future factors. **3. The next crash** imagines another financial crash on the scale of 2008, for example, while **9. Leaderless protests cause paralysis** explores the potential impact on communities of highly decentralised 'protest swarms' which government struggles to contain or negotiate with. And, of course, communities face both the near-term **11. Intensifying impacts of climate change** and, over the longer term, **12. The looming shadow of climate collapse**. As communities face these challenges, they will need to be self-reliant and resilient. However, the capacity for self-reliance is not evenly distributed. Local Trust research shows that mutual-aid groups blossomed where there was already established activity and social infrastructure, but were much less prevalent elsewhere. The future factors look at how communities can practically build self-reliance.

33. Supply chains go local and **32. Grassroots economic power,** for example, both ask how communities can create the hubs of skills and knowledge needed to support local industries and economies. **34. The rise of the neighbourhood energy economy'** asks how communities can kickstart the process of community energy development and sustain it long enough to bear fruit, while **7. The new politics of debt** asks whether community banks or credit unions could emerge as a key alternative to short term lenders. **36. Education takes flight**, meanwhile, looks at communities' role in investing in their own skills, and explores how communities can start, lead, fund and evaluate self-generated adult education programmes. **19. Local infectious disease epidemics** looks at how local efforts may be vital in the absence of sufficient national action (a question that will be particularly relevant post-COVID-19). Finally, **1. Westminster diverted** looks at how communities may need to step up if central government remains preoccupied by the terms of Brexit and, later, Scottish devolution.

This capacity is especially interconnected with other skills on this list – for instance, whether or not places have a culture of **Imagination**; whether they have the kind of relationships highlighted in **Connection**; and also whether they have the sense of story, purpose and pride flagged in the capability in **Celebration**.

© Andy Aitchison

Coastal Communities Challenge, East Lindsey, Lincolnshire

Advocacy

Other key capabilities we think communities will rely on heavily over the next decade are advocacy and campaigning: the ability to organise, mobilise and communicate in pursuit of the support or change they need from external actors, both as individual communities and in larger coalitions of communities across regions or the country.

In many cases, the support they are advocating for will be money, as explored in our future factors. **21. A flood of public spending** and **13. The rise of local fiefdoms** are both about how local communities can influence how central government spends money in communities. **22. Philanthropists change tack** looks at how they can persuade trusts and foundations to spend money differently. And **31. An infrastructure renaissance**, **39. Transport for all** and

40. Homes for everyone touch on different ways local communities may need to influence private sector investors.

But other kinds of influencing will count too. **15. We retreat into our filter bubbles'** looks at how communities can advocate for responsible internet use; **23. Diversity gets real** asks how they can improve gender and ethnic representation; while **17. The partial death of the high street** touches on how communities could organise to demand compulsory purchase orders for vacant buildings in town centres. **8. The rise of data-driven exclusion**, meanwhile, asks whether communities will be able to find new ways of influencing how their data is collected and used, recognising that this could become a new way in which some places get left behind.

© Zute Lightfoot

Black Lives Matter workshop, W12 Big Local, West London

An enterprising spirit

This capability is the energy, enthusiasm and sense of purpose that communities will need to seize the opportunities that may appear over the decade ahead. It's closely allied to other capabilities, including **Self-reliance**, **Advocacy** and **Imagination**.

In a world of possible fragmentation (**1. Westminster diverted**), the potential for **3. The next crash** and an increasingly fast-moving education and employment landscape (**36. Education takes flight**, **4. Working for the algorithm**), those communities that are able to spot and exploit chances to build skills, networks and businesses are more likely to prosper.

We look at various aspects of this: from a renaissance in caring in **37. The new care economy** to better local provision of well-designed infrastructure in **40. Homes for everyone**, **31. An infrastructure renaissance** and **39. Transport for all**, as well as a reduced risk of economic fragility in **33. Supply chains go local**.

There's a common thread here: it's about decisive, well-coordinated local leadership (avoiding the pitfalls of **2. The tensions of devolution** or **18. Political tribalism goes feral**, and about ordinary people who feel that they belong and have a sense of agency.

© James O Jenkins

West End, Morecambe

Imagination

Because the coming decade will involve so many new opportunities and threats, communities will constantly be having to make it up as they go along. They may find themselves facing the unfamiliar prospect of **21. A flood of public spending**, for example, or innovating with local currencies as a way of keeping wealth circulating locally, as we explore in **25. The currency multiverse**. In **41. Post-religious congregations'**, they experiment with new kinds of congregational spaces as formal religious observance declines; and in **37. The new care economy**, they are trying out very different models of providing care for people who need it.

While a culture of creativity and risk-taking is one key element of what it takes for this capability to thrive, another will be the ability to learn quickly from experiments – to evaluate not just what works, but why. This will place a particular premium on communities' ability to learn from each other. If places all over the country are undertaking the same experiments, then the risk of everyone reinventing the wheel will be immense. Instead, communities will need to find new ways of collaborating – not just within, but also *between* places.

© Fotonow

Nudge Community Builders, Stonehouse, Plymouth

Celebration

Even in communities that are struggling to stay afloat during the coming, turbulent decade, being able to take pride in and celebrate the place that they share – its story, its beauty, its quirks, its traditions, its diversity, its resilience in the face of challenges – will matter hugely.

This capability surfaces most explicitly in **27. A decade of nation building**, which asks both how community celebrations or secular rituals can help to build social cohesion and offset fatalism, apathy and polarisation, and how communities can contribute to the emergence of new narratives that emphasise what we have in common, without leaving anyone out.

These narratives have the potential to become self-fulfilling prophecies.

But, in more subtle ways, this capability underpins many more factors: from the local economic systems seen in **25. The currency multiverse**, **33. Supply chains go local**, **17. The partial death of the high street** or **34. The rise of the neighbourhood energy economy**, through to the DIY public service provision that communities scramble to put together in future factors such as **10. The retreat of the NHS**, **20. Mental health breakdown**, or **36. Education takes flight**.

© Marcus Way

Filwood Fantastic – Creative Civic Change

Appendix: the future factors

This section explores in full detail each of the 41 future factors outlined in the first section. Here we explore the possible implications for communities and share illustrative quotes from interviews and workshops conducted as part of the research for this project.

Thank you to everyone who participated in these research interviews and workshops.

The centre cannot hold

1 Westminster diverted

The 2020s see virtually all political bandwidth consumed by the coronavirus pandemic, Brexit, and continued pressures towards a possible break-up of the United Kingdom. Domestic and local issues are largely overlooked. On Brexit and Scottish secession, endless negotiations founder on the minutiae of what kind of relationship politicians in London really want with their neighbours – rather than what's happening on the ground in communities.

Issue overview

In the years immediately following the Brexit referendum, Britain's system of government was so dominated by Brexit that ministers, MPs and civil servants had limited bandwidth for anything else. Add a global pandemic to the mix, and everything else had to take a back seat.

In the early years of the 2020s, the medium-term ramifications of Brexit and the economic shock of Coronavirus – regardless of how quickly and effectively vaccines can be rolled out – are likely to reverberate for years, and absorb much of the time and mental energy of the UK's political class.

Meanwhile, the odds are shortening that Scotland could vote to leave the UK if another referendum is held. Since the close-run no verdict in 2014, Scotland's first minister Nicola Sturgeon has twice sought Westminster's approval for a second referendum, and has twice been rebuffed. A weakened London may find it hard to say no a third time.

These three issues could continue to absorb the bulk of political attention, parliamentary time and public sector spending for years. The risk is that there is little left over for pressing domestic priorities such as climate policy, infrastructure or housing.

Signals of change

According to a YouGov poll, autumn 2020 saw a slide in public confidence in how the pandemic was being handled, from over 72 per cent in late March, to 37 per cent by early September.

Since the pandemic began, opinion polls have started to show a consistent majority of Scottish voters in favour of secession for the first time since the 2014 referendum.

What does it mean for communities?

- **Which issues are so complex or cross-cutting that they strongly rely on central government taking a lead, and would hence suffer most from neglect in Westminster?**

- **If Westminster remains diverted, which issues are local communities well placed to take the lead on?**

> There's all this talk about getting Brexit done. What people don't realise is that the work is only just beginning - whatever the politicians finally decide to do next."

> The regional economic impact of Brexit will be massive. Nobody has ever closely integrated their economy and then pulled the plug before."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

2 The tensions of devolution

Throughout the 2020s, debate on constitutional reform is intense, driven by disaffection with a political elite that struggled to manage the coronavirus pandemic and led the country into a painful Brexit. Scotland's secession in 2026 forces London to relinquish more power to the remaining countries and regions of the Union. But, though years of centralisation of power may finally be coming to an end, new tensions are emerging between ultra-local town and parish councils, powerful municipalities, new regional and metropolitan institutions, and a possible English parliament.

Issue overview

Pressure for constitutional reform is growing in the UK amid signs of disenchantment with politics and mistrust of politicians.

At the national level, support for a second referendum on Scottish independence has grown through 2020, with Westminster's veto potentially becoming untenable. Secession would have huge implications for English governance. A new regional layer of government with real clout is patchily emerging, especially in the form of powerful, directly elected mayors, in places such as London, Manchester and Liverpool. And more,

local levels of government – such as town and parish councils – are also starting to flex their muscles and demand more power and money.

But much remains uncertain in how this rapidly shifting map of power and representation will look in 2030: which levels of government will be most effective at tackling the challenges of the future; whether the most effective tiers of government will be most effective at securing power and resources; and how all these different tiers will relate to one another.

Signals of change

In 2019, 61 per cent of people felt their views were not represented in British politics.

A YouGov poll in August 2020 found that 53 per cent of Scottish voters would support independence. John Curtice of Strathclyde University commented that this was a "major moment", as "the first time that the Yes side have been consistently ahead in a series of opinion polls."

In 2019 there were already 24 directly elected mayors in England.

Dozens of town and parish councils across the UK (out of a total of 9,000 covering 25 per cent of the UK's population) have doubled their council tax bills, with some taking on services that larger councils can no longer afford.

49 per cent of the public support giving more decision-making power to local areas.

What does it mean for communities?

- **Which levels of government will emerge as most important and powerful by 2030, and will relationships between them be hallmarked by cooperation or competition?**

- **How far will devolution go – and will it be genuinely distributed, or merely lead to a concentration of power in different hands?**

It's really key that communities get to plan for themselves, aren't told what's best for them by Westminster."

Britain has always been variegated... different areas are different from each other, in their cultures and their strengths... so devolution of power makes sense."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

3 The next crash

In 2021, in the aftermath of COVID-19, the UK economy enters a deep recession. With public debt at an eye-watering high, the government implements austerity measures and raises taxes. But it's a long, slow road to recovery, with the possibility of nasty bouts of hyperinflation en route. The result: an even more savage wave of cuts than those following the 2008 financial crisis, with communities struggling to pick up the pieces.

Issue overview

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic is still unfolding, but it's clear that across the globe countries are facing deep and possibly prolonged recessions. Debate in the UK focuses on the likely shape – with the best-case scenario still a rapid bounce-back (the 'V' shape) or, worst case, a prolonged slump (the dreaded 'L'). More nuanced analysis suggests that we may be seeing more of a 'K', with the better-off in industries that have weathered the pandemic well (supermarkets, tech) or whose jobs have been doable from home, versus those whose industries have been forced to shut down (the arts, much hospitality, and high-street retail).

Either way, the level of public debt is eye-watering. In late August 2020, the Office for Budget Responsibility estimated that government spending so far in 2020/21 is up by over a third and public debt up by a fifth compared with a year earlier, whilst tax receipts are down by a third.

The government could choose to tackle this mountain of debt with fresh austerity measures and/or tax increases. Or, it could choose to print money to spend its way out of the debt, which risks hyperinflation. Austerity could mean profound cuts to health, education, welfare and local spending at a time when many of these services are already struggling. Initial estimates point to a £2 billion shortfall for councils in England in 2020-21 despite additional help from central government; this figure is likely to grow next year if tax revenues fall further (Ogden and Phillips, 2020).

Signals of change

The Treasury needs to balance the books after an unprecedented level of public support to UK businesses and employees during the first wave of the pandemic. The next budget will provide the first clues on sources of income, with austerity and/or increases to income tax, National Insurance Contributions and VAT all being possibilities (Miller, 2020).

Following the first wave of coronavirus, global fears are growing that despite central banks' willingness to do whatever it takes to keep economies afloat in the short term; as chief economist Hyun Song Shin of the Bank for International Settlements has been quoted saying that the "immediate liquidity phase of the crisis is [now] giving way to the solvency phase, and banks will undoubtedly bear the brunt."

In June 2020, the International Monetary Fund forecast that 2021 global GDP would be down 6.5 percentage points on pre-COVID estimates, with particularly adverse impacts anticipated on low-income households around the world.

What does it mean for communities?

- **We are already seeing a perfect storm for councils hit by increased demands, such as housing rough sleepers and supporting COVID test-and-trace, but whose income has at the same time been badly affected by the crisis. If the 2020s saw another far-reaching round of cuts, where would they fall?**

- **Much of the way we live, travel and work has shifted utterly since March 2020. How many of these changes will become permanent – and how will local communities need to adapt?**

> The challenge and adversity produce a spirit in the community... often out of desperation, it makes you think and act in different ways... sometimes in a way that makes smaller resource work harder."

