WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT FROM BREXIT?

JRF and UK in a Changing Europe
July 2019
# Section Seven: Brexit

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April and May 2019, ComRes conducted 18 deliberative workshops with low-income voters living in nine deprived areas across the UK. During the workshops, ComRes aimed to understand the priorities for low-income voters as the UK looks to leave the European Union. Participants were asked to be ambitious and creative as they considered what would improve the wealth of their local area and the wealth of people like them.

Across the workshops, priorities for change were varied; however, there were some clear overarching themes that revealed what low-income voters want from a post-Brexit UK. Ultimately, delays in the Brexit process and failures to deliver on promises are deeply frustrating low-income voters as they want the government to make progress on the issues that matter to them. Improving work, wages and training are perceived as fundamental to low-income voters as they seek opportunities to improve their day to day lives.

The locations chosen are diverse with different local identities; however, a majority of low-income voters feel locked out of opportunity and desire a sense of pride and belonging in their community and local area. Despite divisions in their vision for what they’d like Brexit to bring, low-income voters find common ground in proposed solutions to issues closer to home.

Differences mainly occurred between the typology of places, as defined by Pike et al (2016) in their Uneven Growth report for JRF:

- **Core cities**: are the principal cities of their city regions, hosting high-level services and anchor institutions that attract investment and people.
- **Overshadowed towns**: have larger neighbouring cities that host the higher-level functions, main employment sites attracting commuters and provide the principal growth opportunities.
- **Freestanding cities/towns**: are not overshadowed but are smaller than core cities and some distance from them.

Overall, low-income voters living in overshadowed towns and cities say they feel they are living in a rigged economy, trapped in an area lacking investment and attention. In comparison, those from core and freestanding cities and towns are more able to highlight opportunities and solutions for change. However, differences are also apparent between cities and towns in the North, Midlands and Wales that feel particularly left behind by the South and London. Moreover, there is also a difference within freestanding areas according to relative levels of deprivation; low-income voters in Southampton are more positive about their ambitions than those from Newport and Middlesbrough. Older participants reflect upon their areas’ decreasing presence in trade and manufacturing while younger adults tend to focus upon support and more opportunities to gain secure employment while balancing life pressures such as having a family. Overwhelmingly, the majority of low-income voters we spoke to want to see a shift of focus away from Brexit and onto the issues and struggles that affect them daily.
Brexit and confidence in future prospects

The findings reveal a deep-seated anger with the political establishment for years of perceived economic marginalisation, resulting in poverty and a lack of opportunities for people to thrive in their local area. Low-income voters describe this feeling being present well before Brexit and still being prevalent today. Brexit remains uncertain but low-income voters are just as impatient for change now as before Brexit.

Overwhelmingly, the low-income voters we spoke to say they have lost faith and confidence in politicians at both local and central government levels. They are pessimistic about the opportunities for growth and progress to be made in their local areas while the Brexit process continues. However, Brexit is only the latest topic that they perceive to be distracting government from prioritising low-income voters. Many participants living in the North, Midlands and Wales argue the “North-South” divide has eroded trust in Westminster for years.

In overshadowed towns (JRF’s typology of place described above), where investment is already perceived to be limited, participants describe a “rigged” economy that only benefits the wealthiest in the UK and sucks investment from smaller towns. Participants have faith in the people and in the “bulldog spirit” of the UK but have little to no confidence in the current political system (mentioning expenses scandals, lack of transparency over taxes and for being perceived as ignoring the Brexit result). Politicians are seen as out of touch and not representing people in their local area, patronising and belittling small towns, especially in the North and Midlands.

In spite of this, low-income voters see it as the responsibility of government to implement changes and invest in their local economy. In core and freestanding cities/towns, some participants say improving local economies is a shared responsibility, but in overshadowed towns participants say that as the vulnerable in society, they should not have to shoulder the burden. They demand the government reallocate funding and investment to build a country that actually does work for everyone.

Brexit makes participants feel insecure, uncertain and ignored. Many participants also describe an indifference to the effect Brexit may have on their daily lives, but all feel pessimistic that any of the changes they want to see made will likely happen over the coming years. An embedded belief that low-income voters are bottom of the priority list for the government is held by many.

Improving local businesses

Participants across the UK lament the decline of economic opportunity in their local areas, they speak of tired high streets and insufficient support for local businesses. It is clear that for participants, local pride and self-worth stems from thriving local economies. Low-income voters want healthy businesses that are supported by local government in order to provide opportunities. Participants express a nervous relationship towards big businesses but recognise the important role they can play in rejuvenating local areas and bringing people into their town centres. This plays into the general tension between a desire for modernisation but fears around gentrification and a loss of the peace they currently find. Supermarkets, out of town shopping centres and online stores are begrudgingly embraced by participants as “necessary evils”, but are seen with distrust and participants want stringent taxation and regulation.

Participants express disappointment with the industries that have filled the vacuums left behind after the trades of the past have ended. This, in combination with an unhealthy national skew towards London, generate a sense of injustice and disillusionment with the ‘system’ and business more broadly. Low-income voters want to see government investment in their businesses that will benefit employers, employees and consumers.
Improving work and wages

Low-income participants we spoke to express frustrations with the economy and low wages. They struggle to find work while also juggling childcare, working in low-paid jobs or lacking training and skills. Overshadowed towns in the North, the Midlands and in Wales appear to be suffering the most from a perceived lack of funding and support for jobs and skills. However, within each location there is a plea to politicians, governments, charities and policy makers to refocus on these areas, invest financially and boost local businesses. Participants showed passion for their communities to improve and for their local areas to receive investment.

In-work poverty is a consistent issue across type of place in the UK. Low-income voters describe a stagnant economy with low-paid jobs and high living costs, with many struggling just to get by. Participants in overshadowed towns propose the minimum wage becoming the living wage to ensure low-income voters can afford basic essentials and banning zero-hour contracts as they say work should offer stability. Many participants describe a situation where they feel better off on benefits than working due to the low wages and rising travel and childcare costs. Participants in core and freestanding cities propose giving low-income voters more freedom in the workplace by offering flexible working hours and diversifying childcare provision.

Overall, participants say improving work for low-income voters will be essential in a post-Brexit UK. Low-income voters want the stability and security of employment and want to be a productive employee, but the perceived injustice of in-work poverty is seen to hold people on the lowest incomes back.

Improving training and skills

Low-income voters that we spoke to across the UK want their areas to offer young people opportunities outside of university, with apprenticeships and training schemes particularly front of mind. Participants propose more, higher quality and better-paid apprenticeships that would improve the wealth of people. Discussions revealed what low-income voters want from a ‘good’ apprenticeship and exposed a desire for training and skills, not only for young people, but also for adults looking to retrain. Low-income voters want to see apprenticeships that provide people with the skills they need to learn a trade or progress in their career.

Participants see the important role that employers and local businesses could play in improving training and skills for all. Older adults are more likely to reflect upon the role of trade and manufacturing, which previously made their area well-known. Overshadowed areas particularly raise the need for skilled workers and ensuring that adults of all ages are able to retrain and upskill within the high cost of living. In core cities, participants want more digital and IT skills training that will enable workers to adapt in an ever-changing employment landscape.

Improving community and environment

Participants in the workshops across the UK raise a variety of challenges that their local communities are currently facing. Regarding the area that they live in, they focus on the aesthetic and safety of their high streets and town centres, and the role they play in providing services for the community, as well as the activities and facilities that are available to them in their area. Consistently, low-income voters describe a loss of “community spirit” and the need to revive it in order to improve the wealth of their local area.

Low-income voters across the UK raise empty shops and the lack of diversity on their high streets as challenges to improving their communities. Participants in overshadowed towns feel their local area is
not invested in and look to surrounding areas for shopping and leisure activities. They cite closures of police stations and limited resources to reignite their town centres. In contrast, those from core and more optimistic freestanding cities like Southampton, propose more community and individual involvement to keep their streets clean and safe. Participants propose changes coming from grassroots and the communities themselves so as to truly benefit those living in the area.

Barriers to a sense of community for low-income voters include anti-social behaviour, a perceived rise in crime, litter and pollution and lack of accessible community facilities, spaces and services. Participants raise concerns over the look of their areas and feel they are “unclean” and “worn-down”. Low-income voters want to see their green areas protected and for investment to be made in the aesthetic of their local areas so as to increase footfall on their high streets. For many, free leisure activities and spaces to relax for low-income families, provisions for young people and taking care of the elderly would go a long way in improving their local communities and in turn improving the wealth of people in the area.
INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) and UK in a Changing Europe (UKandEU) commissioned ComRes to conduct a suite of deliberative workshops (three hour, moderator-led groups where issues can be explored in greater detail and complexity than a focus group) to investigate the priorities of low-income voters in deprived areas after Brexit. They wanted to step back from the detail of the UK’s withdrawal deal and the terms of departure and explore attitudes among low-income voters to the UK’s economic and social future outside of the European Union.

The project was conducted in two phases, where the findings from phase one directly informed what was discussed and tested in phase two. Nine locations were selected, based on levels of deprivation and typology of place definition as outlined in JRF’s report by Pike et al Uneven growth: tackling city decline (2016). In this report, JRF identify types of deprived cities and towns and these definitions are used throughout this report:

- **Core cities**: are the principal cities of their city regions, hosting high-level services and anchor institutions that attract investment and people.
- **Overshadowed towns**: have larger neighbouring cities that host the higher-level functions, main employment sites attracting commuters and provide the principal growth opportunities.
- **Freestanding cities/towns**: are not overshadowed but are smaller than core cities and some distance from them.

18 deliberative workshops with between ten and twelve low-income participants in each group living in or near the selected locations took place.

JRF and UKandEU sought to discover how individuals view the prospects for their local economy, what opportunities they want it to offer and what the barriers are to achieving this. JRF and UKandEU argue that the Brexit campaign of 2016 spoke directly to low-income voters and the Leave campaign encouraged those who had long been forgotten about and ignored to ‘take back control’. However, three years on, there are still millions of people in poverty in the UK and many still feel ignored and left behind. As UKandEU research (2017) sets out, and this piece of research builds upon, the interests and concerns of the most deprived areas should be at the centre of the debate as the UK looks to become a fairer and more functional society once it leaves the EU.

This report engages with what people on low incomes say are their priorities and expectations for life after the UK leaves the EU and considers what common ground can be found to create opportunities to ensure low-income voters are able to benefit. The Brexit debate and coverage presented leaving the EU as an opportunity and arguably raised expectations for low-income voters that life could be different. Therefore, we explored whether low-income voters genuinely believe change is possible in terms of work, wages and jobs. We spoke in depth to 190 people, from across the political spectrum, and asked the question ‘What would help increase the wealth of your local area and people like you?’

Within a rapidly changing political climate; including a new Prime Minister and the ongoing Brexit process, this piece of work captures the social and economic dynamics at work in less prosperous parts

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2 [https://ukandeu.ac.uk/testing-brexit-researchers-layout-blueprint-for-success/](https://ukandeu.ac.uk/testing-brexit-researchers-layout-blueprint-for-success/)
of the country. This report aims to put the voices of low-income voters at the forefront of the debate and will inform JRF and UKandEU’s future work in convincing the government and policy makers to protect struggling places and economies.

METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

In partnership with JRF and UKandEU, ComRes identified nine locations across the UK in which to conduct 18 deliberative workshops with low-income voters. These were: Glasgow, Middlesbrough, Bolton, Dudley, Newport, Hastings, Leeds, Worksop and Southampton. Locations were informed by JRF’s typology of different places, indices of deprivation and parliamentary majority. For the analysis of this report, types of places, as indicated through Pike et al’s *Uneven growth* report are used throughout:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Place</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core city (the principal cities of their city regions, hosting high-level services and anchor institutions that attract investment and people.)</td>
<td>Glasgow, Leeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freestanding city (not overshadowed but are smaller than core cities and some distance from them.)</td>
<td>Newport, Southampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freestanding town (as above)</td>
<td>Middlesbrough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overshadowed town (have larger neighbouring cities that host the higher-level functions, main employment sites attracting commuters and provide the principal growth opportunities.)</td>
<td>Bolton, Worksop*, Hastings*, Dudley*</td>
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</tbody>
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Previous research⁴ conducted by JRF suggests that analysis by type of place (city and town) and by region will reveal a disparity in the distribution of investment and wealth in the UK. Especially as their research found that while many of the cities in the UK are growing, growth in many Northern cities is lagging significantly behind national levels. JRF point out that economic growth alone will not necessarily reduce poverty in cities, so comprehensive and integrated packages of long-term policies around economic development, employment and skills and infrastructure are required.

Two phases

It was imperative that this piece of research was conducted using a bottom-up approach in which the voices of low-income voters were leading the content. With this in mind, this piece of research was conducted across two phases using a deliberative approach to provide a comprehensive overview of the

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³ These places were not categorised by Pike et al in the *Uneven Growth* report, but were selected and categorised here based on JRF’s understanding of the report’s findings.
priorities of low-income voters. Phase one was an exploratory exercise with 12 workshops taking place between 23rd April – 3rd May 2019. Six locations were chosen for phase one so that ideas could be fully explored and a comprehensive list of priorities could be formed. Participants were asked to consider their local area more generally and were asked to explore areas they would like to see change and improve while also identifying the challenges and barriers to these changes.

Following an in–depth analysis session with JRF and UKandEU where key themes, ideas and proposals were identified as recurring in phase one, phase two was designed to delve deeper into specific ideas. Only three locations were chosen for phase two and six workshops took place between 14th–17th May 2019. Debates occurred within the groups to flesh out the positive and negatives of proposals to see where priorities lay. Deliberative workshops were moderator–led and were designed to engage participants and explore complex ideas in interactive ways, using flip charts, post–its, tables and various stimuli. Throughout the workshops, participants were encouraged to be positive and ambitious in the changes and ideas they suggested rather than getting bogged down in anti–Brexit or anti–government sentiment that can often limit productive and fruitful discussions.

A full and detailed methodology including sample and recruitment details is included at the end of this report.
SECTION ONE: CURRENT EXPERIENCES

This section analyses the experience of living in different areas of the UK. There is a varied experience of living on a low income in a core city like Leeds or Glasgow compared to a freestanding city or town like Newport, Middlesbrough or Southampton, or an overshadowed town like Bolton, Worksop, Hastings or Dudley. This section examines the overarching feelings associated with living in different areas and the effect this has on aspirations for improving or changing the prosperity of people in the local area.

1.1 CURRENT EXPERIENCES OF LOCAL AREAS

Participants vary in how they identify with their local area and what they feel it needs to improve. Instinctively and unprompted, participants focus on the aesthetic of the area, highlighting litter and disrepair that make the area feel tired and unwelcoming. The importance of pleasant, shared public space is also highlighted, including the protection of green spaces. Older participants and those with children also highlight giving young people things to do in order to get them off the streets and into more productive activities.

“Cleaner. Less rubbish, less litter.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“They’ve taken away all the football parks that they used to play in and they’ve put a lot of swings in for the younger kids, but you need something for the youth.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

In phase two of the workshops (Leeds, Worksop and Southampton), participants delved deeper into how the local area makes them feel by identifying with a figure on an emotion tree. Using a simple cartoon image of non-specific characters in different situations, participants were asked to consider which character they most identify with.

Participants living in Leeds feel relatively positive about their local area and express a sense of pride and happiness with their lives. Participants describe elements of ambition and determination to succeed despite hardships and a strong sense of community with opportunities for different people to get involved. Overall, there appears to be a sense of stability and security associated with living in this core city.

“Sometimes, I feel happy and lucky about where I live because I think it’s generally quite a nice place to live and particularly the spot that I’m in in the area.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

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5 Having deliberated on how phase one worked, it became apparent participants needed an emotional vocabulary to identify with, so this emotion map provided a communication tool for participants to do this. A blank emotion tree is included in appendix three.
“The person who is standing on a stable platform, because I don’t know about anybody else, but I feel quite stable and I feel quite positive, to be honest with you.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Emotion blob trees, Leeds workshops

In Southampton, a freestanding city, participants describe an up-and-coming local area that has opportunities to thrive. While low-income voters describe hardships and frustrations with the difficulty getting to each pay day, feelings towards the area appear similar to that of Leeds. Low-income voters perceive Southampton to offer stability and a sense of progression, even if there is still room for improvement.

“Well, it’s just a place of safety, it’s an opportunity, it’s not sort of complete, you know, being right at the top, but it’s somewhere in the middle here.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“I am the person reaching to the other person. I’m not quite there yet, I’m on my way but I’m not quite there yet. I kind of feel that with my area, I’m on my way.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two
In strong contrast to both Leeds and Southampton, Worksop, an *overshadowed* town, is described in bleak terms by participants. There is no feeling of opportunity or progression with nearly all participants expressing feelings of unhappiness, feeling fed up and lacking support as an area. This is mainly associated with lack of jobs, poor wages and having very little opportunities to improve their situation.

“Just hanging on, like, with your money and everything. You know, when you just survive.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“So, my money is going out of the door, I’m not getting any help. I just feel like I’m just hanging there.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two
1.2 LOCAL IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Each location has a distinct local identity that in many cases is enjoyed and celebrated. However, for some low-income voters in Dudley and Middlesbrough, they lament how their local area is portrayed in the media and fear this will put others off from visiting. Participants in Dudley claim others view them as “thick”, citing jokes on television and by comedians about being from Birmingham and Dudley that often focus on their accent rather than on what their local area can offer.

“Then when you see on the news your area, things of it being run down or no one’s got any jobs, you’re not going to feel any pride.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“The Black Country should be up there, shouldn’t it? They should be looking up at it, thinking, ‘what a place,’ instead of looking down thinking, ‘what a place.’”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

For low-income voters, their sense of identity, in some cases, is affirmed by people from elsewhere recognising what it has to offer in terms of jobs, trade and community. For the participants in Dudley, there is a strong affiliation to the Black Country and a sense of pride in what it means to be from the Black Country.

“It just makes you feel like you’ve got something to prove, and when you can prove it, it just feels good. Like, Black Country has its own flag.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Without the Black Country, the world wouldn’t have happened.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

In terms of being recognised, participants also see their local area’s history and physical locations as improving their sense of place and belonging. In Dudley, respondents mention the local zoo, the Black Country Museum and the cinema as being key to bringing people into the area. In Hastings there is a strong affiliation with the pier and what it can offer the local area if it was invested in properly. In Southampton, participants cite specific local centres that encourage a sense of community and belonging.

“Well, the Black Country Museum is always packed, every time you go past, massive crowd filler.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Actually, it did have quite a lot of family-orientated events and there was quite a lot of workshops, free workshops for children that had quite a lot of art exhibitions and stuff like that.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“The Wallhouse was used by artists to open up another community thing that different people-, every month, different people went in, and took part in exhibitions, music, they had all sorts of things going on there.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two
1.3 NORTH–SOUTH DIVIDE AND A LONDON–CENTRIC ECONOMY

Throughout the workshops, across locations, participants spoke of a London–centric economy in which other areas of the UK are forgotten. Low-income voters outside of London express resentment and frustrations that decisions around investment and funding are often made with a London mind–set rather than paying attention to the particular local area and its needs. However, it is most apparent and is felt most strongly in overshadowed towns where investment is already limited.

