

WEST MIDLANDS FORUM



**A
GOLDEN
DECADE
AHEAD**

**How the West Midlands Powers
Forward in the 10 Years to Come**



WEST MIDLANDS FORUM

New ideas for the
Heart of Britain

A GOLDEN DECADE AHEAD

In loving memory of Jack Dromey MP

1948 - 2022

*"His life was a crusade for decency."
Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.*

The West Midlands is the heart of Britain. Home to three cities, four boroughs and a royal town. The cradle of the industrial revolution, now fast becoming a capital of enterprise and a green workshop of the world. The cross-roads of the country and the new High Speed rail network. Proud host of the Commonwealth Games and City of Culture. One of the most diverse places in Europe – and one of the youngest. A place where people know how to live together well. Ours is a place that makes history and builds futures. And we're determined the future will be better than the past.

The West Midlands Forum brings together leaders from politics, industry, business and unions, universities and colleges, the creative, cultural and third sectors, public life and public administration to research, publish and debate new ideas for the heart of Britain. We work to build a shared understanding of how to best unlock the full measure of our incredible potential and the common good for our region's future – along with the change, decisions, and policies needed to turn that vision into reality. We aim to build consensus for action on the progressive causes we can champion together. And we help take the region's case to decision-makers in the corridors of power in Parliament and Whitehall.

PATRONS:

CO-CHAIRS



Cllr Ian Ward
Leader, Birmingham
City Council



Liam Byrne MP
Birmingham Hodge Hill
(Co-Chair and
Secretary)



Pat McFadden MP
Wolverhampton
South East



Valerie Vaz MP
Walsall South



Colleen Fletcher MP
Coventry NorthEast



Cllr Jim O'Boyle
Cabinet Member
Coventry



Cllr Sharon Thompson
Cabinet Member
Birmingham



**Cllr Beverley
Momedibadi**
Cabinet,
Wolverhampton



Tom McNeill
West Midlands
Deputy Police & Crime
Commissioner



Stephen Goldstein CBE DL,
Senior Advisor,
Strategic
Advisory Group



Cllr Brigid Jones
Deputy Leader,
Birmingham



Cllr Waseem Zaffar
Cabinet Member,
Birmingham



Baron Peter Snape



Richard Parker

TREASURER

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Martin Bailey is the current Senior Manager of Strategic Relationships at City of London Corporation. Martin has previously worked for both the Scottish Government and UK Government as well as being the former Associate director of RBS.



Lee Barron is the West Midlands Regional Secretary of the Trade Union Congress, holding the position since 2014. He was formerly the youngest official within the CWU, serving the union first at the local level, then the regional level



Ashley Bertie is currently Chief Executive Officer at Independent Custody Visiting Association. Formerly the Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands, he was born, raised and still lives in Birmingham.



Jonathan Bloom is the current Head of Public Affairs at Galliard Homes joining the property developer in 2018. Jonathan is the former Public Affairs Manager at Construction Products Association and was the Member and Guest Relations Executive at The Chemistry Club.



Liam Byrne is MP for Hodge Hill and Chair of the Global Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and IMF. A former Cabinet minister, Fulbright Scholar at Harvard Business School, and Gwilym Gibbon Research Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford. Liam is a member of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, and chairs the APPG on Inclusive Growth.



Paul Cadman is a national and international award-winning leader, with a demonstrated history of success working in Technology, Manufacturing, Retail, Consultancy, Media and Membership organisations. He has taken businesses from conception to £100m plus turnover based largely on organic growth, experience, strategy and contacts.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Lucy Caldicott was born and raised in Coventry and is the founder of ChangeOut, providing consultancy and change programmes to the voluntary sector. She is also a governor of an NHS Foundation Trust, and was a Parliamentary candidate for Dudley South in the 2019 General Election.



Ian Cooper taught in various sixth form colleges in the West Midlands and served as a local Councillor and parliamentary candidate. He did a masters at Birmingham University and later worked in the public and charity sector. He currently works for the Workers Educational Association (writing in a personal capacity).



Corin Crane is chief executive of the Black Country Chamber of Commerce. He was the former director of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership and the Head of Economic Partnerships and Investments.



Colleen Fletcher is a former Coventry Councillor and current MP for the Coventry North East seat. Colleen was born, raised in and currently represents Coventry



Martin Freer is a Nuclear Physicist and current director of Birmingham Centre for Nuclear Education & Research. Freer was head of the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Birmingham. A recipient of 2010 Rutherford Medal and Prize for establishing the existence of nuclear configurations analogous to molecules.



Margot James is the former Conservative MP for the Stourbridge constituency and served as the Minister of State for Digital & Creative Industries. Previously, Margot served as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and is today the Executive Chair at the Warwick Manufacturing Group at the University of Warwick.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Simon Marks is the City Executive for Birmingham at Arcadis. He works with city leaders to decide on how to best use the city's resources. Off the back of the Commonwealth Games. Simon is ensuring resources provided by the event will create social & economic prosperity for Birmingham.



Pat McFadden is the MP for Wolverhampton South East, representing the constituency since 2005. McFadden is also the Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He has held numerous positions in the Cabinet and the Shadow Cabinet, including Minister of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and now is shadow Chief Secretary to HM Treasury.



Tom McNeil is the current Assistant Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands. McNeil is a former charity and social enterprise lawyer, providing legal advice to charities and NGOs. He volunteers for Barnardo's and is a former parliamentary candidate for the Meriden constituency.



Dame Julie Moore is the current director of the Board for the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games and the Director of the Prince of Wales's Charitable Foundation. She was the Chief Executive of University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust.



Beverley Nielsen is a current Worcestershire County Councillor who is also the Executive Director and Associate Professor for Birmingham City University under the Institute for Design, Economic Acceleration and Sustainability. Beverley is also the Founding Director for Beverley Nielsen Consulting and is Chairman for Boundless Outdoors.



Jim O'Boyle represents the St Michael's ward for Coventry City Council and is Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change in Coventry City Council. He is also a school governor at Frederick Bird School.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Carl Richardson, alongside his brothers, Martyn and Lee, leads the Richardson family business. Richardson is a leader in real estate and growth capital with a business portfolio that is embedded across the world.



Ed Shedd is writing in his capacity as Chair of Create Central. He is currently North & South Europe TMT Industry Leader at Deloitte. Ed formerly led the Global Media & Entertainment Practice and served as the Transformation Director at the BBC.



Martin Sutherland is the Chief Executive of the Coventry City of Culture Trust, responsible for celebrating Coventry and showcasing the diversity and culture of the city. Martin is also the current Chair of the WMCA Leadership Board and was previously Chief Executive of Royal & Dergate theatres.



Jean Templeton has been Chief Executive of St Basils since 2000. She had over 20 years' experience of managing housing and neighbourhood services in a number of Local Authorities, chairs of the West Midlands Combined Authority Homelessness Taskforce and is a member of the Government's Advisory Panel on Rough Sleeping and Homelessness.



Paul Thandi CBE, DL is the CEO of the NEC Group, leading the group as a major venue enterprise. Paul was previously the Executive Director of Miller Freeman and CMP Information before joining the NEC Group in 2006.



Sharon Thompson is a Birmingham City Councillor for North Edgbaston ward and Cabinet Member for Vulnerable Children & Families. She has provided political leadership for Birmingham's housing, homelessness and bereavement services.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Adam Tranter is the current Cycling & Walking Commissioner for the West Midlands Combined Authority, responsible for getting Birmingham to adopt more active forms of transport. He is also the former bicycle mayor for Coventry and founded Fusion Media, creating a communications bridge between brands and active people.



Ian Ward is the current leader of Birmingham City Council and the Leader of the Labour Group. Ian currently represents Shard End. He was the former Cabinet Member for Leisure, Sport and Culture.

INTRODUCTION: THE GOLDEN DECADE

By Liam Byrne

The next decade won't be plain sailing for our region. Far from it. The forecasts for growth are that we'll fall further behind the rest of the country. Thousands of manufacturing jobs are in peril from automation. And we're off-course to meet our goals to cut carbon. But that is why this book is so important: to lay out an ambition to bend this future, to shoot for a decade that transforms opportunities not simply for some, but for all. It's an ambition for a golden decade.

As our authors make clear, no-one is going to hand this to us. But as Carl Richardson explains, the world is going to change a lot between the Commonwealth Games and the first HS2 trains rolling into Curzon Street. The global economy will power ahead. It's centre of gravity will continue its shift to the Indo-Pacific. And for a region once known as the workshop of the world that is an extraordinary opportunity as long as we continue to think entrepreneurially - and globally. Success, as Paul Cadman and Colleen Fletcher make clear will need us to remember two things; no-one can succeed alone and so collaboration between the huge networks of good people in our region will be critical. And so will our sheer resilience, industriousness and comfort level with change.

What shines through the essays

here, is a confidence that our region has it within our grasp to lead the green, digital, creative revolution that will transform the times ahead. Margot James, Lee Barron, Pat McFadden, Jim O'Boyle, Beverley Nielson, and Martin Freer all explain in different ways how we are uniquely placed to make the green future. The 'maker' ethos is coded deep in our region's DNA. But the prize for getting this right is immense.

As Margot James writes, leading in autonomous transport, carbon neutral mobility and the digital economy could help create over half a million jobs and 'ensure the region's economy matches the national average within the next half decade'. But as Pat McFadden explains success will require robust, consistent, long-term industrial policy. We cannot leave everything to the market. That is clear from Jim O Boyle's illustration of how the sheer scope and scale of Coventry's partnerships is helping deliver progress. And as Lee Barron explains, there will be no progress worth its name without an approach that rewards the innovation, skill and sheer hard work of workers themselves.

Underpinning this green shift is of course the revolution in energy. And as Beverley Nielson sets out, given the deadlines we have, our region cannot succeed without embracing the full spectrum of

green energy solutions. And as Martin Freer bluntly reminds us, we won't hit our net zero carbon targets without tackling the hardest problem of all, which is decarbonising heat.

Cllr Sharon Thompson and Jean Templeton set out how we can re-organise a rebuilding of the safety nets for the most vulnerable and Ashley Bertie forcefully reminds us, true progress has got to roll back the scandal of child poverty.

Finally, our writers bring a hugely welcome focus on just how all these big trends and ambitions are actually going to transform our places. The sheer scale of the investment transforming Birmingham, Coventry and the Black Country is set out on all its magnificent dimensions by Cllr Ian Ward and Jonathan Bloom who set out how the region truly is becoming 'investment central'.

But, we have moved on a long way from the sort of 'box-building' regeneration of the old days, when 'renewal' meant throwing up a few apartments blocks in city centres. That's why Simon Marks' essay about the art of place-making is so welcome; place-making is an art, its complicated but there are a few key elements, that Simon sets out, that increase the chances of success. And amongst the key to success is culture.

Martin Sutherland's extraordinary experience leading Coventry's City of Culture year is a lesson for all of us, in the way culture can re-animate and inspire a place. His lessons are not simply for a one-off year. They should be for every year. As are the lessons set out by Adam Tranter, who chides us that at in the past at some point, we lost sight of the simple truth that for thousands of years, cities have been hubs for people to live, work and meet; 'hives of interaction between people, using the natural density to prosper socially and economically'. Yet somehow we ended up redesigning our cities around private motor vehicles, and so too many 'town and city centres are now through routes to get someplace else'. That error now needs unravelling.

Making all this very tangible is the vision set out by Paul Thandi CBE DL, the chief executive of the NEC Group, whose essay exemplifies the re-imagination of place that is now possible because of the many shifts now underway. Paul sets out how around the airport in Solihull, an incredible vision is taking shape to build thousands of new homes, together with 'leisure and community spaces with the highest quality schooling and healthcare services' with 'easy access to local, national and international travel'. It is quite simply, the region's new gateway to the world.

The final word in our book goes to my friend, mentor and political partner Jack Dromey, one of the founding co-Chairs on the West Midlands Forum. We dedicate this book to Jack's memory, his inspiration, his energy. Few people I have ever met were able to build coalitions like Jack. He was always focused on what progress would mean to 'Joe and Josephine Soap in the Dog and Duck in Erdington'. He was always clear about what was right.

But he was always pragmatic about how good people of different views needed to come together, to work hard to make change happen. In his final essay, which he was working on the day before he died, Jack once again looked forward to the future, and the changing world of work.

He could see how the green revolution could reshape our world for the better. But he understood too, the urgency of the moment; 'There is much to do' he wrote, 'and little time to achieve it before it's too late'. Jack will never be forgotten by those who worked with Jack - and often in my case, for Jack. Delivering on the dreams in this book, would be one fine way to honour him.

A MINDSET OF AMBITION

SEIZE THE MOMENT

By Carl Richardson



The West Midlands needs ambition, optimism and good old-fashioned hard work if we're to make the most of the new global opportunity taking shape around us.

When the 2022 Commonwealth Games opens in Birmingham's refurbished Alexander Stadium on the 28th of July, this showpiece event has the potential to act as a catalyst for a reinvigoration of the West Midlands economy, building towards 2032 when the inaugural HS2 trains are due to arrive at the city's Curzon Street station – a future landmark that will become the first brand new intercity rail terminus to have been built in Britain since the 19th century.

The most exciting thing about the future is that it is yet to be written, and is ours, collectively, to shape. The decade ahead for the West Midlands will be neatly bookended by these two significant events, with both bringing significant infrastructure benefits that will be felt more in the region than elsewhere in the country (an example of levelling up in action?). However, it should not be lost on us that, as the past couple of years has well illustrated, nothing in life is guaranteed.

In an increasingly competitive world, it is essential that the region as a whole grasps this positive hand we have fought hard to be dealt, and strains every sinew to ensure that maximum value is wrung from these events and all the activity that will happen in between.

Over and above the Games and HS2 we also have many other factors in our favour, not least a geographical position at the heart of the country coupled with global connectivity through the hub and spoke model operated by the likes of Emirates, Qatar and Turkish Airlines flying out of Birmingham International airport. If the region was looking for a motto that could define our approach to the upcoming decade, then one might suggest 'Carpe Diem'.

The ingredients are all there for the West Midlands, but if we do not collectively make the most of this moment then one can be certain that other locations around the world will be pushing hard to make the most of their own particular circumstances, and to seize some of the benefits that otherwise could be captured here.

As we emerge from two years that have been shaped by Covid-19, hosting the Games in 2022 presents a unique opportunity that can stimulate renewed post-pandemic economic growth across the West Midlands, as well as allowing the region to, 'reboot' its image on a global stage.

Although it might be 'Birmingham' in the title, with swimming in Sandwell, cycling in Cannock and lawn bowls in Leamington, as well as beach volleyball

in Birmingham, the Games presents the entire area with an unprecedented marketing opportunity to put itself back 'on the map' and showcase all that is great about the area to a worldwide audience, as well as hopefully shattering a few outdated and negative preconceptions that sadly still exist in some other parts of the UK.

By the time the first race is run over £750 million of public money will have been invested in a host of local infrastructure around the Games and more than 1 million tickets will have been sold to people who will visit and travel across the region to attend the events in person. Over the duration of the Games the global TV audience will be over 1.5 billion, as people tune in to watch the sporting action taking place all over the West Midlands. The scale is truly impressive, and there are very few events that can deliver such reach and coverage for a region over the prolonged period of the Games duration.

Hopefully, the Games will also leave an important legacy in helping to tackle some of the domestic challenges and inequalities that must be addressed throughout the region if we are to fulfil our economic potential in the years ahead. From a skills gap and shortages through to being far better at harnessing

the wonderful diversity that exists in the West Midlands, there is much to be done to improve income inequality and access to opportunities for all. The fact that over 40,000 local volunteers have already put themselves forward to support activities around the Games is a good example of the potential the event has to deliver some lasting benefits within the community, and it is to be hoped that programmes such as that around volunteers can be capitalised on in order to leave a tangible legacy that can improve lives and make an additional contribution to regional economic growth.

Looking further from home, and on a more macro level, if the West Midlands is to really enjoy a decade to remember for the right reasons, building on the unique and catalytic opportunity that the Games present, then one might also suggest that we need to be fully aware of the big international economic trends that are currently taking place. These will shape the world for years to come, and so we should ensure that our businesses are prepared and ready to take advantage of the trading opportunities these shifts will present on the world stage. The Games may provide the watching world with pictures of a modern, diverse and dynamic West Midlands, but this must be a two-way exchange of knowledge and insight, and, as a

region, we should push to ensure we are as outward looking in all we do as possible.

One such trend to highlight and be aware of is the advent of what is increasingly being described as the 'Asian Century'. By 2030 Asia will be home to 65% of the world's 5.4 billion middle class consumers. Ten years later, in 2040, McKinsey research estimates that Asia will be generating at least 50% of the world's GDP, with the shifts in terms of an increasing Asian global share of trade, capital, people, knowledge, transport and resources already well under way.

Our family business has been active in Asia-Pacific for a number of years, with investments in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the west coast of Canada (as well as having physical representation in the latter two), and we have been observing and following the developments in the region with particular interest, not least how it is proactively positioning itself to ensure that the projected growth does indeed occur.

While it attracted little coverage in the UK, the turn of the year saw the 'Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' (RCEP) take effect, having been nearly a decade in the making. The RCEP immediately becomes the largest

trading bloc in history, surpassing the EU and NAFTA, with its 15 member signatories, including China, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea and Australia, making up close to 30% of the world's population and global GDP.

With apologies for the alphabet soup, the RCEP now sits alongside the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership), as an Asia-Pacific focused trading framework, designed to stimulate further growth in regional economies.

CPTPP came into force at the end of 2018 with 11 member countries, and even without the present participation of the US, whose engagement was ended by President Trump, its signatories collectively represent close to 15% of global GDP.

There are similarities (seven countries are members of both) and differences between these two partnerships that will be debated elsewhere, not least around the strength and subsequent real value of their commitments, but their development is most interesting as a clear sign of the trading developments taking place around the Pacific.

From a UK perspective this takes on additional significance as a result of the country's 'tilt' to the Indo-Pacific region that was outlined in last year's foreign

and defence policy review, highlighted by the formal application that was made for the UK to join the CPTPP in February. Nothing seems to move quickly with trade agreements, and that process is expected to continue throughout 2022, but it has been impressive to watch the Department for International Trade line up a number of Free Trade Agreements with CPTPP members including Japan, Australia and New Zealand in recent months which contain language that will certainly make the accession process more straightforward.

With 6 of the 11 CPTPP members also part of the Commonwealth, is it too much of a stretch to imagine the Games in summer 2022 providing a convenient backdrop and global audience to witness the UK's formal entry into the CPTPP being signed-off in Birmingham?

Regardless, it seems certain that the UK will join the CPTPP at some point in 2022, and so it, and the opportunities that membership will present, deserve due attention and would seem like a welcome chance for businesses in the West Midlands to steal a march on the competition and build on the boost the region will receive from the Commonwealth Games.

Balancing a focus on domestic

and overseas opportunities certainly should not be a matter of either/or for business. From the perspective of our own business, we are proud of our Black Country heritage and recent investments such as the £160m West Midlands Designer Outlet Village that opened last April and has already created over 1,000 new jobs in the region. Yet at the same time the Richardson family continue to actively invest internationally, completing deals in Australia, Canada, Singapore and the US amongst others in the past 12 months.

There is no doubt that overseas opportunities are out there for businesses and equally that the West Midlands is incredibly well placed at the start of 2022 for a period of sustained economic growth. Our business has always been entrepreneurial at its core since it was founded in the first half of the twentieth century, and that brings with it a certain degree of in-built optimism around the future, together with a fierce desire to make things happen. While we regard that as a positive, it also reinforces the belief that we cannot simply sit back and expect good things to happen, something which is true for any business, and certainly for the West Midlands region as we look out ahead over the next decade.