> There has been no spontaneous grassroots-led plugging of the gaps. The 'big society' idea didn't work. Where communities have taken charge...it has taken a lot of effort."

> From our perspective, austerity gives space for new models and new ways of working that can produce different and new ways of doing."

> We are on a trajectory of going back to the Victorian age...We need some honesty about the impact austerity has had on marginalised communities."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

4 Working for the algorithm

Artificial intelligence, big data and automation continue to turn labour markets upside down throughout the 2020s. Jobs are polarised between the highly skilled and those caught in the casual gig economy, who were already struggling to make ends meet before COVID-19 devastated the service sector. Increasingly, the decade has seen a divergence between the people writing the algorithms and those whose lives are scripted by them.

Issue overview

The rise of the gig economy – with people working freelance or under-zero-hours contracts for companies like Uber, Deliveroo, Amazon, or in sectors like hotels and restaurants or administration and support services – is well documented. Companies have benefited from the flexibility of being able to take on staff without the burdens of hiring full-time employees.

The labour market has become steadily more polarised between high-skilled, high-paying jobs on the one hand, and low-skill, low-pay "McJobs" on the other.

Pre-pandemic, there was already growing concern about the impact of long hours, low pay, and uncertain earnings on gig economy workers and their families. Now, evidence suggests that these workers have been hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Many lost their jobs altogether as demand for services shrivelled during lockdowns, or were forced to choose between their health and an income.

These trends could accelerate markedly over the course of the 2020s. Estimates suggest that anything from five to 47 per cent of jobs may be automated by 2030. Low-paid, low-skill jobs, often currently done by women, are likely to be hardest hit (Skidelsky, 2019).

These shifts would have significant impacts, not just on individuals and families but also communities, given the potential for much less time available for volunteering or participation, higher levels of loneliness, and so on. But there is also a scenario in which some of these trends abate as a result of regulation or legislation, leading to greater economic security for families and communities.

Signals of change

The UK has 1.8 million zero-hour contracts a year – up fivefold in the last 20 years.

PwC suggests that we are already in the first wave of automation, affecting around three per cent of jobs, and that the next wave, to the late 2020s, will be five times bigger.

In 2019, California – home to the tech industry and to firms like Uber and Lyft – passed legislation compelling companies to treat gig workers like conventional employees in terms of protections.

In April 2020, shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Economic Forum suggested that gig-economy workers were amongst those hardest hit by coronavirus, with almost 70 per cent of those surveyed reporting no earnings.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities create frameworks of support – for instance, around childcare or mental wellbeing – for overstretched people working in the gig economy?**

- **Can communities join forces to advocate for regulation of employers to ensure a fair deal for employees in the gig economy?**

> The richest 10 per cent [of people on zero-hours contracts] think they are just about managing, and automation means they no longer feel safe. This affects their attitude to solidarity."

> The stable parts of community, like a stable job, aren't there anymore. The loss of community makes people feel insecure."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

5 Inequality wider than ever

Inequality – of wealth, income, and opportunity – has only widened by 2030, with increasingly worrying impacts in many places. But the voting power of the elderly means that it's becoming a problem primarily for young people and children, while state pensions and other benefits for the old have become far more generous.

Issue overview

Income inequality in the UK is high relative to other rich countries. The majority of households have disposable incomes below the mean income level (£34,200 in 2018), with recent increases in the median income mostly due to higher average incomes for the top fifth of earners.

Exactly who is at the sharp end is changing. Pensioner poverty has fallen over the last 25 years, but the number of households with children in poverty is increasing (The National Centre for Social Research, 2019). And we have recently seen new forms of inequality emerge during the pandemic: between those with large houses and gardens and those stuck in inner-city flats during lockdowns; those who have jobs they can do from home and those who don't; those who can homeschool and those who can't; and between older workers with more secure jobs and 16-24 year-olds in precarious or no employment.

These trends are likely to continue, and to be exacerbated by both the pandemic and the slower-burn question of who pays for the response. The political power of older people looks unlikely to decline any time soon, while working-age families will probably continue to experience high housing costs, lower wages, insecure jobs, lower in-work benefits, and the stress that comes with having to work too hard.

Signals of change

Pre-pandemic research suggested that millennials (born 1981-2000) were the first generation with less disposable income than their parents, thanks to stagnant wages and increasing housing costs. COVID-19 has hit young workers hardest, increasing this inequality.

Those born between 2016-2020 are expected to experience the highest rates of child poverty yet seen – close to 40 per cent at the age of two (Rahman, 2019).

In the 2017 general election, age replaced class as the best predictor of voting intention (Sloam and Henn, 2019).

Despite claims of a youthquake, young people remained much less likely than older voters to turn out to vote in the 2019 general election.

Excluding key workers, most people in the bottom tenth of the earnings distribution are in sectors that have been forced to shut down. 80 per cent are either in a shut-down sector or are unlikely to be able to do their job from home, compared with only a quarter of the highest-earning tenth (Blundell et al, 2020).

What does it mean for communities?

- **What could communities do to reduce inequality at local level?**

- **How will communities pull together to support young people who are growing up in poverty, rather than ignoring, blaming or demonising them?**

- **How will communities work with the imbalance in availability of adults for community work, with older people having far more spare time than younger ones?**

> The narrative of older people stealing from their children has been corrosive."

> There are places with deep trauma and damage. They need long-term investment in normalising the social situation so the kids can actually benefit from a booming economy."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

6 Places the state has abandoned

By 2030, the idea of 'left behind' places has given way to a narrative of 'failed communities' – in locations where cycles of trauma, conflict, political neglect, economic under-investment and hollowed-out institutions, exacerbated by COVID-19's disproportionate impact on the poor, combine to create a vortex that's almost impossible to escape.

Issue overview

The narrative of certain communities being 'left behind' can obscure the deliberate choices in our economic system that put peripheral places at a systematic disadvantage, and the inadequacy of isolated interventions that ignore the structural nature of the problem. Unless and until this changes, it is increasingly hard to imagine a level playing field for all communities.

This phenomenon affects not just traditionally 'left behind' areas, such as post-industrial districts in northern England and coastal areas in southern England, but also post-war social housing estates on the peripheries of cities and towns, and rural areas struggling with poor connectedness and low economic prospects. The coronavirus pandemic has been a stark illustration of how deprivation manifests itself in multiple

ways, for example, in the areas of physical and mental health and digital connectivity, as well as in the more familiar economic indices; and how different facets of deprivation, such as precarious employment and over-crowded housing, can combine with the virus, at some points feared to be endemic in poorer northern areas.

Looking ahead, the risk is that the poverty and exclusion traps facing these places intensify: with residents wishing they could live elsewhere, stigmatisation by surrounding communities, limited political voice, and inadequate support or investment as a result – with government, in effect, giving up on places and focusing its attention elsewhere.

Signals of change

Research shows that the lack of places to meet, the absence of civic activity, and poor physical and digital connectivity make a significant difference to social and economic outcomes for deprived communities, making them feel left behind. It also shows a strong correlation between a lack of these three, and a vote to leave the EU.

Despite the higher levels of need, average levels of government service funding per capita in areas identified as 'left behind' is lower than in deprived areas generally (Local Trust, 2019).

What does it mean for communities?

- **What are the best examples of 'left behind' places that have turned themselves around, and what can be learned from these lessons?**

- **How can surrounding communities lean in to help areas that are struggling?**

- **How can communities heal long legacies of psychological trauma and confidence loss?**

When we talk about inclusion it's about small minority communities, and there's a gap between perception and reality. We want to see an evening out of investment. If you can't get it right in Grimsby, Port Talbot or Barnsley, then you can't get it right at all."

Left-behind communities don't just want jobs. They want a sense that they are moving forward, going places, there's excitement around the new job prospects, of dynamic economic growth."

Maybe people don't want to have any control because they've had the expectation flushed out of them. That seems dangerous, if people have no expectation that they might change things."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

7 The new politics of debt

Personal debt levels accelerate over the 2020s, after a hefty push from the pandemic. More and more of us are going into debt just to make ends meet. As a result, slogans of 'debt servitude' are increasingly part of our politics, loan sharks are thriving, food banks are feeding more of us than ever, and there are signs of a movement among younger people towards refusing to pay off debt.

Issue overview

As real incomes fall, housing costs rise and work becomes ever more insecure, borrowing to finance day-to-day life has become the norm for many, creating a vicious cycle where the vast majority of people simply don't have money to spare for most of their lives.

As a result, more people are turning to short-term loans from payday lenders: over 5.4 million such loans were made in the year to June 2018, with borrowers on average paying well over half as much again as they borrowed. Pre-pandemic, household debt was already beyond levels seen before the financial crash of 2007, reaching £428 billion in 2019.[1]

The impact of COVID-19 on the UK economy has been devastating for many, but the long-term consequences are not yet clear. Emerging evidence suggests that the earnings of the poorest fifth of households have been worst affected (Bourquin et al, 2020), yet others have used lockdown to pay down debt. Whilst the Treasury continues to support many of those worst affected, it is unclear what proportion of those jobs and businesses will survive once emergency state support ends. Similarly, payment holidays for mortgage, loan and credit card debt and the moratorium on repossessions and evictions mean that the full impact has yet to be felt.

These trends could easily evolve over the next decade as we see the longer-term consequences of COVID-19 for personal debt unfold and if, for instance, wages continue to stagnate or decline, or imports become more expensive after Brexit, or if automation means there is less work to be done. This would in turn have far-reaching impacts on communities.

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[1] This figure includes student debt.

Signals of change

Debts (excluding mortgages) rose by 11 per cent in the two years to March 2018; much of the increase was due to higher student loan debt and hire purchase debt.

The poorest households have the most debt: just under half of those who pay more than a quarter of their income in debt repayments have annual incomes of less than £15,000.

44 per cent of people find their borrowing to be a burden and 100,000 people in problem debt in England attempt suicide every year.

By mid-September 2020, 10 per cent of the UK's workforce was still on furlough, and 11 per cent of businesses were at moderate or severe risk of insolvency.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How will the general lack of spending power caused by chronic, widespread debt – exacerbated by COVID-19 – affect local economies?**

- **Could community banks or credit unions emerge as a larger-scale alternative to short- term lenders charging high interest rates?**

- **Will the payment holidays, granted during the pandemic, drive community demands for greater debt forbearance in the long term?**

> There's still so much household debt. If we have another recession or financial crisis, the vulnerabilities will be massive."

> The new rules on payday lending haven't solved the problem; they've just pushed it underground to the loan sharks."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

8 The rise of data-driven exclusion

By 2030, the economy is driven by data, with goods and services shaped by the data of the people who generate most value through their spending power. As a result, people who generate little data, or who have little money and whose data is therefore less valuable, are not catered for in an economy increasingly built on hyper-personalisation.

Issue overview

Data harvesting is becoming one of the biggest industries in the world. Big tech companies make over half their advertising revenue by targeting advertising at individual users. Meanwhile, more and more areas of life – from home heating and energy use to 'wearables' that monitor health, activity and even sleep – can be connected to the internet, allowing yet more data harvesting and micro-targeting.

For some consumers, this is great. It allows real-time monitoring of the conditions in their homes and 'smart' ability to adjust them, alerts to health problems before they escalate, and whatever they want to buy delivered to their door, when and how they want it.

But others may be left behind as a result of not being connected to the internet or having limited purchasing power. If people with little spending power generate little data, or data of little value, then they risk being even further excluded, with the result of being less able to secure work, loans, insurance or products. Meanwhile, concerns over 'surveillance capitalism' could escalate dramatically, as individuals or even communities belatedly wake up to the extent to which their data is being collected, bundled and sold with minimal oversight or accountability.

Signals of change

The data harvesting industry is already worth $76 billion in the US alone and is projected to more than double to nearly $200 billion by 2022 (Shapiro and Aneja, 2019). Online microtargeting is designed to drive as much advertising revenue as possible. Its erosion of shared media spaces and its encouragement of partisan reporting are simply side effects, but ones with society-wide consequences.

23 per cent of UK homes and businesses lack good indoor 4G coverage from all operators – an important consideration given that around 155,000 UK households,

mostly rural, lack access to what Ofcom defines as 'decent' internet. Big data has proved invaluable in the fight against COVID-19, with several East Asian countries quick to harness its potential to track individuals' health and exposure risk. But this application also shows how security can quickly trump privacy, with Hong Kong forcing thousands of arriving travellers to wear electronic wristbands for quarantine purposes, and Taiwan using phone data for police-enforced 'mobile geofencing' (Lin and Hou, 2020).

What does it mean for communities?

- **Can communities respond with their own initiatives if they find themselves being left behind as the data economy surges ahead?**

- **Can communities influence how their data is collected and used?**

" Technology change is epochal in its nature… Digitalisation is as big as industrialisation."

" People don't realise how AI is very subtly affecting their lives: it's way more than driverless cars… people aren't aware of how fundamental and powerful the forces are."

" While the digital comms revolution has connected millennials and urban communities, a lot of people have been left behind. Lots of rural communities don't even have 3G, and their broadband is terrible – it just compounds their lack of connectivity to bus services. It's the equitability shadow of connectivity."