“This country is too London–centred. Everything happens and all the needs and all the money is all on London and that’s what always attracts all the kids to London.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“I mean, everything is very London centric in the UK and a lot of the things that work in London just doesn’t work in other places.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

This is expanded upon further by low-income voters in Newport who, living in a devolved nation, perceive a dominant role in Westminster over how money in distributed. Participants in Newport speak of a Westminster that only cares about London and distributes money unfairly and unequally so that certain areas are left to suffer.

“Westminster and the government are London–centric, and the further west, east, North you go, you know, the poorer things are.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

Participants describe feeling forgotten about and abandoned not only by London, but by the South in general. Low-income voters in Northern and Midlands cities and towns speak most passionately of a more general North–South divide that damages their sense of place and provokes feelings of resentment and inequality. The South is most often seen in terms of unequal distribution of wealth and investment, that strips local areas in the North of resources and economic attention. For example, in a number of groups across the North and Midlands, uncertainty over HS2 is raised as evidence of this perceived lack of investment.

“Yes, the South just sucks everyone dry.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“There’s always the North–South divide. Public transport in the North is a lot worse than it is down South. The high-speed link (HS2), was supposed to be getting built. They’re saying now, ‘We might scrap that, because it’s going to cost too much money.’ Yes, we always seem to get forgotten.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“Well, it annoys you, doesn’t it? It really annoys you. We’ve worked hard exactly the same as the people up the South, probably even harder because the Northerners are really gutsy people.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One
1.4 CONCLUSIONS

- Low-income voters living in deprived areas in the UK are pleading for the government and policy makers to recognise the need to take the whole country into account when making and explaining decisions. If not, they risk further eroding participants' sense of identity and belonging and hindering the opportunities that these local areas have to thrive.
- All participants have a clear vision for their local areas – they want them to be prosperous, clean and seen as prosperous.
- For many participants, this sense of identity has been diminished over time as their local area does not feel valued or invested in.
- Both internal and international immigration is sometimes seen as having a negative impact on community spirit, citing that it inevitably makes communities become more segregated. In the case of international migration, participants express a desire for more emphasis to be placed on integration.
- Core cities and places in the South East recognise the potential in their area for fresh opportunity and change.
- However, the feeling of discouragement and disillusionment is ingrained, especially in the North and in overshadowed towns, and participants struggle to identify positively with their local area.
- While all participants feel the hardship of being on low incomes, participants in overshadowed areas are impatient for higher living standards, while those in Leeds and Southampton, both more prosperous than the other locations, are able to look beyond austerity and see opportunities to thrive in their local area.
- Participants in core cities describe a sense of community which fosters an ambition and determination among low-income voters to succeed and overcome hardships.
- In freestanding cities, the sense of stability and progression remains but perhaps to a less enthusiastic extent.
- Overshadowed areas, however, report feeling left behind, abandoned and unhappy.
- The London-centric nature of the UK economically and politically is often blamed for places feeling isolated and forgotten. While there is a tendency from some Northern areas to focus their ire towards the South overall, low-income voters in Southern towns and cities also feel the impact of falling outside of the greater wealth and influence of London.
SECTION TWO: IMPROVING LOCAL BUSINESS

This section explores the role of businesses in improving the wealth of local areas across the UK. In phase one of the workshops, participants across the UK see it to be the role of businesses and employers to improve their local economy. In phase two, supporting local businesses was included as a proposal for participants to discuss in greater depth.

Participants across the UK openly lament the lack of local economic opportunity. The specific issues and solutions vary by region and type of place, but most commonly across the towns and cities visited they raise:

- A depressed local retail sector, specifically the high street;
- Insufficient support from local government towards local business;
- The challenges that big business poses to their local economy;
- Long-term aftershocks of large industrial shifts on local economies, and their impact on communities;
- Education opportunities that lead to fulfilling and well-paid jobs are limited in the local area;
- Inadequate transport links that hinders economic growth and expensive public transport that forces locals to out-of-town shopping centres to find free parking.

As well as these over-arching themes for local business that emerge universally across all locations visited, there are also specific challenges and suggested solutions to aid local business by type of place.

2.1 THE STATE OF THE HIGH STREET

For the majority of participants, the strength of the local economy and the fate of local business are closely related with the health of the high street. Participants immediately recognise businesses with a retail presence, such as on the high street, and their opinions on its health serve as a barometer for their opinions on the fate of locally-owned businesses. There is a frustration at the short-lifespan of many local retail businesses seen to face challenges in reaching their potential. Participants mention a number of challenges facing the high street, outlined below.

Lack of diversity

Participants across typology of place despair at the lack of diversity on their high streets. Low-income voters describe their town centres having become “repetitive” due to the prevalence of certain types of retail units such as betting shops, phone shops, vape shops, hairdressers, charity shops and fast-food outlets, and express a desire for change.

“Grow[th] industries here, Wonga, your nail bars and different sorts of food shops. You know, we do need more variety than nail bars and Wonga and Betfred…”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed town, Phase Two
“I keep seeing the same kind of fast food shop after fast food shop and it seems to be bringing the area down. It increases litter and it just doesn’t do anything for the kind of buzz of a community if it’s just the same kind of shops selling the same kind of stuff.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“You watch the high street getting emptier and emptier and you can see it just going one way, you know? More places closing, less people going out, it’s a vicious circle.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“To have fewer charity shops, so that you actually keep the vibrancy and the local independent businesses. You’re not just walking down rows and rows of charity shops, because that’s quite depressing.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Shops standing empty

In the overshadowed towns of Bolton, Dudley and Worksop, as well as freestanding Middlesbrough and Newport, participants express concerns for the number of empty shops, buildings and car parks in their high streets. They say these vacant buildings are unsightly, contribute to the perception that their town centres are worn down, as well as feelings of frustration that nothing is being done to take advantage of these sites. Participants in Bolton and Dudley, as well as those in the freestanding Middlesbrough and Southampton say their area is being wasted as they see the green belt converted to estates and out-of-town shopping centres.

“I always think there’s a missed opportunity there because of all the housing that’s getting built on all the green belt around here that are getting built on where the town centres are empty. There’s an opportunity to develop above the shops and put people in there…”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“That’s been vandalised. That’s just such an eyesore and nothing’s being done about it. It just looks horrific… It’s got water, gas, electricity. It only needs conversion, but it’s just standing there rotting away”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Competition from big and online businesses

‘Big business’ is almost always seen as a negative entity, working in conjunction with other national bodies such as government to operate in a manner that participants describe as “corrupt”. Supermarkets, the go-to face of big business for the majority of participants, were seen as the enemy of local business, killing off and undercutting competition.

“Supermarkets can sell everything so cheap because they buy such big quantities of it, they forced loads of the smaller businesses and shops out of business, and it’s the bigger supermarkets that are responsible for a lot of our high streets looking bereft, derelict and abandoned.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One
“The big corporations are taking, taking, taking, they don’t need us anymore... They want a big divide. That’s the new world order.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Those from overshadowed towns are the most conflicted on the effects of, and solutions to, big business. Participants express anger at councils and developers whom they perceive to be raising rents and chasing revenue rather than the welfare of the local area, in order to price out local and independent businesses in favour of big chains.

“I think what’s actually happened with a lot of these buildings, is the council has actually doubled the rent. Forced a lot of the small businesses to struggle, so a lot of external, big companies that are coming from abroad, the multi-millionaires, putting in offers and tenders, and it’s unfair.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“With new businesses when they open, I think the local council should go and make themselves known to that local business, [so] you’re aware that they can help with any advice... that’s why a lot of small businesses are closing down because they’ve not got the help and they can’t afford to keep the businesses open.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Participants express concerns over lack of incentives for shopping locally and supporting local businesses instead of chains and buying online. Among the top reasons for this given by participants is cost and that big businesses and chains are cheaper.

“If you create this really nice environment to be in, that you’re more tempted to go there. Rather than, ‘Oh, I’m just going to go online.’ Because that’s the big problem these days, isn’t it?”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“When you’ve got like Aldi’s, Lidl’s ...[and] not supporting their local ones in the community because they can’t afford it. They can’t afford to go to a local fruit and veg shop and pay an extra pound for something so they’ll go to Aldi and pay 29p for it ... prices are going up for rent, bills, this, that and the other, council tax but their wages are not apart from a percentage.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Online shopping, exclusively associated with large business and not smaller, independent businesses, provokes a mixed reaction. The majority of participants see the convenience and price advantages of online as leading to its inevitable rise. Despite perception that this is achieved through low-pay and tax avoidance, leading to resentment and negative associations for online stores, its ease, prices and simplicity mean many say that consumers simply have no choice.

“People would rather sit at home, and this is why the shops are closing down, because they’re all buying it online and they’re not going to the shops. Okay, that’s up to them, but that is one of the main causes of the shops closing down.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One
In comparison to other participants, those from core cities display a greater investment of faith in big business, its motivations, and its capability to align itself harmoniously with local and independent businesses. Associations with online shopping and the internet are not as distinctly negative, with one participant even describing how social media and online shopping provide a sense of “community” that they do not receive from the real world around them. Participants stress the value of good customer service, predominantly found in local businesses, but also the importance of elite business practice, associated with big business.

**Nostalgia vs modernisation**

Participants across the locations are aware that there is a need to look at the role of the high street for the future. Some participants argue it should revert to its traditional state of providing goods and services for local people, while others say it needs to be upgraded in line with technological developments and consumer behaviours. The tension between a longing for the past and awareness of the need to adapt is prevalent among low-income voters.

“**How can we make the high street better and more appealing than online?** So, one idea was to tax online stores more and another idea was, ’What can the high street do that online can’t?’ One of it is human interaction, actually to have better customer service.”

**Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two**

Many participants, especially those living in Southern towns and cities such as Hastings and Southampton, identify a tension between wanting to develop and modernise their local area without losing a peaceful, community feeling to their high streets. While participants say they want investment and development, there is also a fear of gentrification and losing a sense of local identity.

“**Keeping its identity and bringing something in, but not completely over-gentrifying it so that local people don’t–, because then you just repeat the same thing somewhere else.**”

**Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One**

For example, in Hastings, while Brighton is seen as having a strong reputation, participants do not want to lose their own sense of community and peace in Hastings which they say Brighton has lost. Other participants feel impatient for change and for a more modern outlook on infrastructure, for example, in design ideas for the pier.

“**I then lived in Brighton and compared to, like, other areas, there is a huge sense of community here [in Hastings]. This is why I want to live here. People do help each other out.**”

**Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One**

“**I know with the pier, of the sort of nostalgia of, ’This is what a pier should be like.’ I think we need to start thinking about, maybe just, completely new things for a seaside town, that are unexpected and different.**”

**Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One**
Competition from out of town

Because of the poor offering of a variety of shopping facilities and services, participants say that they are forced to shop elsewhere – either in decentralised out-of-town shopping centres, for example, Merry Hill in Dudley, or in neighbouring towns or cities, such as Eastbourne instead of Hastings.

“I used them going into Dudley for my shopping days. Then, when Merry Hill opened, I think everybody’s decided to desert Dudley... all the big supermarkets and Merry Hill centres, they took it away [from Dudley].”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“That’s the superstores that have done that, isn’t it? They’ve taken the bakers away, the butchers away, the ironmongers, the key-makers, all these people used to be on the high street...it was lively, and now, all you can get is a haircut, have a drink and go to the bookies.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

Inevitably, participants from overshadowed towns feel threatened by nearby cities or towns. Compared to these neighbouring locations, it is perceived that the high street and town centre has a poor offering, higher levels of traffic and more expensive parking. There appears to be differences in levels of deprivation between overshadowed towns. For example, in Worksop, participants are very pessimistic and contrast their “poor” and “deserted” town centre with small nearby areas such as Retford and Rotherham which are perceived to be doing well, offering coffee shops, restaurants, community activities and an attractive place to spend time in.

“There are no shops on offer. I literally haven’t been into the town centre of Worksop for about four years. Four years, literally. I’ve got no reason to go.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

While participants in Hastings, also an overshadowed town, are more positive about their local area and its potential overall, they still compare the town centre with that of Brighton and Eastbourne, explaining that Hastings has “no sense” of a town centre, good shopping or reliable local and regional transport links.

“I live here and if I want to do shopping, I will go back out to Eastbourne. I’ll go to Ashford. There’s actually no sense of something in the town centre itself, the business is the shops. It’s actually dead, and if you see the turnover, it’s closing and opening, and new management. The infrastructure is there...It could be brilliant for people to come for holidays..”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Low-income voters in Glasgow appear less concerned than those in Middlesbrough and Southampton about the challenge for their high streets and city centres, although two participants raise it as an issue. This could be down to Glasgow being a larger city, and while very deprived in areas, has more developed infrastructure compared to Middlesbrough or Southampton.

“There’s just no money being spent on making it look nice, the pavements, everything, the town centre is disgusting.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One
“There is nothing worse than actually having a town centre or a row of shops where there are lots of empty units.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Participants have a number of proposed solutions for how their local high streets and town centres might be improved.

Investment in appearance of the high street

In Middlesbrough, Hastings and Newport participants want investment to spruce up the physical appearance of their local area to encourage a sense of pride, to boost community spirit and social interaction to their central high streets.

Ideas for Hastings include creating an attractive marina in the centre, regenerating the seafront and town centre, refurbishing the promenade, providing 24-hour buses for safety and giving more people access to the town centre.

“I was just thinking there should be massive investment. If you look at Sydney, the way that they’ve redone the seafront there with monorail and towns like Seattle and so on, where they really invested in their waterside. That there would be a possibility to build a proper walkway down here, planted, with a bike lane and little shops and cafes and stuff like that.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think we need a big investment from somebody, you know, we’re probably not the most skint town in the country…it just needs somebody to believe in us.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

Below is an example of a task participants completed in phase one of the workshops. Participants gave their views on changes they want to see in their local area, ideas on how they would make this change, what the result would be, how it would make them feel and who it would help. A participant in Newport outlines their desire for a rejuvenated town centre through lower rates, more shops which are locally owned and free parking. They feel this would make people happier, lead to a safer environment and mean more money for Newport as a local area.
Newport participant, phase one, task one.

Community use of empty shops

During the phase one workshops which were more exploratory, low-income voters find common ground and offer a range of intersecting ideas for how vacant shops could be best repurposed. For example, as affordable rental properties, houses for the homeless, or carparks. Other ideas include multi-use spaces such as community hubs for young people, families and older people to gather, socialise and feel safe as well as spaces to hold activities, training sessions and workshops to upskill the community.

Below, a Middlesbrough participant proposes having fewer empty shops, a wider variety of shops and lots of plants and flowers in order to increase footfall on their local high street and attract more people to the area. They suggest lower business rates to support independent businesses and limit the amount of repetitive shops.

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6 We conducted twelve workshops in six locations for phase where we explored what low-income voters want for their local areas and what would improve the wealth of people like them.
Middlesbrough participant, phase one, task one.

During the debates in the phase two workshops, some participants in Worksop and Southampton went further to deliberate the use of empty shops as free-to-rent pop-up spaces for smaller local businesses and start-ups.

"Council-owned empty shops could become pop-up shops for just a two-week period. Again, that enables people to sell their products, their ideas, or what have you, and it would bring people in."

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

Investment in local business

Participants present solutions around local councils and developers incentivising and supporting locally-owned businesses. Participants suggest that locally-owned businesses might demonstrate investment and collaboration to the community and show their commitment to the local economy and are then rewarded with favourable terms in comparison to nationwide chains or multi-national corporations.

"I was prepared to do up the inside of the building myself, I could have got them to do it, the owners, but I decided to do it myself. I was given eighteen months free rent, because I was prepared to put the money into it, to actually do it up, right?"

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

"Maybe Westquay should have given that opportunity to the smaller businesses? If they were, like, ‘We’ll give you a discount on the rental of the property, come and move to our area.’"

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

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7 Six workshops took place in three locations, where specific concepts and policy ideas that were recurring in phase one were explored in further detail.
Sheffield and Liverpool are proposed by participants in Middlesbrough and Worksop as case studies where investment has transformed derelict areas into gentrified streets with affluent wine bars, restaurants and clubs which has revived the community spirit in that area.

“I was in Liverpool not so long back and they’ve turned a load of derelict--., what used to be…red light areas into affluent bars and wine bars and clubs and what have you. Same thing in Sheffield... There’s an area around there that was run down and, like I say, a red-light area and that’s come around and that’s now the place to go.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

In the case of Hastings, with its perceived thriving community spirit and engagement, participants are adamant that any council–led attempts to do this should support the grassroots community and arts projects that already exist. They do not want it to become a clone of Brighton and want the community to be put at the centre of the decision–making process. This is because of the perception that council efforts have fallen flat in the past.

**Easing costs of local business**

Participants in almost every location suggest that a lack of relief from high business rates from their local council are hurting local businesses, and perceive this to be the case in particular for companies in their infancy. However, owing to the declining presence of high streets and the physical retail sector, this is also perceived to be true for more established brands that decorate Britain’s high streets.

The most commonly requested form of intervention in local economies is allowances from local government towards local businesses. Participants widely prescribe either a revision to local business rates, or a formal support body for new small businesses in the area. By offering greater relief on business rates, or even implementing a more dynamic system related to age and size of business, participants hope to better protect local business. There is, to a lesser extent, an acknowledgment that this reform comes at a cost which local councils may not be in a position to burden.

“They need to look at business rates, as well, because Brierley Hill High Street, most of its closed down, because they can’t afford the rent on the shops. Even Merry Hill’s going that way.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I know even Debenham’s closing.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Lowering the rates for where the shops are. They’re all that high they can’t afford to keep them.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two
Benefiting from big businesses

A possible contribution to the local economy that participants see big business as being able to provide is sharing business practice and mentoring local business, who in turn can provide lessons about the area and best local practice.

“They are successful. They’ve got a lot to offer. They’ve got a lot they could train other businesses in. So, I think giving them incentive to help them, to work with other businesses that are coming into the area, because where’s the support for businesses that are starting? Local, independent ones. Sometimes they close really quickly because they just haven’t got a good business strategy. It could just be a lack of support, not their lack of a good idea. Could be that they weren’t able to follow it through.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two
Leeds Participant, phase two, task six

Other ideas in the freestanding city of Southampton include regulating and taxing businesses operating online to give local businesses a competitive edge; mandating big businesses and chains to offer family activities, workshops and training for the local community, as well as investing in the redesign of shops and the aesthetic of the high street.

"Businesses could hold community days. The example was that Costa, for example, could have a day where you come as a family, and you learn how to make the coffee, and all that kind of thing. Council-owned empty shops could become pop-up shops...enables people to sell their products, their ideas, and it would bring people in. That would create more of a community feel, and people would be more inclined to look after the area as well."