Dubai is currently halfway

through hosting the six-month long World Expo, where 192 countries are represented in an incredibly impressive and immersive experience, with the stated goal of being the 'greatest showcase of human brilliance and achievement'. Over the course of a visit one can feel as though you have had toured the entire world, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, and come away with a sense of how each nation is looking to the future and what they have to offer those seeking to make business happen.

Set against this showcase of ambition in the Middle East, a recent article in The Guardian about the build up to the Commonwealth Games highlighted the fact that organisers were expecting 'at least' 90% of spectators to be from the UK. While that figure struck me as certainly less than ideal in terms of making the most of the Games to showcase the best of the West Midlands to the rest of the world in person.

I mention these examples simply to emphasise the point that in the global race, and even with many factors in our favour, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels, as success and future prosperity are by no means a given. Rather, we should take inspiration from the region's industrial past, when the West Midlands was known as the 'workshop of the world' and was

shaping how the planet evolved during the 19th century Industrial Revolution, and couple that with ambition and a commitment to hard work in order to ensure that our optimism in looking at the years ahead is fully realised.

The ingredients are certainly in place for the West Midlands to enjoy a golden decade, but, like the athletes competing at the Commonwealth Games, success will only come if we constantly challenge ourselves to perform to the very best of our abilities.



HARNESSING THE POWER OF WE

By Prof Paul Cadman



Success this decade will demand we collaborate across the full breadth and depth of our networks across the region.

The next decade will be defined by how the businesses and communities of the West Midlands worked together to produce an economic renaissance by unleashing the talent hidden within the region's marginalised communities.

Charities will work together to produce the evidence that enables the Combined Authority to implement policy that addresses inequality. Front-line voluntary sector organisations will receive the support they need to provide the first steps for the economically inactive to engage in programmes such as skills builder and start their journey towards meaningful, rewarding and sustainable work. The funding for this will come from corporate social responsibility, loans and fund raising.

Employers will work with major charities to define the essential and technical skills required to grow their green credentials. These skills will be delivered through a combination of FE and HE with the essential skills for specific job roles delivered in schools from age eleven.

Employers will be happy to invest because they will see that the quality of new recruits and those on traineeships and apprenticeships will be very close to what they need. Employers will contribute directly to regional and

local levies that will overcome the issues experienced in 2022 concerning the employability of young and not so young people.

The creative and arts sectors across the region will engage with those on their journey to work to lead innovation and creative problem solving.

In 2032, across the West Midlands, diverse sources of talent will find their way to employers who recognise the value of cognitive diversity and essential skills, and these employers will become international exemplars of the best in business, world-wide.

CHANGE AS A FORCE FOR GOOD

By Colleen Fletcher MP



The resilience and innovation of our region will not only help us shape new industries – but reshape the way we live for the better.

When I'm asked to consider what the future of the West Midlands might be, I find myself first drawn to considering just how far we have come.

As we continue to celebrate Coventry's year as City of Culture and move towards the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, there is certainly much to reflect on. More widely, having grown up in Coventry I have seen constant change in the city.

I sometimes wonder if my parents would recognise Coventry now. Whilst I think they may find themselves lost as they tried to move around the town, I think they would recognise a spirit in the city which has stayed the same whilst many other things have changed.

Like our region as a whole, Coventry emerged from the devastation of the Second World War as a centre of manufacturing and engineering excellence. Later, when change meant punishing job losses and cruel austerity, this spirit of resilience and innovation has remained in our region.

We continue to be a centre of research excellence in our world-beating universities. Universities like Coventry and Warwick are working hand in hand with industry to help us shape

the technology of the future. Technology which will help us meet the challenge of the green industrial revolution which will be key not just to the next decade but many to come.

Importantly though these partnerships present an opportunity to not only shape the future but to build it as well in our region. This means the chance to once again have new high paid and high-quality jobs in our region. Opportunities like a Gigafactory, just outside of Coventry, will secure the future of the automotive industry and open up new areas. By 2032 wouldn't it be wonderful if our region, the workshop of the industrial revolution, would be the workshop of the green industrial revolution.

I would also like to see this industrial renaissance go hand in hand with the regeneration and reshaping of our cities. As people change the way they use and interact with public spaces we need to think about how our high streets can suit people's needs.

Rather unfairly the West Midlands has often been looked down on as a concrete jungle. Yet as I travel around the region, I see wonderful examples of regeneration and reshaping of our city centres and public spaces. Out of town retail parks and the convenience of internet shopping may well

have changed the way we shop forever, but there still exists a role for both our city centres and local high streets, even if it is one different to what we have previously envisioned.

In Coventry, recent years have seen a dramatic regeneration of the city centre. Cathedral Lanes, a formerly unloved shopping centre, has been transformed into a hub of restaurants. What were empty units are now doing a roaring trade, drawing people of all ages into the city centre. Outside the restaurants, what was once an island separated from the rest of the city centre by a busy road is now a large public square. Nowadays Lady Godiva's statue looks down from its plinth upon a bustling public square which frequently hosts seasonal attractions. In this way it is a fitting tribute to the post war architects of the city centre who envisioned it as a space for pedestrians to move freely with no fear of traffic as they shopped. Whilst purposes may be forever changing, I think it is important that we continue to shape our city centres to suit the needs of residents.

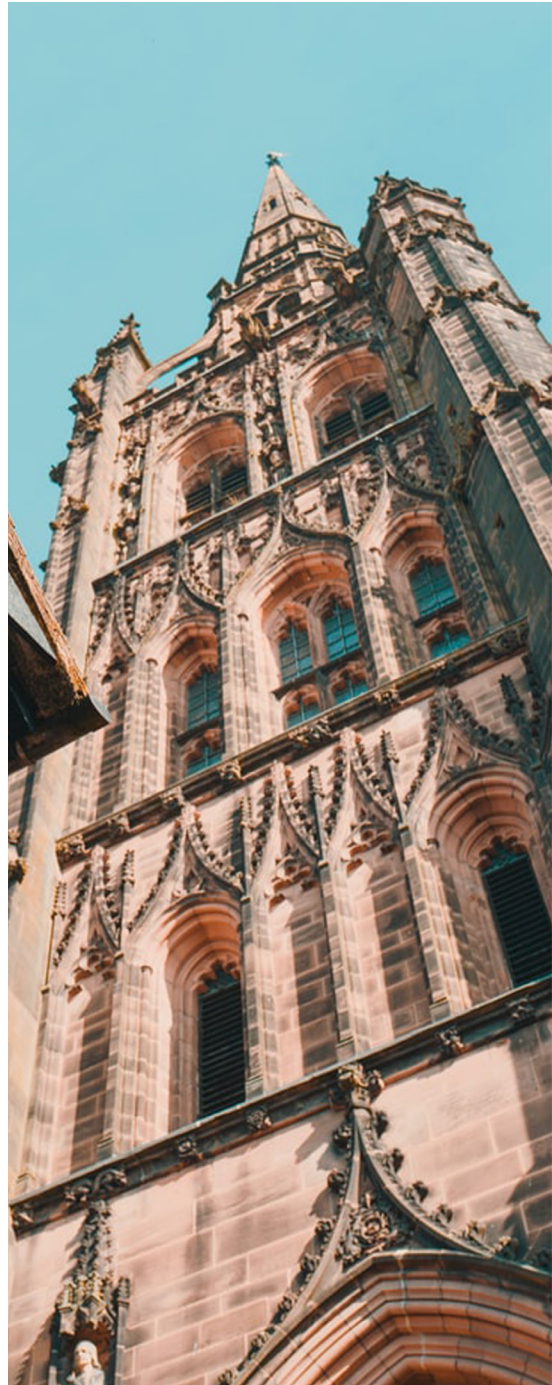
Finally, one thing that ties all of the above together is the change we need to see in public transport. Utilising the technological change I have already mentioned I believe we can see a public transport revolution in our region. In Coventry I see our redeveloped

and expanded railway station as a challenge to all of us to expand the use of public transport throughout the decade. This requires not only increased investment in traditional forms like rail, but again our region's passion for innovation.

In Coventry we are developing a Very Light Rail system that will mean a cost effective and reliable transport service. Importantly, it is a system which will be cheap to run and install wherever it is needed. In the future my constituents will be able to travel around the city with ease on direct routes which connect important amenities.

I think it is also important to think about how this new technology can help us move around our region and improve journeys. Wouldn't it be wonderful if by 2032 it was cheaper, easier and more reliable for a person from Coventry to go to a concert or play in Birmingham or Wolverhampton by public transport rather than by car.

I want to see the next decade as a decade of change for the West Midlands. Where change is a force for good. Where we make our region the best possible place to live and work in. Where we are united by our shared pride in our skills and industriousness. Most importantly where we celebrate our shared success and purpose.



**LEADING THE GREEN
CREATIVE DIGITAL
REVOLUTION**

A REGION RENEWED

By Margot James



We all know the history of the West Midlands as the workshop of the world. Now is the chance to renew that mission, recast to meet the challenges of the connected, green economy.

The coming decade will be an era of renewal and hope for the West Midlands. We will use our outstanding expertise, innovation and talent, a powerful legacy of our proud industrial history, to be leaders in the coming global transformation in mobility, green energy, and the digital economy.

To do this, we must make the West Midlands the essential centre of the global manufacturing economy. Our cities and towns should be a welcoming home for world leading advanced manufacturing and engineering firms. Our universities and research centres will drive forward advances in autonomous transport, carbon neutral mobility and the digital economy. The whole region will work together to create clusters of businesses to meet the needs of emerging high growth markets.

Succeeding here will create over half a million jobs and ensure the region's economy matches the national average within the next half decade. This will make the West Midlands one of the most prosperous regions in the nation by 2032.

How do we get there?

The first step is to be relentlessly focussed on innovation. The West Midlands already has one of the highest rates of business

investment in R&D in the country, at over £400 a head.

Yet for each pound business spends, the public sector spends less than a pound. Other regions get two, or even three, times as much. Over the next decade, we should focus national public investment in R&D to drive industrial innovation in our region, whether creating a Gigafactory to power electric cars or developing the video games and connected healthcare systems of the future.

We know an innovation led route to growth can work, because it is working already. Last year, the West Midlands attracted over £460 million in investment for high growth companies. In the Automotive and Machinery sectors, the midlands is home to over a fifth of the UK's high growth companies.

Our digital economy is booming, growing by an average of 7.6 per cent a year between 2014 and 2019, the fastest in Britain. It's projected to add almost three billion to our economy and create over 50,000 new jobs in the next four years alone. We're home to over 14,000 tech and digital businesses, the largest regional cluster in the UK.

In advanced manufacturing, we've seen significant gains. Think of Norton choosing to build their new motorcycle factory in Solihull,

Lotus Advanced engineering coming to Warwickshire or Remedy Health developing 3-D printed personalised nutrition from their base in Birmingham, creating a business valued at over £50 million in just two years.

One reason for this growth is the West Midlands' strength of being outstandingly well-connected digitally, physically, and culturally to the world. With the highest rate of 5G coverage in Britain, and the best internet coverage in the UK, we're well on the way to making the Midlands the best-connected region of Britain.

Over the next decade, we'll strengthen those connections at an incredible rate, with High-Speed Rail coming to the region in 2026, cutting journey times to London to under 40 minutes. This, alongside investments in our cities' and towns' transport networks, from Coventry's very light rail programme to the expansion of the West Midlands Metro, will ensure our connections to the world are as strong physically as they are digitally, meaning ideas, people and innovation will all move faster in the West Midlands.

We should take this spirit of connectedness even further over the next decade, using our strengths in aerospace, automotive, and rail manufacturing and digital

technologies to expand our presence in the space sector. The west midlands can become a home for the manufacture of satellites, spacecraft, and launch vehicles. On the services side, we have the potential to take a tenth of the UK space applications market, creating an industry worth over £1.5 billion by the end of the decade.

One reason we can move at speed is that we are a young, vibrant region – one of the youngest in Europe, with almost a third of our population under 25. Our challenge over next decade is to ensure that every young person has the opportunity and skills to succeed. No-one should lack qualifications.

We need to ensure that every one of our people have a chance to learn and grow in their careers. We can do this by ensuring thousands of young West Midlander's can start apprenticeships and that every one of us should have the opportunity to study while working through the new lifelong loan entitlement.

Those of us in the education sector have a special responsibility here to help create those opportunities. At Warwickshire Manufacturing Group (WVG) and Warwick University, we're educating one thousand degree apprentices, have two academies for young engineers

in Coventry and Solihull, while our new Skills Centre offers short courses on vital technologies. Over the next decade, I want to see us go further, creating a skills framework, bringing together Universities, local colleges and industry, so that whether you're starting your education journey or looking to update your skills, the West Midlands will be the place to learn and grow.

This skills revolution is needed for us to become a region where well-paid, high value work is the standard, with salaries well above the national average. It is the people of our region who make it so special, so they deserve to be well rewarded for their hard work.

The rewards for the productivity and skills of our people should return to the community, not only from higher pay, but also from a world class public realm, whether building on the Commonwealth games by strengthening our leisure and sports facilities or improving our housing and healthcare.

Here, economic growth will support the development of stronger public services, with more local control of the tax revenues created by firms and individuals. This will help us address local priorities, whether improving life expectancy, reducing our carbon emissions by half, or building sustainable,

affordable homes for social rent.

That's my vision for a golden decade for the region – a growing economy based on our heritage and ingenuity, transforming the world through innovation, technology, and skills, connected to the world and each other, with the rewards for our efforts benefitting all in our community.



WE CAN MAKE IT

By Lee Barron



The history of our region is one of solidarity, innovation, creativity, and enterprise. We need to build on that for the future.

Trade unions and their members must be at the heart of the West Midlands' economic revival. We have the skills, the enthusiasm, the people, and the vision. We have an enviable tradition of good industrial relations with unions, managements and investors working together, and we must continue to do so if we are to secure a prosperous future for our region.

Every town and city in the region was at the centre of the industrial revolution that transformed the world. When the world demanded industrial goods, the response in the West Midlands was simple "We can make it". We are ready to do so again.

The next industrial revolution will undoubtedly be based on the new green technologies. For the West Midlands to succeed we need clear and inclusive regionally based leadership, training to provide the changing skills needed throughout our working lives, and a rapid transport system which enables workers and their skills to move to where they are needed.

The Covid crisis has shown just how our communities depend on one another. We now understand the value of the "key worker". Often underpaid and undervalued, these were the people who stayed at their posts

during those difficult years and ensured that essential services were maintained.

We also saw government and local authorities in a new light. There were things that only government can do. Mass vaccination and testing, the building of the 'Nightingale hospitals' and timely regulation and advice can only be provided by government.

Communities throughout the country realised that each of us has a part to play. Almost overnight we saw small community mutual aid groups created on WhatsApp. Thousands of people volunteered to help at vaccination centres. For several months whole neighbourhoods would gather on their doorsteps to 'clap for carers'.

The contrast with the economic and political narrative of the last decade could not have been starker. Austerity, combined with a fervent belief that any problem can be fixed with market forces alone, has led to a crisis in practically every sphere of community life – health, housing, transport, and policing are just some examples.

Over the last two years we have learnt again that important and strategic decisions rely on the support of the whole community working together, co-operating

and having a common vision. Markets have their place, but also have serious limitations, especially in public services and we need to ensure we get the balance right and support a thriving social market economy in the West Midlands.

Trades unions want to contribute to a vision for the West Midlands. We want to reverse the deindustrialisation of our economy and the running down of public services and civic society. A social market economy would provide a stake for every citizen in our region, every community. It would mean all institutions and groups working together to reduce the poverty, inequality and entrenched deprivation that has afflicted too many areas of the West Midlands. A social market economy that allows our businesses, large and small, established and start-ups, to secure the funding, support and access to markets they need to thrive. But also strong local, regional and civic leadership, strong institutions and an enabling state that works to give opportunities to all. Our region is diverse, it would be a travesty not to utilise all our talents.

Our members want and need highly skilled, well paid, secure jobs which enable them to provide for their families. We want to live in safe and clean communities, in decent homes with well-run local

schools, libraries and accessible health services.

Since the closure of Advantage West Midlands, the economic development agency, the region has struggled to make our voice heard in government and with investors. The hotchpotch of bodies created since has not had the same punch. The Local Economic Partnerships, each with varying powers and resources, nor the Combined Authority have the powers and resources to provide the strategic leadership.

There isn't even a generally accepted definition of the West Midlands. Are we speaking of the conurbation that links the three cities of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton, or do we include cities such as Hereford, Lichfield, Stoke, Worcester, and towns such as Shrewsbury, Rugby and Burton?

We hear much talk of the Northern Powerhouse but less of the Midlands Engine. I do fear that the Midlands is often neglected and overlooked with greater attention focussed on London and the South East and 'the North'. Devolution will need to go further to allow us across the region to forge ahead and take advantage of the skills and assets that we know we have. But it will also take courage locally to come together to build the devolution of a scale we need.

The TUC recently called for the creation of a National Recovery Council. We would like to see a regional equivalent bringing together unions, management, local government, and education providers at every level. Our preference would be for a regional body that encompasses the historic counties of Hereford, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire, but with a clear understanding that there should be regular contact with opposite organisations in Wales, the South West, the North West and the East Midlands whose economies often overlap our own.

We can't emphasise enough the importance of an agile and comprehensive education and skills programme. New products and processes will inevitably mean that we will each have to undergo retraining at different stages of our working lives. We need good schools to provide the basics but beyond that our universities and further education colleges have a massive part to play in equipping our members with the new skills they and their employers will need in the future. Young people should be able to start their working lives in a high-quality apprenticeship and to be provided a first class start to their working lives.

In recent years trade unions have played an active part in

training, working in partnership with government and industry through the Union Learning Fund (ULF).

This scheme made an enormous contribution to improving access to skills in the local area, enabling both union and non-union members to access training. Such practical was crucial as it made paper entitlements to free learning a reality for working adults who need to improve their skills. Seven in ten learners through the ULF said they would not have taken part in learning or training without union support. This rises to around 8 in 10 of those with no prior qualifications.

The short-sighted Government decision to axe the Union Learning Fund shows how ideology and a Westminster first mindset can let our region down. We stand ready to work again with government to again deliver such practical schemes that give life to the mantra of lifelong learning. But it also shows that we need to take ownership of this agenda fully at a regional level and bring together those who know what works to deliver for our people and our economy.

We welcome HS2 as a symbol of the region's connectivity with the markets of the world, particularly Europe. We would eventually like to see extensions into the North and to Scotland and one to the

North West and Wales, taking pressure off the land bridge between Ireland and Europe, which contributes so much to the congestion on our motorways.

HS2 will also free up capacity on our railway lines within the three cities conurbation. And, of course, HS2 can, and should, be seen as a project that can deliver on delivering opportunities for underrepresented groups and deprived communities in so doing, it is a beacon of how we can use infrastructure and procurement in a fashion that delivers social value as well as greater GDP. A real example of how we can power up a social market economy.

Together with an expansion of a cheap and reliable metro system or very light railways, our workforce will be more mobile and benefit from a wider jobs market. Cheap and accessible public transport, especially if, where possible, using vehicles made in the region using renewable energy will be critical for our future success.