" Right now, the bogeymen are in parliament – we may increasingly come to see them as being in silicon valley instead."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

9 Leaderless protests cause paralysis

By 2030, leaderless protest swarms are adept at disrupting critical infrastructure, and have become a chronic feature of the political landscape – with governments often unclear about how to disrupt them or whom they're supposed to negotiate with.

Issue overview

Protest movements are shifting towards leaderless structures, and harnessing the potential of encrypted platforms like WhatsApp, Signal or Telegram to spread memes, self-organise and aggregate issues into bigger movements. Future social media innovation will only make this easier.

These trends will make it harder for law enforcement agencies to arrest ringleaders or to shut down actions, while creating a major headache for governments who want to negotiate compromises with leaders.

Protests may well also become longer lived: rather than short surges of unrest over a few days, disruptions could last for weeks or even months. At the same time, protestors will increasingly be able to target critical infrastructure to maximise disruption – roads, airports, public transit systems, power stations, refineries – or to target flows such as supply chains.

Signals of change

In England, leaderless protests have already proved hard to police and respond to – from the 2011 London riots to Extinction Rebellion actions in 2019, to the 2020 QAnon COVID-19 protests in London.

2019 also saw largely leaderless and self-organised protests in Hong Kong, Lebanon, Chile, Catalonia, Algeria, Sudan, France and Russia.

What does it mean for communities?

- Will local communities need to adopt protest skills to get things done?

- What can communities do if leaderless protests shut down infrastructures that they rely on?

- Could leaderless protest movements lead to further polarisation of politics, as negotiating and bridge-building become harder to do?

Youth-led movements are rising … young people feel they can do something."

If Brexit is thwarted, I don't anticipate riots, but people will feel resentful and bitter. Then, something else that we're not expecting will capture the public imagination and spark that to emerge."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

10 The retreat of the NHS

The increased public spending demanded by the pandemic helps the NHS recover a little in the early 2020s, but by 2030 it's in crisis once again thanks to chronic underfunding, administrative complexity, endless reforms, spiking demand and spiralling costs. Local community healthcare tries to step into the gap, but it's more of a desperate rearguard action than a real replacement.

Issue overview

Short-term policy decisions, an ageing population, spiralling demand for care and a shortage of nurses have left the NHS in permanent crisis in recent years. Community hospitals are in decline with the rise of super-hospitals, staff are leaving, and community and acute care are becoming ever more distant. And that was before the coronavirus pandemic hit, putting the entire system – and its social care cousin – under unprecedented strain.

Much now depends on how the government handles the NHS post-COVID-19: with incremental sticking plasters, or wholesale reform and (critically) significantly enhanced funding. So far, signs point to the former. Despite intense national acclaim for NHS workers during the pandemic, government support has involved little more than warm words and a pay rise that still leaves many health workers worse off than they were pre-austerity.

All these factors could combine to create a scenario in which the NHS is in retreat by 2030 –either nationally or in the most deprived communities – or forced to radically reinvent how it delivers its core objectives. Some civil society groups, in collaboration with the local authorities or entrepreneurial GP practices, are trying to fill these gaps, for instance, with initiatives focusing on prevention in areas such as diet, exercise, alcohol and smoking.

But the NHS faces huge inequalities in health outcomes, with people in the most deprived areas developing long-term conditions 10 to 15 years earlier than the general population, and those with learning disabilities or severe mental illness dying a decade earlier. Without serious action by central government to redress these inequalities, community-based health care will be unlikely to extend much beyond a very imperfect holding action.

Signals of change

Demand for general practice services has risen as the UK population has increased and got older. Between 2010 and 2018, the number of people aged 65 or over grew by 19 per cent. Patients with multiple chronic conditions (such as arthritis and diabetes) are also raising demand, along with an increase in patients' expectations.

Between 2018 and 2019, spending on temporary staff in hospitals rose from 10.3 per cent to 10.6 per cent of total pay costs, while vacancies for permanent roles increased.

A 2020 survey by the British Medical Association found that 45 per cent of GPs faced "work-related mental health issues, such as burnout, depressions, anxiety or stress, with most attributing this to the pandemic." MPs have since launched a parliamentary enquiry into burnout in the NHS.

What does it mean for communities?

- **What roles do communities play in ensuring a minimum standard of healthcare in their areas, amidst rising demand?**

- **Which preventive and public health interventions can have most impact at community level?**

- **How can social prescribing become embedded and effective, long-term?**

In 2030, GP surgeries won't just be places for prescriptions, but community hubs for activities and wellness, and with lots of opportunities to take part in community events or physical activity. And there'll be a blurrier line between community and the NHS."

The best-case scenario in 2030 (is a) focus on prevention and wider social determinants of health, [and the] recognition that, if we want to reduce A&E visits, then we have to look at everything from job security to social connection – and therefore need to invest in that area."

Older people have been affected by austerity: cataract surgery and hip replacements are more difficult to get on the NHS than 10 years ago."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

11 Intensifying impacts of climate crisis

By 2030, communities are already struggling with climate impacts much more powerful than the ones seen ten years earlier – in particular, in the form of heatwaves, droughts, flash floods and storms. Transport and utility infrastructure struggle to cope, and there is a far stronger focus on community resilience.

Issue overview

As extreme weather events become more common, everything is affected – food and water security, social mobility, people's ability to plan, or insure or sell a home. Climate events such as flooding and extreme temperatures affect older people disproportionately and will increasingly place new strains on communities. Migration pressures due to climate change are set to increase significantly, and it is not clear how and where these will be met. Our health, emotional state, and even cognitive abilities are all impacted by climate change too.

As communities face very real threats to their survival and a need to adapt, there will be a premium on having systems in place to keep each other safe and resilient (Twigger-Ross et al., 2015). Building community resilience must go beyond energy production and emergency planning and extend to long-term adaptation to factors including water scarcity, flood defence, storm damage and extreme heat. Shocks are likely to become the new normal, increasingly forming the context for everything else, from health to infrastructure and from economic policy to social cohesion.

Signals of change

The Committee on Climate Change's 2016 UK risk assessment emphasised that "the impacts of climate change are already being felt in the UK," and highlighted the six current "most urgent" risks as: flooding, heat, drought, soil and biodiversity loss, food security and pests.

The Environment Agency's director of flood-risk management recently expressed concern that floods are going to "get worse, more frequently, more often."

The UK's ten hottest years on record have all been since 2002.

A Greenpeace investigation found that almost 10,000 new homes are being planned for some of the most flood-prone areas of England.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities best identify their most important vulnerabilities to climate change – especially consequences of consequences – as well as to direct impacts such as floods?**

- **In particular, what can be done to mitigate the fact that direct climate impacts will hit poor people and communities hardest?**

- **If government provides significantly increased resources for community resilience, how can that funding best be invested, and what expertise will be needed?**

> 12.5 per cent of housing in Leeds is not fit for purpose, and will come under greater stress pressure as the climate crisis accelerates."

> We weren't sure whether left-behind communities would want to talk about climate change, but they really did."

> I think climate change impact will be quicker than people think. Unless we've thought things through, we are going to get hit. What happens when the electricity goes down and it's really hot and old people are overheating? Where is the voluntary sector panic button? We need to get our arse in gear now."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

12 The looming shadow of climate collapse

Although the worst climate impacts are still in the future in 2030, they're already casting a long shadow. Across the globe, people still scarred by the coronavirus pandemic have a fresh appreciation of mankind's vulnerability to existential risk. Coastal communities, towns prone to flooding, and upland farms are increasingly struggling to attract investment or hold on to their inhabitants as we start to realise the shape of things to come. Insurance premiums are rising, investment patterns are shifting, and there's widespread climate anxiety and grief.

Issue overview

Although some climate impacts are already making themselves felt and will increase through the 2020s (see previous factor), the worst will still be to come in 2030. Yet, by then, we may already be pricing in many future climate impacts, both economically and psychologically.

One key area is likely to be insurance. Insurers are already making higher payouts as a result of more frequent and severe extreme weather events, but in the long term may simply not be able to insure against climate risks. This long-term prospect may in turn affect nearer-term investment decisions – for instance, if housebuilders decide they cannot afford to risk building homes on floodplains that may not be insurable in the future.

The potential for climate change to reduce the future value of assets and so radically shift investment patterns is another key area. The Bank of England has warned that up to $20 trillion worth of assets could be wiped out by climate change if the issue is not addressed; by extension, the communities in England and around the world that are home to these assets are hence also at risk.

The combination of fear and lack of control has already started to generate widespread anxiety and insecurity among people who have begun to internalise the long-term outlook on climate change. Coronavirus has brought home to us what collapse can look like, combined with a new understanding of our vulnerability as a species. But a significant minority will remain in overwhelmed denial, angry at having to take action in their homes, diets, or transport and consumption patterns, and feeling these are impositions by a government that wants cynically to dismantle their way of life. Either way, the long-term psychological shadow of climate change is likely to loom larger than ever by 2030.

Signals of change

In summer 2019, 85 per cent of Britons said they were "concerned" about climate change, and 52 per cent "very concerned". Three in four thought the effects were already being felt in Britain, up from 41 per cent in 2010.

The UK government has already partnered with insurers to create Flood Re, a dedicated reinsurance scheme to make flood cover more widely available and affordable as part of home insurance, but the scheme has been criticised as no more than a transitional arrangement.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that by 2100, in a worst-case scenario, sea levels could rise by between 61cm to 1.1m. 69 per cent of Britain's GDP and 78 per cent of its population is located within 50k of the coast.

In late 2020, the realisation is slowly dawning that, as Bill Gates puts it, "COVID-19 is awful. Climate change could be worse."

What does it mean for communities?

- **What are the key long-term risks – physical, economic, social and psychological – that communities need to start to anticipate now?**

- **What are the most important determinants of climate resilience at community level, and how can communities invest in them?**

- **How will communities cope with the emotional toll of looming climate change, for instance, climate-related anxiety or grief?**

> The thing that's unique about humans is our capacity to think long-term, but we're just not activating that part of our brains at the moment."

> We need to de-escalate people. Last winter there was snow, and someone got really angry because there was no milk. There is more of this kind of anxiety because of Brexit, and in the future because of climate change. You plan your cauliflower curry and there's no cauliflower. It's going to happen."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

The challenge within

13 The rise of local fiefdoms

The 2020s see a wave of devolution across England. Money, power and political attention increasingly flow to community level, leading to a new cadre of local barons and fiefdoms. Impressive results ensue in some places, but concerns rise in others about corruption, patronage and accountability.

Issue overview

The last decade has seen the emergence of a wealth of new forms of local organising, delivering and spending. This trend is likely to continue through the 2020s, particularly if more government or philanthropic money is routed through the local level, or if we see real decentralisation of power away from central government

At the same time, the coronavirus pandemic has already changed the face of modern Britain further, and faster, than at any other moment in peacetime history. Local communities have come together to support each other, and councils are increasingly taking on the burden of testing, tracing and managing local lockdowns.

In some cases, local authorities will be best placed to capture any new resources; in others, leaders of bottom-up community projects will be the winners. Either way, hard questions will arise about whether the accountability and oversight mechanisms needed to ensure that money and power are used wisely and equitably will be in place.

Corruption experts point to a galaxy of ways that money can be misappropriated at local level in the UK – from bribery, collusion, conflicts of interest, cronyism and fraud through to lobbying, revolving doors, abuse of authority and even vote rigging.

Signals of change

Transparency International has warned that recent changes, such as those made in the Localism Act and the Local Audit and Accountability Act, may have created an enabling environment for corruption.

Since 2005 more than 200 local newspapers have closed across the UK and the number of regional journalists has halved to 6,500.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How will local authorities adapt to the permanent shift in businesses, demographics and associated transport and welfare needs post-COVID?**

- **How can communities create accountability mechanisms that work, and what are the key risk areas for local-level corruption?**

If more money comes into communities, will that be captured by established community leaders, acting as gatekeepers, holding on to power, or will there be collective leadership, distributing power and resources? As money flows into communities, there is a real risk of concentrating power at a local level in a very few hands."

We may reach a tipping point at which the local authority architecture that's been the organising framework for our communities reaches an emperor's new clothes point."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

14 Too much participation?

New and more participatory forms of democracy are flourishing in communities in 2030. The challenge now is how to join these disparate strategies and processes into something coherent, and how to resolve sometimes intense conflicts of legitimacy. Some local councils successfully rise to the challenge but, increasingly, it's new self-organised community networks – often forged in the crucible of the 2020 pandemic response – that are proving best suited for the job.

Issue overview

Local participation in politics is flourishing – from the self-organised community groups that sprang up nationwide to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, to citizens running their own councils in places like Frome; and from citizens' assemblies on issues like social care and climate change, to parish councils starting to use their tax-raising powers – even as engagement, trust, and confidence in mainstream politics dwindles.

If this trend continues and branches out into yet more forms of participation intended to complement representative local government – or even one day replace it – then questions will soon start to emerge about how this patchwork of local engagement adds up to more than the sum of its parts.

Some degree of duplication, competition and incoherence seems likely, although collective approaches facilitated on crowdsourcing platforms may emerge as part of the way forward. Inclusion will also be a problem – those who can't participate are those most in need and their voices will be less heard, both within communities that are participatory and those that aren't.