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

2.2 STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND CONTROLS

Participants express an underlying fear towards an inevitable sense of permanent ‘peripherism’ – with their local area often being little beyond a largely unskilled regional outpost for large businesses headquartered in London or abroad. This phenomenon is seen to create a strict ceiling on the affluence of the local area, both for individuals’ careers and for shared wealth.

"Those types of jobs, high-skilled, high-paid jobs, they’ve all been drying up so there’s nothing to replace those. They’ve got rid of our steel industry, we supplied for 120 odd years, that’s all gone."

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One
“The other thing is the rail link. I think something needs to be done about that. Considering the last time I went up to London, it actually cost me more than getting the train from Ashford to Paris.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Historical local trades and industries are firmly embedded in the consciousnesses of participants across all types of places. Virtually all can recall, and have opinions on, the current state of their area’s historic industry. The perception rings true across all types of places that the hollowing out of industries has left a vacuum in local economies, and contributed heavily to weakened communities. Whether it be mines in Bolton and Worksop, steel and glasswork in Dudley, ships and aircraft in Glasgow, or fishing in Hastings, industries of yesteryear remain clear in the memories of participants. Many express that new industries have insufficiently replaced, or counteracted, the losses that the local area is still experiencing, and that this is the root of many local troubles including anti-social behaviour, suppressed wages and unmotivated young people.

“So much of the industry's been taken away from here now, as well, from Glasgow, you know, like the shipbuilding. Aircrafts used to get built in Scotland and they're built in France or somewhere new.”

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“My dad used to work for a whisky company and he got made redundant in his work, because the whisky companies are in bloody Spain now. You can't even keep the whisky industry in Scotland, it's like, what hope do you have?”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

Participants from overshadowed towns have some of the most downbeat viewpoints on their local areas, following the shrinking of previous regional industries. The common conclusion is that the hollowing out of trade has been replaced with insecure, low-paid jobs that fundamentally cannot form the bedrock of a community in the same way that previous trade had. They also feel particularly vulnerable to crises in unemployment given that they feel their local economies have historically relied disproportionately on one single source of income.

“There were loads of jobs, people had loads of money and it's always been hard–working, hard drinking type of place. People worked hard and they played hard. That doesn’t fit in any more with today's society.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“The community has gone, the spirit has gone, hasn’t it?”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“Even when there are jobs, they’re all zero-hour contracts, minimum or below wage, especially for under 25s.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

As detailed within section one of this report, in addition to the loss of local industry, the rest of the country regards London and the South–East with distaste, and regret their good fortune at what they perceive to be the expense of the rest of the country. Participants cite the Olympics as an example of the government being curiously selective in which post–industrial locations it decides to invest in, and express frustration at London’s stranglehold over British tourism. The blame is laid squarely at the feet
of government, particularly by participants in Glasgow, and the consequence of Westminster and big business looking after its own first, rather than caring to spread investment and wealth nationwide.

“Yes, they did that in London, didn’t they, with the Olympic Village and everything like that, so there was money invested there in Canary Wharf and everything but all the money seems to have gone there, we’ve been, sort of, left in this area.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

In Southampton, participants express dismay that a lot of the larger businesses in their city are simply franchises, headquartered in London, and that profits from local endeavours are not staying in the local area. In Newport, participants say that the current lack of local further education opportunities mean their young people feel no choice but to go to university if they aspire to develop their career. Unfortunately, in their eyes, this means they will never return, and the city faces a brain drain to larger metropolitan areas, to capitals like London and Cardiff. Participants in Glasgow echo this, expressing exasperation that they know many people that involuntarily have to move all the way to London, in order to follow the supply of jobs.

“You’ve got big franchise companies. A lot of them are based in the UK, for example, in London. It means you’ll be taking the profits, say, from Birmingham, Manchester, Southampton, whatever. You’ll be taking those profits, and they all just go back to London. They all just go back to the middle.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“The thing is, they go away to university. They don’t come back.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“I think large businesses are getting a lot more presence in Southampton than local businesses. Like, when Watermark got built, it’s all chain restaurants.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

Low-income voters also draw attention to the changing dynamics of belonging to an area, with a number of participants having moved to the areas motivated by cheaper homes and costs of living, and lamenting the loss of young and talented people to other parts of the UK. As reported by The Telegraph in 2015, the UK has a high rate of internal migration compared to other European countries, with an average of 3.5 percent of its population moving each year. Younger people are more likely to move around within the UK, with London and the South East the hotspots for migration. When a young person in Middlesbrough described their struggles finding a job and juggling the pressures of childcare responsibilities and low wages, an older participant encourages them to leave Middlesbrough as a solution.

“Leave and go to where they are paying you more.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

This is seen as a symptom of an unhealthy, imbalanced economy skewed towards London and the South at large. More so than in towns, participants from freestanding cities carry a lingering distrust of local government in both their willpower, and the plausible impact they can have, to offset the negative

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consequences of industrial shift and big business on local people. Participants see their areas ransacked by expensive chains from afar that do little to stimulate a sense of community and keep money in local hands.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Low-income voters propose various ways of rejuvenating their local economy including investment through government intervention, education to both revitalise previous trades, and usher in a new, empowered workforce and improve the connectivity to the local area.

The majority of participants from all types of places, bar core cities, bemoan that big businesses work to overall remove money from the local economy. Big businesses, especially those that are online, are heavily associated with tax avoidance (for example Amazon, Apple, and Google) and draining tax revenues for the national and local area, and those operating brick and mortar operations are often seen as nothing more than equally-prolific tax avoiders with storefronts and minimum wage staff (Starbucks is top-of-mind). The bulk of revenues and high-skilled employees are perceived to be funnelled away to more prosperous parts of the country, predominantly London, leaving their local areas seldom better off for having big businesses in the area.

“I’ll tell you, it gets up your nose when Google, and Amazon, and all them, don’t pay proper business rates […] they make billions, but they’re not taxed enough, and that’s what gets up people’s nose. They’ll chase the little man.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“If you taxed big businesses properly, then there wouldn’t be such a stress on people like us, you know? Like, £161 [for council tax], that’s a lot of money for people like us, per month, but there’re businesses who are getting away with billions a year.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“It’s the businesses who aren’t necessarily from the area, coming in to the area. Don’t just take all of the money out of it. They should be held to account. All businesses should be held to account. They can’t just come in here […], take and not give anything back.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

However, despite these concerns and apprehensions many participants see attracting big business to the area as the only way of kickstarting the local economy. There is a presiding mood of resignation towards how little influence local business can truly have when big, international money is put on the table. A possible solution that participants suggest is local and national government providing appropriate incentives to attract big business to the area; local, in the form of sharing the burden of training local staff, and national, in the form of using tax relief to attract head offices to keep as much company revenue as possible in the UK.

“You need to offer the incentives. One of them [is to offer] free training, so this company [don’t] have to pay to do any training so that [is] their incentive to come to Worksop because they [get] free training compared to anywhere else in the country. So…they [keep] people in the local area and [eventually] in high-paid jobs. At the same time, they do need to give tax relief incentives to these companies because
what they do is have their head offices in another country so the money’s not staying in our country.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

Freestanding towns and cities have a broadly more proud and optimistic view of themselves and their potential than overshadowed areas. This is most keenly embodied by participants asking for their local council to better represent them and attract new business to the local area.

“I think the responsibility for finding new business in the town should come from not government but local government. They should have a committee that actually goes out and seeks and offer some good rates to actually bring them into town. Nobody’s going there and saying, ‘Come to our town, we’ll make it easy for you,’ or even going out to the wider area and saying—, seeking different shops to say, ‘Come to us.’”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

Even more so than elsewhere, participants from freestanding cities call for government intervention in order to establish business hubs, through mechanisms such as mentorships and facilities sharing, and to attract more private investment to divest the economy from the public sector. Some perceive there to be flaws in their local economy, and bemoan the lack of state aid to local business as much as in other places in the country. They see a lot of potential in themselves, much like those in freestanding towns, and are even more ambitious in what they can achieve due to their size.

“Most of the income generated here is from public sector. You think of all the work, the jobs generated, especially in South-East Wales. We’re totally dependent on government jobs. It’s unsustainable.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“I think one of the main things that we felt would be very helpful is, when a business registers with the council, that the council have a funnel to this group that we’re thinking would be very helpful. We’re calling it just a hub group. It would create more of a community, so that it would then open up dialogue between business owners. They have to actually take the council up on this invitation to be part of this group. So, obviously, the council is quite instrumental in making this happen.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two
Across all types of places, participants say that the local council also has a role to play in building and incubating local business. Many participants suggest that they are best suited to do this by supporting and training people. This ranges from basic training in business and finance for entrepreneurs, to digital upskilling and mentoring in the form of The Prince’s Trust, which serves as a reference point for some. It is clear that participants too often feel that their local council is a passive and helpless spectator as local and locally-owned businesses live and die, and would prefer to see them playing a more active role in incubating and nurturing local businesses.

“We talked about grants and mentorship, the need for both of those to support local businesses.”

**Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two**

“I think if there was some sort of mentor scheme for people who have never opened a business before. I know there’ll be some people who think they’re experts and do whatever.”

**Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One**
2.3 TRANSPORT CONNECTIONS

Transport is a recurring grievance amongst participants and seen to be blunting the economic potential of towns and cities across the UK, as underinvestment restricts both labour and capital from freely accessing regional towns and cities.

For many, the decline of local commerce can be at least partially attributed to expensive and under-provided infrastructure. Costly and awkward town centre parking is off-putting enough on its own to deter would-be spenders from visiting high streets and shopping in their local area. Instead, participants detail how free parking at shopping centres and out of town industrial estates are pulling business away from town centres.

“So how are we supposed to support local businesses whether it’s Manchester city centre, which doesn’t give you free parking until after eight o’clock at night, which is ridiculous? People want to go after work at 6:00. The only other place you’ve got is the Trafford Centre, which is not your local area but it’s free parking.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“A lot of people go to Cwmbran because it’s free parking up there. That’s another thing, you can’t even take your children [into Newport town centre] if you haven’t got that much money now.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Participants propose public transport being more readily available and less expensive, which would encourage them to head into town and make them more likely to spend money in local businesses. Additionally, improving transport infrastructure in more isolated, coastal towns would open up the opportunities for local business and commerce to grow or attract workers.

“I would like to see the dual carriageway extended the whole way down Hastings because I think it would improve the area. It would encourage business to come down here which would have an effect on employment.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“You know if the public transport was cheaper, I’d do that.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One
2.4 CONCLUSIONS

- Local businesses are not seen to be thriving, especially in overshadowed areas, where post-industrial decline is seen to be the root of many troubles an area faces.
- The deterioration of bygone industries has led to a race to the bottom for precarious, low-paid employment that does not adequately replace the community feel that previous trade had.
- The number of retail units contribute to a sense that local business is neglected and no effort is put into encouraging entrepreneurship.
- The odds are against local retail businesses to succeed; declining high streets disincentivise shoppers and lack of business rates relief offered by councils mean that new businesses do not feel invested in.
- Poor connectivity, either in terms of roads, public transport, or high parking, drive consumers away from town centres into the arms of big online brands, supermarkets, or those that tend to occupy large out-of-town retail parks.
- Participants again acknowledge their role in this, and some admit to being avid online shoppers, but they feel as though they have no choice but to go for these cheaper, more convenient shopping options because they cannot afford not to.
- Participants identify, and grapple with, a tension between wanting to develop and modernise with a desire to retain an equilibrium that fundamental change could disrupt.
• Participants also recognise a brain drain, or skills deficit, in their area, where young people may go off to university to never return, tempted by better wages and prospects in London and the South, leaving the area with a dearth of skilled, employable people.
• Participants detailed proposals to reform business rates, potentially a dynamic system related to age and size of business, that could help businesses in their infancy.
• Local councils were not seen to be proactively supporting new local businesses, so participants proposed a new support body, set–up by local councils, to help nurture new local businesses.
• Core areas recognise that big business can have a positive impact locally, namely by employing local people, but also by sharing business best practice and mentoring local businesses
SECTION THREE: IMPROVING WORK AND WAGES

Issues related to jobs, work and wages were prevalent across the locations and throughout both phases with low-income voters drawing particular attention to issues surrounding the living wage, making work pay and zero-hour contracts. Following phase one, it became clear that a priority for low-income voters was training and skills. Therefore, in phase two, participants were asked to present a proposal for two policy ideas which came out strongly in phase one; options for young people who do not decide to go to university and retraining for adults.

3.1 MAKING WORK PAY

One of the major problems which participants describe, throughout both phases of workshops, is the challenge of making sure people have enough money to live. Participants say they are feeling the impact of low wages which makes it very difficult for low-income voters to get by. Participants raise the pressures of a post-financial crash economy and feel the pinch of there being little money to go around.

In particular, low-income voters mention high living costs that do not match wages and a stagnant economy where their wages and standard of living is not felt to have increased for years.

“And a better standard of employment, not just all low paid work which is what we’ve got at the moment.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

Participants describe feeling held back by in-work poverty and a widely held view that work should always pay. Participants feel strongly that employees should be able to have enough money to save and feel the benefits of working in order to incentivise those who are not. In overshadowed towns such as Bolton and Worksop, participants express particularly poignantly this desire for making sure work is rewarded.

“You shouldn’t just be working to break even, you should be working to have something left after you’ve paid your bills, shop, I’m not saying it has to be a fortune. If you can see something left at the end of the week when you’ve paid your bills or whatever, after you’ve worked 40 hours, then you feel good about it, at least you’ve got something there having gone to work for all those hours.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“People are on low-paid work so they're on benefits as well, there's no money to spend because people are low paid.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two
PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Participants positively associate self-sufficiency, pride and knowing the value of money with working and earning a wage. As a result, participants in all types of place say they feel demoralised by the situation and think that they would be better off not working and staying on benefits than living in their current working situation.

“I feel like, for me, being a single mum with two kids, it’s like I’m better off not working... I’ve got all my bills to pay, and I’m actually worse off than what I am currently on full benefits.”

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“I think a lot of people do feel like they’re not getting paid enough so they don’t even want to work.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

For example, when participants were asked to create a worksheet describing the changes they want to see to improve the wealth of their local area, many raised the issue of people not getting paid enough for working. One participant in Bolton suggested businesses should offer extra incentives to work, for example by paying their council tax or contributing to certain bills.

![Worksheet](image)

Bolton participant, phase one, task one.

In overshadowed towns, participants express disappointment with being a lesser neighbour of nearby, more successful areas. They broadly call for more state intervention and guidance to raise living standards. Such ideas include raising the minimum wage, lowering the retirement age to create more
opportunities for young people that were previously held by older citizens, ensuring that businesses are offering generous employment contracts and reviewing town centre alcohol licencing standards. Other participants in overshadowed towns are eager for the minimum wage to become a living wage in order to address the need to increase standards and ensure low-income voters are able to afford basic expenses. Participants call upon businesses who they feel are getting away with capping wages despite the rising living costs.

“It shouldn’t be a minimum wage; it should be a living wage.”
Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Living wages is your right, rather than the burden of employment.”
Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“But you can’t live on minimum wage. Once you’ve paid all your rent, all your bills, everything that comes out, your petrol, once you’ve lived, what have you got left?”
Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

However, some participants express trepidation over an increase in the minimum wage as they fear this will lead to higher costs of living. This is because it is felt businesses will have to increase prices for consumers in order to cover the costs.

“The cost of living goes up. It makes it even worse. You think you’re getting more money but you’re not. You’re getting less.”
Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

3.2 ZERO–HOURS CONTRACTS

Alongside discussions around making work pay, participants describe zero–hours contracts as a problem, with many highlighting the insecurity it brings. Participants who live in overshadowed towns are more likely to discuss zero–hours contracts than those who live in core cities – with the exception of Glasgow.

“I worked on one in the university, a zero–hours and it didn’t suit me because I had a good few kids at a time and we just wanted a proper contract, but you couldn’t get one in whatever and I did that with security as well, zero–hour contract.”
Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“My son’s done zero–hours and, you know, going to work and not being paid for it is a bit tough. So, I mean, he did a month of it, but he said the way he was, you know, it just really deflated him.”
Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

The lack of security is a common thread in the way participants speak about zero–hours contracts. One participant in Glasgow describes their experience of wanting a “proper” contract, particularly in light of having children to support and the instability of having different hours each week with little security. Not knowing how much money you are earning each week is another problem that participants identify with
zero–hours contracts and participants speak of wanting the certainty of a wage and knowing that you will be able to pay the next bill you are due to pay.

This is particularly the case for those with children and a higher cost of living with the need to provide for a family. Many also feel a zero–hours contract may also have a detrimental effect on mental health and wellbeing due to the lack of security and permanence. While for some zero–hour contracts may work well, it appears to be unpopular amongst low–income voters, especially as they look to their future and future of their local economy.

“For adults with children, how can you live on zero–hours when from one week to the next, you don’t know how much you’re going to be getting? You can’t do it… How’s that going to affect a person’s confidence and mental health and stuff?… At the end of the day, if it’s a zero–hour contract, you’ll be worrying one week to the next, ‘How much am I getting this week? How much am I getting next week? Is it worth me working?’”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

As a result of these negative associations, particularly during the political speech writing exercise in phase one, participants strongly advocate in favour of banning zero–hours contracts, using language such as “abolish” and “outlaw”.

“I think abolish zero hours because it doesn't do anybody's morale any good. They need money to go to work and to eat whilst at work.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Full time employment for everyone. No zero–hour contracts and skilled apprenticeship opportunities will come from that no zero hour contracts as well.”

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

Bolton participant, phase one, task two.
3.3 WORKING AND RAISING CHILDREN

Participants across the locations discuss the high cost of childcare as a major problem that limits low-income parent’s ability to increase the wealth of their local area. This issue is frequently mentioned by participants, although particularly top-of-mind for female participants. There is a general agreement that the cost of childcare is a problem for working parents regardless of gender. Words such as “expensive” and “extortionate” are consistently used in discussions about the cost of childcare. In phase one of the research, participants generally mention childcare in relation to changes they would like to see in their area to improve its wealth, with many selecting it as an issue they would like to see change when writing a speech for the radio for a new political party.

This issue leaves parents on lower incomes considering whether or not it is financially worth going back to work as they are unlikely to be able to keep much of the wage they earn.

"With childcare, you’re in a position where, if you’re not earning, say, £20,000 a year, at least, what’s the point in going to work? Because your earnings for the day go on the childcare for that day, and then sometimes the childcare can be more than what you’ve earned... But then, we’re encouraged to have this mentality where we really want to work, but if you’re working for nothing, it, kind of, makes you think, ‘Well, why bother?’"

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

"You see, for me, I love working and I want to go back to work full-time, but there’s literally no point in me going back to work full-time because I wouldn’t have enough money to pay for childcare and to pay for rent and stuff. I wouldn’t get anything."

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One
On the one hand, participants feel that they want to be in work and feel that they are encouraged to do so by society, but on the other, are not rewarded for doing so in the way that work is meant to pay and be a means of supporting a family. Participants also highlight that working often means not spending as much time with their child and so makes returning to work even less appealing.