At the very least the revived West Midlands should see the living wage as standard and reject the siren voices that call for a race to the bottom. Birmingham's recent accreditation as a Living Wage City is welcome and we must build upon this to deliver fair pay for the whole region,

zero hours contracts and bogus self-employment should be scrapped. All workers should be enrolled into a pension scheme so that they can look forward to a secure retirement.

Workers should be at the heart of our recovery. When they make the contribution, they should reap the rewards. The West Midlands has a great future, and trade unions will be part of that future.

Together we can make it.



BUILD ON THE OPPORTUNITIES BEFORE US

By Pat McFadden MP



An active industrial strategy is the key to unlocking our potential – even if we craft it ourselves.

After more than a decade of low investment and low growth alongside a failure to deliver a fair taxation system we are now facing a cost-of-living crisis compounded by an environmental crisis.

Those on the lowest incomes spend a higher proportion of their income on energy bills than those who are better off. So, when energy prices rise, they are hardest hit. The cost of essentials has gone up nationwide but here in the West Midlands more families than in any other region in England have been affected by the Government's decision to cut universal credit by £20 a week.

In the short-term people need a plan to help with energy bills. That's why we need a fully costed plan that would reduce energy bills by £200 per household across the board and a further £400 for those on the lowest incomes – funded in part by a windfall tax on the oil and gas companies making the most out of the current huge rise in gas prices.

But in the longer term the country needs a plan to manage the transition to net zero – and I believe this region can play a huge part in that.

For this to work, we need technological innovation and a proper partnership between

government, business and the public to make it happen.

We can't simply load all the costs onto already hard-pressed households.

Many hard-working families across the West Midlands are already struggling to make ends meet, and a net-zero agenda that only the better off can afford adds an additional strain to their personal finances and impedes our ability to combat the climate crisis head-on.

There are reasons to be hopeful. We have a fantastic record of innovation in the West Midlands. We have a great network of universities. We have a young diverse workforce. We can lead the charge to make the most of this transition.

That starts with building on the opportunities that already exist.

Already we have an amazing facility like UK Battery Industrialisation Centre in Coventry which offers manufacturers the opportunity to test and make new batteries at industrial scale.

The state of the art, 18,500 square metre battery manufacturing development facility shows what a good, active industrial strategy from central government can do alongside the world-renowned

research expertise of our higher education institutions.

It builds on our history in the West Midlands as a manufacturing heartland in partnership with the likes of Warwick University, Warwick Manufacturing Group and Coventry City Council.

UKBIC is designed to ensure that the UK can become a leading large-scale manufacturer of the batteries that will power our transport, store our energy and have applications in an ever-increasing range of fields.

Be in no doubt – countries that want to retain an automotive industry will need large scale battery manufacturing alongside the making of the vehicles themselves.

However, it is a mistake to have scrapped the industrial strategy in a pointless ideological move and legislate for a cap on investment spending at the very moment when we need to press ahead with the transition needed for our economy.

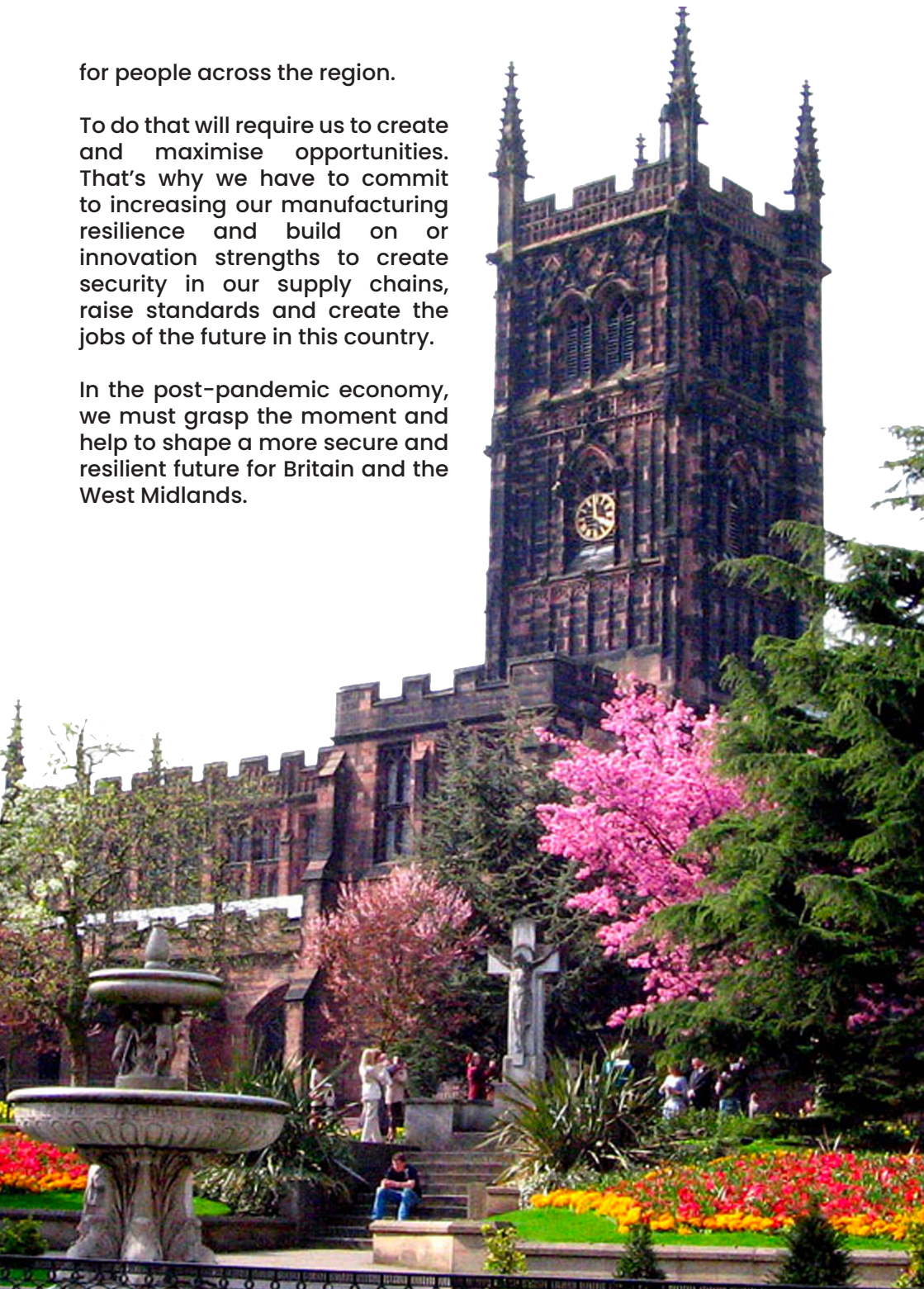
My hopes for the next 10 years are that we make the most of this transition and of the strengths that our region can bring.

In 2032 I hope to look back and see that the immense potential of the West Midlands has been utilised to build and create opportunities

for people across the region.

To do that will require us to create and maximise opportunities. That's why we have to commit to increasing our manufacturing resilience and build on or innovation strengths to create security in our supply chains, raise standards and create the jobs of the future in this country.

In the post-pandemic economy, we must grasp the moment and help to shape a more secure and resilient future for Britain and the West Midlands.



PARTNERSHIPS WILL POWER THE FUTURE

By Jim O'Boyle



**Unlocking the Green
Industrial Revolution will
need partnership like
never before.**

Coventry is doing its best to go green, we just need more help from the Government.

Tackling climate change is our chance to take global shared ambition and translate it into meaningful action. It means committing to transforming our economies to make them cleaner and greener through tangible, measurable action.

This has to happen at all levels, from the global to the individual. In Coventry, we know that tackling climate change and delivering sustainable growth go hand in hand, because we know that bold action can yield economic gains. We can create skilled, well paid, low carbon jobs and reduce air pollution to improve health outcomes and cut healthcare costs. And we can still grow our economy while cutting emissions.

Coventry is demonstrating what local action can do.

We cannot wait for The Government, so we are acting and demonstrating our leadership and investment. As one of the UK's fastest growing cities, we have a sizeable climate programme and we are working towards a greener, sustainable future for those who live here.

Coventry has more electric vehicle charging points than any other city outside London.

We are on course to have the UK's first all-electric bus fleet by the end of 2025, ten already on the streets with another 297 electric buses on their way. The city has more than twenty five kilometres of purpose-built cycleways. Almost fifty schools and council buildings will have taken advantage of solar power to become more energy efficient by the end of next year, and we are replacing our street lighting with energy efficient alternatives. With our partners at Act on Energy, our residents are getting home insulation schemes, which is definitely the right thing to do now given how quickly domestic fuel bills are rising.

Using our leadership position in the city we are making the meaningful, tangible and visible changes that communities can understand and relate to. And we stand ready to go further and faster, with the bold and ambitious vision of our new Climate Change Board with an ex-Conservative (yes Conservative!) Minister as Chair with myself as a Vice-Chair.

Coventry has long been the home of the automotive industry and a new Gigafactory, building car batteries, will ensure we remain at the heart of it. Our plans for the UK's biggest Gigafactory are essential to our city, our region, as well as for the future of the automotive industry across the UK. Based at Coventry airport, the

Gigafactory will be adjacent to the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre, part of the UK's Faraday Challenge. It will inject £2.5 billion investment into the region, making it the largest new industrial facility of any kind in the UK, and it will be within reach of almost every car manufacturing plant in the UK.

Very Light Rail (VLR) is a research and development project, using the latest automotive expertise developed in the West Midlands, to deliver an innovative and affordable light rail system. A growing city like Coventry needs an environmentally and financially sustainable mass transit system, capable of supporting urban and economic development and helping to improve air quality. VLR will provide a solution that is comfortable, efficient, reliable and low cost. These vehicles will have low floors to enable passengers to embark and disembark from the pavement. They will be lightweight, self-propelled and battery powered, and will run on a lightweight track laid closer to the surface than conventional tram track, and thus will be considerably cheaper than traditional light rail solutions.

The city is supporting businesses to change.

We are also using our convening

powers to support and encourage the hundreds of businesses across the city to take definitive action. Through a programme of grants and support, we are helping businesses with fewer than 250 employees to save money on energy, waste and water bills and maximise low carbon opportunities. Several local businesses are signed up to UK Business Climate Hub's 'Make the Commitment' initiative and, during COP26, we will be redoubling our effort urging companies to take action to cut their carbon emissions and develop a climate transition plan.

These programmes demonstrate the appetite we have, along with other local authorities, to meet climate change targets, while delivering economic prosperity for local people. But central government needs to help by committing more capital investment for innovations such as VLR and Gigafactories. The Government needs to send the right signals to the market on where to innovate and where to invest. Ending traditional gas boilers, for instance, will offer new opportunities for existing manufacturers, likewise cleantech and fuel for aviation.

At Coventry City Council, we sit at the heart of our ecosystem of business, academia, the local enterprise partnership, and the combined authority, ready to

capitalise on all these exciting, emerging opportunities. The Government should engage local councils early to make it happen. For example, if it is planning more work on heat network zoning, it will need pilots which local councils can facilitate.

Local authorities, such as Coventry City Council, are doing what we can to force the pace, and it is imperative that The Government works with us on this journey.



A WORLD CAPITAL OF RENEWABLE NET ZERO ENERGY

By Beverley Nielsen



We will need the full spectrum of green energy solutions if we are to hit our net zero targets – and new powers to achieve them.

As we enter 2022 after a turbulent couple of years, you, perhaps like me, have been considering possible New Year's resolutions.

I've also been thinking about what the West Midlands might have as its New Years' resolutions as we look ahead to the next decade.

I'm conscious of our ambition to be net-zero by 2041 but I'd like to see some place-based targets to improve our region's competitiveness and quality of life.

We do have some exciting times ahead. We can look forward to the Commonwealth Games this year delivering, we're told, £778 million investment, including redevelopment of the Alexander Stadium and the brand-new Sandwell Aquatics Centre. Post-Games, the Perry Barr development is due to be converted into around 1,400 homes as part of a long-term regeneration plan providing up to 5,000 new homes. Investment in HS2 is ongoing, at least to Manchester/Marsden and up to East Midlands Parkway on the Eastern link, if not to Leeds.

But alongside Coronavirus and Brexit, we have an energy crisis to confront. Admittedly not only confined to the UK, but one that is, together with other crises,

affecting both quality of life and standards of living.

How will we fare in the West Midlands with regards to reasonably priced low-carbon energy over the coming decade?

Nationally, too many are falling into fuel poverty and 'fuel stress' where 10% or more of household budgets are spent on energy. The Resolution Foundation brought out a report this month stating that average domestic monthly fuel bills will rise from £100 to £150 when the energy price cap is adjusted to an anticipated £2,000 in April, putting 6.3 million (or 27%, up from 9%) of UK homes into fuel stress.

This will hit the West Midlands badly with over 300,000 homes already in fuel poverty and amongst the highest levels in the country.

Energy is the backbone of any economy, and the UK currently uses about 1,873 terawatt hours (TWh) of energy each year. Sources vary on percentages generated from different sources with one suggesting oil accounting for 756 TWh, Natural Gas - 872 TWh, Coal - 59 TWh, with electricity from non-carbon sources contributing 186 TWh (renewables, nuclear, hydro, bioenergy and imports).

In 2020, one source suggests the

UK obtained 21.5% of its primary energy from low carbon sources, with 37% of this from biomass, 31% from nuclear, and 18% from wind. Another source suggests that last year 24% of our energy was generated by renewable sources – wind, solar and hydroelectric with 25% from nuclear, biomass and other sources.

It appears energy from solar increased by 4.4%, nuclear fell by 11% due to numerous outages at all eight of the UK's power stations during 2020, wind increased by 18%, with capacity up by 2.5% and higher wind speeds and biomass supply increasing by 3.9%.

The Chair of Energy Capital West Midlands, Matthew Rhodes, has long argued that without greatly enhanced devolution in England our chances remain very low of providing a 'just energy transition' and tackling fuel poverty levels which have been at 11% rising dramatically as prices have risen.

Certainly, we need to consider our regional assets, ensuring these are harnessed as efficiently as possible if we are to deliver sufficient energy to both eliminate fuel poverty and ensure sufficient low-carbon energy access for our manufacturing, especially in light of our position as the UK's industrial heartlands.

'WM2041: A Programme for Implementing an Environmental

Recovery', published in June 2020, is referenced in the WMCA's Five Year Plan which in turn builds on consultancy support from WSP. The report makes no mention of the opportunities for biofuels, in particular biomethane, nor does it include any reference to geothermal with some parts of the West Midlands, including Worcestershire, providing viable commercial opportunities in this sector.

Equally it does not include reference to any audit of West Midlands energy assets and it certainly seems no one is looking to take advantage of these highly local opportunities.

The West Midlands should look carefully at its position in terms of energy requirements and assets – we have little wind capacity, no off-shore, no hydro, but one thing we do have plenty of, given food and crop production in our neighbouring shire counties, is the organic waste materials which, properly harnessed and managed, can make a far greater, cost-effective contribution in meeting our energy needs.

For example, the WMCA Five Year Plan suggests accelerated scenarios for net-zero deployment in industry include 33% hydrogen use.

Whilst government's hydrogen strategy envisages between

20-35% energy consumption provided by hydrogen by 2050, I'm told by industry experts that appropriate hydrogen infrastructures are only due to reach the West Midlands towards the end of the national upgrades, in around 2045.

The same report suggests 100% of cars, buses, taxis and HGVs should be electrified and yet an earlier WMCA report highlighted the impracticality of transferring everything over to electric vehicles. The Regional Energy Strategy sets out that 42,547 GWh of energy is currently delivered to vehicles operating in our region as petrol and diesel. This amount equals the energy delivered through the entire regional gas network or is almost twice that delivered by the electricity system.

The #WM2041 discussion document states: "The implications for local energy infrastructure of shifting transport fuel use from petrol to electricity or gas are significant. As such, a lot of that demand will need to be met or otherwise eliminated by mass transit or active travel."

A report, supported by gas utilities, including Cadent Gas, prioritised biomethane use in transitioning to green hydrogen. They saw the opportunity to increase biomethane's energy contribution from 2TWh to 120TWh or just under 14% of the

gas energy consumed today, by using currently available wastes. By immediately using accessible biomethane we can reduce HGV CO2 emissions by between 22-38% over the coming decade whereas waiting for hydrogen results in just 6% emissions reductions by 2030.

Severn Trent and Cadent Gas are already producing and distributing biomethane on an industrial scale and have green hydrogen aspirations planning to produce this from biomethane reformation.

By properly capturing organic wastes we can harness fugitive methane emissions, as envisaged in the COP26 Methane Pledge. These waste streams are abundant, including more of the 90million T/pa of UK manures (only 3% is currently treated), sewage, industrial and institutional food wastes, crop residues and more than 12million T/pa household food wastes due to be collected following implementation of the Environment Act from 2023.

These actions would, in turn, enable greater use of digestates, produced following anaerobic digestion and replacing fossil-fuel chemical fertilisers whilst also helping to alleviate fuel poverty by using a gas that already is viable for distribution and use through our established

gas grid and is well understood, readily available and therefore available at a much lower cost than green hydrogen.

Niclas Svenningsen, Manager of Global Climate Action at UNFCCC has outlined local 'wins' from producing biomethane through opportunities to:

- Use biomethane replacing fossil fuels
- Turn more than 2% currently used of the 105 billion tonnes of organic wastes currently produced globally each year into bioenergy
- Prevent releases of methane gas – 85 times more harmful than CO2
- Create energy and new jobs, contributing to the new low-carbon economy through a stable energy source that can be built and used, even at household scale.

Locally Birmingham City University IDEAS think tank brought together the Birmingham Biomethane Cluster in 2020 to promote this opportunity. The cluster brought together world-leading specialists and businesses based in our region including Severn Trent Water, Cadent Gas, Air Liquide, CNG Services – all businesses already investing in this opportunity in our region. With one kilo of biomethane equivalent, in energy output terms, to one litre

of diesel, the biofuel provides a real alternative to fossil fuels and is already available for use in transport, being especially practical for heavier vehicles – HGVs, trains, trams, buses, refuse trucks, cement mixers, tractors, as well as for use in heating and energy generation.

Severn Trent Water currently produces just under 600 gigawatt hours (GWh) per annum of biogas from anaerobic digestion, with 118 GWh of this converted into biomethane and injected into the grid (the remainder is used for CHP generation). The current combined biomethane produced by both Severn Trent Water and Severn Trent Green Power would heat 22,000 homes or power over 500 HGVs.

With energy prices in the news over the past year through vast gas price rises, up over 70% since August 2021 and 250% since start 2021 and big electricity price increases too, biomethane needs to gain greater policy recognition for the role it can play over the coming decade and especially in transitioning to green hydrogen. Rather than slicing through national assumptions to come up with a set of regional data why not sum up our own strengths and come up with our own ideas based on our West Midlands assets?

What about promoting the

West Midlands as the centre of renewable net-zero energy by facilitating bioenergy exports to neighbouring counties through local energy networks?

Let's see some clear goal setting (not ambitions) across WMCA this year combined with more social entrepreneurship to drive our 2041 net-zero ambitions into reality by harnessing our own circular economy solutions.



LEADING THE GREEN HEAT REVOLUTION

By Martin Freer



The West Midlands could lead solutions to one of the biggest green challenges of all: net zero carbon heat.

In November 2019 the Confederation of British Industry announced the initiation of the “Decade of Delivery”. The then General Director, Carolyn Fairburn, set out “To tackle the climate emergency in the time we have, we need to go faster, and further, than ever before... But the truth is that nobody has done anything like this, on this scale before. Business can’t do it alone. It must be done in partnership with government every step of the way.”