Signals of change

There are already 20 flatpack towns in the UK (where local people have taken control of councils by standing as independents, bypassing established political parties) and 100 places have shown serious interest.

Citizens' assemblies on climate crisis are taking off (with at least 19 in train across the UK) and they also played an important part in the 2018 referendum on abortion in Ireland.

In Porto Alegre, Brazil, 17,200 citizens use participatory budgeting to distribute around $160 million of public spending annually. Smaller-scale experiments have been run in multiple communities in the UK.

Thousands of self-organised community groups sprang up around the UK in spring 2020 as the country went into lockdown, to help vulnerable neighbours access essentials such as food and medicine.

What does it mean for communities?

- **Which kinds of approach to participation are likely to emerge as most important and influential between now and 2030?**

- **What are the key potential pitfalls of more participation?**

- **How can representative and participatory forms of democracy complement each other, and what are the key ways in which they may clash?**

There's nothing where people don't know what's happening. People don't ask, what are they going to do about the road, because everyone is involved in the road."

We tried citizens' panels...getting the ambivalent middle into the conversation was so hard."

The bottom-up approach cuts across left and right – there are people on both sides who are interested, and people on both sides who are not."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

15 We retreat into our filter bubbles

By 2030, misinformation, fake news, online filter bubbles, the rise of nearly undetectable 'deep fakes' and the prevalence of AI-mediated social media have led to 'the end of truth', with the collapse of any idea of common ground in politics.

Issue overview

As time spent on social media increases, so more of us get ever more of our news this way. This marks a big shift in the balance and trustworthiness of our news sources, given that friendship groups on social media tend to be homogenous and share similar political views.

At the same time, the algorithms used by social media companies to determine the content we see are calibrated to what will most effectively monetise our attention – which will usually be content that triggers an emotional response, such as fear or outrage. Social media can also provide a perfect environment for fake news to flourish, as the UK's 2019 general election showed.

As a result, social media and the filter bubbles it creates – which are in many cases highly localised – can easily amplify political polarisation. With individuals and groups existing in their own information universes, the existence of a shared common ground or reality is becoming harder to locate, which in turn erodes trust in institutions and experts – and things could get much worse.

Signals of change

Doteveryone has launched a campaign called 'Be a better internetter' with a section dedicated to bursting the filter bubble.

Almost half of all adults in the UK now use social media to keep up with the latest news, according to Ofcom.

The coronavirus pandemic proved fertile ground for disinformation spread by social media. In September 2020, for instance, engagement with anti-vaxxer posts was growing fast, as countries around the world raced to identify an effective vaccine for COVID-19 and cities including London saw QAnon-related protests.

What does it mean for communities?

- **What are the risks at the community level, specifically from localised social-media filter bubbles?**

- **How can communities and local institutions help to promote responsible internet use – both in what is shared, and in applying a critical perspective to the content we see online?**

You see people whose entire Facebook lists are in the same village as they are. Yet social media is also opening them up to a whole new world of doubtful information. It's opening up a deluge of conspiracy theories and people are reacting accordingly in these hyper-local environments, whether it's Trumpism or anti-vaxxing. The echo chamber can be local."

Democracy requires citizens to see things from one another's point of view, but instead we're more and more enclosed in our own bubbles. Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we're being offered parallel but separate universes."

(Social media) affects people's sense of the truth and what control they have. People need to get used to how this stuff is impacting their lives…It's doing stuff together that gives people back meaning, and being useful and productive in a community."

If you can't see it – the data they have, how it turns to an outcome – how can you assess how much say you want this to have in your life?"

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

16 We still feel alone

Following the atomising effect of multiple lockdowns in the early 2020s, an ageing society with more single-person households, busier lives and more time online combine to make us lonelier than ever in 2030 – in the process, making us less happy, less healthy and more prone to extremism.

Issue overview

Loneliness in Britain is spiking, with nine million adults across the UK – more than the population of London – reporting that they always or often feel lonely. The causes are varied: from the closure of many shared spaces and links that create 'weak ties' between people (libraries, SureStart centres, bus routes, pubs, cafes) to more time spent online; from an ageing society to the rise of single-person households; and from the increase of mental health conditions like social phobia, to perceived stigma around loneliness. COVID-19 has turbo-charged some of these drivers of loneliness, with lockdowns stripping the elderly, those self-isolating and single-person households of other human contacts.

The effects on public health are enormous, with research suggesting that loneliness is as bad for health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Loneliness is bad for social cohesion, too, with clear correlations with decreased empathy, lower trust, and increased support for political extremism.

Efforts to combat loneliness are increasing – from the growth of 'social prescribing' by doctors (where GPs' surgeries prescribe social activities rather than medication for conditions like depression) to the creation of a new government minister for loneliness and, potentially, even the use of AI to combat loneliness. Initial reports suggest that the pandemic may have brought communities together in some ways – with the reemergence of family and neighbours as sources of strength – even as it has pushed people apart. But the deep-seated trends driving the problem suggest it will take a still more determined effort to turn the issue around.

Signals of change

Two-fifths of all older people say the television is their main company, and half live alone.

Over a fifth of the UK's population say they are always or often lonely, but almost two thirds feel uncomfortable admitting to it.

Research commissioned by the Eden Project's Big Lunch found that loneliness costs the UK economy £32 billion every year.

Emerging evidence suggests that mental health problems have risen 'substantially' in the UK during the COVID-19 crisis, with the social isolation of lockdown one driver of this rise (Daly et al., 2020).

What does it mean for communities?

- **What are the most effective things communities can do to reduce loneliness?**

- **Are there ways that lonely people (and especially the elderly) could help to meet other needs, for instance in the care economy?**

" People are growing up with no awareness of the option of a cooperative life – people's comfort zone is now to stay at home and play games. We've completely fragmented our human relationships through technology."

" The stable parts of community – like family and a stable job – aren't there any more. The loss of community makes people feel insecure."

" All the connectivity that's becoming greater at global level, it's a shame if that is at the exclusion of connectivity at the local level. That's a sad future – we need both. People need to feel that sense of love and connection in person."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

17 The partial death of the high street

Our high streets haven't recovered as retail hubs in 2030: we're buying more of our stuff online than ever before, in a shift that was turbo-charged by the pandemic. But while malls and retail centres are ailing and retail jobs being lost apace, some high streets are thriving. Falling rents have allowed us to reinvent them as congregational spaces where we can gather, learn and get to know each other.

Issue overview

Even before the pandemic there was concern at the closure of independent shops throughout Britain (Portas, 2011). Convenience, the internet, large supermarkets and out-of-town shopping are all driving factors. In tandem with cuts to essential public services, this has led to ghost high streets, where betting, mobile, vape and charity shops are the only survivors amidst boarded-up shop fronts and closed-down libraries, post offices and banks.

COVID-19 has seen footfall in city centres vanish, after long periods during which people avoided in-person shopping for anything bar groceries or the post office, with resulting soaring rates of internet shopping. Whilst small independent retailers have been badly hit, there has also been a conscious move towards support for local businesses, and an increasing demand for goods and services where people live, rather than where they (used to) work.

The retail aspect of our high streets seems unlikely to recover post-COVID, with especially negative effects on older people and small villages. By 2030, most high streets will not exist in the same form at all: in some town centres, retail may effectively disappear, bar online collection points.

The future of British retail looks smaller, more service-led and less dependent on location. In many ways this indicates the end of a 19th-century trend during which retail became about the shopping experience over the goods. Depending on how public funds are invested and whether rent and rates are lowered, it's possible that new forms of civic spaces are created that serve multiple functions, combining private consumption, civic engagement and congregation.

Signals of change

Bishopthorpe Road in York has reversed its decline in part by concentrating on organising traders to focus on making it a 'sticky street', centred on spaces in which people want to linger.

The coronavirus pandemic saw an explosion of innovation amongst UK restaurants and farm shops, many of which adapted to lockdown rules by offering takeaway and/or home delivery services. National chains like Pret a Manger, faced with deserted city centres, did likewise.

August 2020 data from the UK's Office of National Statistics shows that the proportion of UK retail purchases that were made online shot up by over 50 per cent during the pandemic.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can local traders team up with councils, charities and others to kick-start high-street renaissances?**

- **How can local transport systems best be configured to support town centres?**

- **How could councils and communities organise to demand compulsory purchase powers for vacant shop units on high streets, allowing them to be used as community hubs?**

> People are rightly upset about boarded-up shops and less connectivity to services."

> Communities need hubs. I don't mean re-opening post offices...Public money has gone into creating shared workspaces. What if these were also cafes and Amazon drop-off points?"

> We need to reconsider what we think of as a civic space – add a social aspect to the cinema and the gym, as these are now the places people gather."

> Parking charges and costs really annoy people and deter them from going into town – especially now there's less to go for."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

18 Political tribalism goes feral

Through the 2020s, political polarisation and populism have intensified, making what happened in the wake of the Brexit referendum look like a playground squabble. New issues such as Black Lives Matter and transgender rights have been drawn into a deepening culture war; intergenerational conflict has exploded; political leaders have become better at exploiting our fear and outrage; and both the media and social media fan the flames. Result: we're increasingly at each other's throats, just as the issues we're up against need us to pull together.

Issue overview

Political polarisation has become an open wound in our social fabric – the result of factors ranging from loss of trust in politics to cultural anxieties about anxiety and respect, and from economic drivers of inequality and loss of social mobility to the psychology of what happens when a critical mass of people perceive politics more in terms of the perceived threat from opposing views and political tribes than in terms of shared identity and common ground.

At the same time, our information sources amplify division, often deliberately. Both the news media and social media push us towards content that fans fear and outrage, recognising that this is the most effective way of securing attention and hence advertising revenue.

Looking ahead, it seems likely that political frustration and rage may increase, as populist promises of easy answers give way in the face of the difficulty of making progress on complex issues such as COVID-19, climate change, inequality and political inclusion. There is a clear risk that them-and-us politics will only get worse just at the moment we can least afford it, and that it could become more local.

Signals of change

Research has found that people on both sides of the Brexit vote dislike the other side intensely, even though they don't necessarily disagree on salient issues (Duffy et al., 2019).

Identities have hardened by a process of 'social sorting' that has eroded traditional cross-cutting ties, reducing the space for empathy and common ground (Mason, 2016).

COVID-19 has the potential to bolster or splinter intergenerational relationships. Young people have "taken a huge economic hit [...] to protect older people [in] an extraordinary act of solidarity across generations," but it's unclear whether they will also have to pick up the bill (Evans, 2020).

What does it mean for communities?

- Should communities focus on ways of helping people to meet the 'other', across political divides?

- How can communities create more experiences – such as the mutual-aid groups that sprang up to tackle COVID-19 – that highlight what they have in common?

- How can communities help to build trust in the democratic process and share power more evenly?

> Those bubbles exist, but digital technology has reinforced that human reflex of going towards common features... At the moment it seems there's a focus more on… 'what makes me different to you?', not, 'what have we got in common?'"

> We finally have a national conversation about power. There has clearly been a major shift in awareness of people's sense of anger and frustration."

> We can't talk about communities without talking about Brexit. It has been a really divisive issue – it feels divisive across the country, across communities and at a personal level… Whatever happens, it feels communities have been a bit traumatised by the whole process, and it's worrying because trust in political institutions is low, getting lower, and in terms of social cohesion it's been a divisive issue."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

19 Local infectious disease epidemics

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic reshaped the world. But a decade on, despite far better UK public health surveillance and pandemic preparedness, many communities are struggling with much more localised disease outbreaks – from tuberculosis hotspots in areas of high deprivation, to measles and mumps in areas where strong anti-vaccine opinion has taken hold.

Issue overview

2020 has taught the world an unforgettable lesson about our vulnerability to global pandemics. Unlike Ebola or SARS, coronavirus is everywhere and the impacts (health, economic, social) are being felt by everybody. Public health systems across the world are likely to look very different by the end of the decade as a consequence.

The COVID-19 crisis has simply exacerbated an existing problem, though. Rates of some infectious diseases have been quietly increasing in recent years. For some of these diseases – such as tuberculosis – the real issue is social deprivation. The rate of TB among the most deprived 10 per cent of the population is six times higher than for the least deprived 10 per cent. In other cases, public attitudes are the key issue: recent years have seen outbreaks of diseases like measles as anti-vaxxer groups have promoted scare stories about vaccinations.

Meanwhile, the spread of antibiotic-resistant infections is also accelerating rapidly, with Public Health England research finding a nine per cent increase in their incidence just from 2017 to 2018, and the World Health Organisation warning of disruption to the treatment of diseases such as HIV and malaria.

With inequality and poverty both staying stubbornly high, social media's ability to spread fake news showing no sign of abating and health services facing their greatest challenge in living memory, all of these trends could accelerate over the coming decade, creating new challenges for the communities facing them.

Signals of change

The World Health Organization declared that the UK had eliminated measles in 2016, but this measles-free status was lost in 2019, as measles cases rose rapidly because of under-vaccination.

There were an estimated 61,000 antibiotic-resistant infections in England in 2018.