Moreover, those living in overshadowed towns highlight the lack of diversity of professions and jobs especially when trying to balance a job and family life. Participants describe feeling “stuck” due to the inflexibility of the job market. Having more variation of jobs which are part-time or during school hours are seen as part of the solution to this, and some participants feel that these jobs are becoming less and less available leading to feelings of desperation.

“Finding a job that fits around your homelife, your children, especially if you’re a single mum and you’ve got nobody else to support you, back you up, anything like that, is an absolute nightmare.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

**PROPOSED SOLUTIONS**

Participants in core and freestanding cities propose giving low-income voters more freedom and choice by offering flexible working hours, a variety of childcare options and for more places to become available so that every parent has the option of free childcare if they choose to do so.

“We’d build more facilities to accommodate, so there’d be more options, other than just the childminder itself...It would allow choice of working hours, so if you want to work part-time, full-time or flexibly, you know, and create more employment.”

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“This charity should be campaigning for free childcare because there are not enough free childcare places. Families that want to work half of their money is going out on the childcare costs and it’s crippling families so tying it to community centres. Parents who maybe are not working they can go there and using the buildings to provide free childcare because that would help improve people’s standards of living.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

Ultimately, participants argue this will benefit the wealth of their area as it will increase employment by having more types of childcare provision and diversifying where childcare is provided. However, more than this, it will increase a sense of community by using community centres and public buildings to provide childcare and bring together parents from all walks of life.

Participants in overshadowed towns say they want to give parents choice and options regarding childcare and work. However, many raise the difficulty of building the confidence to return to work due to the lack of training opportunities available for those with children.
“I looked into doing my maths, because I didn't get my NVQ in maths I'm really struggling to find somebody...my mum works, my mother–in–law works and it's really hard to find somebody to look after the baby... the maths course is free, brilliant, love it, but I really struggle looking for somewhere to look after the baby while I'm doing it.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“You lose all your skills and your confidence because your life has revolved around your children and there’s nothing locally to help you with that at all, unless you can pay £50 a day childcare, which for three children each, it's not worth working.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

Other participants suggest removing some of the current limitations to childcare; these include providing more free childcare to those who are in training, ensuring more than 15 hours of childcare is available to those who are able to complete the course or training programmes to help incentivise people who want to retrain, ensuring that the number of children a parent has does not have an impact on the amount of childcare on offer, and making childcare places available from a younger age to help young families who may want to make use of it.

“You get fifteen hours a week [of childcare], but there’s not much you can do in fifteen hours...there needs to be more support for young people, especially with children.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“We thought more free spaces [at a] younger age, and there'd be more job opportunities for parents, and obviously more people able to work because they could afford to send their child to nursery or childcare.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

3.4 UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Participants express concern over the limits of Universal Credit as they do not feel it is properly supporting those who are unable to work and so therefore call upon the government to increase the amount of benefits offered so as to support the most vulnerable in society.

“Better rates of benefits for those who are genuinely unable to work.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

While discussions of Universal Credit do not dominate conversations, it is generally seen in a negative light when raised. Some see Universal Credit as an abandonment of those who are struggling at the bottom, while others feel frustrated that some people may live off benefits when they could work. The former idea is much more common among this group of participants. The overall impression of how Universal Credit is working for low–income voters is that it has resulted in people having less money and feeling less support from the government and the state in general.
“I can live within my Universal Credit budget. I know it’s a struggle, but to me it’s not.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“It’s disgusting, what they expect anyone to live on, especially with Universal Credit.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“It is hard, Universal Credit, I know we’re down £150 a month from what we were before, but like I said, we do everything from scratch.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Beyond just more financial help, those on low incomes suggest solutions related to job centres and public services for those seeking work. These include: making sure that people are being properly supported and considered as an individual; having a continuous point of contact as a work coach to prevent those on low incomes from feeling part of a process-driven system. Higher wages for those working in the job centre is also cited as a solution to help those working there to feel more valued in the work that they do and in turn invest more in those seeking work.

“I just even think higher wages for job centre staff and more training for them in unconscious bias or dealing with difficult situations, dealing with people who don’t speak English as a first language. You hear a lot in the job centre, people who work there are quite short…higher pay for workers there. So, then they can help give the maximum help for people who want to use the services.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Once you’re on benefits, though, they make it really hard for you to come off them, even though they say they don’t…I needed help with certain things and then they’d say it was here and then they’d pass you to this person and pass you to that person.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

Other suggestions are around helping those on benefits to gain skills to help them find work, such as some form of volunteering. This idea is not popular with all participants, however, as some feel that people working for free rather than being helped to find a job is counterproductive. Rewarding people for volunteering or adding to their benefits as a result of community service is one way that participants suggest countering this. That said, soft skills and helping people gain the confidence to apply for jobs or to be able to start something new at whatever age is important to low-income voters.

“We talked about a change in benefits to encourage people to pursue either voluntary or work experience. In order for that, maybe they could have a bonus on their benefits.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“Get us off benefits. Nobody who’s on benefits wants to be on them. They want to go and work, but there is a lot of anxiety about going out and getting a job or going out
and starting a new job in your 30s, 40s, 50s, thinking, ‘How am I going to learn something new at this age?’ There is nothing to put your mind at rest about it.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

3.5 CONCLUSIONS

- Participants across the UK feel the impact of low, stagnant wages, coupled with a high cost of living, resulting in many struggling to make ends meet.
- Participants feel demoralised due to in-work poverty, at odds with the notion that working should be financially worthwhile, generate a sense of pride and promote self-sufficiency.
- Parents are being priced out of going back to work due to high childcare costs, while also suffering from an uncompromising jobs market failing to promote flexible working and good part-time jobs.
- National policies such as implementing a living wage, a universal basic income, and abolishing zero-hours contracts are also discussed as ways of boosting wages that would have a knock-on effect on local economies.
SECTION FOUR: IMPROVING TRAINING AND SKILLS

Throughout phase one, training and skills was a consistent issue that low-income voters want to see improve in their local area. They are seen as fundamental to not only improving the wealth of individuals but also of the local area as a whole. Participants want to keep people in their local area, they want their young people to be given the opportunities to thrive as workers and boost their local economies. However, they also want adults to have the same opportunities to retrain, especially if they left education early or started a family and are now looking to re-enter the workplace.

Because of the prevalence of these issues in phase one, during the deliberative workshop with JRF/UKandEU, it was decided to delve into them further and discuss with participants how they might go about making changes and understand more about where their priorities lie on the issue of training and skills. During phase two, participants were split into two groups and tasked with defending either more opportunities for young people outside of university or retraining for adults as a route to improving the wealth of their area. When asked to vote for one or the other, participants struggled and felt it was important to offer both opportunities for younger residents just starting off and older residents looking for a second chance.

4.1 TRAINING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Participants across locations consider the lack of opportunities for young people in their local area to be a barrier to improving the wealth of people. For many, university is often considered the only option despite it leading to high levels of debt and meaning there are less skilled workers in their local area. Participants want to see young people encouraged to improve their skills and consider alternatives to university. Participants also mention that the education system is not career-focused and presents a barrier to improving the opportunities of their local young people.

In phase one, participants were asked to write a speech for a new political party as if they were on the radio. Many of the speeches included giving young people more opportunities outside of going to university:

Image of a hand-written note:

Our Aims are:

- To encourage school leavers to take up a skilled trade. To set up more apprenticeships and career development.
- To give more opportunities to school leavers that are not going on to higher education.

Dudley participant, phase one, task two.
According to participants, too often opportunities for local education and subsequent careers are amiss. Apprenticeships, formerly of elevated importance, are bemoaned as underpaid and rare. This means that young people are too often leaving town for university, as the only advertised and plausible “valued” route of further education – and too often not returning home afterwards, migrating to university towns and cities.

“For people who are not going to uni, there should be a much more person-centred approach to them. You know, not going to uni is not of less value... You should really engage with them at a school level, immediately, about what your options are and explore them properly so that people feel equally valued. Also, so they feel inspired and motivated about what they do want to do.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“Better training overall, you know, in all different types of professions. I think there’s far too much emphasis put on universities.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

City-based participants are nearly all focussed on developing their city as capable of being a standalone hub for talent and commerce. This means giving the relevant education and opportunities for high-paid jobs outside of London.
"They need to put the funding in while the people are younger and get them trained up instead of them coming out of school having absolutely no skills."

**Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One**

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Participants consistently highlight apprenticeships as a key change they want to see to improve the wealth of people in their local area with many arguing more young people should be encouraged to do an apprenticeship, learn a trade, earn money as they do it and have a guaranteed job at the end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The change you want to see:</th>
<th>Encourage Young People to improve skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How would you make this change? | - Training Sheds & Apprenticeships  
- Youth Centres  
- Transfer of Skills programme  
- Lead Authority/APP champion  
- Young people in work placements/paid experience |
| What would the result of your changes be? | - High rates of employment  
- Increase progressions in community  
- Less people on welfare benefits pay for money to improve Always make awareness by g |

*Dudley participant, phase one, task one.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The change you want to see:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you make this change?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would the result of your changes be?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choose a picture which shows how this change would make you feel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
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**Glasgow participant, phase one, task one.**

**Increase number of apprenticeships**

More apprenticeships is raised across the workshops and are seen to help provide more opportunities for young people and ultimately impact the wealth of people.

“I think the apprenticeships are a really good thing. Yes, even if businesses already just employ people and they kind of learn on the job, so they’re learning but they’re training. Again, it’s just a direct route into something that that person wants to do.”

*Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One*

While overall apprenticeships are seen as a good thing for young people, there is a disparity in thought over how available they are. Older participants seem to think there are very few apprenticeships available and there appears to be a limited knowledge of apprenticeship schemes and policies which have been introduced over the last ten years. For those who have perhaps been out of the skills system, simply more apprenticeships would help to address the skills gap for young people in their local area.

“Now I mean if you can get apprenticeship now, you know, you’ve won the lottery because they’re so few and far between.”

*Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One*

“Training young people, and not just pushing kids into uni, creating more apprenticeships and developing on encouraging people to go more so that route, rather than university”

*Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One*
“For young people it needs to be some work, there needs to be some apprenticeships… now, there isn’t a way into work. You either go to university and take potluck, or you get whatever job is available and work up, and there’s nothing.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

However, younger participants appear to be more aware of apprenticeships being on offer in their local area or perhaps have more of a personalised experience of apprenticeships in family members or for themselves.

“So, there are a lot [of apprenticeships] but it’s not really encouraged these days I don’t think.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“A lot of businesses are taking on apprenticeships so they’re hitting that age group that are between sixteen to nineteen.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“I think there are a lot of apprenticeship schemes at the minute, depending on what you’re wanting to go into.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

In every location in phase one, participants called on local businesses to run more schemes to foster and encourage apprenticeships, nominating strategies such as subsidising funding, and incentivising businesses to take on apprentices by offering levies from local government as acknowledgement, in order to sustain the local economy.

“You don’t get help with apprenticeships anymore with local businesses taking on apprenticeships, they used to do funding, the government where they’d pay local businesses about £1,500 to help you pay for the apprenticeship that you’ve taken on, now they don’t do that. You’ve got to pay to take an apprenticeship on, so you’ve got to pay for their funding. An apprenticeship levy. Stuff like that is harder, that’s why a lot of small businesses are closing down because they’ve not got the help and they can’t afford to keep the businesses open.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think the apprenticeships are a really good thing. Yes, even if businesses already just employ people and they kind of learn on the job, so they’re learning but they’re training. Again, it’s just a direct route into something that that person wants to do, but doesn’t necessarily have to do uni. I think that will open up a lot more opportunity.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Overall, participants propose having more, higher quality and better-paid apprenticeships with better education targeted at young people to show the benefits of an apprenticeship compared to university. Participants say that apprenticeships need to pay higher wages and say there is a danger that they can be exploited by employers to pay young people less money without training them or providing them with the skills they need to learn a trade or progress in their career. As a result, apprenticeships seem
like a less attractive option to young people looking to leave school as there is a concern that they could be worse off financially.

“You can get an apprenticeship in retail, where it pays, like, £7,500 a year, which is below the minimum wage. People use the apprenticeship wage as an excuse to underpay people.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“\text{\em I think it's the younger generation that's struggling because they have taken apprenticeships, where they pay you like zero...They don't pay enough to motivate young kids to work.}”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“You've got to question the value of them. Whether they're not just being used to employ people on a cheap basis and putting them into positions where they haven't really got the education at that point to do the job and they're supposed to absorb it as they go along.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Secure employment

Ensuring that apprenticeships are genuinely training people to do a job and learn as part of a programme or scheme, with enough money to live, is important to participants. However, one participant in Southampton – a freestanding city – highlights that the wage of apprentices depends on the employer. Therefore, minimum standards for apprenticeships to meet or putting pressure on employers to pay their apprentices a good wage is proposed as a way of encouraging young people to do apprenticeships and make them a more attractive option.

“It's not always minimum wage that they're put on. I think that's just the common misconception of apprenticeships, that people go in at a low wage but it's not always the case. That's dependent on the employer.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

The security of having a job at the end of the apprenticeship to give young people an aim and career path is also something that participants feel should be improved in order to make apprenticeships more appealing and worthwhile. Low-income voters say that doing this may help with training if the young person and employer are looking beyond the set time for the apprenticeship. Ultimately, participants feel this will benefit all involved as the employer gains a motivated employee, and the employee can have the security of a well-paid job in their local area.

“In a sense that you need to show, then, what's the end goal?... Stability, I think, is the best way to put it. I think if they don't have that then an apprenticeship won't be worthwhile.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“There are about 100 apprenticeships [at a local university] all in training and they're not guaranteed a job at the end of it.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One
Other initiatives that participants suggest in order to improve the quality of apprenticeships include having mentors for young people so that they can learn and have someone to look up to. Participants propose having an interactive online CV as a way of displaying the transferable skills that the young person has learned while doing the apprenticeship to show future, prospective employers as they look to progress.

**Investing in trades and manufacturing**

Ensuring that apprenticeships are being developed in sectors where there is a shortage of workers or in areas where there will always be a need for those jobs is also something which participants feel should be encouraged. When speaking about apprenticeships, trades are often mentioned, but areas such as healthcare, and ones which would provide young people with practical skills, are also welcomed. In terms of healthcare, in light of some participants’ concerns about the UK labour force being adequately equipped post–Brexit, this is perhaps even more of a priority as they say there may be skills gap if freedom of movement is limited.

“Encourage apprenticeships in healthcare, which I actually did read about not long ago, which the government are actually trying to do now.”

**Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One**

“There are a lot of apprenticeships but not for the joinery, electricians and all that, where there’s a demand for jobs.”

**Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One**

Participants living in **overshadowed** towns are particularly eager to see apprenticeships in their local area which bring jobs and wealth. Within this, the focus is generally on learning a trade that could help the local area. Older participants consider a trade to be important and, in some areas, think about trade and apprenticeships which previously made their area well–known and noteworthy but are less prominent now.

“For apprenticeships and skilled qualifications, how they can grow their staffing pool, and how they can increase their vocational qualification element to better access the use of skilful opportunities, and how they can grow their talent pool so they can benefit Dudley residents as a whole.”

**Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One**

“You can tailor your apprenticeships to what there is in the local area as to what courses they offer to get people into that employment because you can’t get people into employment if there’s no training available to do it... The type of businesses that we need, everything but particularly this area needs trades, skilled workers, higher paid jobs, no more distribution centres.”

**Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two**

**Incorporating local businesses**

Across all locations, participants feel that local businesses – with help and incentives from government – would be best placed to offer apprenticeships to young people in the area; however, the local angle is
particularly strong for those living in towns and is seen as a way to improve the wealth and prosperity of the local area as well as being a way to innovate it.

“The businesses that are already here, the hotels, the theatres, they can create the apprenticeships and the opportunities … and it also creates fresh ideas as well, these new people coming in, they can bring new ideas.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“The companies need to be investing in apprenticeships and trainees, it’s the companies that come into the area that need to be spending the money on the kids that are coming in. Not necessarily the kids but upskilling the workforce that’s there. Currently, at the minute, there’s no investment.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

Although participants are eager for local businesses to take ownership over apprenticeships, given the high cost of doing business and examples such as rising business rates, some understand why some businesses may find it difficult to use resource to train up young people, even if there is a long-term benefit in keeping young workers in the local area. Participants also feel that central government and local councils should be supporting businesses to provide training and incentivising them to ensure the high-quality apprenticeships are available across the UK.

“I think local businesses, if government and councils will help local businesses, I have no doubt local businesses will be more than happy to give back to the community and support that way.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“It has got to be something that’s universal across the country and therefore, it’s got to be central government with input from local government, local councils, because obviously, it’s on their patch. Facilities need to be provided; local funding needs to be in place as well.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Filling the training and skills gaps

In terms of training and skills more widely, some low-income voters see the main challenges to be around awareness of opportunities – citing good examples such as the Open University – and the messaging around schemes and training. However, others feel that there are not enough training programmes for people or ways for people to find out what interests them, feeling that training and skills should be more tailored to individuals.

“Education seems to be one of the issues, where training opportunities and fulfilling people’s potential and futures is one of the issues.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“This is what we said about recognising the individual’s skills, whether they want to change their pathway on it.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two
Having a forum for people to develop their skills to improve the wealth of the local area is a key theme across the workshops. These ideas are sometimes joined up with local and community projects, another priority that participants discuss when thinking about what would improve the lives of people like them. Participants propose offering skills workshops, drop-in learning centres and opportunities to build on skills that people already have or want to develop further. Participants say that using community spaces in this way will bring people together in the area and allow for business sponsorship and financial support from councils. This idea is seen as being for the whole community, including career support for young people to help them decide what they want to do.

“So, we’ve gone for the community centre where we want to put job skills workshops for over twelves.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“Drop in learning centres, which is kind of like a new idea. Rather than just being set to having to go to college at this time and go to doing whatever course you want to do, having it where you can just drop in when you’ve got the time.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

Skills around entrepreneurship and running or setting up a business – marketing, finances and digital skills – are also key things that low-income voters would like to see provided in their local area to improve the wealth of people and encourage local businesses. This is a theme that emerges across the UK and may be connected to wanting greater opportunities for people to stay in their area or the sense of being proud of their area and wanting better support for their local economy.

“The best thing I ever did was I took a business course. I knew my trade, as far as taking photographs etc. was concerned, but I didn’t know how to run a business and that was essential.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think equally a lot of the small businesses need to be given some sort of free training on marketing, on how to get online. I think that should be there for them.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

As with apprenticeships, localised training schemes and ensuring that there are sufficient skills in the local area to ensure that people want to continue to live there are important to low-income voters, particularly given that some describe their local area as not being the industrial hub of skills and enterprise that it once was. Participants would like more of a focus on developing local skills through businesses in the area but in some ways want this to be coordinated and funded by government.

“So, one of the things that would be required is a localised training scheme to keep people in the area.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“We need to, basically, better regulate the economic market so that there’s less emphasis on corporate investment and more focus on UK local industry and skills development.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One
Investment and ensuring that the right types of businesses are available in the local area to provide their employees with the skills they need to do well in life and keep people in the area is seen as a priority particularly in overshadowed towns such as Worksop. Government prioritisation of regional growth and regeneration is seen as key to overcoming this challenge.