Why the decade and not the 30 years of delivery given the UK’s commitment to be net zero by 2050? That rests with the need to first stop emitting greenhouse gases to limit their impact on global warming and, second, the later you leave it, the more drastic the intervention required and hence acting early makes economic sense. Indeed, Birmingham has set a 2030 net zero target.

Birmingham and the West Midlands are rightly proud of having been the progenitor of the industrial transformation that has driven global economic growth for several centuries. In a remarkable period of history between two to three hundred years ago, there was a confluence of developments which exploited human ingenuity and natural resources laying the foundations for the creation of industry. The

access to coal as cheap fuel, the development of the steam engine, the creation of the first "mass production" factory and the civil engineering and canal infrastructure to interconnect. The names are now legends; Boulton, Brindley, Smeaton, Watt... Manufacturing took over.

This also became a focus of intellectual industry, via the Lunar Society, attracting the likes of Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father of the United States, William Thompson (Lord Kelvin, as in the unit of temperature), a giant of thermal science, who amongst many contributions pondered the origins of the energy of the Sun, through to William Herschel an astronomer after which the Herschel telescope employed to understand how stars and galaxies are formed. One might also argue that via Priestley, who discovered oxygen, and Wedgwood who employed Nicholson, that the region also had a role to play in the discovery of gases and splitting of water, via electrolysis, into hydrogen and oxygen.

Though fuelled by coal, this industry attracted the seeds of debate which now bridge to low carbon solutions; solar energy which in turn drives the Earth's weather is the platform for global decarbonisation. Kelvins' conclusions on the Sun as a thermal body were reasonably

dismal, speculating that unless there was some hitherto unknown source of energy that the sun would run out of energy in a matter of millions of years. Now we know that the lifecycle of stars is billions of years and that they are fuelled by nuclear processes.

Twenty years ago, solar and wind power existed, but there was no real prospect of a major role in the energy system due to their high unit cost. We are now on the other side of major scale up of solar panel manufacturing in China (cost reduction by a factor of five) and the cost reduction, by a factor of three, associated with manufacturing and installation of wind turbines in the UK. There is now no barrier to wind and solar from a price perspective, and if one puts to one side the need to manage intermittent generation, wind is cheaper than everything. Here national and regional governments have had a major role to play in setting a policy direction and ambition which industry can follow and jobs and growth ensued.

There has been much discussion on the role of hydrogen in a low carbon energy system, in part recognised in The Government's Hydrogen Strategy. There are few definitive answers yet, but hydrogen has the potential to play a role via decarbonisation of industry replacing the combustion of natural gas, decarbonisation

of heavy transport replacing diesel and, via hydrogen boilers, delivering low-carbon domestic heating. The Hydrogen Strategy is a wait and see approach, with a moderate amount of funding to simulate innovation. We will know by the end of the decade one way or other.

Similarly, and accelerated by concerns over the rise in the natural gas price, nuclear energy is back as a priority, with innovation funding supporting the small modular, SMR, and advanced nuclear reactor programmes in both fission and fusion energy. The flexibility of these reactors mean that their locations will not be restricted to coastal regions, will have the capability to deliver heat and electrical power and could be the basis for hydrogen production and grid balancing.

Though these are national and global challenges, many UK regions have moved effectively to establish leadership. The Humber has become the UK centre for offshore wind development, the Tees Valley is well positioned to become the location for generation of hydrogen and its utilisation in decarbonisation of manufacturing and industry.

The East Midlands is set to benefit from the investments into Rolls Royce's SMR programme. What about the West Midlands and

Birmingham, has the last train left?

Maybe not, though there is a need to look beyond its historical ties to the automotive sector. The biggest net zero challenge is one which has not yet been discussed – the decarbonisation of heating of homes and buildings. Powered by gas, involving nearly 28 million homes and requiring investments running to hundreds of billions of pounds this is also an opportunity. Birmingham has its flagship district heating system, the region has major manufacturers such as Worcester Bosch and Baxi, energy companies such as E.ON and those who manage infrastructure – National Grid and Western Power Distribution.

Why has heating been left to last? Well, there is no great enthusiasm for a more expensive heating solution which requires major disruption to the home and no government deadline for a transition. To turn this sector around, the transformation that has happened in the wind and solar sector is required; prices need to come down and innovation and scale up is required. This is the growth sector of the future, yet to be grasped, and the region has assets to make it a leader.

How does this focus on innovation square with the decade of delivery? Vision, leadership

and the need for the region to rediscover its roots. Delivery of net zero and the seizing of new sector opportunities needs to accelerate and be more ambitious, we are being left behind. The truth is, in local government there is a lot of delivery happening already, linked to services such as waste, education and law and order.

With overly stretched budgets and limited human resource local and city councils do not have the capacity and capability to act at the scale and pace required to deliver net zero. The West Midlands Combined Authority too is under resourced. It could be the decade of debate, deliberation and drawn-out decision making. Birmingham Town Council was established in 1838 (Birmingham was not a city until 50 years later). It was the pioneers of the industrial revolution which created the city of a thousand trades in the preceding years.

It is time for a new way of working, where there is partnership between local and city government, industry and business, financial and academic institutions, and indeed national government. For a decade term, the region should establish a net zero delivery body. Organisations would second their most able and driven and financially invest to create the capacity to deliver.

The machinery of local

government, e.g. planning, would be aligned with the capacity of industry to deliver. Setting the region above the national competition, creating jointly owned ambition and recognising "Business can't do it alone. It must be done in partnership with government every step of the way", investment and talent will follow. That talent, in turn, will seed future success.

The West Midlands and Birmingham are behind the curve and business as usual is not going to cut it. Vision and leadership are key and building on its industry, innovation and academic assets. We should set out our stall to be the region that delivers the innovation required for net zero heating and thermal energy efficiency for the people of Britain.

A CAPITAL OF CREATORS

By Ed Shedd



We have it within our reach to build a global reputation in multi-platform, multi-format immersive content and services.

It is 2050. 75% of the world's population live in cities. We are in the world of powerful digital technologies and green infrastructure. We are in the world of smart, green, inclusive cities which have radically transformed how we live, work and play, our impact on the environment and our personal wellbeing.

How did this happen?

Thirty years ago, a region in the UK, the West Midlands, began a movement, which sprung from a germ of an idea and was given life by the emergence of an increasingly powerful force – the world's leading cities.

The germ of an idea? That it was possible to have a strong local voice, whilst also being able to collaborate nationally and globally. That digital creativity, inclusivity and environmental change lay at the heart of a successful city. That we can change the way we do things.

In the early 2020s the world's cities were all tackling the same issues, which the pandemic had only exacerbated. To improve the brand and attractiveness of their cities, the economic prospects of all their citizens – the young, long-term unemployed, low skilled and skilled alike – and the health and wellbeing of their people.

Whilst at the same time reducing

their environmental footprint and building a sustainable future.

But it was the West Midlands that took the first, decisive step, turning the decade between the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the first HS2 trains rolling into Curzon Street Station in 2032 into a golden one.

The region's leaders grasped that the world of 2032 would be a world of immersive content and services, enabled by superfast networks offering awe inspiring speed and capacity. They recognised that this world would be defined by a blurring of media formats. TV, gaming, social media, digital marketing and commerce blending into a seamless whole. Consumers being able to feast on snackable subs – affordable, accessible and easily turned on and off – and shoppable TV, where a game player, chatting to friends on a social broadcast feed would be able to respond to a digital marketing offer and buy a product without ever taking her eyes off the game she's playing.

They understood that the virtual and physical world were complementary not competing, and that the impact of this digital creative revolution would be felt not only in the future of mobility, data driven health and life science, professional service and creative content sectors, the four

pillars of the region's industrial strategy, but much, much more broadly across the region. And they also understood that their diversity – a city in which more than 100 languages were spoken – would be a major positive in a world hungry to hear different voices.

At the same time, they also recognised that the world's cities (which occupied only 3% of land globally, but which were responsible for 80% of GDP, 70% of global carbon emissions, and 60% of resource use) needed to radically transform environmentally, as well as technologically. A transformation just as, if not more, fundamental than the famous photos of New York in 1908 and 1918 reveal. In the one, all traffic is horse and cart. In the next, all cars.

Only this time around, the transformation they required to build, at speed, was an increasingly digital, inclusive, sustainable way of life.

How did lives improve?

By 2032 the West Midlands had built a global reputation in multi-platform, multi-format immersive content and services.

The world's leading creatives queued to work with our region's specialist pitch, pre-vis, production and post-

production teams. Teams who were instrumental in helping creatives get their ideas listened to and commissioned in the first place, who helped ideas come to life by turning them into virtual prototypes and storyboards, and then helped produce and deliver that exquisite final piece of games, film, TV, augmented reality or metaversal content.

The world's audiences thrilled to the extraordinary diversity of opinion that West Midlands creatives offered them. The home of original storytelling, which had begun with Shakespeare and Tolkien, was now telling new and different stories in more than 100 languages and almost as many formats.

And that reputation in turn attracted the world's businesses, drawn by the volume and vibrancy of the region's talent, and its applicability more broadly across sectors. With the help of a joined-up skills strategy the West Midlands was able to create over 100,000 jobs in the creative digital industries. Jobs that covered a vast range of ability and experience, and which provided a way to harness people's passion and talent, while providing flexible and inclusive environments in which to work and grow.

From highly skilled creative jobs to the enabling support

service jobs, for example, script writers, editors, pre-vis technicians, production teams, coders, technology innovators, camera operators, electricians, accountants, carpenters, Esports producers, marketing execs, user experience experts, 3D modelling and texture artists, sound design engineers, games testers, hair, make-up and costume designers, production buyers, data wranglers, kit room assistants, riggers, caterers and much more...

The West Midlands had also built a reputation for "getting sustainability and the race to negative zero right". The region's Sustainability Roadmap 2030 led to improved social, economic and environmental indicators across the region resulting in a more sustainable, fairer and greener place to live, work and play, for all.

The early decision to change planning regulation to utilise and respect green assets, or green infrastructure as they would ultimately be described, had paid off. As had the introduction of a carbon tax on products and services bought and sold in the region. Recognising that to solve the climate crisis the region needed to tackle both production and consumption.

The benefits of these decisions – in addition to rapidly falling

emissions - could be seen in many examples, both large and small, as one walked around the region.

Hedgerows had proved powerful scrubbers of pollution, and now lined the major routes into the city. Strategically placed trees and living walls next to and on offices had reduced ambient temperature, significantly lowering the demand for air con. And the replacement of hard landscaping had improved the region's capacity to deal with ever increasing torrential downpours.

The establishment of an "urban eden" which allowed the region to work with its communities in the choice, development and running of sustainability initiatives had increased public, private and community engagement, and had, somewhat unexpectedly, led to an upsurge in funding and early-stage companies operating in the green technology sector.

And a reinvigorated and expanded Parks and Recreation department - formed in response to the fact that green infrastructure, as with software, needs regular maintenance - had given the low skilled and long-term unemployed access to secure employment, with one major, unforeseen benefit: a corresponding drop in violence and improved wellbeing and

mental health. The need for and costs of policing and social care reducing as a result.

What challenges had the region's leaders overcome, and what was their approach?

When asked this question, the answer from the region's leaders was both resounding and simple. There had been many challenges over the decade, some expected, some entirely unexpected, which they had overcome by consistently applying five, very basic, principles to the programmes and initiatives they were delivering.

First, the need to ensure public, private and community engagement & alignment. This was an essential element. Easy to say, hugely difficult to deliver in practice.

Secondly, a strong local voice, able to collaborate nationally and globally. The levelling up agenda and decentralisation of political power and decision making had been essential, enabling vibrant regional decision making with access to funds. Another sine qua non.

Third, a strong, positive, collective view of the future, with a recognition that we all - citizens, communities, the public realm and business alike - need to change. And that we can all

contribute to and benefit from that change.

Fourth, a strong delivery capability. Here the region's leaders talked seriously about "getting real about transformation and behavioural change". It wasn't just about building a content hub and studios, hosting a global event such as the Commonwealth Games, or even opening Curzon Street station, but about stimulating and sustaining life in them after they had launched.

And fifth, "It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish" as Samwise Gamgee says in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings. You need to start, and test, then refine and test, refine and test, on almost permanent repeat.

These core principles helped define the approach the region's leaders took to building a smarter, green, inclusive city.

Take Create Central, for example, the private sector trade body, led by industry for industry, in partnership with national and regional public sector organisations, which they formed to turbo-charge digital creativity and inclusion across the West Midlands.

Established at the start of the 2020s, with a remit to create a common strategy and delivery plan, shaped, agreed and led by the industry, Create Central

had both public, private and community engagement, and a strong, positive collective view of the region's multi-platform, multi-format digital content and services future at its core.

Its focus on turning words into reality, and making a tangible difference, which was noticed by the region, nationally and globally, was an exemplar of a strong local voice, being able to collaborate on a national and global stage.

The initial focus on increasing production in the region showed early success with the development of a major indie production hub in Digbeth. More soon followed as the groundbreaking partnership with the BBC brought big name titles to Birmingham, and Mercian Studios saw its first productions underway.

Striking partnership deals with the UK's leading public service broadcasters and global streamers provided the spark that kicked off some of our most successful and established production companies. Initiatives like Create Central's Bootcamp programme and the BBC Apprentice Hub were just the start of a framework that provided young people in the region with a clear career path into and opportunities within the digital creative industries.

The City of Culture coming to Coventry and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games gave the West Midlands the chance to showcase its digital innovation to a global audience. And thanks to the Create Central Esports Task Force and the support of so many of the big-name games companies in the Leamington Spa cluster, it wasn't long before the region was established as the home of Esports, with tournaments, an Esports accelerator and an Esports academy; not to mention the regular inward and outward missions to and from the USA and China.

They also encouraged cross-sector collaboration, for example, establishing a programme to support the growth and use of virtual production facilities, in which games, film and TV production support staff worked ever more closely together.

All of this enabled Create Central to breathe life into its tagline – the Home of Original Storytelling – and led to the region backing the trade body with increased funding, inward investment support, and delivery capability. A similar approach was adopted on sustainability and the race to negative zero, with “urban eden” connecting communities across the region with each other, assembling all the projects and initiatives underway into a single

coherent whole, and helping secure funding and delivery at scale for the most promising ideas and projects.

Looking back from 2050, in a world of negative zero emissions and smart, bio, diverse cities, which have radically transformed how we live work & play, our impact on the environment and our personal well-being, we can view the West Midlands actions in context. We have much to thank the leaders of the golden decade, who refused to accept the status quo and agreed to work together to build a more digital, inclusive and sustainable future for us all.

UNLOCKING THE POWER OF OUR CREATIVE POTENTIAL

By Tom McNeill



Creativity Centres could unlock the power and potential of our region's greatest asset: our children.

Commentators have, for many years now, warned of the cliff edge of the machine era. Automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, super computers and machines we can't yet imagine but which are upon us; frequently held out as major threats to society as we know it. From manufacturing, to surgery, to adult social care; all are presented as being susceptible to technological solutions and the potential removal of human labour altogether.

Industrial replacement of jobs, mass unemployment, lack of purpose, challenges to human dignity and the risk that technological progress is not owned or applied for the benefit of all of us, paint a bleak prospect.

Thankfully, optimism flourishes when we rewrite this dystopia into an opportunity; a more hopeful vision of a new generation of highly innovative industries maximising our future population's creative and intellectual talents. This more desirable alternative comes when a large proportion of our nation's population are given the chance to possess the necessary skills to design, engineer and use the next wave of advanced technology. It looks like energetic and highly trained communities of millions of adults and young people alike, who are equipped to tackle climate change, embrace

futuristic transport whether in outer space or virtual realities, or forge the way for radical solutions to health crises for cancer to genetic disorders.

If we can envision this world, where many millions are empowered to reach their human potential whether in the arts, modern manufacturing or as world class scientists, we must ensure it does not create new dividing lines. It must not intensify splits between rich and poor, exclude communities or shore up elitism in sectors that reserve, often unintentionally, the best jobs for small numbers of people from more fortunate beginnings. Leave these opportunities to a lucky few, and we miss the chance to build our utopia.

Indeed, not only would this repeat many injustices we see today, but it would then fail to provide the kinds of employment required in the coming decades to defeat the problems connected to the era of machines. But get it right, then we do not just avoid the catastrophe of human alienation, it builds an invigorated, diverse, entrepreneurial and expansive economy that paves the ways for hundreds of years ahead, and not just next quarter's conceptually flawed GDP figures.

What this short essay sets out, is a simple idea for what we can do now to help make some of this a

reality. This is the establishment of Creativity Centres. The modern society we see today did not spin out of thin air. It came from generations upon generations of great human minds building on what was there before them, whether in music, literature or physics. The evolution of this aggregated knowledge came when people were inspired by the ideas and brilliance before them; when current possibilities served as the platform for new ones. The opportunity we have here then, is to spark this notion of exciting possibilities in far more people, far sooner and for the many children that today do not yet know what they want to be or what their role in a changing society looks like.

People who work in the philanthropic effort to raise aspirations and opportunity for those coming from low-income backgrounds, underrepresented groups or people with a different skill set to the contemporary orthodoxy of what constitutes 'intelligence', have known for a long time that one of the key steps is to actually make young people aware of what is possible. Until people know what they can strive for and the successes they can have, they are constrained by the limits of their experiential sphere.

Too many people do not believe in themselves, because we have not done enough to tell them

how brilliant they can be, and how brilliant they can make our country. While achievement requires role models, encouragement and sometimes support by way of welfare and funding in various forms, simply knowing what they can aspire to and how they can get there can be truly transformative. That's where Creativity Centres step in.

Knowing this, we have the chance to bring the cutting edge of science, technology and artificial frontiers directly to the classrooms of our children. Let's not wait until they battle through the postcode lotteries and varied life chances before we show our future workers about the next developments in rocket science, coding or quantum mechanics. They can be the ones to deliver it; they can be the bridge between our vision by being the ones to make positive science fiction and reality.