Global rates of anti-vax sentiment shot up during the coronavirus pandemic, driven by concern at the pace of vaccine development, and fanned by social media.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities ensure adequate education, prevention and protection from infectious diseases in the local population?**

- **What can communities do to encourage responsible antibiotic use, and build resilience for a future of more antibiotic-resistant infections?**

> Antibiotic resistance is terrifying in its implications. Most people have no idea what's coming our way."

> It's a scandal that we're seeing tuberculosis here, today, in Britain. Because this is about poverty."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

20 Mental health breakdown

The past decade has seen a splintering of professional psychology and psychotherapy services. Already struggling to meet the rapidly growing incidence of depression, anxiety, suicide and self-harm, these services were utterly unequal to the mental health demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. Now in 2030, ordinary people and communities are increasingly discovering how much they can do for themselves amid an explosion of collective self-help groups that give people the chance to hear and be heard.

Issue overview

Mental health accounts for over 10 per cent of NHS spending – yet virtually all this is focused on crisis management rather than prevention, and three quarters of people who need care receive no support at all. Shortages are endemic, with the number of NHS mental health nurses falling by 10 per cent over the last decade and a massive long-term decline in the number of mental health beds in the NHS.

The COVID-19 crisis has thrown these existing shortcomings into sharp relief. Emerging UK evidence suggests that certain groups' mental distress has been particularly pronounced during the pandemic, including people with pre-existing health conditions, those on low incomes, women and the young (Pierce et al., 2020). Provision of mental health support has had to take a back seat to treatment of the disease itself, and it is unclear how an already overstretched set of formal services will cope with the legacy impact of coronavirus. With NHS resources unlikely to be able to cope with future demand, there will be a premium on developing new systems to help people meet their mental health needs – whether through social prescribing as a way of combating loneliness, new self-help groups, or better resources to help us to be resilient to what life throws at us.

Signals of change

WHO data suggest that global depression and anxiety disorders increased 54 per cent and 42 per cent respectively between 1990 and 2013.

Almost half of all GP appointments are related to mental health.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists and the King's Fund produced a report in 2017 that called for "whole-person care that responds to mental health, physical health and social needs together" (Naylor et al., 2017).

Whilst the global coronavirus pandemic has been devastating, there are also stories of innovation and resilience. People have experimented with ways to protect and build their mental health during lockdowns – using everything from baking to TikTok dance routines to gardening.

What does it mean for communities?

- **What can communities do to protect and invest in their mental health?**
- **What are the most promising ways of tackling anxiety and depression in young people?**
- **What approaches offer most potential for helping people to build mental resilience to be able to cope with life's ups and downs?**

There is an increasing sense of anxiety, a sense of desertion and alienation."

Social prescribing is racing up the agenda. We know that. But inevitably, friendship is a random and organic thing. It's not clear you can just turn it into a service."

People don't know how to be with emotion and get attached to feelings and react – manifesting in the rise of extremism (stories about other) and mental health issues."

The main reason for the rise in rough sleeping is cuts in services for people with complex needs, including mental health needs and addictions."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

Glad tidings

21 A flood of public spending

Austerity is a distant memory by the mid 2020s, as public appetite for a larger state soars post-pandemic. The government makes a bold gamble on modern monetary theory, printing money to spend its way out of COVID-19 debt. Health, infrastructure and local services all see a wave of investment, particularly in areas previously described as 'red wall' seats – the neglected towns of the north. Some local authorities struggle to cope with the influx of money after years of scarcity, reverting to top-down models of service delivery and prioritising big-ticket items, leading to tensions with grassroots groups.

Issue overview

The decade to 2030 will be dominated by the aftermath of the COVID pandemic: both the initial cost to the country of keeping millions on furlough, and the longer-term impacts on vulnerable parts of the economy such as tourism, hospitality, and city-centre rents and businesses.

A return to austerity seems implausible given the impact on 'heroic' public sector workers, not to mention the poorer areas targeted by the Conservatives' 'levelling up' agenda. Tax rises could provide some of the financing, but additional

fiscal firepower will be needed. Printing money (as the government did through quantitative easing after the 2008 crash) is another option.

If councils do see such a sudden influx of funding, it could play out in a range of ways. Public services – especially local ones – are in a very different state from a decade ago. A sudden influx of cash could lead to a renaissance in some areas, but also to expensive white elephants or new battles about who controls the cash.

Signals of change

The 2019 spending review saw the biggest spending rise in 15 years, including announcements that local authorities would receive an extra £3.5 billion over the next year – the first real-terms increase in a decade – with £1 billion set aside for social care.

In response to the economic impact of COVID-19 in the UK, the Bank of England's monetary policy committee has unanimously supported the ongoing policy of quantitative easing (the creation of new money to purchase government debt).

What does it mean for communities?

- **How ready are local authorities for a potentially major scale-up in spending?**

- **What are the key shifts in delivery models over the last decade that would affect how new money is spent? Would new money be spent through local authorities or grassroots initiatives?**

> The last ten years have been all about asking the question, how do you cut spending on public services without reducing quality? The next ten may be about asking, how do you put more money in without wasting it?"

> There's a fantasy narrative around that at some point things will get back to normal. But there's no normal anymore. And it's people in communities, on the sharp end of austerity, who are realising that. For them, who is there, really? Local authorities are variable but broken. And unless they are lucky, the third sector feels very distant."

> The money could quite likely go into shiny new stuff, not the long-term, slow process of building trust, confidence, skills and relationships. Local government could flip back into the old models, rather than using new funds to support the grassroots change that has been emerging since austerity."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

22 Philanthropists change tack

Through the 2020s, philanthropy and funding more broadly have decisively shifted in approach. Following lessons learned in the pandemic response, the old focus on stand-alone or high-profile projects has gone. Instead, there is greater focus on core funding for people and organisations, collaborations on joint funds, and place-based approaches.

Issue overview

Independent funders such as trusts and foundations are already a key part of the local funding landscape, especially as local authority budgets have fallen. But their impact and effectiveness have often been hampered by a preference for funding discrete projects rather than providing core funding to their partners on the ground; as well as by a tendency to invest only in projects that are already succeeding and ready to scale up, rather than taking risks on early-stage innovations.

But there are already some signs this is starting to change, with a few funders making deliberate decisions to focus more of their spending on core or on higher-risk, early-stage investments (see Signals of change). Whilst the coronavirus pandemic saw some charity receipts tumble, and some philanthropic funders pull up the drawbridge to protect core endowments, others adopted a 'let's do what it takes' mindset.

If these are signs of a bigger shift in the funding sector, the benefits for communities could be substantial – ranging from more innovation and early-stage prototyping of ideas, through to greater capability of organisations to scale up on what they do best rather than constantly having to invent new projects to keep funders interested and engaged.

Signals of change

Some funders, like the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, are deliberately prioritising spending on core funding wherever they can, rather than on projects.

The Local Motion initiative sees six funders – Esmée Fairbairn, City Bridge Trust, Lankelly Chase, Lloyds Bank Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and Tudor Trust – collaborating to support community-led initiatives in more joined-up ways.

Other funders, like the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, are creating new funds to direct small amounts of seedcorn funding to early-stage initiatives. After the coronavirus pandemic hit, a diverse group of nearly 200 UK funders – including Children in Need, Joseph Rowntree and various London boroughs – pledged to reduce requirements of grantees and listen to them more.

What does it mean for communities?

- **What are the key ways in which local communities could benefit from more core funding?**

- **How can community-based organisations best join forces to advocate for funders to channel their support in more helpful and joined-up ways?**

The retreat of the state means a different role for independent funders – there is a need for core funding for boring operational stuff, core costs, not the shiny new things. Not enough funders have adapted yet."

It would be amazing to see funders thinking how (to) invest and seed-fund those new forms of organising."

"Some innovation funders are totally obsessed with ideas of return on investment."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

23 Diversity gets real

The sparks of #MeToo and Black Lives Matter lit a fire that burned brightly throughout the 2020s. An avalanche of popular pressure forced a serious and sometimes painful engagement with questions of voice and representation in modern Britain. The result? By 2030 we saw an acceleration of the steady progress that was already being made on gender equity, a step change in ethnic representation and steadily improved rights for those in the LGBTQ+ community.

Issue overview

Following the police killing of George Floyd in May 2020, a wave of protest swept first the US and then the UK. Like the #MeToo movement against sexual harassment, which started in 2017 following revelations of persistent sexual abuse by a powerful Hollywood producer, Black Lives Matter quickly gained prominence. Together with growing calls for improved rights around sexual orientation and gender identity, at its heart this debate focused on giving previously unheard people a voice.

The biggest shift, for people and institutions alike, was realising that these issues don't belong to someone else –they involve all of us. By 2030, the onus has moved onto employers, from banks in the City of London to established institutions such as the BBC or the National Trust, to demonstrate how they are actively examining racial, sexual orientation and gender bias within their own systems, and working to get rid of it.

Signals of change

Just under 14 per cent of the UK population is Black, Asian or of another ethnic minority (BAME), but only eight per cent of MPs and under six per cent of the House of Lords.

While FTSE 100 companies have significantly improved gender diversity over the past decade, with 33 per cent of board members now female (up from 12 per cent in 2011), over a third still had no ethnic minority board members at the start of 2020.

The deeply polarised reactionto the National Trust's 2020 work on links between its stately homes and slavery shows how far Britain has to go in acknowledging some elements of its history, and how difficult these conversations can be.[4]

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[4] See, for example, the different reactions from the Daily Mail and the Guardian to the National Trust's work to highlight its links to slavery in 2020.

What does it mean for communities?

- What does 'success' at diversity look like for different communities? Is it about local political representation? Work opportunities? Community integration? All of these things?

- How does education play into these debates?

There's something about respect and being comfortable in your own skin that really matters for the tone of public debate and our public life."

We finally have a national conversation about power. There has clearly been a major shift in awareness of people's sense of anger and frustration."

You have multiple and complex identities, all these things are complex and interconnected. It seems lately we've seen things in a polarised way, without acknowledging that the boundaries are far more blurred than people acknowledge."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

24 Ageing kicks in

By 2030, the effects of an ageing population are being felt in earnest. Millions of old people are volunteering, transforming community life. Yet the burden of care – in terms of time, money, tax and emotion – is proving bigger than anyone expected. Meanwhile, the dominance of the more conservative baby-boomer vote is declining thanks to an accelerating values-shift among some older people, who recognise the sacrifices made by the young for the old during the early 2020s coronavirus pandemic. They want to be allies to their children and grandchildren and are increasingly dependent on them as they age.

Issue overview

As the proportion of the population in retirement increases, new challenges and opportunities are opening up which will transform the relationship between generations over the coming decade.

The fact that some older people now enjoy many years of good health in retirement could unlock billions of hours of volunteering from people with huge amounts of life experience. That said, healthy life expectancy is highly unequal, and care needs will still spiral, putting new caring and taxation pressures on younger generations. And, as the coronavirus pandemic has shown, increases in life expectancy can go into reverse if a public health crisis is big enough, and the world into which people retire may look very different – socially and financially – from that which they had imagined.

In either case, interdependencies between generations will become more explicit – potentially creating the space for a new national conversation about mutual responsibility that could do much to heal divides at a time when age has replaced class as the biggest determinant of how people vote.

Signals of change

In 2001, the average age of the UK population rose from 35.1 in 1947 to 38.6 and stands at 40.2 today.

Demographic divergence is increasing, with areas with older populations grappling with rising demand for social care services in the wake of acute funding cuts.

Nearly half of 55-74 year-olds currently volunteer, equating to 1.4 billion hours each year.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can generations mutually support each other to flourish, and how can communities foster conversations between generations that create mutual respect and recognition of how we rely on each other?**

- **How can communities meet the increasing demand for adult social care, at lower cost but higher value?**

> Older people are being more recognised and represented than previously, for example, on the TV news."

> The pensions issue (is) contributing to intergenerational tension – it's good that we have the triple lock on pensions, but other benefits need to keep pace with them. We want a society where everyone can meet their needs and participate in society – and that is not controversial."

> Young people are experiencing a lower standard of living than their parents for the first time in a generation."

> The social contract was, if you work hard and do your bit you'll be able to live a good life. But it isn't true anymore."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

25 The currency multiverse

The pound is just one of a range of currencies we use in 2030: euros, dollars, private currencies run by companies like PayPal and Facebook, and cryptocurrencies are all part of everyday life, and concerns are growing about the extractive economic dynamics they can drive. But a growing number of communities are also running their own currencies or gift economies, with surprising successes – and a few mishaps.

Issue overview

As electronic payments become the norm for everything, the range of payment platforms and even currencies we use is expanding fast – creating the potential for companies that provide those platforms to go all the way and create their own currencies. Facebook has already mooted the creation of a new cryptocurrency called Libra, which it aims to launch once regulatory permissions are in place.

For communities, the risk is that these kinds of new, internationally rooted currencies would enable global companies to extract value from real-world places rather than keeping money circulating locally, even more than is already the case.

At the same time, the importance of cash in the economy is dwindling fast: by 2027, cash is forecast to account for 16 per cent of all payments in the UK, compared with 61 per cent in 2007 (UK Finance, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic seems likely to have accelerated the move to contactless payments, with 'tap and go' limits raised from £30 to £45 in the UK. People who cannot get bank accounts and cash cards could effectively become excluded from parts of the economy. Vulnerability to fraud is another element of potential exclusion, with rates soaring during the pandemic.