“I think it needs more businesses that are skilled work because the trouble is with Worksop is that it's all low skilled work which is why it's low paid and then it's just a spiral so we need businesses that bring in skilled work.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

4.1 RETRAINING FOR ADULTS

Low-income voters say lack of flexibility for adults to retrain is an obstacle to improving the wealth of their local area. When asked whether retraining adults or opportunities for young people is more important, while some participants veer towards children, others do not see it as an either/or choice and say that there should be opportunities available for everyone regardless of age and that those who wish to should be given a second chance to encourage social mobility and better their local economy.

“Why should apprenticeships only be aimed around young kids? Why not aim them at adults that want to go back in work, that want to start again?”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

In some ways the desire for retraining adults is similar to that of apprenticeships and training and skills for young people, namely, being able to earn a decent wage. However, some key differences emerge, primarily around flexibility and ensuring a resilient workforce with training for adults who are less confident in their use of technology.

When perhaps already in work or with caring responsibilities that make retraining difficult or unfeasible, participants recognise that retraining for adults needs to cater to people’s different needs and schedules, as this level of flexibility they say is currently not available.

“Our approach just in training and education should be diverse. So, it should be, different approaches for different people. I think that’s what we’re missing in our society.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“We’ve put, so, again, training at times that suit adults with children or other commitments, like night courses, day courses, whatever, actually speak to and find out, because everyone’s got different hours.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

As a result, suggestions for retraining adults and opening up opportunities for this group often link in some way with participants thinking about more diverse options beyond formal or entirely structured training courses.
PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Networking

Ideas connected to networking are particularly popular in cities, giving adults the opportunity to find out about other options and ensuring that this benefits the local area by including businesses that are facilitated by local councils. One idea from Southampton, a freestanding city, is to have a careers fair for adults with businesses and seminars about what there is available for them, and hearing the experiences of people who are already doing those jobs. Having these events regularly and at a variety of times is also suggested as a way to ensure that it provides flexibility and is convenient for adults at different stages of life.

“You can talk to other people who are on a similar sort of thought train to you, because I can imagine it's quite a lonely place sometimes when you’re thinking about moving job, if you’re not happy in a certain job. You sort of just have that one–two hour session a month, it’s mandatory for the businesses, it’s not mandatory for the adults, but you’re there because you want to be there. You’re there because you want to retrain.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

Flexibility

In Leeds, a core city, a similar suggestion around flexibility in retraining emerges in the form of taster sessions so that people who are perhaps nervous or slightly daunted about retraining as an adult or who do not want to commit to a longer course can learn skills and try before they commit.

“I like adult taster sessions maybe at the library, colleges, community centres because then, at least, people are able to go in and try it for themselves.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Ensuring that adults are able to retrain and upskill within the high cost of living that participants describe is also a key aspect to retraining adults, with participants suggesting free training, incentives for those made redundant, or the option to pay back the cost over a period of time while earning, as potential solutions to help those who want to retrain.

“More opportunities for adults to go and learn and develop their skills for free, rather than having to pay stupid university fees, because when you get to an adult, you want to go back and learn sometimes.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Like a student loan type of thing so there’s no upfront cost to anyone. I think that’s a really good idea.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“Financial help to retrain if redundant and advertise what’s available.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two
In Worksop, an overshadowed town, one participant says EU funding provides free training for those in the area, which has attracted people to the area by giving people the opportunities to learn something new. In light of the UK leaving the EU, deprived areas say they fear they may see reduced EU regional funding.

“My mum worked on a project where they offered free training, they got money from the EU to offer free training for this company, so this company didn’t have to pay to do any training so that was their incentive to come to Worksop because they got free training compared to anywhere else in the country.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

**Digital and IT skills**

Something which numerous participants mention is the need for adults to have more digital and IT skills. This is seen in the context both of needing these skills increasingly as part of jobs as well as potential of technology to change the jobs landscape and the need for people to retrain because of redundancies. This area specifically differs from training and skills for young people where participants feel they have missed out on learning these skills and feel that young people have more opportunities than them because of their digital skills.

“A lot of the technology’s evolving, changing, so whatever degree a person would have had is obsolete after two years because of forever changing technology.”

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“Young people have more technology available, so they can create opportunities for themselves. There are an awful lot of people who are not used to the technology, who don’t have access to the technology, so then they can’t create things.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Numerous participants say they would benefit from training in this area as it currently holds them back and knocks their confidence. As technology has advanced since many participants were trained, low-income voters feel the pressures of finding a job within an unsettling and changing workforce and are therefore calling for adapted training to help adults who want to return to work or retrain.

“Maybe if there were centres out there where people can go to learn skills that perhaps weren’t around when they were young.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

### 4.2 CONCLUSIONS

- A skills deficit in local areas, particularly those that have suffered industrial decline, results in a lack of new business development and an uncompetitive jobs market.
- Participants think that a higher-quality apprenticeship scheme in the UK would drastically benefit local areas, by upskilling young people, training them in a sector which is required locally, and keeping them in the area – as opposed to losing them to a university town or larger city with better prospects.
• Participants think similarly about retraining adults; more should be done to encourage and incentivise time-poor and cash-strapped adults to retrain in sectors which are desperately needed in the local area, sectors which may have a dearth of skilled employees in a post-Brexit UK.

• Networking and entrepreneurship training were also proposed as ways to bridge promote business growth locally, but these tend to be exclusive to core and freestanding cities.

• A greater focus on digital and IT skills are key, as participants often felt that they lack these skills in order to compete with a younger person in a technologically-advancing jobs market. However, they also cite barriers to taking up any future such schemes, including lack of money, and poor availability, so would need them to be free or very low-cost and would need them to be offered at various times of day.
SECTION FIVE: IMPROVING COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Beyond how the local area makes participants feel and the sense of place that they associate with their local area, low-income voters call for improvements to bring benefits to their communities. During phase one of the workshops, participants were asked what they would like to see change in order to improve the wealth of people like them, how they would go about making this change, who it would benefit, and how the change would make them feel. Many participants bring forward a number of solutions that seek to tackle multiple cross-cutting social and environmental challenges that they notice in their community.

As apparent from section one, low-income voters across the UK are discontent with the current state of their local high streets and town centres. As a result, following the deliberative workshop between phases, improving the look of your local area was included as one of four key priorities to delve deeper into and task participants with arguing for and against this proposal. However, beyond the aesthetic, participants also raise crime and safety and high levels of anti-social behaviour as eroding their sense of community. Low-income voters want to see investment in activities and leisure centres as well as more general community engagement.

5.1 ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND CRIME

Low-income voters from very deprived areas like Bolton, Dudley, Hastings, Worksop and Newport all express feeling unsafe walking in their town centre. They are fearful of anti-social behaviour, knife crime, burglaries, petty theft, muggings, drug abuse and “spice heads” as well as poor lighting and transport connections at night-time in some areas. Furthermore, across all locations, participants report rising numbers of homeless people on the streets of their town centres and associate homelessness with similar concerns about safety in their high street.

“People with drugs and needles and urine and everything. Why aren’t the police on the streets?”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One
These safety challenges for their local areas are felt particularly strongly among those with a concern for their more vulnerable loved ones; for children playing in the streets and older people not leaving their homes due to fear. Low-income parents compare this experience with that of their childhood in which they were able to roam more freely. These participants attribute this change to an increase in abusive people on the streets, substance abuse, anti-social behaviour, “teenage boys congregating on their bikes”, as well as ex-convicts.

“People don’t want to use the local high street in particular, local businesses, because it’s not safe and it’s not a nice environment. It’s full of people that you wouldn’t want your children interacting with... The policing needs to sort it out because you need to sort the environment out if you want people to go in there to start with.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“I only have to go on Facebook, my social media every day and there is something happening in this town that frightens the life out of me, now I have a three-year-old daughter. There is someone that is being knifed, there is somebody that has been punched in the face on a Friday night. There is someone in broad daylight, I feel, like, literally every day, you know, this knife attack this, gun attack that, rape there.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Also you know when we go on about the welfare of our children and their safety and things like that I think it doesn’t help when you know paedophiles have come out of
prison and they’re put in your area regardless to whether they’re being watched and all but that is a big thing when you know.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Safety and tackling crime

Low-income voters raise a few solutions to address safety challenges in the local area and give “freedom” back to the community. These are predominantly based on an increased presence of the police, local community wardens and CCTV cameras to act as a deterrent for anti-social behaviour and street crime. Participants report visible declines in police presence on the streets, on the high street and in their neighbourhoods and police station closures. Furthermore, participants in Dudley and Glasgow suggest turning on streetlights at night in some areas to contribute to better safety when walking at night and to discourage drug dealing.

Middlesbrough participant, phase one, task one.

“So, we really, really do need more police protection and Neighbourhood Watch. People would feel more secure and safe in the environment.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“If you have more police presence on the streets, make the communities feel safer.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

For participants living in overshadowed towns in the Midlands and North of England, closures of police stations and lack of investment in policing is noted, and participants perceive this as another example of being forgotten about and abandoned as a local economy.
“A lot of crime and we know the police are not responding because they can’t, they’re either understaffed or they write it off, it’s not important enough.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Going back to the point we said before about the police stations keep closing, it’s frightening to see how far they might go with the cuts and what public services are going to be suffering, because it just seems to be constant.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“We are going to reinvest in the things that have been taken away from us in public services, for example, the police.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

For others, in perhaps more invested areas like Southampton and Glasgow, participants call for more community and individual involvement in keeping their streets safe. Some participants advocate for apprenticeship schemes to get young people into the police force, while others want the communities to have more of a voice in how the local area is policed, and others make the link between reducing unemployment leading to a reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime related issues.

“I do feel that coming back to policing, the community should be more involved in how it’s run.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“I think it would help basically everyone because, as I say there’s less crime because there are less people unemployed.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

Notably, participants do not focus on root causes as a direct solution to why criminals and drug addicts are on the street in the first place. However, this collective way of thinking emerges when talking about “anti-social youths” and the homeless, as they discuss ways to “get them off the street” and integrate them back into society, into paid jobs, into apprenticeships, education or volunteering roles (discussed in section five), as well as providing council housing or hostels for the homeless.

“Should be up to the council and local businesses to work towards maybe giving them an incentive to move on, or to find something for them, maybe even an occupation and have somewhere for them to go, so they’ve not actually got all their rubbish all over the place.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase One

Helping the homeless

Low-income voters living in Bolton and Leeds discuss the need to care for homeless people, giving them “love and affection” and acting more preventatively to ensure people do not end up in the situation where they are homeless – citing schemes in Finland where it “end[s] up costing the local economy less” to give them homes first. Another participant complains about the lack of action among voluntary organisations to get prostitutes off the street, citing schemes that support them in their job, providing health checks, food and water, without actually helping them into different jobs. Other participants in Bolton want to see homeless people supported through counselling and the community. This reflects an
awareness of the need for central government to enact long-lasting systemic change when it comes to addressing homelessness and prostitution, rather than solely local government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The change you want to see:</th>
<th>Homeless off the street</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you make this change?</td>
<td>Using provision of houses, homes, accessible for homeless people to use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would the result of your changes be?</td>
<td>Great support to the homeless, using communities, giving money, making the homeless feel important. Helping them get back into jobs and not homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose a picture which shows how this change would make you feel</td>
<td>![Image 1]  ![Image 2]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
<td>Community, homeless, homeless people</td>
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</tbody>
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Bolton participant, phase one, task one.

“There is a lot of homelessness. It starts off at a young age, where they have been treated bad by people... Instead of showing love and happiness and harmony by helping them to find jobs, instead, they kick them or they spit on them or they say, ‘Do you need money for drugs and alcohol?’ I think this type of behaviour can lead to self-destruction. In the UK itself, it’s a big thing where people are committing suicide, whether it’s men and women, in different forms.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

5.2 LITTER AND POLLUTION

Low-income voters raise concerns about litter on the streets, fly-tipping of furniture, dog fouling, vandalism, graffiti and potholes contributing to a “dirty”, “unclean” and “worn-down” feeling about their local areas. These concerns are most prevalent in overshadowed and freestanding towns and cities, as well as locations based in the North rather than the South. Some participants also recognise the waste challenges that the UK faces and comment on the lack of recycling provision or council action in their local area. Others mention a “throwaway society” and the need to change behaviours to encourage more individual action for recycling.

“Litter, regular street cleaning is something else I’d like, because there are people fly-tipping at the top of the street, because it’s a grassy area and people are just putting bags of rubbish up there. I’ve spoken to the council, sent emails, took [sic] photographs, everything, it’s fallen on deaf ears.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One
Bolton participant, phase one, task one.

In Bolton, Newport, Southampton and Leeds, participants also report hazardous items (broken glass bottles and needles) on the streets and in parks. They perceive little effort made to clean it up and express concerns about the safety risk it poses to children playing in the same areas. Participants across all locations raise problems with traffic in their area, but only those from the core or freestanding cities such as Glasgow, Leeds and Southampton link this with concerns about air pollution from the congested roads.

“I’m coming into town quite frequently for work...I don’t have connections into town that are affordable that fit with my lifestyle, yet I feel conflicted because we live in an area with some of the worst air pollution in the UK. The Clean Air Act and I don’t have a railway connection. Why are we not incentivising people out of their cars? My journey is a joke.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase One

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Clean-up local areas

The need to clean up the local area is flagged repeatedly among low-income voters as a pressing issue that is relevant to their day-to-day lives.

“Clean-up centres where everybody meets up, just local people will clean the beach or clean the streets or do these things. We’re buying more locally, so we’re putting more money into the local community. If that continues, it will be a domino effect on the surroundings.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One
Educating the community

Some participants also offer green solutions for sorting out recyclable waste include educating young people about recycling and the environment in schools, offering workshops for people of all ages to learn about upcycling and DIY, running reward schemes for recycling as well as banning plastics and non-biodegradable materials. Other solutions for reducing air pollution and green-house gas emissions include incentivising greener cars, cycling and public transport, building new homes - and retrofitting existing ones - with free solar panels and eco-friendly heating systems, as well as supporting local sustainable farming to reduce the transportation of fruit and vegetables.

"Start with the children. Get the children to clear up in schools, behind themselves, rather than the caretaker comes in and does it all for them. So, stopping that idea of somebody coming in to clear up behind you."

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

"We’ve got a subway system that runs in a circle. If you go to London or Paris, they’re far more efficient...It’s going to cause less car pollution; more people would use it if it was better or if it was going to help the environment...I think a congestion charge is a good idea to reduce the air pollution. I personally think that should be extended to the whole of Glasgow as well."

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

Notably, participants in Southampton are particularly cognisant of environmental commitments that should be made. However, despite a lot of action, these disparate hubs of action are not being translated into the feeling that action is being taken and that there is a community effort, even if a lot is already happening. It is apparent that there is still a need to communicate the existing initiatives in Southampton to the wider community.
In phase two, participants were asked to debate support for businesses or improving the look of the local area. Low-income voters struggle to identify which should be prioritised; supporting local businesses to provide the impetus for the high street to be cleaned up and aesthetically invested in, or whether to invest in the aesthetics so as to appeal to businesses and bring them to the area. Unprompted, participants lean towards dealing with the aesthetic first and improving the high street so as to make it profitable for businesses to move in but many struggled to decide. Regardless, participants are in full agreement that there is a direct relationship between the two and recognise a need for change in both areas.

5.3 PUBLIC SPACES

Participants across the UK raise issues around having spaces to relax and get out of the house, for many this means sprucing up the town centres and improving their local green spaces. They cite a lack of access to a range of quality parks, woodland and green spaces in residential areas. Participants also raise degradation of their existing public green spaces – identifying disrepair, glass bottles, rubbish and broken playgrounds.

“*The local council should help, get more cleaners in, make it [shopfronts] look more aesthetically pleasing. We think there should be more benches and meeting places, more green spaces in the high street…we think maybe a bit of the cultural art side of the city, the universities, especially Southampton University where they have got quite a good art–, should work more closely with the local council to maybe have more sculptures in the middle of the high street. Make it look prettier, maybe have hanging baskets up, maybe have more artwork.*”

*Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase One*

In Bolton, participants make comparisons between the brick-heavy terraced residential streets with the tree-lined streets of Didsbury in South Manchester and Prestwich in North Manchester (where two participants live). They also refer to the “gorgeous” restaurants, parks and cafes that have sprung up in this area, creating a community presence there where people relax and spend their money. However, some participants are wary of the demands for building affordable housing and the conflict with protecting greenbelts around towns and cities, which some argue should be preserved for outdoor spaces for families to enjoy and for the protection of natural habitats.

“*Unless the government allows release of green belt, this gentlemen wants more trees, he wants more greenery, what are you going to do if you get to the point where the society says we haven’t got enough room for all the people living in this country unless we take some of this greenery…*”

*Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One*

In Dudley, Hastings and Leeds, participants recognise their great access to spaces for leisure – either out of town country parks (Dudley and Hastings) or inner–city green spaces (Leeds). Despite this, participants still express concerns about the development of the greenbelt and existing green areas for shopping centres, supermarkets and sports facilities.

“*…improving the mental well–being of residents within the Dudley area, so more sports initiatives and playing fields within the district, so areas where there’s a lot of greenery and scenery, do not sell them off to businesses, allow them more sports*
activities, like, more playing initiatives like football sessions or cricket coaching sessions.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Improving green spaces

Participants across locations come together to provide a range of low-cost ideas for improving the green spaces in their local areas. For example, ensuring communal parks and flowerbeds are well-kept, maintained and protected from urban development; planting trees on residential streets and in town centres; as well as creating outdoor gyms in parks for people to use who are on low incomes. Ultimately, they feel this will improve the wealth of their local area by keeping people who already live there but also bring in new people who will spend money in their shops and bring investment to their areas.

Bolton participant, phase one, task one.

“I think they ought to open more allotments for people to be able to use, and to teach the young how to grow all vegetables and make self-sustainable families.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“A lot more colourful, maybe have more hanging baskets, more greener spaces, maybe more trees or bigger planters, just to make it look a little bit prettier, like Chester and Winchester.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

Participants describe how these changes would act as a vehicle for fostering community spirit; improve physical and mental health; promote space for better quality of life; encourage people of all ages out onto streets and parks as well as inspire creativity and tourism.
“Planting more edible plants in public spaces to help feed homeless and poor families, as organic fruits and vegetables are expensive, and that could be a more ecological environment, promoting more bees and more things like that.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

In Hastings, participants talk about a scheme called Green Way (an established walking route through the town and along the coast) and participants raise ideas for community activities that build on this, such as habitat reconstruction, outdoor–based classes for children and edible foraging workshops.