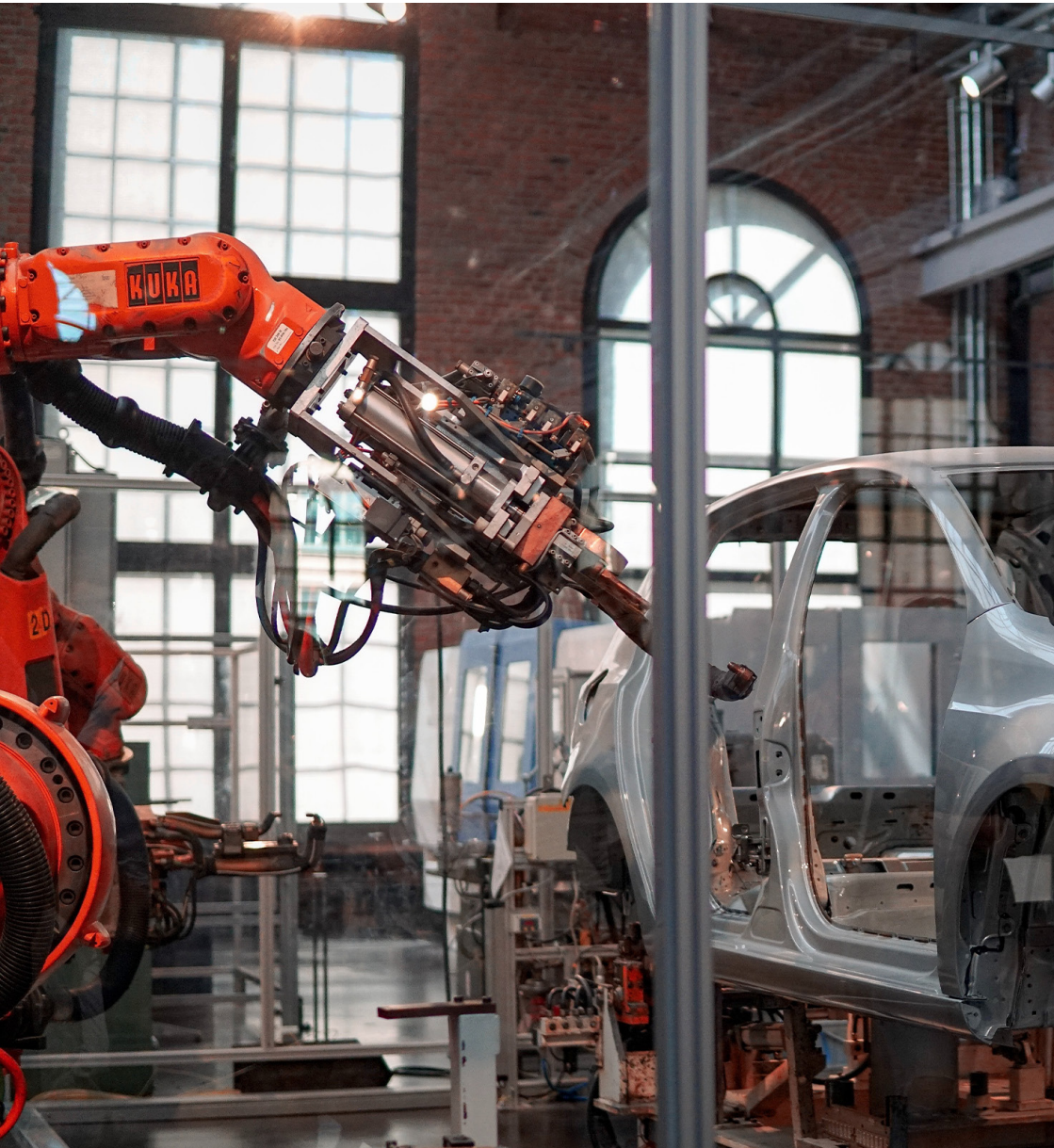
Of course, there are many excellent initiatives out there that work to inspire young people in schools, through online workshops or visits to leading laboratories. But Creativity Centres would seek something far more ambitious and wide ranging. Creativity Centres would bring children from all schools into close contact with an accessible overview of vanguard projects being led by the UK's universities.

Through comprehensible insights on cutting edge technology or areas of human inquiry that push scientific boundaries, alongside artistic trades, we can inspire future generations and carve out new visionaries. In these Centres, it wouldn't just be the universities that provided the 'penny drop' moments and elevated heart rate of excitement, but they would bring together inventors, writers, research and development departments of major enterprises and other creative organisations such as our country's burgeoning social enterprise and tech entrepreneur sectors. And with the elastic brains of youth, we may see new ideas offered up in return – the child's original perspective untainted by conformity, cultural dogmas and engrained academic paradigms.

A meaningful and coordinated effort to bring the newest ideas to the minds of our young people early through Creativity Centres, is good for the grandparents who want to see their grandchildren achieve, good for the parents who worry about what tomorrow's world looks like and brilliant for society as a whole for its preparation for a world that is unrecognisable to the one we have now.

Universities already have obligations to bring their research and learning closer to

the communities they operate within. Let us help tie these duties towards something that offers us a depiction of a society we can all feel excited to see.



PUTTING HANDS ON THE POWERS WE NEED

By Martin Bailey



Unlocking our potential can't be done from Whitehall. We need the right powers here at home.

I was born and raised in North-West Birmingham. A lifetime of travelling up and down the A34, past Alexander Stadium home to this summer's Commonwealth Games, or driving down Thimblemill Road where I learned to swim in the early 90's, seeing the development of what will be the new home of the Sandwell Aquatic Centre, the pace of change has not been so fast round these parts as in the last few years.

For me the Golden Decade will be measured by three key areas of investment in our region: in jobs, in new homes, and a renewed lifelong investment in sport and participation.

Jobs, homes and sport on paper feel like very separate ambitions, but there is a great deal of overlap here. Our region has quietly punched above its weight for years, and we are now seeing the fruits of that labour as innovation and new investment has created our second-ever tech unicorn. Gymshark started life in 2012 in Solihull trading £300 a day in fitness gear and accessories online. Today it has almost 1000 employees and is worth over \$1 billion.

Tech is the fastest growing sector in the West Midlands. We have already seen global industry giants such as BT create 1000 technology and research jobs

in the region, and Goldman Sachs open its digital bank Marcus in Birmingham making commitment to put hundreds of jobs here. These moves are revolutionary in getting employers to not default to London as the place for professional services jobs. These give our young people more chances to create full and exciting careers, here at home, without feeling they need to go to London or elsewhere to get on and do well.

I have lived and worked in Glasgow during my career, seeing first-hand the legacy the 2014 Commonwealth Games left in that region, both in terms of mass participation in sport but how Glasgow harnessed it as part of its outbound trade and investment promotion to the world.

In 2015 around 80% of Birmingham's population were considered to be inactive. More specifically women's participation in sport and physical activity in Birmingham was exceptionally low at just 14.1%. The challenge is set now for the Games to raise those stakes, how active can we be by 2030? How many of Team GB at Brisbane Olympics 2032 will proudly declare Birmingham when asked where they come from?

If the opening of the Commonwealth Games is the official start of our golden decade, then it can only be bookended by then opening of HS2, with the original promised high-speed links to the North, not just London. HS2 must go the length of the country in order for the West Midlands to fully enjoy its benefits. When Birmingham and the West Midlands are within a one hours reach to over 20million people, we reclaim our place as the UK's second city with no naysayers and truly become the centre of the country.

But HS2 is not just about connecting people, but it will unlock the creation of 5,000 new homes and over 3,000 new jobs. We desperately need new homes right across the region.

As I convened a Green Manufacturing Commission as part of Labour's campaign for West Midlands Mayor in 2021, we clearly heard three key demands from business and education experts:

- Full control over skills funding for sixteen to nineteen-year-olds and re-training adults should be handed over to regional control. We know best what jobs we need here and what skills we don't already have locally.
- Government are always keen to talk about retrofitting homes,

greener transport, and green energy. However, they do not talk about investing in those skills here in the UK, manufacturing those goods here in the UK, creating those necessary jobs here in the UK.

- We have a strong history in our part of the industrial revolution, we are proud of our manufacturing past, but today, our role as that centre of new power generation is not recognised. My hope is that this decade we aren't afraid to flex our muscle, and our regional political leaders champion the West Midlands for the role we can play in greening our economy.

- Championing our SMEs and our Mid-Sized businesses. Jaguar Land Rover, IMI, Tarmac, Alstom are household names. We see their engineering expertise daily around us and they are essential anchors of our local economy, but they all have supply chains, they all have smaller companies where our mothers, brothers, cousins and nieces work supplying vital parts that make the whole thing run. But our system is letting them down. They struggle to get funding to expand or sell goods overseas, which means importing more than we are exporting. London, the South West and North East are all net exporting regions, meaning that is money reinvested back into their local economies, creating jobs and opportunities for their

people. Our political leaders must lobby Westminster for more support of our great SMEs and get us to that position.

None of these ambitions come without challenges. They need political leadership, both at a regional, local and national level, to fight for the West Midlands to be front and centre. We need to take control of how we promote ourselves globally. Trade and Investment money and opportunity is not easy to win, especially in crowded fields where every major city is present. Our businesses and our academic institutions need to work closer together than ever before in both creating jobs the region needs, and ensuring we are creating the talent, here, to fill those jobs.

Success at the end of the decade, for me, is being able to sit in the centre of Birmingham, or Coventry, or Wolverhampton, and know that everything I need or want, and everything my cousins or nieces and nephews need to get on, to live, work, play and do well, can be found right here.

SHARING THE FRUITS OF OUR SUCCESS

THE MEASURE OF OUR PROGRESS

By Corin Crane



Not all growth is good growth – putting the community and the environment must be at the heart of business success.

The West Midlands is a remarkable place. It is packed full of exciting entrepreneurs and innovative business leaders, experienced workers and young people hungry for opportunities, it is one of the most culturally diverse places on earth and is full of incredible artists, writers, musicians, sportspeople and creative enterprises.

It has had both highs where it has led the UK economy home and abroad in productivity and innovation and lows where our unemployment and business closures have pushed communities to their limits. The character, resilience and uniqueness of our businesses and residents make this place so special.

However, the nature of our economy has meant national economic crisis 'have a deeper and longer impact on our regional economy than others in the UK.' A recent report by the Barrow Cadbury Trust – The State of Economic Justice in Birmingham and the Black Country – demonstrates that the makeup of our industry and the occupations within these industries, the lower-than-average wages and skills levels and long term unemployment levels in many of our most deprived communities means that for many parts of the West Midlands our productivity will take longer to recover, that

our supply chains won't win the contracts associated with recovery and that many of the jobs created won't go to local people.

The next decade will be full of economic events that we can either treat as opportunities or hurdles for our local economy – the move from combustion engines to electric vehicles, the increased use of artificial intelligence in professional services, the reimagining of urban centres and high streets in the wake of home working and online shopping, the adoption of net zero targets for our logistics, manufacturers, construction and food and drink businesses, reduced commuter times between the West Midlands and London, huge growth in creative businesses, NFTs, crypto currencies and online communication and marketing and of course all those things we can't even imagine at the moment – the list is endless.

If we want to ensure these are opportunities, we must acknowledge that not all growth is good growth, and we need to rebuild the links between our brilliant diverse communities and the businesses that sit within them. We need to create commercially successful civic businesses with a social conscience. Growth needs to be environmentally sustainable,

inclusive and innovative. If we are serious about levelling up and we want this to be a truly golden decade for the West Midlands we need to rewrite the way we create wealth, the way that local community's benefit from this wealth and how we develop a true partnership between business, decision makers and residents to make our economy as competitive as anywhere in the world.

Our businesses need access to well-paid and highly skilled workers. They need affordable energy, good quality sustainable buildings and first-class infrastructure to move their goods and services across the country and across the world and they need to be involved in the development of business-friendly policies that are accountable at a local level.

These ambitions of creating and retaining wealth at a local level and the coordinated development of local workforces and supply chains will only be realised if we make some big changes.

Primarily, we need true devolution that covers health, education, public transport, planning, infrastructure and regeneration funding. Levelling up isn't just about addressing inequalities between regions, but in areas within those regions. The West

Midlands has suffered decades of underinvestment and it will take more than one generation to unleash our potential. We need the powers and the budgets to make our own decisions, made by officials accountable to local people and based on strategies with residents and businesses at their heart. We need to end the costly, time consuming and competitive process of funding that pits regions against regions and requires Whitehall to assess, modify and approve every level of budget. We need joined up, single pots of funding that are agreed for decades, not annually, to allow us to plan and deliver.

Secondly, once we have control of these budget's we need to revolutionise the way we use procurement. We can use the public purse to drive the economy, rewarding businesses whose workforces and supply chains reflect the communities around them. Wherever possible we need to retain the wealth and jobs we create for the benefit of West Midlands businesses and communities. With long term budget agreements, we will be able to plan, developing long term procurement strategies that will have sustainability and inclusivity at their heart – building sustainable houses or retrofitting existing stock, creating sustainable, community focused town centres and high streets, manufacturing the

green products locally, growing sustainable construction businesses, training local people in the Green Skills they'll need to fill these jobs and building sustainable houses for them to live in. With long term procurement plans we can spot gaps in the local market and use these contracts to help develop local capacity and support businesses to diversify their products and services with support from our excellent universities. Already, Local Authorities in Sandwell, Dudley, Birmingham and Wolverhampton are putting Community Wealth Building at the centre of their plans – we need to make sure this succeeds.

Thirdly, we need a skills revolution that delivers the workforce our local businesses need and we need to end the destructive disconnection between record levels of job vacancies in the West Midlands and growing unemployment levels in our most deprived communities. We need local skills plans developed by businesses and flexible budgets for providers to deliver training quickly. We need these plans to be ambitious driving sustainability through innovation, reshoring opportunities that have been made overseas for too long.

Our schools need huge investment and to be judged on educational mobility rather than just qualifications. We

need independent, professional careers support in every primary and secondary school in the region and opportunities for local businesses to partner up with local schools.

Finally, let's show the world how amazing we are. This decade can be the one where we get our swagger back, where business confidence is built on the back of major events such as the Commonwealth Games, the City of Culture, the British Art Show, our festivals and culture, the films and television programmes that are made here and, of course, the incredible businesses that trade across the globe. This will be a golden decade if we can stand side by side, diverse, inclusive, sustainable, innovative, hungry for success and proud to be the West Midlands.

A PLACE OF HEALTHY, HAPPY LIVES

By Dame Julie Moore



A golden decade for the West Midlands would be one where health and wellbeing are continuously improving, and inequalities between sections of the population are decreasing.

I have been concerned with the health of the population throughout my working life, starting as a junior nurse through to being CEO of University Hospitals Birmingham and now working with health care technologies and in other health related areas.

While most of my career has been in acute hospitals, I have always recognised that acute health care is the end of a long chain of events and factors affecting health. Acute health services are there to treat or cure problems, rather than prevent them. Reducing health inequalities has been on the agenda as long as I've been in health service management, and yet it is still nowhere near being achieved. Why is that? It is because health depends on far more factors than what the National Health Service can deliver.

As a child growing up, my grandmother used to tell me that life span was three score years and ten i.e., 70. In fact she lived to the age of 74 which she thought was a good innings. My mother will be 89 this year, and throughout my lifetime we have seen life expectancy rise, at least until recently.

In 2020, Sir Michael Marmot published his second report which noted that life expectancy had risen continuously from the

beginning of the 20th century but from 2011 the improvements slowed and almost came to a halt. Life expectancy actually fell in the decade 2010 to 2020 for women in the most deprived communities outside London and for men in some regions too.

Why is this so? The health of an individual depends on many factors including their economic circumstances, lifestyle and nutrition, and social situation. Poverty is highly correlated with poor health, both physical and mental. The physical environment also impacts health – for better or for worse.

Birmingham and the West Midlands have some areas of significant deprivation and the Covid pandemic highlighted and exacerbated these inequalities. The localities with the poorest health also have higher levels of poverty, unemployment, low wages and low educational attainment. If we wish to address health inequalities, then two of the areas we must deal with are reducing poverty and minimising those environmental factors that contribute to ill health.

Fortunately, we do have some advantages in the West Midlands region; the West Midlands is in the forefront of innovative technology, IT, clean energy and transport.

We have some world class universities on our patch, and researchers and academics are working to address some of these issues. For example, at Warwick University, where I am based, I am fortunate enough to be able to have amazing conversations with engineers and researchers who are developing the next generation of clean energy and transport. Their ingenuity and inventiveness never cease to amaze me. These carbon neutral technologies will enable clean power and transport for the next century, reducing our emissions and pollution and improving air quality.

These technologies can also contribute to the economic prosperity of the area. The expertise of these researchers and engineers, together with support of local government, is a key factor in attracting major investment in these technologies which will provide high value employment opportunities. A great example of this is the proposed Giga site for car battery production which would create 6,000 new jobs in Coventry. The West Midlands has a proud history of car manufacturing, so it is fitting that the next generation of cars and public transport (including trams) which use clean electric technology, are being developed and manufactured here.

Medical and clinical research

is likewise providing answers to some long-standing clinical issues, not only Covid, which should also provide further commercial opportunities and employment in the life sciences industries. The West Midlands has one of the highest concentrations of life sciences SMEs (small to medium enterprises) in the country.

Finally, not everyone is aware that the West Midlands is also a centre for the gaming industry. Gaming is not just about Dungeons and Dragons but can impact many areas of life such as healthcare, education, and assistive technologies. The technological advances in gaming which are being developed here have applications far beyond their original purposes in augmented and virtual reality. For example, such systems are now being used in nursing homes and healthcare settings to enhance the lives of residents.

Underpinning many of these developments is the roll out of 5G technology in the West Midlands, one of the first in the country. This firmly cements the region as being in the forefront of technological advances. These developments together with many more, have the potential to provide significant numbers of high value jobs. These sorts of jobs will help to improve the local economy and reduce

poverty which is one of the main determinants of health.

The use of clean technology for transport will help in reducing the pollution and particulate matter in our air thus improving the environment. Recent reports have shown that the air in the Birmingham on the West Midlands was causing ill health and premature death. The introduction of a clean air zone by Birmingham City Council is helpful for this, but in my view, we have to go much further to promote clean transport, both private and public.

Lifestyle is of course a major determinant of an individual's health, and we all know that exercise is good for us, but sometimes it takes an added incentive to get us up and going. I am extremely proud to be part of the organising committee for the Commonwealth Games. We want to use the Commonwealth Games to promote the value of exercise for all, not just for future generations of athletes.

I would like to see our parks and public spaces better utilised with the public, private and charitable sectors working together to provide more opportunities for all ages to take part in a whole range of sports, physical and creative activities. This will not benefit just individuals of all ages, but provide opportunities for

socialising, reducing loneliness and promoting inclusive communities.

Poor mental health impacts negatively on many aspects of home, work, social life and relationships as well as our physical health. I was delighted therefore to be asked to chair a pilot study (www.MHPP.me) led by Coventry University funded by the Midlands Engine looking at mental health and productivity in the workplace. This study is looking at the effects of caring for the mental health of employees, and the impact this has on productivity, as well as on the individual. This is clearly the right thing to do, but what is heartening is the hundreds of Midlands firms which have signed up to take part in this programme, showing that they really are committed to improving the mental health and wellbeing of their employees.

There are of course many other factors involved in promoting great health and wellbeing such as good housing, personal safety and crime reduction, reduction in loneliness, and diet and nutrition. Too many to explore here, these are rightly the focus of government at both local and national levels.

My vision for the next ten years is of an increasingly prosperous and healthy West Midlands, where everyone can enjoy equal

opportunities, good health and wellbeing, safety and security. Achieving this goal will require coordination across many areas of the public sector, alongside support and investment in our knowledge sectors which are developing future technologies, which together can make all our lives healthier and happier.

By working on solutions to reducing fossil fuel energy and transport, by investing in the life sciences and high-tech industries, not only can we improve the environment, but this has the potential to improve the socioeconomic status of people in the West Midlands thereby further contributing to an improvement in health and wellbeing.

BALANCING OUT, NOT LEVELLING UP

By Lucy Caldicott



Our region will have failed if we allow today's inequalities to persist.

The people whose stories inspire my politics stay with me. When I was parliamentary candidate in Dudley South in 2019, I met many people who I think about often. A young mum recounted how her son had told her that all he wanted for Christmas was a pair of new school trousers. She was visibly emotional as she told us this story at the school gates. Another woman answered the door to one of my canvassers, at her wit's end as her daughter had been discharged home from hospital, clearly still desperately ill. Was there anything we could do to help?

Is there anything we can do to help?