One potential response could be for communities to develop their own local currencies, as a way of both tackling financial exclusion and promoting the recirculation of money in local areas. Right now, there are limited signs of such a renaissance; although local currencies have been around in Britain for over a decade, there are still only a handful in existence. But this could change, especially if there is a future economic crisis.

Signals of change

Online payment methods like Apple Pay, PayPal, or Google Pay already account for a greater volume of payments in the UK than either standing orders or cheques.

The volume of cash payments in the UK declined by 15 per cent in 2017 alone (UK Finance, 2018).

During Greece's financial crisis, many citizens and businesses started bartering for goods and services using a points-based system.

What does it mean for communities?

- **Are local currencies the best way for communities to manage the risks of future shifts in how we use money?**

- **What can communities do to encourage local businesses and consumers to keep money flowing locally as much as possible?**

> Businesses that use the Bristol pound are middle-class businesses in the posh part of Bristol."

> Governments are fast losing control of money and there's only a certain amount they can do about it."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

26 Government gets serious about local climate policy

The UK is well on track for its climate targets by 2030 – the result of a step change in both political priority and funding. Local areas now have their own carbon budgets and money to spend on staying within them, creating a wealth of new jobs in areas such as domestic re-fits, local public transport and community power generation.

Issue overview

From Extinction Rebellion to school strikes, recent years have seen a massive increase in concern about climate breakdown, at the same time as floods, overheated summers and the scientific reports have become steadily more alarming. And with the new government promising to make good on its commitment to make Britain carbon neutral by 2050, real action on the ground may be about to begin.

So far, Britain has kept more or less on track for its climate targets through action on how its power is generated, and in industries that use a lot of energy such as the chemicals industry or manufacturing. Doing so in future will be much harder, and much more about local action on the ground, from car ownership and changes in public transport to making homes far more energy-efficient. And it could prove challenging to look beyond the immediate crisis of the pandemic and its economic repercussions.

Achieving this through top-down policy driven from Whitehall will be hard if not impossible. Instead, getting serious about the next chapter of climate policy will need both real devolution of power and money – and perhaps even carbon budgets – and a flowering of local climate politics and participation. If the government recognises that fact, then the next ten years could see climate emerge as a key driver of local power and innovation.

Signals of change

Climate and environment have raced up the UK's political agenda, from eight per cent of the British public placing this in their top three issues in 2017 to over 25 per cent in 2019.

300 local authorities had declared climate emergencies by October 2020.

West Sussex, Greater Manchester and the Lake District already have prototype local carbon targets.

In May 2020, the ex-UN climate chief Christiana Figueres argued: "We have learnt many lessons from the pandemic, but the top one is that high probability/ high impact risks must be acted upon in a timely fashion – and delay is costly."

What does it mean for communities?

- **What kinds of political debates and fault lines will open up as climate policy becomes more about what happens in communities?**

- **What would it look like if local authorities had their own carbon targets?**

- **What new resources and powers would local communities need to achieve net zero emissions?**

> MPs are hugely cautious on climate politics – they don't see a mandate for radical action right now."

> Could a green new deal lead to an economic golden age? Look at the postwar golden age – it wasn't just about the welfare state but also how much money went into R&D, and kickstarted a whole lot of sectors and jobs and skills. Climate change could give us that level of investment and focus."

> What is going to force us to have a debate about the nature of our economy and society? Climate change is the big disruption, it will disrupt everything."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

27 A decade of nation building

By 2030, major attempts are being made to bring people together as a nation again. There have been new bank holidays, including one celebrating the NHS, festivals of Britain, countless citizens' assemblies, and a controversial reconciliation commission designed to build bridges across the political divide. Brexit is largely done and dusted, though the underlying culture war continues to erupt in new ways

Issue overview

After the deep polarisation of Brexit, it's clear that reconciliation is needed, with recent research finding strong evidence of 'affective polarisation' centred around Brexit identities, whereby each side of the debate dislikes the other intensely, even when they don't actually disagree on the issues they care about.

After Britain's departure from the EU, there may finally be scope to move on as a nation (even if wrangles over technical details have the potential to continue for years to come). Already, major initiatives are being designed to rebuild a sense of shared identity and common ground, bringing together high-profile figures from faith, the arts, and both sides of the remain / leave divide.

By 2030, we may have come up with a wealth of new shared stories of how we got here, where we're going and who we are, anchored in secular (or indeed religious) rituals and practices that make the stories real and enlist us in them. But there may still be competition about who determines which stories are told, and who is and is not included within them. As the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements illustrate, there's substantial appetite for more attention to be paid to who has narrative power and to broaden these conversations in future, and there's a premium on making this a constructive dialogue rather than competing monologues.

We will also be prompted to re-examine our constitutional monarchy by new moments of crisis and transition, like the possible secession of Scotland or potential death of the Queen before 2030.

Signals of change

The coronavirus pandemic saw Britons from all walks of life gather on the streets outside their homes every Thursday evening to 'clap for carers' and celebrate the National Health Service.

Kynren, a theatrical rendering of English history in Bishop Auckland, Co. Durham, is now rated on Trip Advisor as one of the top five performances to see in the UK.

The use of restorative justice approaches is continuing to expand, as more sectors (policing, education, residential care homes, mental health) adopt its ethos.

An extra bank holiday has been announced in 2022 to celebrate the Queen's platinum jubilee.

The UK government has already committed £120m to design and deliver a Festival UK in 2022.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can community celebrations or secular rituals help to build social cohesion and offset fatalism, apathy and polarisation?**

- **How can communities contribute to the emergence of new narratives that emphasise what we have in common without leaving anyone out?**

> Look in the cracks, what's emerging. It's a chance for hope."

> Brexit has made everyone behave cross-purposes to their national character. It can't be sustained. Brexit was such an un-English thing to do! People would love to not have such strong opinions about the news."

> How effective can we be at telling stories? And how do we tell a different story?"

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

28 A decade of nation building

By 2030, the number of immigrants living in England is higher than ever. There are tensions, with some people heavily focused on keeping immigration numbers low, and increasingly populist in pursuit of this goal. But younger generations are increasingly vocal about the need for more immigration to ease the massive tax-and-care burden that's weighing more heavily on their shoulders every year, and as a necessary moral response to the rapidly rising global number of climate refugees – and overall public opinion is with them.

Issue overview

Recent years have seen a sea-change in attitudes on immigration. Back in 2011, 64 per cent of Britons felt immigration had been bad for the UK but, by 2019, nearly twice as many people felt that immigration had been positive for the country as felt it had been negative.

Analysts suggest a range of reasons for the shift: the possibility that Brexit has assuaged some people's fears and convinced them the issue has been dealt with; the increased prominence given to the UK's reliance on immigrants in the workforce; and the fact that many of the EU migrant workers who came to the UK after 2004 are now well integrated.

In future, new strains are likely to emerge. The 2019 election saw age replacing class as the key dividing line in British politics, and immigration could emerge as a key focus for these tensions. The need for skilled immigrants is well understood by younger voters who are more at ease with economic and social openness, but may be opposed by those who remain nostalgic for a homogenous Britain and supportive of nationalist views. Growing climate impacts, meanwhile, could result in new refugee crises, creating more situations like the Mediterranean crisis in 2015 and the fears of overwhelm it aroused in many voters.

Irrespective of voter preference and government policy, overall immigration is likely to carry on increasing – as authorities overestimate their ability to control it, as push factors such as climate change increase and, above all, as we continue to realise the extent to which our economy depends on and benefits from immigrants' work.

Signals of change

Recent estimates point to 0.8-1.2 million illegal immigrants in the UK.

Every year since 2008, 26.4 million people are forced to leave their homes because of severe weather events such as flooding, earthquakes, hurricanes and droughts.

The coronavirus pandemic was a very visible reminder of Britain's dependence on migrants – from front-line workers in the NHS to seasonal labourers without whom summer crops were left to rot – leading to a rise in positive attitudes towards immigration.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities keep up with either increases or decreases in migration, both in public service provision and in the cultural pressures of population growth and transience?**

- **How can communities avoid a 'white backlash' and ensure proper integration of and welcome to those making England their home?**

It doesn't matter how many studies show that migration brings economic benefits, if the press is hostile it won't help. Messages communicated by national newspapers (are) really important in shaping people's perceptions."

Asylum seekers are housed in areas where housing is cheap – left-behind communities – which puts huge pressure on communities which are already under pressure. This policy has been there for a long time because it saves money, but socially it doesn't work."

Migrants won't be integrated unless you have things on the ground that bring people together, in an inclusive way."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

29 Work takes up far less of our time

As automation gathers pace, there is less work to be done. The economic impacts are hard: wages fall, unemployment rises and inequality rises even more. But the shift also sees the newly time-rich doing more in their communities: volunteering, participating and building a sense of place.

Issue overview

Automation of many types of work – particularly low-skilled, low-paid work – is already causing rumbles. As work becomes scarcer and people compete for it, wages may continue to stagnate or decline. This could mean that over the next few years we work much longer hours, potentially in multiple low-paid jobs, in order to make ends meet. But it is also possible that there will simply be less work to go around.

This could have far-reaching consequences for families, communities and political life if the result is greater economic insecurity and hardship. But there is also the potential for this trend to be a blessing rather than a curse, for instance, if new policies are introduced to share out available work equitably.

At the same time, interest is growing globally in the idea of a universal basic income for all citizens. While it remains hard to foresee this being implemented nationally in Britain any time soon, it is easier to imagine it being trialled in some communities – in the process, creating the space for new ways of volunteering in communities, with unexpected new community benefits.

Signals of change

[A quarter of supermarket checkout jobs disappeared](#) between 2011 and 2017.

Real wages UK [fell by 10 per cent](#) between 2007 and 2015.

38 per cent of adults in England [volunteered at least once a month](#) in 2018/19, with work the biggest barrier to doing more of it.

Liverpool and Sheffield are set to [trial a universal basic income](#), with similar experiments in Scotland, the Netherlands, Finland, France, Italy, India, Brazil and elsewhere.

The economic crisis sparked by COVID-19 has seen fresh interest in the idea of a four-day working week for the UK, with MPs and campaigners [urging the chancellor](#) to consider it.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How will communities be able to get past the divisions caused by poverty and inequality to reap the benefits of having more time-rich members?**

- **How will communities adapt to losing the roles and time-structure provided by traditional work?**

> Time is a privilege, and lack of it is a barrier to inclusion and to making good decisions in the community."

> Only in the 20th century did most work that is not paid labour become non-work."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

30 Drugs are decriminalised

By 2030, following the example of many US states, most drugs have been decriminalised, and some legalised altogether, coupled with major investment in harm reduction that treats addiction as an issue of health rather than criminality. The illegal drugs-trade economy largely implodes and much police time and prison space is freed up, but addiction in the most deprived communities remains a massive problem.

Issue overview

The United Kingdom has some of the highest drug death rates in Europe, with drug related fatalities reaching a record high in 2018. As a result, parliament's Health Select Committee has called for an urgent review of the UK's drug policy, and for decriminalisation of personal possession in a bid to prevent the rising number of casualties, as well as for oversight of the issue to be moved from the Home Office to the Department of Health and Social Care.

Evidence from countries like Portugal, where all drugs have been decriminalised, suggests that a more holistic public health approach, focused on harm reduction, could reduce drug addiction, overdoses, HIV infection, drug-related crime and incarceration rates, while dramatically increasing the numbers of people voluntarily seeking treatment.

Harm-reduction interventions such as needle programmes, drug checking services and safe consumption rooms could all play an important role in preventing deaths among users, as well as protecting local communities from drug related crime – in particular, by reducing the exploitation and harm of vulnerable young people caused by the 'county lines' drug trade.

Signals of change

In 2018 the ONS reported the highest number of deaths from drug poisoning in England and Wales, since records began.

A recent report from the Health and Social Care Committee found the UK's current approach to drugs to be "clearly failing" and said there were 2,670 deaths directly attributed to drug misuse in England last year – an increase of 16 per cent from 2017.

It is estimated that around 4,000 teenagers in London alone are being exploited through child criminal exploitation, or county lines.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities treat drug use as a public-health and harm-reduction matter, rather than a criminal justice one?**

- **How can local addiction, social and health services be better connected to meet the needs of the individual?**

- **How can vulnerable young people be better protected from county lines exploitation?**

The war on drugs has really just been a war on our young people. It's caused so much more harm than good. And it's time to end it."

Quote taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

31 An infrastructure renaissance

By 2030, a massive programme of infrastructure renewal is underway, affecting roads, railways, telecoms, power generation and more. Many communities, especially those in major cities, benefit handsomely from their improved connectedness; but some 'left behind' places, especially in the north and midlands, become more so than ever.

Issue overview

Britain faces an infrastructure gap. Its railways are overcrowded, unreliable and expensive. Its roads are in poor repair and often congested, in part because of inadequacies in public transport. There is a chronic shortage of affordable homes. Power generation faces a supply crunch as ageing coal and nuclear power stations close down, and the electricity transmission grid also needs renewal. All of these factors have knock-on effects on Britain's competitiveness, productivity and attractiveness to investors, and big impacts on communities too.