5.4 ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Low–income voters living in deprived areas with families cite rising challenges for finding activities that are low–cost and easily accessible by public transport. They describe situations where they are forced to travel to other neighbouring locations to find facilities, situations where councils have been forced to close swimming pools and leisure centres, high costs associated with family day trips such as going to the cinema, leisure centres that used to be full of classes and people but are no longer accessible for those on low incomes, and a lack of activities for people of all ages. Specific examples of what is considered as unaffordable include paying £5 an hour for football pitches or £8 to rent a badminton court for 1 hour.

“We said that we would make this change by having a lower cost for gyms or football pitches, maybe some more gyms, more pitches, basketball courts, etc., put in place, but they would be free to use as well, because there’s no point in them getting put in place and then it costs a fortune to use them.”

Female, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“Children’s centre it was for me because most of the children’s centres closed due to budget cuts, so, like, new mums struggling to do things with children during this.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Participants across the UK consistently report challenges regarding the waning community spirit of their local areas because of a perceived lack of activities for young people. This includes a lack of youth clubs, community centres, out–of–school activities, affordable access to sports facilities and leisure centres as well as libraries. They cite community centres and leisure centres as being “underfunded” or “disappearing” where the price has been passed on to the consumer instead of being properly funded by the council.

“More resources for younger people, because they’ve got nowhere to go…They’ve got nothing, you need some type of hub where they can go, learn skills, life skills such as, maybe, decorating or how to maintain a car, they could put it to use.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“[Young people] can’t go to the leisure centres because it costs too much for them to use, except for free swimming in the summer, so it’s like the whole facilities are not open. It’s against the young people really. Cuts and things.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase Two
While younger participants tend to solely focus on the lack of activities and the inaccessibility of them due to rising costs, a narrative also exists among older participants where they perceive young people to not engage with existing activities. They consider young people to be constantly on phones or playing computer games. Older participants compare this with their recollection of the “old days” when children would freely play outdoors all day, playing hopscotch, skipping, riding bikes, and playing games outside. Older participants associate this shift in behaviour among young people with an increase in anti-social behaviour and knife crime, and a lack of respect for others and their elders. However, some are wary that banning or restricting their children’s usage of technology may hinder their future job opportunities if they grow up to be less technologically savvy than their peers. Notably, some participants discuss the need for providing opportunities, apprenticeships and jobs for young people; explored in more detail in section four.

Dudley participant, phase one, task one.

“Sort the kids out, stop them being bored, then the crime might be stopped. They’ll grow up to respect their area by then.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Probably when I was younger, there were, like, youth clubs and more places for younger children to go. Like, not just hanging about down on the streets or parks. The kids of today don’t go out much, because they’re either in playing on the PlayStation, whatever they want to do, and it’s not safe. Parents don’t feel it’s safe anymore letting them out.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Notably, while some are fearful of “youths on the street”, the majority are concerned for the future of young people and the inability for them to play outdoors because they feel like young people don’t feel safe anymore. Participants also express concerns about the mental health of young people and the negative impact of social media and technology, as well as physical health concerns about rising levels of obesity.
“You’ve also got kids being told that they’re obese and maybe a six-year-old being told they’re obese can be scarred for life. It can lead to other issues later on.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Obesity is the fastest growing thing, it’s going to bankrupt the National Health Service, it’s only beaten by the mental health situation. Obesity is a thing which we could all do something about and that’s where education needs to be implemented.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Low-income voters raise a variety of solutions to solve the problems facing him lack of provision of activities for families and young people, favouring solutions that are affordable and easy to access for the individual and invest in the young people today.

Improving sports and leisure facilities is one solution that participants find a great deal of common ground and identify with. This includes re-opening closed council-run swimming pools, leisure centres and libraries; reducing the prices of hiring sports facilities; making outdoor football pitches and tennis courts free to use at any time; and free access to leisure centres for children.

Furthermore, low-income voters suggest boosting community involvement as a means for tackling the challenges facing families, young people and older people. These include providing more youth groups such as Neighbourhood Wardens, Girl Guides or Brownies, providing volunteering opportunities among offenders in the prison system who can offer a range of skills, collaborating between local charities, religious groups and emergency services. Some participants also recognise that volunteers need to be properly incentivised and rewarded for the work that they do in the community to ensure that it is not an unsustainable system. This reflects a broad attitude towards building better community spirit and uniting across society for a common goal.

5.5 RECONNECTING OLDER PEOPLE

Across majority of locations, older participants express a desire to leave something behind in their local area for the future generations and lots of the improvements they want to see made have an emphasis upon benefiting the younger generation in their areas. Significantly, in phase one during the political speeches task, many groups start off with ways in which their political party should focus upon job opportunities for young people and boost the housing economy for the benefit of young people wanting to get onto the property ladder.

“So, we thought we’d start off with the next generation, so some of us in here have kids. It’s important that we vote for something that’s going to be useful to them. So, our party, we’re going to invest in education, we’re going to give these kids some apprenticeship opportunities, a chance for them to get some learning done, some focus in their lives and to get some money in their pockets.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One
"More housing opportunities…if they can offer different initiatives, different schemes, so the younger generation can get onto the property ladder and they can benefit from that, so they see a future."

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

However, the groups also identify divisions between the older and younger generations. Technology is seen as having a negative effect on young people and makes older people feel isolated. Older participants describe feeling left behind by a fast-moving way of life, limiting their capacity to do things.

"With their own personal things like poll tax and gas and electric, they don’t know how to get cheap electric, cheap gas, they don’t know how to do it, and there’s nobody to help them… No, you’ve got to find a five-year-old to show you."

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

"I think it’s the older generation who don’t have a clue. They’re always asking me how to do stuff on the internet and that, they don’t have a clue."

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

"We’re living in a digital age now and I really do restrict my children how much screen time they have, but then…if I restrict them too much how are they going to get those jobs in the future when they’re going to need to have all of that? I’m quite scared for the next generation."

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

Although this feeling of being left behind is not exclusive to any type of area, significantly, the overshadowed towns express this feeling translating into further isolation for the older generation as there is no support or provision to become more familiar with technology and integrate into the community. They feel unsupported as society changes and fear the kind of life they will lead when they are elderly and struggle to leave the house.

"I mean, with their own personal things like poll tax and gas and electric, they don’t know how to get cheap electric, cheap gas, they don’t know how to do it, and there’s nobody to help them."

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

"I’ve got a relative at the moment, my grandad, he’s isolated, and apart from going in a home, there’s no other alternative, there’s no community."

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

Participants across the UK not only recognise a need to “get kids off the street”, but also a need to encourage older people out of their homes. They report feelings of isolation and loneliness among older people as well as the need to bridge the generational divide, properly care for older people as a society to ensure they can live fulfilled lives and support those who are living on their own to help with general household chores and maintenance.
PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

This division between the older and younger generations was prevalent in phase one and so was incorporated into the skills and training section that was tested in phase two (apprenticeships for young versus re-training opportunities for older, as discussed in section four). However, many participants in phase two want policies which will impact both and extend to all generations rather than a bias or preference. For older generations, the lack of computer literacy knocks confidence in seeking and securing work. And for all generations, economic stability is of utmost importance to being able to thrive as an individual in getting a job, and also as a wider community.

“But I put focus on helping all generations to be financially stable and settled because I think for anyone to be able to fully achieve what they want to achieve or be able to do anything, they’ve got to have that sense of being safe and being settled.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“...my confidence has gone down and I can work with computers but not fully, I don’t feel I’ve got the confidence to do it and when I do employment, when I am an event manager or a team leader people are like, ‘Yes but you could get a job,’ but I don’t feel like I can because I haven’t got that computer type of skill that I feel I’ve absolutely got it, like Excel.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The change you want to see:</th>
<th>Overall cleanliness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you make this change?</td>
<td>More pick up for the rubbish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drives to get community to get involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People who are offenders to get them to do community work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| What would the result of your changes be? | Educate people/give training have a skill. Young and old. Participate. To make people culpable for their action. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choose a picture which shows how this change would make you feel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The community we live in. The Society is whole. Our environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who would it help?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The community we live in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Society is whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glasgow participant, phase one, task one.

Other ideas that a minority of participants raise include providing more events such as music and arts festivals, as well as daytime events, free creative workshops for families as well as events in old people’s homes. Solutions for supporting those with children include support networks for single parents such as breakfast clubs and after school clubs as well as pop-up children’s activities in the town centre such as splash parks, sandpits or playgrounds.
“I would love to have more hubs…we really don’t have a community place. So, it would cover things like homelessness. So, there will be a café that would be subsidised. There would be a place where after school, kids to hang out. It would be a local hub that would support everybody…we’d reignite the idea of community, because we talk about community, but one of the reasons we’re in the situation that we’re in with Brexit and everything, is because we’ve come detached from everybody, and we live in a society where we’re wearing our headphones…we wouldn’t need as much police and we wouldn’t need as much attention on mental health or homelessness, because we’d be supporting our neighbours.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“Youth clubs where they teach the young kids DIY, cooking, all the skills that a lot of parents aren’t teaching their kids today.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Funding for the elderly to stay independent in their own homes… It’s more cost-effective that having them in the care homes. If we had community gardening, house maintenance and house visits, it would eventually save the government money on care homes and improve the wellbeing of the elderly and it would benefit the community and the government long-term.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

In terms of who should fund these solutions, the emphasis is placed on devolving more money from central government to local councils to allow them to keep centres open and ensure services are run to a good affordable standard. Furthermore, low-income voters urge councils to take a lead in improving local services and ensuring they don’t diminish further in the future.
“The councils should up their game and say, ‘We’ll do it properly,’ and do it properly, they should be more accountable.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“Council taxes are all going up, but facilities are getting less and less and less.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

In Dudley, younger participants focus on ideas to encourage community spirit through sport. One idea that receives significant support from others is a sports ground that represents Dudley Town Football Club, offering training and opportunities for children in Dudley, instead of forcing them to nearby areas such as Willenhall, as well as a multi-purpose space for other sports (e.g. cricket), car boot sales and family events. It would also provide cheap tickets to go and see the teams play if you can’t afford to go to the bigger teams in the surrounding area.

“If you can’t afford a ticket to go and watch Wolverhampton, West Brom, Aston Villa, you can pay a couple of quid and go and watch the local men’s team there. Jobs for local people, so sports coaches, physios, first aiders, people working behind the bar, ticket managers, referees, different stuff like that. Education as well, obviously, which was the academy…you can go and visit, or as an attraction, people could come to Dudley town and say, ‘Oh, let’s go and watch the footie.’”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The change you want to see:</th>
<th>Dudley Town F.C.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you make this change?</td>
<td>Sports ground in Dudley area. \nWho can games as Dudley Town F.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would the result of your changes be?</td>
<td>Professional club \nJob for local people \nEducation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose a picture which shows how this change would make you feel</td>
<td>![Green grass field]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
<td>Everyone in local area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.6 CONCLUSIONS

- Participants across the UK are discontent with high streets and town centres, but recognise the need to assess the role of the high street in a modern town or city: whether it should revert to its traditional state or be upgraded in line with modern consumer habits.
- Anti-social behaviour is an issue in **overshadowed** and some **freestanding** areas, and participants express a sense of fear towards using their town centres. They believe that anti-social behaviour erodes at the freedom local people once felt in their home town or city.
- Litter, pollution and a general unsavoury aesthetic contribute to a negative feeling towards town centres generally, although more prevalent in the North.
- A lack of access to quality green spaces reduces any pride participants feel towards their town centres, and even those with green spaces complain that they are degraded.
- Participants are being priced out of local activities and leisure centres, and council-run facilities have closed down. This is seen to hit young people and the poorest the hardest, and it further entrenches a disconnect of community.
- Almost all participants bemoan the high street not feeling like it once did, with a desire for independent shops to return, from the traditional butchers, bakers and greengrocers, to more modern boutique clothing outlets, quaint coffee shops and family-run restaurants.
- A decline in markets, fêtes and stalls showcasing local produce and products contributes to a sense of longing for nostalgia, but participants emphasise what they really miss is the thriving atmosphere these bygone events created.
- Participants in **overshadowed** areas feel that they face no choice but to head to larger, nearby towns and cities to do their shopping, but equally appreciate that they are contributing to their own area being more run-down.
- Repurposing empty units is seen as important, and ideas for what they could be used for, even if temporary and not related to retail, would be seen as an effort to make the town centre more attractive.
- Participants want bigger businesses to be proactive rather than an enemy of the high street, offering community-led schemes to help revitalise town centres.
- Universally, participants agree that taxing larger businesses would help to give local economies a boost, injecting a sense of pride and community cohesion that simmers beneath the surface but needs encouragement to come to the fore.
- Participants agree there is a direct relationship between cleaning up the high street to attract local business, or incentivising local business to come to the high street in the hope that it will lead to further regeneration. Local efforts to present a more aesthetically pleasing town centre could generate a greater sense of community spirit.
- Green space is seen as important to act as a vehicle for fostering a sense of community, improving physical and mental health, promoting a better quality of life and inspiring creativity and tourism.
SECTION SIX: CONFIDENCE IN FUTURE PROSPECTS

Low-income voters say they face various issues in a post-Brexit UK around investment, training, jobs and a firm feeling that they are ignored by a London or Southern-centric government. While participants had creative and innovative ideas to addressing these problems, when asked how likely it is that these changes will be made over the next five years, participants were very pessimistic. Confidence and trust have been eroded for low-income participants and majority feel doubtful that they would be prioritised or valued in future decisions.

6.1 EXPECTATIONS AND AGENCY FOR CHANGE

Ambitions and expectations for improving the local area overall are largely low, with those in Northern overshadowed towns in both phases particularly struggling to identify solutions to improving their local area. Feelings of discouragement and disillusionment with their local areas are at the forefront, and participants express deep frustration with how long their struggles have been allowed to go on.

“Certain areas are very deprived...they’d need a lot of money spending in them.”
Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“That we will be safe, and we will be looked after like we should be, and not forgotten about.”
Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

However, in some locations participants positively identify with their local area and the sense of community they feel living in it. Core cities and overshadowed towns in the South East recognise areas for opportunity and change in their local area and feel supported by the organisational structures that are in place which make it an enjoyable place to live.

“So, it is going nicely, slowly but it is not a constant direction to what we want it to be...there is lots of potential. The infrastructure’s brilliant in the town.”
Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

In various deprived locations, the perception of an unequal and rigged economy that only benefits the wealthiest and means the poorer families continue to get poorer is highlighted. Participants say that they have very little confidence in the distribution of wealth in the UK and very little assurance that low-income voters will benefit from improvements. In smaller, overshadowed towns such as Dudley, Hastings and Bolton, participants say the current system feels broken.

“It’s the rich getting richer, the poor getting poorer, isn’t it, that’s how it works.”
Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“So, we need to re-look at the systems we currently have, because they’re fundamentally broken.”
Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One
While investment is desperately desired in some overshadowed towns, their own struggles and hardships to make ends meet comes across powerfully. “Austerity” is mentioned throughout the locations but the concept, and the impact it has on low-income voters, is discussed predominantly in overshadowed towns (Hastings, Worksop and Bolton have the highest number of verbatim mentions of austerity). In Newport, a participant described the sacrifices they had to make in the wake of the financial crash and how families are still struggling to make ends meet. Participants in these areas are impatient for higher living standards and more investment in public services.

“Since 2008 the country’s been in a period of austerity. It’s time for it to end, now, and make investments in education, transport, infrastructure, you know, to get people back into work.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“It’s been too much of a stranglehold for years. They say austerity is to be eased and we should feel the benefit now.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

As highlighted above in Newport, in contrast to the despair and distrust in the political classes, low-income voters express hope and aspirations for their local economies through the people and what communities can achieve. The majority of political speeches made in phase one speak of fairness, honesty and a people’s party, representing the views of people in their local area. Some participants propose more community engagement where committees or hubs are put together to give low-income voters a voice over the running of their local economy.

“We’re called the people’s party because we are the people for the people.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“So, my idea for the community hub would be that we’d employ people from within the community. So, it’s for the community, run by the community.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Participants are longing for a leader to take forward the points of views of people like them, who is committed to their local area and advocates for their needs and priorities.

“We need to have more trust. We need to have more trust in people, help them in confidence and help them to grow.”

Male, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“I believe in the people, but we haven’t got a figurehead, we haven’t got somebody there who’s going to stand up for us and say, ‘Right, this is what we’re going for.’”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

In relation to politics, participants want to see honesty and realism, speaking about everyday lives rather than a perceived focus on Brexit or politicians’ own self-serving aims. Participants speak of politicians never meaning what they say and speaking a different language to local people. Participants in overshadowed towns and freestanding cities say they want local advocates who know the local area and are in a position to fight for the investment that their local area needs.
“I think we need to create politicians that are actually—, I mean, you need people who have some vague experience of working in the real world.”

Male, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“It’s so out of touch with the local community. You may as well have someone sat in London making the decision for us, because they are so out of touch with actual reality.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

6.2 CONFIDENCE AND TRUST

The hopes and aspirations of low-income voters are influenced by their lack of trust and confidence in politicians and the local council. Participants express frustration and disillusionment with the current political process and distribution of wealth and investment in their local areas. This also seems to transcend type of place and any North or South divide, even transcending the Brexit debate – universally, participants feel let down and not listened to by the political classes.

Ultimately, participants have lost confidence and trust in the government, local council and politicians to make changes in their local area. This evidently has a detrimental impact on how participants view work and the desire to gain employment.

“It’s all confidence really, I mean, everyone on the table, we’re all pessimistic. No-one has any confidence. We need some strong leadership to take us through and really give us that boost to get us back in.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Specifically, with the pop-up, it is something that I’ve approached the council with… They weren’t even willing to discuss it. It was just a blank no. They’re interested in businesses renting the building for a specific amount of time. You can’t even have a dialogue when they’re that closed.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

One participant in Newport, a freestanding city, explains this desire for more support in stark terms:

“Instead of having rehabilitation centres for criminals, who chose that life, they should do rehabilitation for the unemployed who want to get back into work who haven’t got the self-confidence, who need support in those areas.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

Beyond a lack of confidence in their local representatives, participants also express high levels of disillusionment and distrust in politicians more generally. For some, this is related to Brexit but for many groups, Brexit rarely came up unprompted until the end of session when respondents were asked to consider the changes they want to see made in the context of Brexit. In this instance, respondents express a distrust in politicians and the local council over what they say, how they act and in their allocation of support, funding and investment.
“I don’t think there’s any trust in any politician now. Doesn’t matter who you vote for, there’s just no trust at all.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

“I’m really just disappointed, as you say, with the politicians. They’re absolutely a disgrace.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“You’ve got two political parties, doing what’s best for them to try and get power as opposed to doing what’s best for the people that they represent.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

For many participants across all locations, there is frustration at a lack of communication of where money is being spent and what council tax goes towards. This leaves participants feeling angry and not listened to as budgetary cuts are made with no understanding of where money is being spent. There appears to be demand for more transparency over what council tax is spent on in order to re-build an element of trust between local people and their local councils.