If there's one thing that Covid has drawn our attention to, it's the searing inequalities in our society. Too many people feel powerless and disconnected from decision-making. So, my hope for a golden decade for the West Midlands is that the gold, and power, can be shared out more equitably. I don't like to talk about levelling up, because that implies there's endless gold to go round and that those that already have plenty can level up too. I'd prefer to see a balancing out, not a levelling; taking society beyond fairness, to equity.

Oxfam's latest report into global inequality tells us that the world's richest ten men have seen their

incomes double in the last two years. Even before the pandemic, someone born in the West Midlands in 2019 could expect to live around six years less than someone born in Westminster. The IFS report into inequality and Covid in the UK shows how the pandemic has had a worse impact on the least resilient in our communities, such as those with mental ill health, and those in low-paid or more precarious work. Women, especially racially inoritized women, do the bulk of unpaid care work and this has been exacerbated during the pandemic. The TUC recently reported that over 800,000 working age adults in the West Midlands are living in poverty.

Inequality is dangerous. It drives wedges within society, and, coupled with diminishing trust in our institutions and elected representatives, I believe it's the most important issue of our era, for the West Midlands, and the whole world. Striving for equity doesn't mean treating everyone equally, it means giving everyone what they need to flourish. We also know that inequality is a political choice. It is not an inevitability. So, what are some of the choices we should be making?

Fair pay and conditions

I would like to see the West Midlands become a living wage region, building on the progress already made in Birmingham.

If key institutions such as the region's hospital trusts and the business community were to become living wage employers, they would immediately lift some of the lowest paid workers out of in-work poverty, putting money in their pockets which in turn will be spent in our local economy. It's wrong that care workers are so poorly paid. Care for our elderly and disabled residents is an issue that should be close to all our hearts. They've been on the frontline during the pandemic and I would like to see them rewarded not only with better pay, but also better conditions, an end to zero hours contracts and paid travel time between clients. It would be good to see health and care employers across the West Midlands adopt Unison's Ethical Care Charter.

Jobs

As we attempt to recover from the heartbreak and economic impact of the pandemic, I would establish a Community Wealth Building Partnership across the West Midlands to create local jobs, support small businesses, charities, and social enterprises, and repurpose local authority procurement to benefit everyone, not just the bottom line. It is wonderful to celebrate events like the Coventry City of Culture and Birmingham's Commonwealth Games to build up the hospitality, leisure and tourism, and cultural sectors that have been so affected

by the pandemic. The recent announcement of Coventry's Gigafactory and the building of HS2 are huge opportunities for new jobs, and green jobs, but we need to ensure that the work and business opportunities from these are shared equitably.

Food

Food poverty is a huge and growing problem. It is nothing short of shameful that in the sixth richest economy on the planet in the 21st century, our fellow citizens across the region are having to rely on food banks for essential items. We've seen through the pandemic how communities have rallied round to support each other. I would like to see the West Midlands develop a comprehensive food strategy, building on the many community activities that have sprung up right across the area. One example is Incredible Edible Leamington Spa, a community food growing project bringing people together and sharing resources. Companies like Iceland are leading the way piloting a food voucher scheme for pensioners in association with Age UK. But voluntary projects can't tackle these huge problems alone, we need central government action to make sure no one goes hungry.

Housing

The West Midlands, like many areas across the UK, is in the

grip of a serious housing crisis. Having a warm, dry, safe home plays a huge role in people's health and wellbeing and there are simply not enough affordable homes for everyone who needs one. Too many renters are having to put up with poor quality accommodation. We need protections for renters and we simply need to be building far more homes. I would like to see local authorities across the region collaborate with the combined authority and national government to ensure more homes are built, with a particular emphasis on repurposing brownfield sites and retrofitting and improving existing housing stock where possible.

Transport

Reducing our reliance on roads has to be a priority. Reducing and slowing traffic would reduce the risk of pedestrian – and especially child – fatalities and bring about wider benefits such as less pollution and stronger communities. I welcome Birmingham council's plans to reduce traffic and short car journeys in the region. I would like to see a Healthy Streets policy, which centres people and their health, adopted throughout the West Midlands. A focus on improvements to public realm, and creating safe, accessible, and attractive streets, would help to bring people back to our once-bustling town and city centres.

Whether we're looking at poverty, jobs, food, housing, or transport, all of these affect people's health and wellbeing.

My vision and hope for the next ten years is that there is commitment across the West Midlands to tackling inequality, whether that's health, wealth or any other dimension. Decision makers need to implement specific actions with measurable targets keeping those that have the least front of mind. Just like I do when I think of that boy's school trousers and the woman caring for her bed-bound daughter. My vision and hope is that everyone can have their fair share, today, for the next ten years, and always.

SUCCESS MUST MEAN INCLUSIVE SUCCESS

By Sharon Thompson and Jean Templeton



If we get it right for the most vulnerable, we have more chance of getting it right for everyone.

There are both individual and structural factors which drive homelessness and exclusion. We need to tackle both. We need to create an inclusive universal domain which enables people to thrive and to use their talents and skills, and we need to provide compassionate responsive assistance to those who need it, at the earliest opportunity to enable them to remain within the universal domain.

Homelessness is not the preferred or intentional route to housing for anyone. It should be the exception. Too often, however it is the default route in a system where need hugely outstrips supply and allocations systems are forced to focus on those in the most desperate circumstances. What should we aspire to and plan for? An accessible, affordable, desirable housing offer which underpins our ability to live, work, earn and learn; to make a home, to be safe. Without that, the cycle of homelessness is perpetuated, and prevention becomes a short-term gate-keeping measure delaying the often inevitable.

Homelessness is fundamentally an equalities issue - it is about:

- Economic inequality at all levels, with some communities and people including women, those from BAME communities, LGBTQ+ people and young people more exposed because of structural

inequalities.

- Policy and investment choices which prioritise short term rescue services rather than tackling root causes.

- Poverty which creates an inability to meet your own and your family's needs.

- Power inequality and compliance with system expectations, employing deficit rather than asset-based approaches, rather than making the system inclusive for all.

It is not true that we are all no more than a pay cheque away from homelessness.

We will always have a homelessness problem until we have a housing strategy and development plan which meets household needs over the timeframe of successive Parliaments. Otherwise, we will continue to patch up those who are most vulnerable to falling out of the system, to make them fit to fight for the tightly rationed resources.... a Home.

In the West Midlands, we have a collective ambition, to 'design out homelessness'.

What do we mean by that? We mean ensuring that our mainstream services and systems are inclusive, and

keep people in homes, jobs, communities, education, and safe support. We mean intentional, perpetual prevention of the ultimate exclusion of homelessness.

We have taken a life-course approach using the Positive Pathway model, examining what we have in place and where the gaps exist, for children and families, young people, and older people, paying particular attention to those who are serially excluded.

Initially developed by St Basils to prevent youth homelessness, it has much wider relevance. It is the framework for both our homelessness strategy in Birmingham and our West Midlands Combined Authority 'Designing out Homelessness' strategy. The pathway model looks at five domains: universal prevention, targeted prevention and early help; crisis prevention; recovery and move on, and a sustainable home.

The Framework enables each of our systems to consider a fundamental question, "what is our universal offer?" What is in our universal space which all may access and experience, for example in education, health services, housing, public services, community assets; public spaces, employment.... How successful is it? who is likely

to fall out and how do we prevent them from doing so? How do we use our collective resources such as finance, planning, regulation, assets, and powers to enhance the universal domain? Do we use them in a creative way to take a prevention-first approach or do we focus them on the point of crisis? What is mandatory? and what is discretionary? The challenge for Local Authorities can be how to meet mandatory requirements without funnelling resources into crisis and how to lever in the wider contributions from other sectors and partners, not in silos but in collaborative and integrated approaches, making the whole greater than the sum of the parts...

It is a collaborative partnership approach which enables all sectors: public, business, voluntary and community to consider what are our assets and how we make best use of them collectively and collaboratively to prevent crisis and optimise INclusion. Research shows that early spend is more effective than late spend, both socially and financially. It is therefore in our collective interests to move from a system of silo services, high access thresholds, generic approaches, and often multiple exclusions to one where there are integrated, simple access routes, early intervention, and accessible, skilled, compassionate assistance.

These keep people in the universal domain, reducing financial and social costs for all.

Our approach is based on the principle that we need to make the universal domain that we all occupy inclusive for everyone, including the most vulnerable.

We need to move from a Cycle of Exclusion- each event making the next more likely, to a cycle of INclusion - keeping people IN the universal space.

What does INclusion look like?

INclusion Education - understand the underlying issues; offer unconditional support; keep the child in school; support the family; intensify targeted support where required in a respectful way.

INclusion Employment - create pathways into employment for those furthest from the labour market; 'good work' for all; a housing offer which underpins work; ban the box; employers provide assistance to those experiencing difficulties within their workforce, including homelessness, domestic abuse, mental health issues and provide access to confidential early help.

INclusion Welfare - link Universal Credit to Minimum income standards above destitution levels; realign housing benefits with housing costs; remove SAR

for under thirty-fives; reinstate Employment Maintenance Allowance; reclaim the meaning of social security.

Inclusion Housing – develop a national housing strategy not just a homelessness strategy; increase capital subsidy for social housing and make rents truly affordable to enable people to live, work, earn and learn; exclude affordability criteria in allocations policies for social housing; create a duty to collaborate to prevent and relieve homelessness; provide bespoke housing management and fund housing-related support.

Inclusion Health and Social Care – provide life course accessible health support; ensure integrated care systems are focused on keeping people in and access to mental health support is part of the universal service. We need timely access to health and social care. Ensure transition to adulthood is a developmental transition not a service transition.

Inclusion Community: optimise social and community network support for people when allocating housing; understand the need to build social capital and positive belonging; investment in the whole person; optimise the wider social value of community and voluntary sector; ensure the voice of those with lived experience is heard at all

levels....

What do we each need to do to 'design out homelessness' within and across our systems?

Universal prevention

- Consider what is your universal space and your offer?
- How do you currently keep people 'IN', and could you do more?
- Do you work in silos or in partnership?
- How do you contribute to the universal offer of others?
- What is the total housing supply / capacity/ affordability in your area?
- Do you understand the experience of those who use your universal offer?
- How do you prevent exclusions and maintain Inclusion?
- Do you work with specialist services to help you?
- Do you listen to the experience of those using your space?

Targeted prevention

- How do you use your data and intelligence to provide early intervention to those struggling?
- How do you provide information, advice, and assistance to those who may need it in your space?
- How do you work with wider partnerships doing the same?
- Do you listen to the voice of those experiencing difficulties?

Crisis Prevention and Relief

- What do you have in place to

respond quickly in crises and help minimise crisis?

- Can you prevent evictions and exclusions?
- Can you rehouse rapidly?
- Do you have access to specialist services to intensify your support?
- Do you work in an agile and flexible way to support your partners?
- Do you listen to the voices of those experiencing crisis?

Recovery

- Do you have a pathway back to full tenancy?
- Can you work with others who have specialist skills?
- Are you plugged into mainstream services?
- Do you have high standards and how do you know?
- Are you working in an integrated way across health, housing, and social care?
- Do you listen and engage those you are working with?

Sustainable Home

- Do you develop accommodation for vulnerable people?
- Do you have a truly affordable offer for all groups, including young people?
- Do you provide stability and assistance to maintain a home?
- Do you assess-out those with challenges from your accommodation through affordability assessments, prior history of anti-social behaviour, or criminal record? How conditional are you and how inclusive could you be?

- Are you happy for the poorest & most vulnerable to be housed by the PRS with least support?

We don't want poverty and homelessness 'tourism'; we do need to educate ourselves, recognise the limitations of our knowledge and personal experience, our unconscious and conscious bias, in order to respond effectively and create a universal space which works for everyone, and which keeps people in the mainstream. We need to develop policy which makes a difference and strategy which achieves the difference the policy requires.

Fundamentally we need a national Housing Strategy not just a Homelessness Strategy; one which addresses affordable, safe, decent, and sustainable housing which allows individuals and families to live and work and contribute to their communities. We need to reclaim the meaning of 'social security'!

As a wise woman once said: "If we get it right for the most vulnerable, we have more chance of getting it right for everyone."



BUILDING STRONG PLATFORMS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

By Ashley Bertie



Realising our region's potential requires us to make child poverty history.

Birmingham is the youngest major city in Europe, with under twenty-fives accounting for nearly 40% of its residents.

Such a large population of under twenty-fives provides a vast reservoir of young talent who will be the workforce of tomorrow and represents huge economic potential for the city. However, for this potential to be realised, addressing the issues that plague young people in Birmingham is essential. Birmingham's young population will only be an asset if they are equipped with the skills and opportunities they need to succeed as they enter the local workforce. In practice, this means reimagining how we work together to tackle child poverty.

According to the Government's own figures, 42.5% of children in the city of Birmingham, more than one in three, are now growing up in poverty - much higher than the national average of one in five (20%). Where I live in Erdington, child poverty has increased by 6.6% since 2015, with more than 10,000 children now living in poverty.

With the cost of living rising, young people in Birmingham will be more acutely affected than other metropolitan cities. Unless a comprehensive plan is put in place, the city is in extreme danger of failing to realise the great potential that its young

population represents.

No family in modern Britain should be struggling to put food on the table, heat their homes and clothe their children. Lifting this financial burden on families will assist in affording Birmingham's young people an opportunity to obtain a slice of Birmingham's resurgence.

And what a resurgence it is. Known as the city of a thousand trades during the industrial revolution, Birmingham is leading the digital revolution, as the city is piloting the country's 5G network and ultrafast broadband rollout. With massive investment in infrastructure projects such as HS2 and tram extensions happening apace, and of course the Commonwealth Games being hosted in the city this year, Birmingham's moment in the sun has well and truly arrived.

However, such progress means nothing unless there is a coordinated and comprehensive plan to help young people realise their talents and maximise on their potential. A child poverty reduction unit is a chance to posit progressive and tangible policies that will unlock that potential. Change must be holistic. Improving our benefit safety net needs to go hand-in-hand with building affordable housing, creating well paid jobs, investing in communities, and

more. Although the challenges are many, the future is bright for the young people of Birmingham - now is the moment to take advantage of Birmingham's untapped potential and afford young people the platform to succeed.



MEMORY OF GENIUS

By Ian Cooper



Transforming post-16 education can help the Black Country become great once more.

Back in the mists of time, when Margaret Thatcher bestrode the earth, off toddled a Black Country lad to a university far away. The only child and first to venture off into higher education etc... A well-trodden path and an often-told story and I don't want to focus on the very real and personal ways in which relatively well-funded access to education changed the lives of a few in my generation. We certainly knew no better, having visited a paltry number of universities before making our choices, so ignored the peeling walls of Victorian lecture rooms and squeezed without protest into seminars crammed into Georgian terraces. All part of this institution's Brideshead-y seaside charm.

Now, like many education facilities up and down the country, these aged facilities have been replaced by gleaming edifices of steel and glass equipped with all mod cons. Such primitive surroundings are banished to private, nostalgic reminiscence, so I don't want to talk about this sector directly – universities will look after themselves and many will continue to do very well thank you. Instead, I would assert that it was the stage before, my education Sixth Form College that gave me the breadth and the confidence, verging on arrogance to overthrow any lingering impostor syndrome,

that I could survive in such an arena and thrive.

My later teaching career was spent in such places, and I saw close-up how this perennially underfunded Cinderella Service impacted on working class young people's lives because I believed in the way further or post-16 education empowered these young people. College was a kind of safe halfway house between school and the big bad world. It gave students the opportunity to explore adulthood and the enhanced responsibilities it brings by affording space to develop individuality and explore adulthood, within a supportive setting.

It was in one such college that the extra-curricular student politics group invited local MP Gisela Stuart to attend a debate about the then new student loans scheme. You can imagine that it was a robust afternoon, with no quarter asked nor none given, and Gisela did not patronise, passionately advocating her position in favour of the loans system intended to fund the expansion of opportunity the HE system then needed. No-one could of course imagine the ways in which the HE landscape would be changed but it's clear, given the competing priorities of the time, that not enough money would flow into this sector. Education, Education, Education

meant primary and secondary took priority and it was hard to disagree when you recall the broken windows and dripping, rotten roofs of many schools up and down the country.

While sixth form colleges generally retain a laser-like focus on preparing students for HE, the other arm of this underfunded Cinderella Service remains Further Education. I remember walking the halls of Dudley Tech, as a callow part time lecturer, peering in on workshops packed with lathes and other indescribable machines that I'd heard about from my uncles' conversations, all to be swept away by automation and its stalking horse – redundancies. This to many is the picture of the local Tech, however they are today as crucial as sixth forms in giving young people access to high quality training, higher education, and opportunity.

Fast forward to more recent times, as a Dudley councillor and cabinet member I remember walking around a bright and shiny new college complex situated on long vacated industrial land, marvelling at the complexity and endless innovation afforded by the state-of-the-art design and manufacturing equipment proudly on display. Crucially this kit represents a language that people in the Black County still speak (an idiom shared with

the City of a Thousand Trades nearby) – there's still a smell of machine oil about the place, a smear of grease, the folk memory of genius. Colleges admit what our education system elsewhere does not: that people are different, not everyone wants or needs academic training, that perceived failure at 16 is not the end; that education should not just be the territory of the young. They implicitly assert that vocational study is as valuable as the academic – that both can be pathways to fulfilling and often lucrative work.

When will our region's manufacturing genius be fully recognised again? I believe we're literally already down the road. We are told that as a country and a region that we must compete globally and innovate or die. That there is always someone sharper and hungrier eyeing the prize. Well, Black Country people know something about sharpness and hunger, both real and figurative. At the time, that centre in Dudley (which sat close to an equally prestigious sixth form centre) was the outrider for a complex which is currently under development, with a Very Light Rail Innovation Centre underway to develop the next generation of rapid passenger transport systems.

And yes, HE is finally ready to come back into the town after a hiatus of thirty years, with a HE

campus planned in partnership with the University of Worcester to replace the derelict Hippodrome Theatre.

I also visited a local engineering company in Sedgley, which is designing and exporting driverless cars and its accompanying technology around the globe. It's also employing apprentices from the area, but these young workers need motivation and inspiration, so the company also devises engineering projects for schools, challenging the next generation of problem solvers.

There are of course many more examples and I think it proves three things: that the Black Country and our region never lost its aspiration to create the new; things can happen with belief, planning and ambition; that our Techs and sixth forms are the springboard to opportunity. They deserve the funding recognition that will deliver more than notional guff about parity between vocational and academic learning.



**A REGION OF
INCREDIBLE PLACES**

A GOLDEN DECADE

By Ian Ward



Birmingham's time has come.

It says a lot about Birmingham's burgeoning reputation as a place to live, work and invest that - even amidst a growing cost of living crisis and an ongoing global pandemic - I remain confident that this will be a Golden Decade of opportunity for the people and communities across city.

Birmingham's time has come. And while I accept that we face challenges as we emerge from an incredibly tough few years, we have every reason to be optimistic and upbeat, because our city is undergoing a once in a generation transformation that has the potential to shape the lives of people living and working here for generations to come.

Prior to Covid, Birmingham was seeing growth at almost twice the rate of London, and four times the national average. And, while the pandemic has had a profound impact, both economically and socially, the factors that made Birmingham such an attractive place to live, work and invest in early 2020 remain in place and will now help power our recovery.

In fact, even at a time of such upheaval, we have continued to make progress on a significant number of major projects, which will stimulate growth across the city and there remains a lengthy list of projects that will supercharge our recovery -

bringing many millions of pounds of investment into the city region.