Over the next ten years, this may well change. Infrastructure is rising up the political agenda, particularly in the wake of the 2019 general election and the Conservative party's capture of many seats in the midlands and north

of England. But even assuming that promised infrastructure spending goes ahead, big questions will remain.

Will government take a highly centralised approach to infrastructure projects (often focused on 'mega projects' like HS2, Crossrail, Heathrow expansion or the Hinkley Point nuclear power station), or will regional and local government – and communities themselves – have a significant role? Will there be a serious long-term strategy focused on a pipeline of projects, or will attention be episodic? Above all, will new infrastructure spending be targeted at reducing existing inequalities, or will it end up exacerbating them through focusing on the south of England and urban centres rather than the peripheries?

Signals of change

London's £15 billion Crossrail line is Europe's biggest infrastructure project.

The newly elected Conservative government has promised to earmark tens of billions of pounds from a new £100 billion infrastructure fund for the midlands and the north.

In June 2020, at the height of the coronavirus pandemic, prime minister Boris Johnson announced that £5.6 billion in infrastructure spending would be brought forward to help reboot the economy. This 'new deal' announcement included a focus on 'building back greener'.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities work with both government and the private sector to secure needed infrastructure investment?**

- **How can communities make themselves more resilient to the risks of fragility in critical infrastructure?**

- **What will be the new big idea in infrastructure as private finance initiative (PFI) projects dwindle in credibility and number?**

> Government's been far too ready to pass responsibility for infrastructure investment on to the private sector and hope for the best. We need much more leadership, and above all a serious plan."

> Our community's just 10 miles away from where HS2 is supposed to be coming to, but we won't see any benefits from it, any more than we do from all the big companies in Leeds city centre."

> We've been failing to invest just to keep our existing assets in good shape, never mind develop new ones to meet future demand, and the bill for that is going to come due in the next decade."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

The future is ours

32 Grassroots economic power

A new world of hyper-local social and economic ecosystems has emerged, with locally owned social enterprises connecting with local authorities and community organisations to manage common resources, from streets to housing to local food production. The result: a new level of coherence and accountability rooted in dense webs of community relationships.

Issue overview

Purpose-driven businesses in the UK are growing rapidly: a full third of small- and medium-sized enterprises have social aims at their heart; many of them are firmly anchored in local communities, with the sector worth three times more to the UK than agriculture and employing as many people as the creative industries. Meanwhile, other kinds of grassroots economic organisations, from community businesses to charities, are also flourishing. The coronavirus pandemic has seen an estimated 4200-plus local mutual aid groups delivering 3.6 million hours' support to their neighbours in the first three months of the crisis. And local government is increasingly willing to work with all of these kinds of organisations in different ways as delivery partners.

One scenario for the next decade could see these existing partnerships evolve into something much more complex and sophisticated: a web of local social and economic systems that seamlessly blend government's capacity to set frameworks and incentives with the capability of both business and non-profits to innovate and deliver.

But there are also challenges ahead. These different actors have different interests, which won't always align. Social enterprises may struggle to find the right balance between social purpose and commercial viability. The reliance of so many local community organisations on public money could make them vulnerable if the 2020s see new rounds of austerity. And new, grassroots economic ecosystems may thrive more easily in places that are already well-off, bypassing the coastal and far-from-London towns that are already struggling in the UK's highly unequal regional economy.

Signals of change

There are an estimated 471,000 social enterprises in the UK, employing 1.44 million people and contributing three per cent of GDP. Of these, 25 per cent are less than three years old, and 47 per cent grew their turnover in the last 12 months (compared with 34 per cent of Small and Medium Enterprises).

In Whiterock, Hastings, a community business (involving the local council and Local Economic Partnership) has taken over two major buildings under a community land trust model, providing space for local small businesses and housing, connecting social organisations, and managing a public commons (a street).

What does it mean for communities?

- **What could catalyse more cooperative local economic systems, and which actors are best placed to lead?**

- **How will communities whose resources, skills and talents are already overstretched find the space to get social enterprises going?**

It is regeneration but not gentrification."

You don't have networks if you are low-income. People feel like the economy is rigged and it doesn't matter what they do."

Large institutions are becoming less relevant. Big businesses like Deloitte are creating lots of niche versions of themselves in an attempt to continue to appeal as an employer and as a business… no more 'working for the man.'"

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

33 Supply chains go local

The age of globalised supply chains – from food and fuel to manufactured goods and finance – is well into its twilight by 2030. Instead, a mixture of consumer demand, higher energy costs, 3D printing, maker spaces and local innovation clusters means that much more of what we use and consume is produced locally – part of a thriving community wealth movement, that pushes back against big-business chain stores that suck money out of the town to go somewhere else.

Issue overview

Today, Britain is a highly globalised economy, with international trade accounting for 62 per cent of its GDP, well above the global average. But that could change over the next decade. Our departure from the EU could see imports of many goods become more expensive, while exports may face tariffs. And it's not just about Brexit. Import prices could also rise due to increasing international labour costs, higher energy prices, new international climate policies that raise the costs of shipping goods, or protectionist trade policies and the 'reshoring' movement in the US. Early 2020 saw UK supermarket shelves stripped of perishables such as fruit and salad as the pandemic took hold, bringing home to British consumers how fragile international supply chains can be. Businesses may have to build in more redundancy in future, with big cost implications.

Meanwhile, technological innovations such as 3D printing are making small-scale local production economical again. Vertical farming can boost agricultural production in urban areas, slashing transport costs to consumers. Combined with a consumer backlash against the uniformity of many mass-produced products, a new 'maker movement' is emerging, which also embraces recycling, upcycling, zero waste and the circular economy. At the same time, there is also a growing movement focusing on ways of keeping wealth circulating locally, typified by the Preston experiment in Lancashire.

In future, communities may rediscover the possibilities of making a living through local industries – including modern, digital versions of craft manufacturing – and local networks that thrive with local production. These shifts could in turn support community resilience, alongside reduced dependence on global, just-in-time supply chains.

Signals of change

Raspberry Pi is a community enterprise in Merthyr Tydfil, a former mining valley town in south Wales, which was founded in 2010. It manufactures low-cost computers and promotes digital manufacturing and creation in communities around the world.

In August 2020, the Financial Times reported how pandemic-led disruption to international supply chains has fuelled UK interest in vertical farming.

By focusing on local suppliers, the town of Preston in Lancashire increased the amount of procurement-spend staying within the town from £38.3 million in 2012/13 to £112.3 million in 2016/17 (CLES, 2019).

When plans for a new harbourside development fell through in Watchet, Somerset, local people set up the Onion Collective to pool skills and resources and step into the gap, with a visitor centre, museum, community garden, and a maker space.

What does it mean for communities?

- How can communities create the hubs of skills and knowledge needed for local supply?
- What kinds of local authority policies can support the emergence of local supply chains?

> If you believe the media, the future is full of killer artificial intelligence, efficient robots replacing human workers and a 'technopocalypse'… the maker movement is a sign that things might be brighter than we think."

> Access to educational materials and knowledge is the cheapest it's ever been, or free. A man taught himself orthodontics on YouTube and 3D-printed a retainer."

> 3D printing and open source might be part of creating new jobs, although you need a community hub to access it."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

34 The rise of the neighbourhood energy economy

By 2030, over half of us have become producers as well as consumers of energy, as domestic and community-level power generation become the new normal. Power grids look very different; communities have a new source of income; but it's the change in relationships and social capital that's the real surprise and that drives more local economic success.

Issue overview

Wind and solar prices are plummeting, batteries enabling smoother supply are improving rapidly, and recognition of the reality of climate breakdown is growing fast. While many community energy initiatives have been hard hit by the withdrawal of government financial support, this may soon be offset by continued falls in prices, or by new climate policies.

Making this happen will mean communities have to come together, getting to know each other, developing democratic processes for making decisions and resolving conflicts over who benefits. So, communities either need to have fairly high capability in the first place in order to benefit, or to have the right support and guidance on tap.

But where they make it over this hurdle, they will create an income-generating asset for the community, as well as a sense of local autonomy and solidarity, and increased resilience against potential power cuts resulting from fragilities in national or regional power grids. The growth of local energy economies may also presage the emergence of other local economies around resources, including land, housing or water supply.

Signals of change

There are already [275 community energy organisations](#) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In 2018 they generated enough electricity for 64,000 homes.

The price of onshore wind and solar energy will soon be [consistently cheaper than fossil fuels](#), helped by the fact that prices for battery-based power storage technologies are [dropping far faster than expected](#).

Climate and environment have [raced up the UK's political agenda](#), from eight per cent of the British public placing this in their top three issues in 2017 to over 25 per cent in 2019.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How will communities kickstart the process of community energy development, and sustain it for long enough for it to bear fruit?**

- **How can communities with lower capability or confidence still benefit from the potential of neighbourhood energy economies?**

> Ownership of assets is absolutely central to any positive vision of communities in England."

> Community-owned assets give more people a sense of agency."

> For now, the green new deal is a project of the left. But aspects of it, like communities and markets, could so easily appeal to the right."

> Local councils are increasingly engaging with asset-based community building."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

35 Farming gives way to rewilding and regeneration

Much of English farming as it used to exist has ceased by 2030 – the result of Brexit, shifts in global markets, more extreme weather and recognition of the deep unsustainability of much of the old approach. Yet rural communities are flourishing nonetheless, thanks to new policies that have created thousands of jobs in conservation, regenerative agriculture, urban and indoor farming, and rewilding.

Issue overview

In 2018, farmers received £3.5 billion in financial support through the EU Common Agricultural Policy. But if Brexit leads to full-scale withdrawal of many agricultural subsidies, coupled with cheap food imports from countries with huge economies of scale and low environmental regulation, many farmers could go bankrupt as a result. The coronavirus pandemic has illustrated the devastating impact that sudden loss of seasonal labour can have on UK agriculture. Farmers are also already on the front line of growing climate impacts, whether wild swings between too much and too little rain, flooding, or heatwaves. In the background, public concern is steadily increasing about both biodiversity loss and factory farming practices.

These factors will present huge challenges for many rural communities in which lives have been based around agriculture for generations. But there is also real potential for new livelihoods to emerge if government policy shifts decisively towards supporting new land uses. There is huge interest around regenerative agriculture that combines food production with ecological restoration, or even in allowing land to be rewilded and enabling the return of long-gone species –in both cases with massive climate benefits from improved soil carbon storage, as well as more biodiversity.

Meanwhile, the emergence of hi-tech indoor farming technologies could create new economic and employment opportunities in cities and towns as well as rural areas – for instance, in foods produced from microbes and water in tanks rather than from crops grown in the ground.

Signals of change

42 per cent of UK farms would have made a loss between 2014 and 2017 without EU subsidy payments.

Many farmers are already keen to host solar farms, which can also support biodiversity, as for some this is already more economically viable than agriculture.

There are already over a dozen rewilding projects in the UK, including reforestation and reintroduction of mammals.

There is already recognition that the coronavirus pandemic reinforces the case for more sustainable and resilient UK farming practices. As the UK charity Wildlife and Countryside Link has observed, "Building back from this crisis cannot be done at the expense of nature."

What does it mean for communities?

- **What kinds of skills and support are needed for creating new, environmentally rooted livelihoods for rural communities?**

- **How will rural communities embrace the culture change inherent in the decline of farming?**

Farmers are good spenders… there's a knock-on effect on the community fabric."

The end of EU farm support is going to be a body blow for us in the countryside. But there's also so much opportunity to reinvent how we do things."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

36 Education takes flight

The 2020s see acknowledgment that education in the UK is no longer fit for purpose. Lessons from lockdown – some surprising – lead to changes, from primary education starting one year later to a massive move online for college and university students. As the skills needed for jobs continue to shift rapidly, communities realise that their ability to help people retrain dictates their ability to attract jobs and investment.

Issue overview

Even before the pandemic, there was a lively debate in the UK about the form and function of our education system. Virtually unchanged for a century, there were arguments that it was over- testing our children and failing us as adults. The temporary changes forced in lockdown – from a break in early-years testing for primary age children, through to wholly online learning for some secondary and most tertiary students – are likely to have profound consequences.

The pandemic has also highlighted the speed at which our workforce is polarising into better paid, high-skilled jobs on one hand, and low-paid, low-skilled 'McJobs' on the other. For many people, the second of these categories risks becoming a trap, where the need to work long and unpredictable hours in order to make ends meet prevents them from accessing the training they need in order to be able to move into the high-skill economy.

The demand for those with higher skills is clear: 89 per cent of STEM (science, technology, engineering, medicine) businesses in the UK struggle to recruit. But supply of those skills falls consistently short: 30 per cent of 16-24 year-olds in the UK have weak skills, three times more than in the highest performing countries. Those with weak skills are twice as likely to be unemployed. This puts a huge premium on adult education, which can provide training at low cost and is compatible with busy lives and unpredictable working hours, and which can overcome the legacy of underinvestment in technical education.

Communities that can ensure they stay skilled-up and adaptive will be the most attractive to employees and workers alike. Negotiated curriculums, civic universities and personal learning accounts could all help with lifelong learning.

Signals of change

In 2016/17, WEA, the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of adult education, recruited over 50,000 students on nearly 9,000 courses, supported by over 3,000 volunteers.

More than half of students at new university technical colleges drop out before their course is completed, according to a 2018 report.