“The councils are letting us down now, they’re taking more off us and we’re getting nothing back, they’re bleeding us dry...saying there’s no money and there’s cut backs and cut backs and cut backs and people on benefits now have to pay council tax, as well, so they’re bringing more money in, where’s it all going?”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

“Lack of community goes with the fact that if you ever try and speak to anybody about nailing a problem, you can never get to speak to them. The system is designed so that you cannot speak to the person.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I mean, it can’t get much worse...it’s just slowly going down and down and down, and the poor are getting poorer. It’s getting worse. Something needs to change quickly.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

While this ingrained lack of trust is felt across the country, some issues are unique to certain places. For example, in Newport, participants express a deep mistrust of the devolution of power and that it is “clearly not working” as it is felt to be so costly and bureaucratic that participants feel it is a waste of money. Instead, participants would rather more power was handed down to the people rather than just involving more politicians, who participants say are out of touch with reality and the local area.

“Give the people the decision. They need to stop overruling people. Come back to community spirit and people sticking together and actually, I think you said it earlier, going out into the community. And asking what they want.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One
6.3 WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO IMPROVE THINGS?

Across the majority of groups, participants hold the council and government to account for making changes in their local area. However, there is a tension as participants also report high levels of mistrust in the government and politicians. There is a general recognition that the community as a whole should play a role in improving the wealth of people.

“There are empty hotels, there are houses, they could do these places up and make it a refuge for the homeless people and I think as a community we have a responsibility to help these people, and not look at them like a piece of rubbish.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think people really, really need to take responsibility and not just keep expecting things to happen.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Participants express frustration at the lack of action from councils to clean up their local areas which make them an unenjoyable place to relax. Those living in overshadowed towns describe frustration that the council only run rubbish collections yet are unable to even manage that well enough. Little attention is placed on who would enact such changes, it is apparent that participants want councils to be more proactive but one participant from Hastings suggests creating an assembly of representatives to help implement green initiatives.

“The litter was one of the things that put me off moving down here because I… was just gobsmacked at how bad it was and the council’s attitude to addressing it, they’re not interested… I think all that would be back down to austerity, and money, and cuts to the council.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I feel like I just pay my council tax to have my bins emptied.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

In phase two of the workshops, participants were directly asked to consider whose responsibility it is to make their proposed changes in their local area and improve the wealth of people in order to understand this dynamic better. In core and freestanding cities, there is a sense of shared responsibility as both the community and the local and central government are seen as having a role to play.

“We have all sorts of different community groups. We are a really, really close-knit community. I think that you do find that in the more deprived areas. We do tend to stick together a lot more than the more wealthy areas where people don’t speak to each other.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“Government. It’s the government passing money down to local councils and giving them enough money to do these things. At the moment all local councils are struggling from what I can see and running up debts.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two
In strong contrast, in the **overshadowed** town of Worksop, participants feel it is *only* the role of government to help improve the wealth of people in their area. This is despite having low levels of trust in politicians. Low-income voters describe feeling disillusioned with their local MP following the expenses scandal, when they themselves are limited in what benefits they can claim. Some participants, when asked if they would be willing to pay higher taxes, say they would if they knew the money would be invested into their local area. However, overwhelmingly participants say they perceive themselves to be the most vulnerable in society, and therefore should not be expected to shoulder the responsibility.

“The MPs and things, as well, they’re supposed to fight for things for us and grants and lottery grants and that, kind of, thing. I’ve not really seen anything in this area where we’ve benefitted.”

**Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two**

“The government can provide infrastructure or legislation and rates, tax breaks, setting a good example, things like that.”

**Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two**

“If it [tax] was going to go around where I live, the money was going to improve my area, I would probably gladly say yes if it could be guaranteed that every penny went to that project.”

**Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two**

### 6.4 CONCLUSIONS

- Looking to the future, participants express an acute lack of confidence not only in themselves, but also in their local area and the potential for changes to come about.
- They believe that there should be a focus upon job opportunities for young people, while also identifying a technological divide between the older and younger generations.
- Participants say that they have very little confidence in the distribution of wealth in the UK, with those in smaller, **overshadowed** towns particularly likely to say the current system feels broken.
- However, hope and aspirations for local economies do come through, with a focus on what communities can achieve.
- Participants emphasise “the people” doing it for themselves, with a bottom–up approach from communities promoting fairness, honesty and activity in their local area.
SECTION SEVEN: BREXIT

Despite the dominance of Brexit in public debate, when considering the priorities for their local area and improving the wealth of people, low-income voters did not see the significance of Brexit. Following the first two sets of workshops, the time dedicated to this section was cut down as participants did not have a lot to contribute. Many feel confused and tired of debating Brexit and do not see how it will impact their local areas. For others, Brexit provokes a divisive debate that triggered strong emotions and heated conversation between participants. As a result, participants were simply asked whether they believe Brexit will help or hinder changes being made in their local area and why and what their priorities are for the UK as it looks to leave the EU.

Low-income voters feel very unsure about what effect Brexit will have on them individually, their local economy, the nation or where the UK sits on the world stage. Many express a frustration that if politicians have no idea what Brexit means, they simply cannot be expected to have a comprehensive understanding. However, universally across all types of places, participants feel pessimistic that any of the changes they came up with during the workshops would likely happen in the next five years.

This seems to come from an embedded belief that their local areas have been abandoned by the government and by the “South”. Groups in the North and the Midlands express an adamant belief that things are very unlikely to change, as they have not changed for so long.

“Because it’s stayed the same for so long…and it’s just getting worse.”
Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“Yes, I was going to say, I don’t know if it will. We haven’t got the attention before Brexit; I don’t know if we’ll get it after.”
Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

Some participants express the belief that Brexit is only the latest political focus, as entrenched poverty has been building for years – that it is not Brexit that has caused poverty, it is a longstanding issue originating well before Brexit, and participants believe it will continue on after Brexit has passed.

“We’ve been going down for ages and ages and ages, now Brexit will be used as an excuse for that. The reason you’re getting poorer is because of Brexit, and it’s not. It’s been going on for years and years and years, you know what I mean, so it’ll be like a scapegoat…”
Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

While Brexit does not dominate conversations on the local economy, when prompted for, Brexit causes much division within the groups (which were mixed with Leave and Remain voters). During phase one, the discussion guide was amended to factor in these tensions and asked individuals to write down their priorities for a post-Brexit UK and share them one by one. Despite this, Brexit was discussed in various ways and its effects on jobs and work is varied.
7.1 EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALS

Overall, participants feel deeply let down and frustrated by the Brexit process. Many participants feel like they were lied to during the referendum campaign, where they believe false information was spread. Those who believe the UK should leave say they feel deeply let down and angry with politicians who are ignoring what they asked them to do, and some feel patronised by the “political elite” who are not listening.

“They make a decision, they ask for a vote, we vote, and then they say, ‘Oh, actually, we don’t like that, we’ll all have to vote again.’ So, there’s no confidence in anybody, is there?”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“The fact that we actually voted, the people voted out of Brexit and it still hasn’t happened just goes to show that. That they don’t listen.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“We give ideas but nobody of authority takes on board, they seem to think that they’re better than us and they don’t implement what we’re asking for.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

Such frustrations are felt across the UK and it appears to be the most lasting and immediate effect that Brexit has had on low-income voters so far; they feel let down, ignored and patronised. For most participants, a second referendum is not seen positively, as it reinforces the sense of not being listened to. However, for some that voted Remain, a second referendum is favourable in an attempt to remain in the EU.

“I’m a Remainer, I think there should be a second referendum but what I’m frightened about that second referendum because of really bad leadership. We’re not in a place where we could have civil unrest over this...”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

Participants also feel fundamentally confused by what effect Brexit is going to have on them as individuals. Participants want clarity over what Brexit will mean for low-income voters, with many having little to no concept of how this important political event might affect their lives.

“They need to clarify what leaving actually means to the working class, and what effect it will have on us at the bottom level.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think the problem is, because we haven’t got a clear idea of what it’s going to look like, it’s hard for us, for anybody in this room, I think, but for me personally, to answer if it’s going to improve or hinder society, because we don’t know.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two
Many participants express despondence with Brexit and feel it is unlikely to have any effect on their day-to-day lives. It is apparent that for many, Brexit seems to be a distraction from their more pressing fundamental needs.

“Whether you voted in or out, I don’t think it even matters. I think it’s all just to keep your thoughts here while they’re doing whatever they’re doing, going on somewhere else. It’s a distraction from what’s really going on.”

Female, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“I think the sun will still shine on your street, the birds will sing, everything’s going to be exactly the same the next day.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

In the cities of Newport and Glasgow, participants describe the Brexit vote as a chance to rebel and try to spark a change that will affect them at an individual level; however, this does not seem to have prompted what participants expected and the plea for change has not been heard.

“I thought something needs to change because the poor are getting poorer and the rich are getting richer. So, I voted leave to see if we could get a change. Gamble to see if something would change, see if it would get better.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

7.2 EFFECT LOCALLY

In a similar way to participants feeling unclear what the effects Brexit will have on them as individuals, participants are also unsure as to the effect Brexit will have on their local area. When asked whether Brexit will hinder or help the changes they want to see in their local area, most participants doubt that their local area will feel the effects.

However, there are some areas and locations that feel vulnerable to the changes that Brexit may bring for their local economy. For participants living in Newport and Southampton, both freestanding cities, they express fears of EU regional funding that may get cut as a result of the UK leaving the EU.

“The Swansea Bay thing, they’re not funding that. They’re cancelling our high-speed ring link to Swansea and beyond. It’s like they’re taking from us all the time. It’s like we’re the poor relation, really… at the moment, we don’t see we’re the poor relation because we get the funding from the EU.”

Male, Newport, Freestanding City, Phase One

“We won’t be entitled to any EU funding. As soon as we have left the EU Common Market, and the EU in general, we would lose access to all of that scientific funding, which would then put progress on a backburner.”

Male, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase One

In contrast, areas such as Hastings see the benefits that Brexit may bring to their local economy, especially the fishing industry as it may become less regulated.
“They [The EU] regulate the quotas. The European Union are regulating what fishermen can do.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Despite not being coastal locations, the fishing industry also came up in Bolton and Glasgow, perhaps revealing its dominance in the EU debate and elevated status in the national psyche.

“The fishing industry and I think all of that will impact on our local areas, because people will have jobs.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

For participants in smaller overshadowed towns, there is a fear for low-income voters that the prices of staple items such as food may go up as a result of Brexit.

“Like, the shopping, if we go to supermarkets, some of the things that do come from other countries, the prices of them are going to go a lot higher.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think it’s quite worrying because you don’t really know the ins and outs, and I think everything will go, prices will just increase, so for everything you buy.”

Female, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

The uncertainty and pessimism surrounding Brexit is being felt by low-income voters, and their fears are affecting their expectations for what might improve in their local areas. However, in a different sense, participants also express concerns over the Brexit divisions within their own communities that need to be addressed.

Participants describe deep divisions within their local areas exposed through the Brexit process. This comes in stark contrast to the tasks that participants took part in where community and local identity was promoted as participants explored the possibilities for their local areas.

“Communities are very segregated, divided, as a result of Brexit, I would say that in terms of the opinions and some of the stances people hold still in principle. So, I think communities have become very divided and, you know, crime has been one of the issues that is related to this.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“The biggest thing that’s happened is that people are almost afraid to say to each other whether they’re Brexit or Remain. The country seems to be divided. It’s been the most negative thing that’s actually divided people, it really has.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

7.2.1 IMMIGRATION

For some participants, immigration is seen as eroding their sense of belonging to the local area. Some participants say this makes them feel isolated, as communities become more segregated. In terms of a
sense of belonging and community, participants highlight feelings of isolation within their own area caused by segregation of certain communities.

“In that [Polish] community it’s a massive problem but I don’t think that if you live in an area that you should feel isolated from your local area.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“I think, it’s not the only reason, but the way you could make the change is tighter immigration rules, because there are too many people coming into the country prepared to work for nothing, and taking so the local businesses are just going down.”

Male, Dudley, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

For others, Brexit is seen as benefitting their local community as it may limit immigration. While this is not a majority view, there is a small minority who feel the sense of community is broken down by those coming from the European Union and not settling in the country. Controls on immigration are seen as beneficial not only for allocation of money and public services, but also in Opening more job opportunities for young people, that respondents feel are not currently available. And for others, respondents want to see controlled immigration that allows for those with certain skill sets into the country as they recognise

“I think a lot of people from the EU do come here to work temporarily and then leave, which actually isn’t great for community spirit and long–term improvements to the area. So, whilst actually I am pro–immigration and I voted to remain and everything, I think in some ways community feel might actually improve when people are settled here permanently, rather than working for a few years.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“there are more people coming into the country, so then there's less opportunity for jobs for yourself [looking at young person] when you finish college... yes, that's where you want controlled immigration. We need to bring people with certain resources and capabilities into the country.”

Female, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase Two

7.3 EFFECT NATIONALLY

Across the locations, those who are pro–Leave express sovereignty as being a major factor that will benefit the country in the long term. The ability for the UK to make its own laws as a nation rather than “being dictated to” by Brussels is a vital element of Brexit for participants across the UK, and seen to benefit the UK as a nation as well in terms of businesses, industries and investments.

“We’ll have to stand on our feet. We’ll have to do it ourselves. We won’t be governed by laws and EU policies; it will be our own.”

Female, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two
“Yes, I think the farming industry, the environmental industry, all of these will benefit from us being outside of the European Union, because we make our own investments and our own decisions.”

Male, Glasgow, Core City, Phase One

For others, the real benefit of Brexit is perceived to be that it will release funds to be invested back into the local area and public services. However, despite the belief that there may well be more money to spend on domestic policies, there is still a fear amongst those in the North East and the Midlands that this money will not benefit those who need it, once again reinforcing a feeling that they are undervalued and a low priority for the government, who they do not trust to allocate investment fairly.

“In the long run Brexit, the country will benefit, it won’t happen immediately but the country will benefit and I think there will be more money back home.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

“I don’t think it will filter down to, you know, towns and whatever. I mean, the biggest thing that people say about that money is health service.”

Male, Worksop, Overshadowed Town, Phase Two

“Any money that is saved will get sucked down South and it won’t make any difference around the North-East or the North.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

Brexit does cause some uncertainty for participants who fear for the country as a whole and the effect Brexit is having on businesses. Participants express concern that businesses are holding back investments until the withdrawal process is sorted out. Low-income voters also cite the car industry in the North East, and that large corporations are moving out of the UK and cutting jobs and business from those in the poorest areas.

“If you talk about the local area, the North East I think voted for Brexit 80%, and one of the biggest industries in the North East is the motor car industry, and now Nissan and Range Rover, Land Rover, are now cutting jobs by the thousands and threatening to cut thousands more.”

Male, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I think the uncertainty is affecting investment everywhere. So, obviously, no-one wants to invest anywhere, because they don’t know what’s going to happen. So, it’s putting everything on hold in Hastings and everywhere else.”

Female, Hastings, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

“I was going to say, I think the answer to your question is, the uncertainty will stop us having the investments that we’re talking about.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One
7.4 EFFECT INTERNATIONALLY

Some participants feel that Brexit will help build the wealth of their local area, as more doors for international and global trade will be opened if the UK leaves the EU. Some low-income voters feel positively about the effects Brexit will have, but also an equal contingent feel doubtful that Brexit will actually go through and happen. In Middlesbrough especially, participants are excited about the prospects for more freedom in trading with other countries and the fact that growing things (both food and manufacturing) in the UK, rather than looking to the EU, will build our confidence on the world stage.

“I’ve got this vision, a positive vision that when we leave the EU that we’ll go out there and there are countries in Africa that we can’t really trade with because of the tariffs set by the EU.”

Male, Middlesbrough, Freestanding Town, Phase One

The majority of participants expect Brexit to have been resolved by now, and many say the UK has been made a mockery of on the international stage. For those who voted to Leave, the UK’s relationship with the EU is seen as weak and overly dependent, and the negotiation process is doing little to improve that.

“Going far back the country stood on its own, people respected the UK, we were there on the top… But, since we joined the EU, we seem to have gone right downhill, started relying on other people, our money is getting taken whereas our money should be coming back to us to help everyone, to help individuals.”

Female, Bolton, Overshadowed Town, Phase One

Views on Brexit are of course divided as the country continues to debate the benefits of Remain and Leave in the media and in politics. For low-income voters, the Remain and Leave divides are just as entrenched and communities feel split over whether it will help or hinder their local economies. However, overwhelmingly there is a sense that the opportunities of Brexit are predominantly seen in the context of domestic policy in this country. Participants want the UK to make its own laws and start investing in businesses and industries that will influence their jobs and wages, they want to see more money released to help fund the NHS and other public services. For many participants across the country, there is a sense that Brexit is only distracting from the more pressing needs of the most vulnerable and the poorest in this country. Participants are frustrated that the process is still not over, and that what they ask for is ignored by politicians and the “system” more broadly.

“The only reason Universal Credit isn’t a bigger issue than it is, is because of Brexit.”

Female, Southampton, Freestanding City, Phase Two

“We’ve still got to get Brexit out of the way. Either remain or stay. Then things will start to improve.”

Female, Leeds, Core City, Phase Two

At the end of the discussions on Brexit, participants were asked to write down on a post-it what their main priority is for the UK as it looks to leave the EU. Below is a summary table of what was written. For some groups at the beginning of phase one, this task was not completed so these are not included:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Concerns and Priorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newport</td>
<td>‘trade deals’, ‘economic certainty’, ‘local businesses, more self-sufficient’, ‘NHS’, ‘No second referendum’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.5 CONCLUSIONS

- Brexit has increased a feeling of being let down, ignored and patronised by the political classes, but generally, participants are unable to determine the likely impact that it will have on their everyday lives.
- Most participants doubt the impact Brexit may have on the changes they’d like to see in their local area, other than reinforcing a pessimism that any positive change was unlikely to happen anyway. Participants see politicians, whether local or national, as responsible for implementing change, but the perception that politicians are unable to enable Brexit further entrenches a lack of belief that they can change anything.
- Community divisions post-Brexit are unlikely to improve, although a minority believe that lower immigration after Brexit could have a positive effect on community cohesion.
- On a national scale, participants hope there may be more money to spend on domestic policies, although those in the North East and the Midlands are sceptical that this money will benefit the people or the places that need it the most, underpinning a feeling that they are undervalued and a low priority for policymakers.
- Brexit also causes some concern for participants who say that businesses are holding back on investment until the withdrawal process is completed, highlighting the negative impact that current Brexit-related uncertainty is having.
- Participants are enthusiastic about the prospects of negotiating trade deals with other countries, hoping that it will lead to more produce and products being made in the UK to be exported abroad, helping domestic businesses grow and diversify.
CONCLUSIONS

The challenges facing people on low incomes in the UK are very real, and have the potential to be under the microscope post-Brexit, when domestic policy returns to the political agenda. The picture painted of day-to-day life by participants across the country, whether in a core or freestanding city, through to those in smaller, overshadowed towns, is one of economic and personal hardships, feelings of isolation, and being neglected by local and national government. Employment is precarious, low-paid, and progression is stunted; the cost of living is high; their local areas are often run-down and unclean; and any sense of community is diminishing. Sentiments of discouragement and disillusionment are rife, and low-income voters struggle to identify positively with many aspects of their life, including their local surroundings.