Take the £1.9 billion Smithfield Development, which has the potential to create over 8,000 new jobs in future years, the £700 million Paradise development, which has re-imagined and revitalised what was a tired city centre area, creating new commercial buildings, public realm and pedestrian connections for the city, linking the newly rebuilt Chamberlain Square and pedestrian street linking to Centenary Square.

Birmingham is a city being reinvented and the current pace of change is breath-taking. In Digbeth, plans are in place for a forty-two-acre development centred round the iconic Custard Factory, that will support the creation of over 16,000 jobs and provide over 1,800 homes alongside shops, restaurants, cafés, and additional leisure facilities. When you throw the Midland Metro extension, BBC relocation and Steven Knight's proposed film studios into the mix, it's clear that Digbeth will play a major part in the next exciting chapters of the Birmingham story.

And incredibly, there are even more reasons for optimism. The Commonwealth Games, HS2, Peddimore, Langley, the exciting £700 million+ regeneration

of Perry Barr and the planned renewal of Ladywood are additional factors that will shape the lives and life chances of people growing up in Birmingham today.

And that after all is what this Golden Decade must be all about. Success for Birmingham must mean success for the people of Birmingham and together we must challenge deep-seated and long-standing inequalities that continue to blight the lives of far too many of my fellow citizens:

- The rate of unemployment is double the national average
- There is a decade's gap in life expectancy between the poorest areas and the most affluent areas.
- And, perhaps most shocking of all, over 40% of Birmingham's children grow up in relative poverty. We cannot and will not simply accept nearly half of our children growing up in relative poverty in a modern, twenty-first century city.

These and other challenges underline just why Birmingham must be at the very heart of any plan to level up the UK economy, and in response to the Government's white paper on the matter, we have set out our ambitions to challenge deeply ingrained structural inequalities, addressing poor health, poor

educational attainment, low skills and incomes, congestion, and air pollution, while bringing forward new homes, employment sites and community assets.

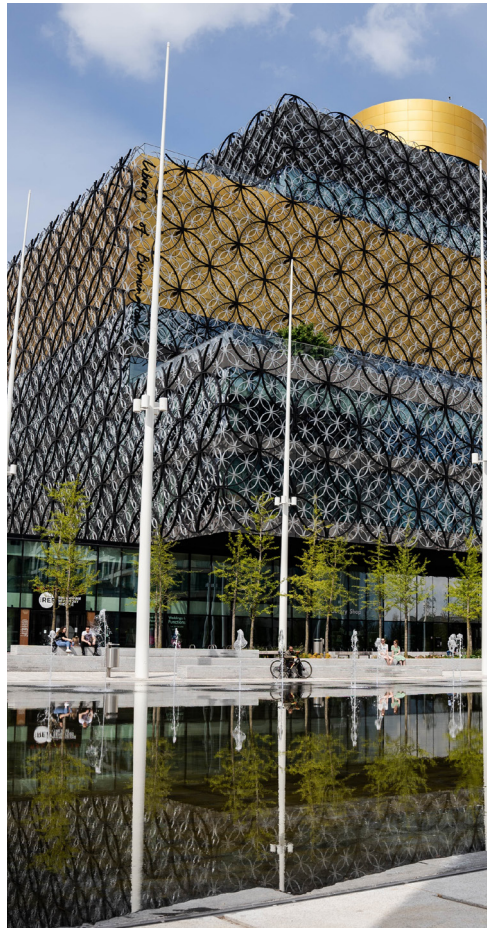
As I have outlined, Birmingham is a city of huge potential and we're already taking a lead on levelling up. Projects such as the Commonwealth Games and HS2 are laying the foundations for change, while we're also investing in public transport, greener housing, and skills.

When I talk about a Golden Decade of Opportunity, this is the real prize I am referring to and we will work in collaboration with partners at local, regional, and national levels to succeed. We will help businesses, investors and developers succeed and we will work with our communities to improve the lives of people who are currently being left behind. We will turn the soundbites of inclusive growth and levelling up into reality and a springboard for even greater success.

Regeneration matters, but we must be clear that shiny new buildings alone will not be enough, and success cannot simply be measured on balance sheets. True success is about people. It is about improving and transforming lives, so we must also create jobs, opportunities, and pathways through to prosperity for every neighbourhood across

the city. We must bridge the skills gap and our citizens must be given a stake in everything we achieve as a city if we are going to address the inequalities that for far too long have held people in our neighbourhoods and communities back.

If we succeed - and I am confident that we will - then future generations in Birmingham will look back and say that this truly was our city's Golden Decade.



COVENTRY MOVES

By Martin Sutherland



Coventry's extraordinary City of Culture year has shown how arts, culture, and creativity can accelerate progress - and excite citizens about defining their future.

In May last year, Coventry began its year as UK City of Culture.

It was the culmination of over four years of hard work by residents, the Coventry City of Culture Trust, Coventry City Council and partners across the region.

Our aim, when we launched Coventry's bid for the title of UK City of Culture 2021, all the way back in 2015, was to use the award as an opportunity to deliver social and economic benefits for Coventry, Warwickshire, and the West Midlands. We sought to ensure that the value of arts and cultural activity was more fairly dispersed, that seldom heard voices took centre stage and that the impact would be felt for many years to come.

In Spring 2020, we launched our manifesto, committing to tell the story of a city that moves:

"This is the city where movement began.

We have transformed raw steel into racing machines. We move every heart, turning flames into hope and ruin into beauty.

Two tones into one voice.

We are young streets and curious eyes. Boundless energy will move us forward. As timeless words are made

new on city streets, a million and more journeys begin here.

The power to move is always in our blood.

COVENTRY MOVES”.

In preparation for Coventry's year in the spotlight we faced a number of challenges as the only UK City of Culture to ever take place during a global pandemic. To ensure a safe and high impact programme, COVID-19 saw us delay the start of the year by five months. While this was a major obstacle, city partners quickly recognised that the lost opportunities would be many, so were galvanised to protect the investment made so far and to ensure that Coventry, the phoenix city, prospered once again.

Working hand-in-hand with a wide range of local artists, voluntary organisations, event producers, venues and city stakeholders, our team is co-creating an outstanding programme that is engaging communities across Coventry and the wider region, reimagining what a City of Culture can be and celebrating our most youthful and diverse city.

And there is no doubt that the people of Coventry and beyond have embraced the opportunities that City of Culture

status has offered. To date we have welcomed 200,000 attendees to events which have taken place in every ward across the city. Through partnerships with the BBC and Sky Arts we have significantly expanded our broadcast and online events programme and, so far, have had over 250,000 engagements with our online events. More than 1,100 volunteers are providing the warmest welcome to Coventry as City Hosts and through our leadership, apprenticeship, and sector development programmes, we are supporting more than fifty future creative and social leaders.

So far, the City of Culture programme has brought in over £150 million in direct capital and revenue investment while supporting thousands of local jobs. City of Culture status has allowed us to invest in the local arts eco-system, creating opportunities which develop and retain local talent.

Meanwhile, our partnerships with key third sector organisations, including those working with young people at risk of exploitation, newly arrived communities, young people experiencing mental health issues and those facing homelessness ensure that we will have used our year to throw a spotlight on some of the major social challenges facing all cities,

while supporting those who seek to “Reform the Norm”.

Mega arts (or sporting) festivals typically focus on a few major moments which create fleeting memories for those who can afford to participate. Engaging with grassroots artists and organisations across Coventry, and ensuring that our programme is co-created with communities, has been the cornerstone of our approach. We have been supporting culture beyond traditional art gallery and theatre settings and highlighting the dynamic social movements already taking place in local communities.

From the outset we believed that the title of UK City of Culture is for everyone and belongs to each-and-every person in Coventry. The programme has been city wide, with producers and Community Connectors working in all eighteen wards and rooted in neighbourhoods. They have supported the co-creation of events and activities in faith spaces, shops, schools, libraries, grey, blue, and green spaces. This approach has complimented the programme of live and broadcast events in the city centre, which are perhaps more commonly associated with a City of Culture programme.

We share our partners’ ambition that the new civic spaces and

refreshed cultural spaces will remain open to all when the spotlight on the city has dimmed a little beyond May 2022.

We have been testing our approach to “legacy” since winning the title in 2017. The Trust and its partners have been “outcome focussed” – insisting that every bit of investment, every new initiative, every programme and project contributes towards the successful delivery of fifteen agreed outcomes – which would assist in the delivery of four longer term impacts.

Starting with the premise that legacy programmes after big cultural events are mainly disappointing, vague, and buzzwordy we have decided to be more single minded. Assuming that the overall goal is to make Coventry a more future-facing and fairer city, we have identified sustainable development (‘green futures’) as the key to making that happen. This builds on much of what we have been doing so far.

Our Green Futures programme is an ambitious series of cultural programmes and events that seek to help increase understanding and support for positive environmental change. Through events such as Observations on Being, an immersive audio-visual exhibition that examined our relationship with nature, and Small Bells Ring, a floating library

based in Coventry Canal Basin, the Green Futures programme has explored Coventry and Warwickshire's wildlife, natural heritage, and landscape, uncovering the story of its 'hidden nature' and reconnecting communities with their local environment.

"I'm not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys. Can't you understand? There's a big blaze going in all around".

Nils Leonard, the Creative Director of Uncommon Studio, our campaigns agency, introduced me to this lesser-known quote from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. And while I'm personally likely to be more interested in the stories of the past than perhaps Arthur Miller's Willy Loman was, I love the sense of urgency here and will be guided by this as we move into our next phase.

Coventry City Council and many partners are working on a range of initiatives to fight climate change and environmental degradation. For these innovation and infrastructure projects to work, they need locals and partners to buy into a long-term vision, one they believe they can shape and benefit from.

That's where the legacy of City

of Culture can help. Arts, culture, and creativity can turn up the volume on Coventry's progress, with creative initiatives and events that help people get excited about defining their future.

Work therefore continues to ensure that Coventry Moves, again.

MAKING PLACES

By Simon Marks



How to deliver a golden decade for the West Midlands – and its communities.

The West Midlands hasn't exactly been quiet or inactive over the last decade with some of the most significant projects and achievements in its modern history underway or already delivered.

We need only say High Speed 2; Midland Metro; Coventry UK City of Culture 2021; Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games to know this statement is true – we read and hear the seemingly never-ending announcements of new developments and infrastructure projects and dare to think 'could this really be our golden decade'.

Placemaking

I have taken a 'placemaking' lens to this thought piece as I like to believe that my work is all about 'making places' – but importantly, making places that improve quality of life.

Places impact on the quality of people's lives. Whether a park, a building, a town or city, people and communities thrive when the spaces in which they live, work, move and play are designed and managed in a way that best meets their needs.

I wrote this paragraph, in the middle of 2019, as a foreword to Arcadis 'Placemaking Report – Liveable Places.' The report, released at the start of 2020, was the result of extensive research, consultation and engagement

with a wide stakeholder group involved in.

At the time we recognised that the traditional approach to Placemaking was not working. It seemed the most important aspect of a place – how it enables people and communities to thrive – was somewhere near the bottom of the list of considerations. Yet we knew, and research had proven, that there was a direct link between the quality of a place and its impact on people’s health, wellbeing, life expectancy, education, economic outcomes and overall quality of life.

Fast forward a pandemic (we hope) and this topic is still the number one discussion in the real estate sector. Whether local authority, developer, housebuilder, investor, consultant or commentator – COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus the importance of Placemaking. Several years, if not a decade, of change happened in a few months, and the question is no longer whether the way in which we plan and deliver places needs to change, but rather; what does change look like and how do we do it?

My Ambition for a Golden Decade (and beyond)

My hopes for this ‘Golden Decade’ are simple but ambitious.

We become a truly Global Region, instantly recognised with a profile and place on the world stage. We are seen as a beacon of best practice, global leaders in our chosen fields and sectors.

That our region is Equitable, opportunities exist for all, everyone can meet and exceed their potential and has the chance to realise their goals – critically though, those goals must be higher than they are now; it is not enough to merely enable people to realise low expectations, that have been shaped by the environment they live in. We want to raise aspirations, raise people’s goals and then enable them to get there.

Our region is net zero carbon, making no contribution (other than a positive one) to climate change. And we are resilient to withstand some of the inevitable shocks that we are to experience as a result of the climate change that has already and is taking place.

The West Midlands is a major positive Contributor to UKPLC ‘putting in’ more than we ‘take out’. Through a combination of revenues, contributions and leadership the region is making ‘credits’ to UKPLC, giving us a strong voice, leverage and an ability to secure what we want and what we need from central government to drive what we

know the people and businesses of our region need to succeed.

We have an unrivalled quality of life, a first choice for people and business looking for a place to live, work, learn and play. Shaped by its high quality built and natural environment.

What do we need to do differently to the last decade (or so)?

The good news is there is a lot we have been and continue to do right.

We should be proud of what has been achieved, the funding secured, investment attracted, projects in flight, infrastructure delivered and under construction, global profile and brand we are building. All the catalysts for the Golden Decade are in place – but more must be done to make sure we maximise the benefits that get delivered and importantly that those benefits are felt more equitably throughout our communities.

I think it has been recognised and bought sharply into focus by the pandemic, that our past successes haven't always seen the benefits generated shared as equitably as they should have been. This is not a criticism. Far from it. That we have achieved so much is fantastic. But the 'trickle down' effect seems to have eluded us. As the region has prospered overall, inequalities

have worsened.

We need to 'reset' the measures of success. We need to proactively and positively manage the benefits flow to have a bigger impact where greatest need exists – but importantly, if we do it well, it will pay us back, in spades. Better education, eradicating poor housing, increasing skills, improving air quality and health outcomes, young people in work or training – every single one of these makes a positive contribution to our region, to people lives, allowing people to live longer, healthier, more productive, fulfilling lives and that in turn costs 'the state' less than managing the poor outcomes experienced by far too many people in the region. Total Place, The Big Society, Place Based Approaches, we can call it whatever we want, the principles of prevention being better and cheaper than cure are known and proven – now let us hardwire them into our Placemaking activity.

How do we do it?

I have always believed that in order to achieve what we set out to do we need a clear Vision, a set of ambitious but realistic objectives, a compelling reason for what we are doing and a robust delivery plan. With these four simple sounding elements in place, all embodying the new measures of success, and

enabled by aligned committed and strong leadership we will have the foundations to move forward with confidence.

It sounds easy, but of course it is not. I have lived and worked in the region for over thirty years and to my recall don't think this has ever really been achieved. With a golden decade ahead of us the easy option is to pretend what we have is good enough, to make a few tactical decisions and put in place some levers to increase the 'social value' commitments of the private sector, to turn up the rhetoric and increase the 'bingo' count in public speeches. In ten years time the region will have grown, improved, be a better place to live – we will feel and look good – but our dirty secret will be – we could have done so much more!

So, let's redouble our efforts, let's put the time and work in now and set ourselves on course to raise our collective ambitions, realise our goals and unlock our true potential.

There are other more practical, but still difficult, recommendations I would make. Several of these come from a recent market engagement exercise I undertook on behalf of the three Cities group of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton Councils:

- Choose your partners wisely:

look to work with partners and collaborators who are there for the long term, who recognise true value is generated over time and can be measured as more than money and levels of profit. This includes small, medium and large organisations, those wanting to invest for a long-term lower level of return and those who, due to their scale, are looking for single development deals with commensurate levels of return. There is a place for all, but what we must avoid is short term, high return, speculative organisations that seek nothing but profit at the expense of quality and who, through their actions, avoid making a long-term sustainable contribution to the region and its people.

- Build in quality: the impact of 'quality' in how places are made should never be underestimated. Well-designed, well-constructed, well-maintained places deliver value in many forms, from enhancing the activity they are created to support; enabling people to easily access work, education and services; creating a sense of wellbeing; contributing to the 'feel' of a place that then translates into monetary / asset value (£); reducing carbon and climate impact and enhancing biodiversity; having lower total life costs. We must use statutory tools and develop levers so we can accept nothing less than the creation of high quality, value

adding places.

- People at the heart of places: it starts, and it ends with people. Our citizens, our communities, our visitors, our working population. Putting people at the heart of placemaking from the outset with an ongoing role and stake in shaping a place so it addresses not their needs and ambitions. Community engagement is not just a box ticking exercise, it is an integral part to placemaking

- Together we are stronger: does anyone really have all the answers, hold all the cards? In the fast-evolving digital sector it has long been recognised the answer is no! Whilst our perception is one where a handful of tech giants are seemingly taking over the world the reality is the digital revolution is being driven by countless organisations and individuals coming together forming ecosystems that agglomerate their collective strengths to solve problems and develop solutions. We should learn from this and apply the approach to our future placemaking activity. Public, private, third sector, community, individuals – bring together these partners and stakeholders, break down the traditional barriers, enable them to collaborate, play to strengths, dare to think differently; only by adopting this approach will we create places that really meet the needs of the people who use them.

- New deal structures: the key to a 'good deal' is about getting the balance right. Where does the risk sit, who takes the reward, who has the skills, where is the expertise, who owns the assets, where is the funding coming from? All the right questions and yesterday there was often only one right – but certainly not perfect – answer. Today the dynamics are different, today there is no right or wrong answer, no one size fits all. Today, to deliver our ambitions, we need partnerships, joint endeavours, shared success measures and a deal structure that places these 'values' at its heart and sees the ecosystem of parties come together to collectively and jointly deliver with an arrangement that is fair and equitable.

- Scale up: we are the second largest city region with a population of 4.7 million people. We are home to some of the UK's and the world's leading businesses. Birmingham is the UK's most investible City (2020). Our economy is worth over £100 billion. These are the numbers that make headlines and attract interest. We are a place of a scale that can grab the attention of investors and governments. Whilst we recognise this, is it really presented as a 'compelling' and 'why wouldn't you invest' proposition? Do we all share a narrative? Could we each sell the others place and the overall

regional ambitions? If not, and I suspect that to be the case, then there is work to be done.

- Get the basics right: having done all the really hard work, the heavy lifting, it would be negligent to fail because the things that should just happen didn't! Spend time understanding and testing the basics of getting things done. Capacity of local authority departments, supply chains, governance and decision-making arrangements, controls and monitoring, scenario testing, third party stakeholder's capability and capacity. Simple stuff often overlooked but fundamental to success.

So how are we doing?

Quite well actually! Nothing I have highlighted in this piece would be a surprise to other commentators and actors in the region, in fact I would expect to see a lot of nodding and general agreement. As always though, the devil is in the detail. For example, many of our planning authorities will point to very high scores in terms of determining applications in the statutory time frames, the development community would however say those might be the statistics, and they would not dispute them, but the experience was not exactly five star or a smooth and well managed process – and it must be going forward – provided of course the development submissions are

meeting our new high quality standards!

Another example being measurable high levels of consultation undertaken with communities – but did it happen early enough? Did it reach the citizens where the biggest difference can be made? Did we really interpret the responses without that confirmation bias we know is within all of us and the current process? Probably not and I wager we couldn't answer those questions with any certainty anyway.

Detail aside though, let us also look at some of the really positive things happening.

Birmingham City Council's new city masterplan – Our Future City Plan. The work that will guide the development of the city for the next twenty years is underway. An excellent document was published last year and consulted upon. It places citizens at the heart of the process, it has net zero carbon and wider sustainability drivers in its DNA, not as a bullet point at the end of a list of 'things to do'; and it is ambitious, setting out a new level of expectation on those looking to work with the city and its partners in those wanting to join Birmingham on its very exciting journey.