Looking at the long-term implications of the shift to online learning during COVID-19, the World Economic Forum observed: '"While some believe that [this] unplanned and rapid move […] will result in a poor user experience that is unconducive to sustained growth, others believe that a new hybrid model of education will emerge, with significant benefits."

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can local authorities harness the legacy of a generation of parents who became temporary teachers in lockdown, and are now far more involved with their children's learning?**

- **How could communities organise their own adult education programmes? How would they be started, led, funded and evaluated?**

> There is a growing realisation [in Whitehall] that we must invest in further education and skills, something we haven't done for 30 years."

> We have been quite concerned about the nature of work in the future and if we're providing the right schooling, skills and equipment. Traditionally, you'd equip people with qualifications, and broadly understand the working environment and labour market.. Now it's very difficult to do that."

> Learning shouldn't stop at 16 or 18. It's a continuum, because what's happening is changing so fast."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

37 The new care economy

By 2030, more people than ever are engaged in care work, but now they're being paid for it. Local authorities are recognising that care by friends and family is both better and cheaper than doing it themselves or outsourcing to the private sector. The result: a fairer deal for carers, and a new economic sector around people providing ultra-small-scale care for a handful of people who need it.

Issue overview

The proportion of over 85s within the UK population is predicted to double in the next 25 years and many more people will be living with disabilities and long-term medical conditions. Dependency ratios between those needing care and those able to care for them will become significantly higher, implying the need for new forms of care that enable workers to flex their care work and include it alongside paid work. Increasing automation of work could also lead to a 'time dividend', freeing up more people's time for care work.

The coronavirus pandemic has shown us what happens to people and to the economy when grandparents are no longer able to provide free childcare for their grandchildren, or when a virus runs amok in underfunded care homes. This increases the likelihood that, in future, care is formally recognised as contributing both to the economy and to the strength and health of communities. Local authorities could start to pay local caregivers rather than outsource care to private companies, often with inadequate or impersonal results. Care could become localised and smart, backed up by community relationships and cooperatives that are supported but not replaced by automation and robots.

Change in this area could also unlock important steps towards greater gender equality, given women's disproportionate role in providing care. Since 2008, there has been a 14 per cent decline in people holding the traditional view of women as homemakers and men as breadwinners but, overall, women still do 60 per cent more unpaid work than men.

Signals of change

Buurtzog Nederland (its name means 'neighbourhood care' in Dutch) has attracted global attention for its use of self-organised nursing teams that perform not just medical services but also support services like dressing and bathing.

The Bromley by Bow Centre in east London is a charity that provides a thriving community hub together with a medical practice that integrates care with wider family support, skills training, and medical care.

As the pandemic unfolds, calls have grown for the "fundamental reform of social care [...] to address the longstanding policy failures exacerbated by COVID-19." Interest in models such as Germany's has grown.

What does it mean for communities?

- **If local authorities were to pay carers for the services they provide, what kind of costs would be involved, and what kind of local economic opportunities could this create for communities?**

- **Where is there scope to combine care for elderly or disabled people with other initiatives and services – for instance, childcare, education or combating loneliness?**

> ...a new culture of generations living together in the same house and more full-time carers... is wonderful, but also a function of the system being broken."

> We need to regard social care as key infrastructure that creates jobs and enables disabled people to contribute – it really is investment."

> A million (disabled) people who used to be eligible (for care) no longer are, and the support that is available is 'clean and feed', not for independent living."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

38 Connection takes over from consumerism

By 2030, we've largely stopped trying to define ourselves through material consumption; instead, status-signalling mainly takes place through virtual or online goods. But the bigger picture is that we're increasingly valuing social connection over consumption.

Issue overview

As consuming the latest product becomes less desirable, access to experiences is an emerging marker of social status pre-pandemic. Whilst COVID-19 has interrupted some elements of this shift – such as air travel – it has significantly reinforced the move away from frivolous spending and towards digital connection. As virtual reality becomes our default way of accessing the internet, it is likely that this trend will continue into the digital realm. Combined with increasing social pressure not to consume more 'stuff', and the realisation that these acquisitions can lead to less happiness rather than more, people are starting to prioritise connective moments.

Even then, numbers of online friends and followers are not the same as physical interaction. The closure of traditional meeting points – pubs, libraries, civic spaces – has forced many interactions online and left many without a sense of connectedness. While falls in consumption may be good for the environment, there is still a risk that our social worlds become as flat as the screens through which we engage with them if physical social connection becomes replaced with digital peacocking.

Signals of change

While millennials have less money, research suggests they tend to focus on value for money and are willing to pay for quality or status.

Eschewing overt materialism, the rich are now signalling their cultural capital through more subtle, inconspicuous consumption, such as education or health.

Emerging research suggests that the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated shifts in consumer behaviour, with an increase in conscious consumption and aversion to waste, combined with a 'growing love of local'.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities provide real-world opportunities to meet that support individuals to connect more deeply?**

- **How can communities build on the legacy of the pandemic to inculcate appreciation of 'enoughness', and resist values that always stress the need for more?**

- **How can tech-enabled remote communities complement place-based ones?**

Young people's drive for status has moved on to social media and is less materialistic."

[We need] community connections that allow us to consume less but allow us to have flourishing lives – making, eating, growing, local livelihoods, cultural creative expression, ceremonies, rituals – so a practical reskilling and a cultural one."

Are we going to see people really taking on board that we have to change the way we are living and consuming and...doing everything, basically? What does that mean and how is a different model of society going to happen when everything is (currently) based on consumption?"

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

39 Transport for all

The 2020s see two quite different transport shifts unfold: a massive and sustained post-pandemic reduction in business and air-travel, as working from home becomes the new normal; and, once we are through the pandemic, a move away from car use and a corresponding reinvigoration of local transport services. Fast, frequent and free bus services connect rural areas, tram lines become a feature of urban centres, and safe, accessible bike lanes pop up everywhere.

Issue overview

The coronavirus pandemic has profoundly changed how and where we live, work and travel. Air travel is currently a ghost of its former self, and those business interactions that can have largely moved online. People are increasingly choosing to walk or cycle. Some of these shifts will stick; others may prove transient. But combined with longer-term drivers of change – such as the desire to improve local air quality, and the need to drive down transport emissions to hit the UK's net zero climate goal – we are likely to see growing government use of regulation and subsidies to encourage the shift to electric cars, e-bikes, and back onto public transport.

The Bank of England's chief economist Andy Haldane calls transport and connectivity one of the "big six" attributes needed to unlock a community's potential, which together create "a modern day Medici effect […] a crucible of creativity."[5] With the explosion in online and home-working, good local transport links will make all the difference to people who now want to live and work in the same place. People will be able to live in more remote areas, without fear that they'll be left unable to get to the shops or the GP or the job centre. The French city of Dunkirk shows what can happen to a 'left behind' place once free bus services are introduced. And UK initiatives such as the Transforming Cities Fund are designed to increase productivity and reduce car dependence.

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[5] The others are schools and education, housing and shelter, high streets and social spaces, good work and fair pay, and money and finance – see a speech made by Haldane in 2019.

Signals of change

Department for Transport data shows that cycling rates were up almost fourfold in England during the summer of 2020, while rail and bus use plummeted. And coronavirus has reduced UK air travel by up to 97 per cent, according to Parliament's Transport Select Committee.

UK sales of e-bikes have doubled over the past year.

Cities such as Milan and Paris are considering whether to permanently reallocate space away from cars for cyclists and pedestrians, following temporary measures during the pandemic.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities harness the legacy of pandemic-inspired shifts in transport use to inspire and enable more walking and cycling?**

- **How can national climate emission and air pollution targets drive sensible shifts in local transport links (and, crucially, the provision of transport services such as buses, trams, trains – not just more transport infrastructure)?**

> We […] need to recognise that everyone should have a basic right to a decent life without having to own or drive a car."

> People don't want a sense of living in a place that everyone's forgotten and you can't get out of. They don't want some crotchety old bus. They want to feel modern and that you can get to places quickly."

> How could driverless cars reshape our economy? Once we can work / sleep in them, that could really change our willingness to cram ourselves into cities – we'll have the freedom to get well out of them."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

40 Homes for everyone

By 2030, a massive wave of investment is taking place in building new housing and upgrading existing homes – and a renaissance is underway in the social housing sector, much of it thanks to community land trusts. COVID-19 set off a mass exodus from cities, and by 2030 the UK's long-declining rural communities are bigger and more diverse.

Issue overview

Housing in the UK is becoming more and more unaffordable, particularly in cities. Today's young families are already just half as likely to own their homes as baby boomers were at the same age, and rental costs are rising while more and more families live in insecure, short-term rented properties (Corlett and Judge, 2017). Successive governments have promised new social housing but it has not materialised. And outside cities, rents are more affordable, but much housing is dilapidated. Homelessness is spiking, with an estimated 320,000 people in Britain homeless, around 0.5 per cent of the population.

While it seems clear that the present situation is unsustainable, it is less certain how the situation will evolve from here over the next decade. One possibility is that major new investment in housing (and especially social housing) could come on-stream: the supply of new homes has been increasing for several years, but remains well short of estimated need (Wilson and Barton, 2020). Another is that the UK could shift towards long-term rental contracts of the kind popular in many European countries, providing renters with greater security. COVID-19 has already sparked a profound reshaping of UK home life, with increasing numbers of people keen to live rurally and work remotely. If this continues, demand for new homes will be felt more in rural and semi-rural areas than in city centres.

But there are also possibilities that could emerge at community level. Communities could start to take matters into their own hands, building affordable homes that are also community assets, potentially owned by democratic, locally controlled community land trusts in perpetuity. Or we could see more people trading space for security and quality, as young people in the co-living movement do already.

Signals of change

Estimates suggest the UK needs between 240,000 and 340,000 new homes per year (Wilson and Barton, 2020).

Millennial-headed households are more likely than previous generations to live in overcrowded conditions (Corlett and Judge, 2017).

There are already 300 community land trusts in the UK, and 16,000 CLT homes in the pipeline, and community land trusts in London are providing housing at a third of the market price (according to a research interview with Local Trust).

One in seven Londoners wants to move out of the city as a result of COVID-19.

What does it mean for communities?

- **How can communities ensure that new housing developments contribute to liveable communities, and that new housing developments are built with community strength in mind?**

- **Will communities be able to acquire the funding, skills and processes needed to get community housing off the ground?**

"The trend on social housing is reversing in narrative, but not yet in action."

"We need to see a lot more families in secure homes.

"A direct result of housing being so expensive is that communities are becoming even more fractured and fragmented, and families are being divided when they don't want to be."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

41 Post-religious congregations

By 2030, the religious landscape looks very different. While formal religious observance is still falling nationally, charismatic congregations are exploding in cities, and, increasingly, young people who see themselves as spiritual but not religious are creating new kinds of congregation leading to engaged activity in their communities.

Issue overview

Recent decades have seen a sharp decline in the proportion of people in the UK who self-identify as Christian, coupled with a sharp rise in people who identify as having no religion, and a slower increase in people who belong to non-Christian faiths.

As many religious congregations shrink, and spirituality becomes for many people a personal pursuit rather than one undertaken collectively and in shared spaces with other people, new questions are emerging about which institutions or groups will take over the social roles that religions have hitherto played – providing shared meaning, deep stories, a sense of belonging in spite of differences, acceptance in spite of shortcomings, and emphasis on the need for practical kindness and action to tackle injustices or harms in the world.

In particular, a key question for the future is whether the growth in spiritual but not religious sentiment could lead to the emergence of new congregations – something that some researchers argue is in effect already happening in contexts from self-help groups to spiritually oriented fitness groups (Thurston and Kuile, 2019).

Signals of change

52 per cent of people in Britain now say they do not regard themselves as belonging to any religion; two thirds say that they never attend religious services other than special occasions such as weddings or funerals (Voas and Bruce, 2019).

Around a fifth of people in the UK now describe themselves as spiritual but not religious (King et al., 2013).

Sunday Assembly, a weekly congregational gathering for people who are not religious, is established in 48 locations around the world.

What does it mean for communities?

- **What role will religious leadership play in communities in the future?**
- **What kinds of congregational spaces could emerge as formal religious affiliation falls?**
- **If religious observance continues to decline, what are the key gaps it will leave behind?**

A great church is powerful as it's highly relational, but it doesn't necessarily reach that far."

One of the things churches do really well is their attention to celebration: the recognition of social goods and meaning."

It feels like a monumental task to reinvent the implicit social networks that people would have been part of through work, religion, and so on."

We've seen an abandonment of traditional institutions like mosques and churches if they're not fleet of foot, but also the emergence of new churches, including via migrant communities. A savvy local vicar can be a game changer."

Quotes taken from interviews and workshops conducted during the research for this project.

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The future is ours speculates on 41 'future factors' that could shape communities to 2030 and beyond. These includes factors that are already well recognised – such as climate change, the mental health crisis and our ageing society – as well as some unexpected jokers in the pack. The report imagines how these looming societal shifts might combine together to impact on communities, and uses this as a basis to suggest six core capabilities we can nurture now to increase our resilience in the face of change.

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources and decision-making into the hands of communities.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding, and to draw on the learning from our work delivering the Big Local programme to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

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