Participants feel abandoned by policymakers and the political classes, and report feeling isolated in their communities by a lack of investment. Those in overshadowed areas in particular are impatient for change and for austerity to be lifted, while those in core and freestanding areas are able to identify some opportunities for growth. Almost all say that a sense of community is eroding, but it is again those in core areas that express an expectation for it to return. Those in some very deprived freestanding and overshadowed locations, although strongly desiring a community spirit and cohesion to be generated again, are more sceptical and negative about its prospects of a return. All acknowledge that Brexit being such a divisive national issue, may have left community partitions that could take a generation to heal. Those in overshadowed areas are more likely to see Brexit, and a subsequent curb on immigration, as an opportunity to regenerate a sense of community that had been lost due to poor integration of immigrant communities.

VISION AND IDENTITY

Low-income voters feel strongly, and are passionate about, their local area. Even if many perceive their town or city to have countless deficiencies, per location there is a general united vision for what it should be like and the positive impact that a vibrant atmosphere could have on local people and local affluence. Participants identify with a strong sense of belonging, and local identity is celebrated even when areas are maligned, deepening a sense of pride. However, feelings of pride are reported to have diminished over time as a result of local areas not feeling valued or invested in, with blame being placed almost solely on a Southern and London-centric economic attitude.

While often torn between a strong nostalgic sentiment for yesteryear and a desire for modernity, the overwhelming barrier to achieving any vision for change among low-income participants is a sense of not having the agency to enact changes themselves. Without support from regional or central government, communities feel as though their hands are tied to the point of severe constraint where improvements to their local area barely progress even incrementally. Even in core and freestanding communities with a strong desire for change, low-income voters report needing to concentrate on just about managing their own lives before they can become active community patrons and improve their local area from the bottom up.

IDEAS FOR CHANGE

If these low-income voters see themselves as short on time, disposable income and skills, they are never short of ideas for ways to improve their local area and bring about increased local wealth. With an
acknowledgement that ideas can only go so far without the expertise, power, will and, most importantly, funding to enact such ideas, participants are able to identify some ways to improve their local area, including focusing on the high street, local environment, activities and leisure, local attitudes to businesses, and employment. These communities do have a yearning for change, with very few seeming content to settle for what they have, but almost all see it as the responsibility of the government to shoulder the burden.

HIGH STREETS

Low-income voters across the UK are discontent with their high streets and town centres. They recognise the high street itself is at a crossroads, where changes in consumer behaviour towards online and out-of-town shopping centres have left high street shop units boarded up and town centres depressing. Anti-social behaviour in town centres leads to litter, pollution and a negative aesthetic, while a lack of green space exacerbates this.

Participants express a desire to regenerate their high street and town centre, but the conflict between modernity and nostalgia is prominent. Participants, consumers themselves, openly admit they and others like them will go where the better shops are, where connectivity is greater, where parking is free, and where goods and services are cheaper, but they still see their town centre as a community hub that, if improved, could help restore a lost spirit. Incentivising local retail entrepreneurship with reductions in business rates, harnessing the skills and expertise of big business in knowledge-sharing forums, and investing in urban regeneration are all seen as broad ways to improve the fortunes of overshadowed towns and freestanding cities.

BUSINESSES AND SKILLS

Issues with businesses, however, stretch beyond the high street. The stated deterioration of bygone industries is perceived to have led to a race to the bottom for precarious, low-paid employment that does not adequately replace the community feel that previous trade had. A skills deficit is felt, where local people lack the necessary expertise to work and thrive in modern towns and cities. Participants feel as though nothing is done to remedy this, exacerbated by young people leaving for university, attracted by higher wages and better prospects in other parts of the country. A need to train and upskill young people in the area, and incentivise them to live, work and prosper locally, is felt to be desperately needed. Higher-quality apprenticeships – ones that are more secure, guarantee employment and are paid on par with other workers – were seen to be a step in the right direction.

WORK AND PAY

However, participants themselves remain on low, stagnant wages which, coupled with rising living costs, mean they struggle to make ends meet. In-work poverty demoralises the people of overshadowed, freestanding and core areas, contradicting the sense of pride and self-sufficiency they say work should bring. Participants feel under-skilled in a digital economy and would appreciate the opportunity to retrain and upskill themselves, but find opportunities to do so are difficult to come by, squeezed out by long, unsocial working hours, childcare and other family commitments, and the unaffordability of courses. They need opportunities that are flexible, affordable and well-promoted, and believe that local areas would feel the benefit of a more skilled locality, especially with a potential dearth of skilled employees in a post-Brexit UK. They need a greater focus on IT skills in order to compete with younger, technologically-savvier peers, but they also need support in making the time to fulfil their potential.
THE CHALLENGE

The challenge for policymakers, then, is to reinvigorate local areas and, while many of the sentiments discussed are consistent across core, freestanding and overshadowed areas, the local nuances of each town and city means a one size fits all approach would be misguided. The people of these areas on low-incomes do see opportunities post-Brexit, recognising a need to rebuild community divisions that have eroded over a number of years, but call on policy influencers, central and local government to give them the support they feel they need to improve their lives. Throughout the discussions, participants never suggested just one approach would answer all of the issues, but a measured and wide-ranging set of policies to stimulate and boost local areas and businesses would be necessary to break a stagnant economic outlook. Wages and pay could be increased across the board, but people also desire the opportunity to retrain and upskill themselves to compete in the local jobs market. Investment and incentives for locally owned businesses are desired to keep businesses going and to encourage young people into work locally. High streets and town centres need transforming to stimulate local spending and support is needed to ease the pressure on low-income voters so that they have the opportunity to thrive.

But, while the disdain for government and politicians, both national and local, remains dangerously high, negativity and scepticism that a “broken” system can ever change will remain and intensify. Policy makers need to take a lead on implementing changes that will support and give agency to people to thrive in their local area.
DETAILED METHODOLOGY

JRF and UKandEU commissioned ComRes to explore the desires for the local economy in less prosperous parts of the nation. A sample and recruitment process were designed to ensure the voices of low-income voters had the opportunity to contribute to the conversation about how to deliver a country in which no one or place is left behind.

LOCATIONS

The locations were selected using Pike et al’s typology of different places index of ‘relative decline’\(^9\), based on changes in employment rates, levels of highly-qualified workers, the number and type of full-time jobs, net migration rates and population change. JRF identified three types of declining places in this *Uneven Growth* report by Pike et al (core, overshadowed and freestanding), a variety across each type of area were also selected. For those locations without a JRF Index of Relative Decline (IRD) ranking, ComRes referred to the English Indices of deprivation\(^10\) (the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas) which identifies an average score of deprivation for each local authority area.\(^11\)

Locations were also selected by considering Parliamentary majorities in order to emphasise the political relevance to these places and the impact these places can have at a future General Election for any government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Type of place</th>
<th>JRF IRD</th>
<th>IMD(^12)</th>
<th>Parliamentary majority</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>23(^{rd}) – 24(^{th}) April</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Core city</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0–7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middlesbrough</td>
<td>24(^{th}) – 25(^{th}) April</td>
<td>Yorkshire and the Humber, England</td>
<td>Freestanding town</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2–39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolton</td>
<td>25(^{th}) – 26(^{th}) April</td>
<td>North West, England</td>
<td>Overshadowed town</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2–31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudley</td>
<td>30(^{th}) April – 1(^{st}) May</td>
<td>West Midlands, England</td>
<td>Overshadowed town(^13)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0–20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12 Note that England and Wales have different Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures and are therefore not comparable across nations.
13 Based on JRF’s assessment of the *Uneven Growth* report.
SAMPLE

ComRes worked in close collaboration with JRF and UKandEU to establish a rigorous set of sample quotas to ensure that we spoke to a relevant and comparable set of people across all locations.

The main sample excluded those currently in full-time education, excluding those who can pay their bills and save, included those both on in work and out of work benefits, limiting those not on benefits, and excluding those earning over £18,000 over the last 12 months before tax. Recruitment also aimed to ensure a variety of participants based on age, gender, education, ethnicity, employment status, benefits, parenthood, living status and EU Referendum vote.

Quotas are set based on recruitment of 12 for 10 in which we allow for the potential for 2 ‘no shows’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Group</th>
<th>Quotas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18–30</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 31–45</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 46–60</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 61+</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14 Based on JRF’s assessment of the Uneven Growth report.
15 Based on JRF’s assessment of the Uneven Growth report.
16 calculated as it is what a single person needs to earn to afford an acceptable minimum standard of living (the Minimum Income Standard).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td>Up to school level</td>
<td>5 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Degree/Apprenticeship/further education</td>
<td>5 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BAME</td>
<td>3 (+/−1) depending on profiling of location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial status</strong></td>
<td>Can pay bills &amp; save</td>
<td>0 (screen out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can pay bills but not save</td>
<td>2/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can pay bills but sometimes go without</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Struggle to pay bills &amp; end up in arrears</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status</strong></td>
<td>Employed – full time/formal</td>
<td>2/4 (depending on AM/PM session)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employed – part time/ zero hours/ gig economy</td>
<td>2/4 (depending on AM/PM session)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of work but looking</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of work but not looking</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>0 (screen out)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong></td>
<td>Out of work and currently/recently claimed benefits excluding working tax</td>
<td>4 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>credit or child tax credit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In work and in receipt of Universal Credit, working tax credit, child tax</td>
<td>4 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>credit, or housing benefit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No benefits, max income 18k (Q16, 1–3), no children (Q10,1), single (Q14–1)</td>
<td>2 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presence of children</strong></td>
<td>With children</td>
<td>6 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Without children</td>
<td>4 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Living status</strong></td>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>5 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single/ not cohabiting</td>
<td>5 (+/−2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EU Referendum vote</strong></td>
<td>2016 Leavers</td>
<td>5 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2016 Remainers</td>
<td>5 (+/−1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Following phase one of fieldwork, the screener was adjusted to limit those who are retired to a maximum of two participants per group to control for any skew towards older generations in the data. We also inserted a question into the screener on income when earning to those who are retired (below £18,000) to ensure we were capturing data of those who are ‘low-income’.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment was conducted using a combination of both in–house recruitment via an established panel and on–street local recruitment partners for harder–to–reach areas. The recruitment was conducted using a screening questionnaire designed jointly by ComRes and JRF/ UKandEU. Participants that said they live in or near the location were allowed to take part; however, as location and place is so fundamental to this project, a full list of exact locations of participants are included in appendix eight.

All participants were offered a financial incentive (either cash or Amazon voucher) to take part in the workshops (£70 for evening groups and £80 for daytime groups – the disparity of price here is due to morning groups requiring more commitment from participants due to the time in a working and school day). Groups aimed to be as flexible and feasible as possible; by offering both an evening and a daytime session, it allows for shift–workers and those with childcare responsibilities, among other potential barriers, to attend. Those for whom childcare commitments may have been a barrier to attending, were given extra financial incentives to contribute towards their childcare cover.

Accessibility was an important consideration and effort was made to sure that selected venues had step–free access and were easily accessible by public transport. Participants were assured of their anonymity throughout the workshops and therefore while workshops were recorded, all transcripts and quotes have been anonymised.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ComRes led on the design of the workshop discussion guide in partnership with JRF and UKandEU. As this project was a listening exercise in which the objective was to apply a bottom–up approach, this was reflected in the workshop design. Research materials had an open design, avoiding alienating participants with technical terminology, and using accessible formats with large print and visual stimuli where appropriate. All moderators were fully briefed on content and on conducting an engaging, understandable workshop.

Phase One

All participants were sent (either by email, post or phone call depending upon their preferred choice of communication) a pre–task and were asked to consider what they would like to change in their local area and community so that people could have a good standard of living. This was to prompt participants to think about their day–to–day lives before coming to the workshop and consider their priorities for their local economy.

Introduction: Participants were reassured of their anonymity and the logistics of the running of the workshop. Participants were asked to introduce each other to help everyone feel comfortable.

Section One: Local priorities

Objective: Reflect on the pre–task and generate concept of what economic policies should be prioritised post–Brexit.
• Participants were asked to consider what they would ideally like their local area to be like (imagining their local area as a teenager and what it would need to become a healthy young adult).
• Participants were asked to consider what change they would like to see in their local area and what would improve the wealth of people.

Section Two: Local solutions and opportunities (appendix one)
Objective: Understand how economic policy might be relevant to participants’ day-to-day lives.

• Participants were split into pairs and asked to consider two economic changes for the local area, how they would make this change, what the result would be and who it would help. Participants were also given a selection of photos and images and were asked to indicate which best expresses how the change would make them feel.
• Whole group discussion followed.

Section Three: Write a one–minute speech (appendix two)
Objective: Explore stand out aspects; collect insights around language, focal messages.

• Participants were in pairs and asked to prepare a one–minute speech, representing a new political party, on what they would prioritise to improve the wealth of people in the UK.
• Whole group discussion followed.

Section Four: Brexit Priorities
Objective: Consider workshop conversation with Brexit lens.

• Participants were asked to consider whether Brexit would help or hinder the changes they have outlined from happening.
• Participants asked to identify their priority for the UK as it looks to leave the EU.

Phase Two

All participants were sent (either by email, post or phone call) a pre–task and were asked to consider what they would like to change in their local area and community so that people could have a good standard of living. This was to prompt participants to think about their day to day lives before coming to the workshop and consider their priorities.

Introduction: Participants were reassured of their anonymity and the logistics of the running of the workshop. Participants were asked to introduce each other to help everyone feel comfortable.

Section One: Local priorities
Objective: Reflect on the pre–task and generate concept of what economic policies should be prioritised post-Brexit.

• Participants were asked to consider what they would ideally like their local area to be like (imagining their local area as a teenager and what it would need to become a healthy young adult).
• Participants were asked to consider what change they would like to see in their local area and what would improve the wealth of people.
• Participants were handed an 'emotion blob tree' (appendix three) and asked to point to which person on the tree they identify with most when considering how their local area makes them feel.

Section Two: Skills Debate
Objective: Testing ideas on skills to see where participants’ priorities lie.

• Participants were split into two groups and handed separate pre-prepared ideas on improving skills and training in their local area; more options for young people who don’t go to university (appendix four) and help for adults to retrain (appendix five).
• Participants were asked to prepare a proposal for this change (how it might help, how they would make the change, what the benefits would be, who needs to be on board and who it would help).
• Participants debated and discussed the two proposals and voted on what their priority would be.

Section Three: Local Area Debate
Objective: Testing ideas on improving the local area and local businesses to see where participants’ priorities lie.

• Participants were split into two groups and handed separate pre-prepared ideas on improving their local area; support for local businesses (appendix six) and improving the look of your local high street (appendix seven).
• Participants were asked to prepare a proposal for this change (how it might help, how they would make the change, what the benefits would be, who needs to be on board and who it would help).
• Participants debated and discussed the two proposals and voted on what their priority would be.

Section Four: Brexit Priorities
Objective: Consider workshop conversation with Brexit lens.

• Participants were asked to consider whether Brexit would help or hinder the changes they have outlined from happening.
• Participants asked to identify their priority for the UK as it looks to leave the EU.

ANALYSIS

As well as regular contact with the project leads following each workshop, ComRes conducted various internal analysis meetings. Following the first three locations, ComRes adjusted the Brexit priorities section of the discussion guide to leave it more open and allow participants to consider their priorities on an individual level as feedback revealed the Brexit section was quite destructive and broke down a lot of positive conversations. Following the first phase of workshops, ComRes ran an internal analysis meeting with all moderators who had attended phase one to discuss key findings and any developing themes. This enabled a picture to begin to be drawn of where the similarities and differences for different areas lay and what adjustments could be made ahead of phase two.

ComRes, JRF and UKandEU all attended an analysis workshop in which emerging themes, hypotheses, and outputs from the phase 1 workshops were analysed together in order to condense them into a set of priority topics to be taken forward into the second phase for further discussion and development of ideas.
Following the completion of both phases of fieldwork, ComRes has taken a grounded theory approach (through methodical gathering and analysis of data) to the analysis, using transcripts from the workshops to analyse the data in a structured, bottom-up way.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is the ComRes belief that social research should be beneficial to society; ComRes comply with SRA ethical guidelines to ensure gold standard ethical practice. ComRes were aware throughout the project of various ethical issues that may arise throughout the workshops and keeping our obligations to participants was paramount. We were committed to SRA core principles and kept the following at the forefront through design and fieldwork:

- Concern for the safety and security of colleagues when conducting research
- Research participants are protected from undue harm
- Research participation is voluntary, and participants are fully informed
- No group is disadvantaged by being excluded from participation

Considering the participant sample, ComRes designed an inclusive workshop discussion guide that ensured participants with varying levels of education were able to take part. Familiarity with the topics or low literacy levels were not a barrier to participation in the workshops. ComRes were prepared to follow up with participants with local emergency services and advice centres for those who needed it. ComRes were also equipped to handle vulnerable and sensitive participants, especially those who disclosed sensitive information. This was required for two participants who revealed during our conversations with them that they would benefit from follow-up support. Participants were clearly communicated the topic and purpose of the research and assured of MRS Code of compliance.
APPENDIX

*Phase One, Task One: Local solutions and opportunities (blank)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The change you want to see:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you make this change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would the result of your changes be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choose a picture which shows how this change would make you feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Phase One, Task Two: Political speeches task (blank)*

You are creating a new political party – you have one minute on the radio – what would you prioritise to improve the wealth for people in the UK?
Phase Two, Task Three: Emotion blob tree (blank)

Phase Two, Task Four: Skills and training: more options for young people who don’t go to university (blank)

Skills and Training, Group 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More options for young people who don’t go to University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions to consider when preparing your proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might this help your area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you go about making this change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be the benefits to the wealth of the area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who needs to be on board to make it a success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who should be responsible for making it happen? Central</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government, local government, businesses, charities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you ensure the options will give young people real</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work opportunities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Phase Two, Task Five: Skills and training: help for adults to retrain (blank)**

**Skills and Training: Group 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help for adults to retrain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions to consider when making your proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might this help your area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you go about making this change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be the benefits to the wealth of the area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who needs to be on board to make it a success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who should be responsible for making it happen? <em>Central government, local government, businesses, charities?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase Two, Task Six: Improving local area: support for local businesses (blank)**

**Improving Local Area: Group 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for local businesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions to consider when preparing your proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might this help your area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you go about making this change?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would be the benefits to the wealth of the area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who needs to be on board to make it a success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who should be responsible for making it happen? <em>Central government, local government, businesses, charities?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sort of businesses and jobs do you want in your local area?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase Two, Task Seven: Improving local area: improving the look of your local high street (blank)**

**Improving Local Area: Group 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improving the look of your local high street</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions to consider when preparing your proposal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How might this help your area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you go about making this change?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What would be the benefits to the wealth of the area?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who needs to be on board to make it a success?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who should be responsible for making it happen? <em>Central government, local government, businesses, charities?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who would it help?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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