



Regeneration &
Levelling Up

Roundtable meeting on Infrastructure and Levelling Up with Richard Holden MP, Minister for Roads & Local Transport

Tuesday 18th April 2023

Introduction

The group met with the Minister for Roads and Local Transport, Richard Holden MP, for a wide ranging discussion around the role of infrastructure in growing the economy and the wider Levelling Up agenda. The conversation also touched on the role of transport in growing the economy and how the Levelling Up White Paper provides a blueprint for this. The spotlight was also placed on the importance of local leadership and devolution and how these factors impact transport, job creation, and education hubs. The discussion also addressed investment and the role of mayors, councils, and local authorities in developing a joint plan. Finally, participants discussed the challenges facing SME developers, including planning paralysis, a housing crisis, and skills underinvestment in the construction industry.



Key takeaways

- Local leadership and autonomy is important in achieving a successful Levelling Up agenda. This includes the need for devolution of powers, with cities and regions not only requiring financial backing but also greater autonomy to make decisions that align with local needs. The successes of Metro Mayors Ben Houchen, Andy Burnham and Andy Street are key examples of this, where a focus on removing planning constraints has led to greater development in the area.
- There is a need for greater investment in skills and innovation hubs to ensure that universities' commodities are leveraged to turn skills into jobs in local areas. This includes the need to work out how universities can work with local authorities to leverage economic benefits. The example of the North East, which has Newcastle and Durham universities, is cited as an opportunity to turn skills into jobs in local areas.

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- The planning paralysis and housing crisis, driven by conflicting policies and lack of political will, are significant barriers to the development of affordable housing and the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the construction industry. The delays caused by planning paralysis increase the cost of development, making it harder for SMEs to access the market and contribute to economic growth and have a significant impact on Levelling Up as a whole.
- Transport is a key driver in regeneration and economic growth. This includes not only better connectivity but also the need for good places to live and work, with a focus on ensuring that where people live is not a marker of productivity, earnings, or health. The Levelling Up White Paper provides a blueprint for achieving this, with a focus on pay, public services, restoration of pride in community, and distribution. Transport is seen as the key factor that connects all of these dots, enabling economic growth across regions beyond London.

Issues raised

- The UK government is committed to investing not just traditional infrastructure but also in sustainable transport infrastructure, including rail and electric vehicles, as part of its efforts to tackle climate change.
- SME developers face challenges related to planning paralysis, a housing crisis, and skills underinvestment in the construction industry, which could hinder the Levelling Up agenda.
- There is a strong need for stable and cohesive long term policy around Levelling Up to ensure a conducive climate for investment to flow into areas and regions across the country that have been left behind.

We would like to thank the members of our Advisory Board for their contributions and continuing support

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