The three Cities is a bold initiative where Coventry, Wolverhampton

and Birmingham Councils have come together to collaborate in areas where the power of three is greater than the sum of the individual parts. They have recognised that scale and leadership supported by a compelling investment case in areas such as energy transition, retrofit and new build, modern construction techniques and battery technology can raise global interest and potential investment and this in turn will lead to further and better opportunities for our regional population.

Inclusive Growth has become the narrative for the West Midlands Combined Authority and the regional local authorities, and it is more than words. Dedicated experts focused on skills, training, learning and partnership working. Taking investment decisions on devolved funding based not just on the financial return that can be realised but on wider 'bucket' of inclusive growth measures.

The appetite for new deal structures is there. A recognition that profit for the private sector isn't a dirty word, but that all the risk cannot be placed with the public sector, it needs to be more equitable and balanced. Examples such as the GBSLEP funded Paradise scheme are a good example. A different structure to what had gone before enabling a world class

mixed-use development on a particularly constrained site to come forward.

Summing it up

I have had the privilege to have been born and spend my entire career in this West Midlands region. I am inevitably biased. As I look forward to the Golden Decade ahead I reflect that we have done well (we could have done more) – I am proud to have been part of what we have delivered (but it could have been better) – but I can't help but feel we have been half a step from true greatness and really unlocking the potential of this region and its people.

So now is our time. It is our Golden Decade. Let's redouble our efforts and accept nothing less than what we have been working so hard for. We must be ambitious; be bold, be brave (feel uncomfortable), accept we won't get it all right all the time (it is ok to fail, provided you learn).

Let's improve the quality of life for everyone in our region in a fair, equitable and inclusive way, creating a region we can be proud to call home.

A UNITED VOICE TO SUPPORT A DECADE OF GROWTH

By Paul Thandi



The scale and ambition of the NEC Group's vision for the future light up how our region has a stunning world-class offer.

A great deal can change for a region in ten years. We've had the arrival of the West Midlands Metro expansion; the redeveloped Grand Central Station; the regeneration of Coventry City Centre, bidding and winning the 2022 Commonwealth Games; and the introduction of a coronavirus that wasn't part of daily life three years ago. But I'm keen not to dwell on the latter in this essay. It inevitably has had an impact on us all – the live events business being a prime example – however, we need to look to the future and decipher ways in which our region can overcome challenges and continue to thrive, from business, culture and community perspectives.

Infrastructural investment has always been a telling indicator of progress and vibrancy within a city. Those that are moving forward always have lots of cranes on the skyline, and you only have to look at what's been happening in Birmingham over the last few years to feel that buzz of a city continuing its transformation. Many will see the construction of the HS2 route on their daily commute as the line connecting London to the Midlands, circles around Leamington Spa, Kenilworth and Castle Bromwich, splitting as it moves into Birmingham and the Staffordshire countryside. Its arrival will encourage a shift to

rail travel, reducing traffic impact on the surrounding areas and be energy efficient and low carbon in operation. This will be a truly, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our region. An infrastructural investment that will benefit future generations and what they are going to be doing in ten, twenty, forty years' time.

The West Midlands is increasingly global in both its offer and reach. For us to remain competitive in global markets and for large economic contributors like the NEC Group to build on our 'best in class' reputation, the capabilities that a true international railway connection provides is a must-have ingredient both in our pursuit of success and for the benefit of the wider regional economy. We are operating in a time of growing immediacy, with pressures increasing around us on a daily basis and a rising importance for UK plc to compete effectively in its rail infrastructure with the rest of the world.

Sixteen years ago, when I became CEO of the NEC Group, I could see the potential of our core business and our campus location in Solihull. Since then, I've brought in numerous partners that could also see my vision. Working primarily with Genting UK and Merlin Entertainments from Resorts World and The Bear Grylls Adventure respectively, the plan is to broaden the variety of our

leisure offering. Similarly, we are always looking at how to improve the facilities within our Group venues. It's no secret that in 2020 we had plans approved for roof extension works at Resorts World Arena. Increasing seating capacity to accommodate audiences of up to 21,600 will create a twenty-first-century arena for global tours, sports and other live events. It will enable us to further diversify content and push the boundaries of the live experience.

The next ten years will see the Group simultaneously harness the power of the real estate we have to offer and seize our locational benefits further with the growth impact of HS2.

The NEC Masterplan will transform the campus into a competitive destination to work, rest, live and play. I am committed to working in partnership with our landowners Birmingham City Council to unlock the full and exciting potential of the site, redeveloping twenty-seven hectares of surface-level car parking and surplus land. We are purposefully accounting for the sustainability triple bottom line of positive social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The plan is set to create 5,000 new homes, leisure and community spaces with the highest quality schooling and healthcare

services that have easy access to local, national and international travel options. Recognised in Solihull's Local Plan as the single largest housing development site in the Borough, this will significantly improve the lives of many in and around the area and meet local housing needs, supplying 2,240 homes within the period to 2036.

The proposed office space will increase the strategic employment land available and support a further increase in GVA per head in the area. However, we need to think carefully about the environmental impact construction will bring. That is why we have also shaped a comprehensive sustainability strategy, so the redevelopment will work in harmony with the existing woodland to promote nature-focused and active lifestyles for residents.

Environmental challenges such as these will continue throughout this period. To hit the Government's net-zero strategy target of decarbonising all sectors of the UK economy by 2050, it is vital that the momentum that's been built in recent years across our region translates into notable outcomes. We've all been working on our sustainability strategies and sat in a number of forums to share best practice with industry and regional associates. Now we need to put words into action, so

come 2032, hitting that 2050 net-zero target in the West Midlands is far more realistic.

This brings me on to cohesion between our respective boroughs. For all the work we are doing to improve the region including a drive for inward investment, how strong a voice do we have outside the area, and with key decision-makers in Whitehall? It's reported that the West Midlands received far less funding from central government from its Levelling Up and Towns Funds, compared to our northern counterparts. Businesses, local bodies and regional stakeholders must continue to work side-by-side and promote our ambitions, to push for more devolved powers so we can realise the potential of this great region. This is why the West Midlands Forum will be extremely beneficial, helping us generate one united voice for the benefit of all.

I hope that the next decade will continue to be a period of growth for this region, for which I am proud to also call home. There will undoubtedly be challenges. Many of us are currently experiencing these in cost volatility and in the labour market, but the future is looking positive and we need to remain optimistic.

The Midlands has one of the most dynamic and fast-growing labour markets in the

UK and a young, diverse and entrepreneurial population. Team this with notable sectors we can boast of including automotive manufacturing, business and professional services, leisure and entertainment, we're on a sure-fire path to future growth.

I hope the Group's proactive approach with the NEC Masterplan will be a great benefit to the region plus the arrival of HS2.

In keeping with our trailblazing past, we will continue to deliver market-leading concepts and develop leisure themes that complement these existing plans, helping us to realise our vision of being Europe's most successful events company. Over 1.5 billion people across the globe are expected to watch the Commonwealth Games this summer – what a showcase for our region! – and with it will come huge legacy benefits from more event bookings to an enhanced transport network. With a more integrated approach to innovation and development, there are plentiful opportunities to be had.

INVESTMENT CENTRAL

By Jonathan Bloom



The new potential for the West Midlands is creating a real sense of excitement. It's a story investors want to be part of.

The future ambitions for the city and the region were the draw that attracted our partnership to invest and to continue to look for future investments in the region. Today the Galliard Apsley Partnership, a joint venture between Galliard Homes and Apsley House Capital, has established a £400 million portfolio of developments in Birmingham over the past five years, delivering around 1,700 homes at sites including Belgrave Village, Timber Yard, St Paul's Quarter and Soho Wharf.

The West Midlands is said to have entered a new 'renaissance' era, with new regeneration projects giving life to forgotten communities. The 2022 Commonwealth Games which is projected to see a huge transformation of the region over the next decade coupled with HS2 is a real driving force to enabling the region to attract further investment and growth.

Since 2015 the investment within the public realm has been transformative to making the city and the region a place where people want to live, work, and socialise. Birmingham has seen the £600 million reopening of New Street station, £700 million Paradise Project, the £10 million redevelopment of Centenary Square, the £50 million redevelopment of The Mailbox, and the £150 million launch

of Grand Central shopping centre, to name a few of the transformative projects creating what's been called a 'halo effect' in the area. These major infrastructural changes, coupled with the prospect of HS2, are what have put the region ahead of the likes of London, Milan and Paris in terms of international investment appeal.

The investment in infrastructure has been a major pull in attracting businesses from a wide range of sectors looking for a fresh, forward-thinking area to base their company. The economy, in recent years, has seen a healthy growth and is set to rise further as more firms are choosing Birmingham as the location for their offices.

In 2007, Deutsche Bank opened in Birmingham and has since expanded their portfolio. In 2018, HSBC returned back to its original home, Birmingham, where 'The Birmingham and Midland Bank' part of the group began in 1836. Barclays, KPMG, PWC, Goldman Sachs and BT have all followed suit. As with any company the decision to relocate across the country takes immense planning and consideration, one of the reasons why businesses have chosen the West Midlands is largely down to the live, work and play environment. This focus ensures that staff can get the most out of not only their

workplace but where they live too.

Birmingham was recently ranked one of the most rapidly improving places to work in Britain and it is therefore no wonder that the West Midlands is seen as an attractive prospect for young professionals. Birmingham has a young and growing population with around 40% of the population found to be under the age of twenty-five. The West Midlands offer young professionals an area that is full of opportunity and affordable living costs.

The investment being made in Birmingham and the wider West Midlands was a major factor in why we have invested within the city. Our current investments include:

- The Timber Yard, situated in the Gay Village and on the edge off Birmingham's dynamic Chinatown, will introduce a new living quarter to Birmingham's prominent Pershore Street. This development, designed by Claridge Architects, will comprise 379 contemporary apartments arranged across two statement buildings.
- Our Soho Wharf site is a sizeable residential newbuild project located just outside the city centre of Birmingham and is part of a wider plan to expand Birmingham to the west,

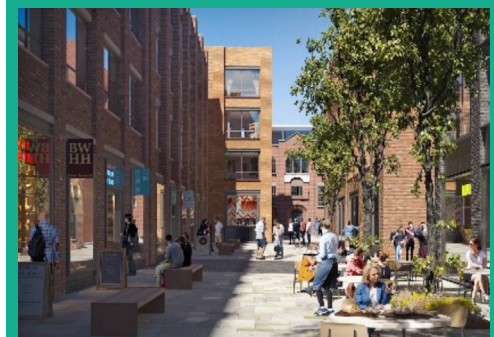
converting former industrial areas into new neighbourhoods with generous public landscaping and high-quality architecture. The project consists of 752 homes, three commercial units with sixty-four homes being offered at discounted market rents. Due to the ambitions of the city and region Heimstaden Bostad have invested into the site as their first investment within the British real estate market. The region fits in with Heimstaden's strategy to expand into strong and attractive European Markets.

- St Paul's Quarter will see a four acre section of Birmingham's vibrant Jewellery Quarter transformed. It is set to combine contemporary and historic architecture, this development will comprise 305 one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments and townhouses situated within a collection of retained listed buildings. St Paul's Quarter will provide the local area with 98,297 sq ft of retail, leisure, and commercial space.

- Belgrave Village will give life to a new community in the heart of Birmingham. In partnership with Wavensmere Homes we will be delivering a landmark scheme which will transform over twelve acres of Birmingham land into a new residential village and approximately 1,100 sq ft of retail space. This mixed-use scheme will produce around 305 new

homes; a mixture of townhouses and one, two and three bedroom apartments.

The future for Birmingham and the wider West Midlands is creating a real sense of excitement and it's a story we are proud to be part of.



PEOPLE-FRIENDLY PLACES

By Adam Tranter



A healthier, happier region will need people-friendly streets – and a lot more active travel.

In the West Midlands we're rightly proud of our rich industrial heritage. Our region changed how the world moved – from the industrial steam engine, to bicycles, cars and even the jet engine – our highly skilled trades fostered exceptional levels of creativity and innovation and provided a sound economic base for prosperity.

Our economy now is more about people than things; we're a fast-growing, young, and creative region and the next decade presents an exciting opportunity to pioneer, once again, in the way people move.

Global cities are fostering an important resurgence in cycling as transport. It's important because we need to clean up our air and urgently decarbonise transport. It's important because active travel provides a cheap and reliable mode of transport; supporting active travel is supporting social mobility and a more equitable transport system.

Visit the Netherlands and you'll see that, come rain or shine, cycling is the primary form of transport for people. Whether they're eight or eighty, it's likely that their bicycle will be the first choice for most journeys. Over half of journeys in Utrecht are by bike while nationwide 75% of secondary school children cycle to school. And they'll do all this

using a bike originally designed in the West Midlands.

Change is hard. But in my job as the region's first Cycling & Walking Commissioner, appointed by West Midlands Mayor Andy Street, showing the art of the possible to our communities in how we reshape our urban centres is going to be key. I'm a firm believer that people know what good looks like when they see it. I can't imagine anybody arriving back from the Netherlands and saying: "I had a nice time but I wish there were more cars."

In the next decade our towns and cities will start to become social hubs again, rather than through roads, and as we enable walking and cycling in local communities and reduce our car dependency, our communities can once again become places to stop and chat, fostering social interaction. Children might even be able to play in the streets again.

These changes seem bold, fundamental and challenging. Giving a view for the next decade feels simultaneously monumental and, when you look at the history of our cities, strangely insignificant.

Cities have been with us for thousands of years and have naturally been hubs for people to live, work and meet. They have

overwhelmingly been places for people; hives of interaction between people, using the natural density to prosper socially and economically.

At some point, we lost sight of that and redesigned our cities around private motor vehicles. Some of our town and city centres are now through routes to get someplace else.

Sure, active travel can be political, but it is not party political. More than anything this is about providing people with the dignity of choice about how they get around. Many of our residents spend large portions of their income on buying, fuelling, taxing and maintaining their cars in the absence of genuine choice of transport.

Don't get me wrong, cars are successful because they are brilliant in providing freedom. Even the Dutch agree with that – they own more cars per head than Brits. But with 41% of car journeys in the West Midlands under two miles – we are quite clearly using the wrong tool for the job in urban centres. Cars were a symbol of freedom, but that freedom quickly evaporates if everybody uses them for every journey, clogging our roads in the process.

To challenge the status quo, we need to be bold and we need to

be supported by funding to do the right thing. The mood music from Government on transport is heading in the right direction and can enable authorities, of all political persuasions, to start to change the way we move for the next decade and beyond. Collaboration will be key and I stand ready to work with local leaders, officials and communities to embrace the opportunities that people-friendly cities will provide.

The Midlands has a long-standing history with transport and industry. An economy which once thrived on making things to help people move, now, more than ever, needs a rejuvenation not of mechanical engineering, but civil engineering, as we look for our city's streets to adapt to the needs of 2022 and beyond.

And this change needs to happen now. If we need any more convincing, for every £1 spent on cycling infrastructure, returns of £5.50 are delivered, according to the Department for Transport's own figures.

The West Midlands is a high-growth region with our population growing by one hundred people per day. If these people used the current make up of transport modes, we'll have an extra eighty-seven cars on the road every single day. With the transition to electric cars making driving per

mile cheaper, we risk increasing congestion by 51% by 2050, according to the Department for Transport. The cost of doing nothing is far greater than the political cost of bold and rapid change.

When it comes to space, bikes are best. Up to seven times more bicycles can travel in a 3.5 metre lane than cars during the same time frame. According to the Netherland Institute for Transport Analysis, a cyclist moving at 15km/h requires 5m² in a city, whereas a single occupancy car travelling at 50 km/h requires 140m² of space.

By focusing on people-friendly streets in this next decade, we can enjoy a happier, healthier and more prosperous region.



THE LAST WORD...



THE FINAL WORD

By Jack Dromey
(1948 - 2022)

Liam Byrne writes:

Jack was working on an essay for this book the day that he died. He was a dear friend and a great colleague.

He had a perspective and enthusiasm which was always infectious. Last autumn he attended the launch of a short book called 'Green Manufacturing - what this involves and how to achieve success', by Dr Steven McCabe and Beverley Nielsen. Jack prepared some notes for the occasion in which his passion for the region and manufacturing speak through every sentence. He was elaborating on these notes for his essay for this book. He will be greatly missed - but never forgotten.

In my time as a trade unionist and Member of Parliament for Erdington, I have seen tremendous change. Though there is much to applaud, the fact is that goods we consume are as likely to be produced thousands of miles away and not locally. This has led to a profoundly damaging impact on the lives of those who, traditionally, would have found employment in businesses producing the items we use. Birmingham, which may claim to be a 'spiritual home' for the car, has suffered a marked decline in the production of vehicles.

Industrialisation, particularly the internal combustion engine, made Birmingham, the 'city of a thousand trades', the destination for many immigrants, including the Irish like my Mum and Dad, who secured employment and better futures for their families. However, the pollution created as a result of this has led to a legacy that harms the continued existence of many millions. Greenhouse gases that have created climate change are a clear and present threat. According to the World Health Organisation, much in the news because of the coronavirus pandemic, climatic change that's already occurred is estimated to result in over 250,000 premature deaths annually across the globe. Without policies explicitly dedicated to dealing with the way in which our economy functions,

we risk reaching a 'tipping point' of average temperature increase which will make life impossible for, potentially, many hundreds of millions of people in areas of the world in which survival is perilous. It is essential that we support policies explicitly intended to ensure the rapid reduction of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon, that have proven so detrimental to the environment. Collectively we can alter our own lives as part of efforts to create a greener society that will protect the earth for the long-term.

I am passionate in my belief that change is possible. However, as my experience as an MP for a constituency with high levels of inequality and poverty, it is crucial that any change is not just ambitious in the objective of dealing with climate change, but radical in creating opportunity for all. The contributions presented by authors in this book underline the argument that developing a greener economy will potentially improve the environment through production of goods and services that are less harmful and benefit the economy.

Equally important, developing an economy based on green principles in which pollution and waste are drastically reduced will offer much needed employment. As such, the potential for a green economy will collectively make life better in terms of

prosperity that is based on improvement in the prospects of future generations but not, as hitherto has been characteristic of traditional orthodoxy, through destruction of the earth's precious resources and delicately balanced environment.

There is much to do and little time to achieve it before it's too late.

A GOLDEN DECADE

With the right decisions, the heart of Britain could be transformed over the decade that takes us from the City of Culture in 2021 and the Commonwealth Games in 2022, through to the first High Speed trains drawing into the region in the early 2030s.

The West Midlands could be the power house of a green industrial revolution which would provide secure highly paid jobs, quality homes, beautiful public spaces, and prosperity for generations to come.

This will need innovation, investment, partnership, and good old fashioned community spirit.

This major collection of essays from leaders across the region sets out a wealth of perspectives on the decade ahead.

As the world recovers from the pandemic and shoots for the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, the West Midlands of the United Kingdom has an unparalleled opportunity to become the global leader it deserves to be. This could well be, Our Golden Decade.

CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:

Adam Tranter, Ashley Bertie, Beverley Nielsen, Carl Richardson, Colleen Fletcher, Corin Crane, Ed Shedd, Ian Cooper, Ian Ward, Jack Dromey, Jean Templeton, Jim O'Boyle, Jonathan Bloom, Julie Moore, Lee Barron, Liam Byrne, Lucy Caldicott, Margot James, Martin Bailey, Martin Freer, Pat McFadden, Paul Cadman, Paul Thandi, Sharon Thompson, Simon Marks, Tom McNeil.

Dedicated to the memory and inspiration of Jack Dromey MP